

Your Community Hub

Plymouth Public Library Strategic Plan

2023 - 2027

About Plymouth

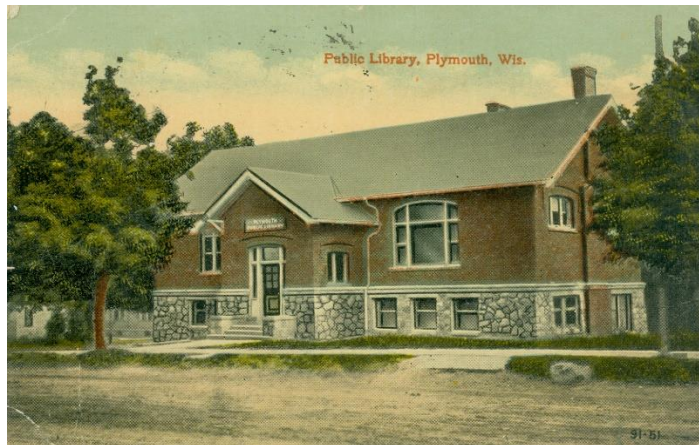
Known as both the “Hub City” for its expert wheelwrighting and the “Cheese Capital of the World,” Plymouth has long been a center for industry. Today, Plymouth is growing, has many entertainment and recreation opportunities for the community to enjoy, and a healthy retail segment, all bolstered by strong local support for the arts and education. Our community’s sense of innovation and enterprise is shared by our library and reflected in its strategic plan.

About the Plymouth Public Library

It is a wonderful A+ resource in our community with "real life" friendly interaction of staff with the patrons.

I am so glad our community has such a wonderful library!

– Comments from the 2022 Community Survey



Our library has been part of the Plymouth community since 1871, even before the city was incorporated. With a membership fee of just twenty-five cents a year in its beginnings, the library grew as the community grew. In 1915, with funds raised through the Plymouth’s Woman’s Club and a \$10,000 grant from philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, the library opened its doors at the current location. At the time, the building was 5,400 square feet, served 1,864 cardholders, and held 4,079 books. In 1988, the library expanded its building to 16,790 total square feet, which is the library’s current footprint.

Today, the Plymouth Public Library is a modern, lively, and responsive community cornerstone.

2019 Snapshot¹

- 9,670 cardholders
- Over 66,000 visits to the library
- 101,463 books checked out, 45,533 of those for children
- 320 programs offered by the library, with nearly 8,200 attendees

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the library quickly adapted to continue to provide services to the Plymouth and Sheboygan County community. The library provided curbside services, added digital services, and hosted virtual programs. In 2020, we had 13,530 eBooks checked out, nearly 4,000 more than the previous year!

To creatively engage our community during the 2020 Summer Reading Program, we challenged the community to build the longest paper chain ever made in Plymouth! To build the chain, readers were asked to report their reading throughout the summer. For every twenty-five pages read and reported, a new link was added to the community-wide paper chain. The final chain ended up being 34,047 chains long.



According to the 2022 community survey, **98% of respondents** agreed with the following statements

- The library is important for the community
 - The library is important to me and/or my family.
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¹ Data from 2020, while useful in many ways, was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting closures. The 2019 data more accurately reflects a “typical” year for the library.

Strategic Plan Background

With the support of the Library Board and Library Foundation, Plymouth Public Library started a strategic planning process in April 2022 when it formed a planning team to guide the planning process and create a plan that reflects and anticipates the needs of the library and the community it serves. A key part of the planning process focused on data gathering, especially from our community members, to guide decision-making. Our information gathering included:

- Community demographics from the U.S. Census and American Community Survey.
- Two community conversations, one virtual and one in-person, that included 16 participants, representing a variety of roles in the community.
- A community survey that was administered June 1 through June 30 and received 173 responses.
- Data and information provided to DPI in annual library reports.
- Information generated by library staff as part of a Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) session.
- A Library Board Questionnaire.
- A Planning Team Questionnaire.

The planning team used this data to identify community needs and aspirations, which were developed into the goals and objectives of this strategic plan.

Our Mission

The Plymouth Public Library supports community empowerment as a hub of learning, literacy, and innovation.

Goals - Our Big Picture



Innovating with our Community

Flexible and forward-thinking spaces, services, and staff allow us and our evolving community to explore and innovate.



Activating Community Strengths

The Plymouth area has many skilled individuals, organizations, and institutions with much to offer. The library is a catalyst for cultivating connections among these entities by helping identify and activate their strengths.



Getting the Word Out

Our library is filled with great stories that should be shared with our Plymouth community. We communicate the work we do, the collections we cultivate, and the spaces we provide widely and effectively.



Finding Organizational Balance

As a modern library, the Plymouth Public Library has many priorities. Healthy internal relationships, achievable staff workloads, and a culture of learning help ensure a balance between growth and stability.

Goals and Objectives - In Detail

Innovating with our Community

The Plymouth community is dynamic, so we are flexible and forward-thinking in our spaces, services, and staff to encourage exploration and innovation.

Objectives

- Align library spaces with the changing needs of the community.
- Increase the community's comfort with and access to technology to improve technical literacy and staff capacity.
- Build collections that are appealing, meet known community needs, and are easy to access.
- Offer programming opportunities that are relevant, engaging, and accessible for the community.

Examples of the work we can do to reach this goal and its objectives

- Perform a space study to more clearly understand community space needs and how the library's physical space can best be utilized.
- Find creative ways to provide more technology help.
- Consider ways to make the library more accessible to rural residents.
- Continue to provide robust children's and teen programming.

Why this goal is important

Providing collections, programs and services that increase literacy, reflect our community, and open doors to new ideas and experiences are evergreen priorities for our library and central to this plan. Of note are the library's changing space needs. The last major renovation of the library occurred over thirty years ago and the Plymouth community has significantly changed since that time. In 1990, the US Census reported our population at 6,797; in 2020, we had nearly 9,000 residents. This growth has been coupled with demographic changes, technology advancements, and evolving work and school needs, all of which our library needs to respond to and be positioned for when circumstances inevitably change again.

Staff shared that there are opportunities to better meet community needs through the creation of study rooms, a dedicated teen space, and an area where community members can get creative. According to the community survey, respondents' top priority for improving the physical space of the library is the creation of a quiet space to read, work, study, and/or use the computers, followed by the creation of a Makerspace area, and more collaborative study rooms.

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| #1 – Create a designated quiet space to read, work, study, or use the computers. |
| #2 – Create a Makerspace area specifically for providing library programs and classes. |
| #3 – Create more collaborative spaces and study rooms for groups. |

Activating Community Strengths

The Plymouth area has many skilled individuals, organizations, and institutions with much to offer. The library is a catalyst for cultivating connections among these entities by helping identify and activate their strengths.

Objectives

- Cultivate community connections through planned and informal conversations with community members.
- Deepen existing and develop new relationships with Plymouth's education community, including public schools, the homeschool community, and daycares.
- Facilitate connections between service providers and volunteer-driven organizations to increase their reach and decrease duplication of efforts.

Examples of the work we can do to reach this goal and its objectives

- Work alongside community members to hear about their interests and support their ideas for events, programming, and initiatives.
- Increase the library's presence in schools where feasible.
- Partner on programs and do storytimes at the daycares or classes at the schools.
- Work with InfoHub partners to help support a central place for volunteers to discover and sign up for volunteering opportunities in Plymouth and maintain and update a common calendar of events and activities.

Why this goal is important

Plymouth has a deep well of community assets to draw from, including an active and lively downtown, excellent schools, strong social services, and a community mentality of volunteerism. There is a network of strong partnerships happening already, a strong school district, welcome-to-town resources, and a central communications hub. These are assets that can be leveraged in support of a variety of community needs and aspirations and we want to be part of this important work.

In our community conversations, we learned (and confirmed) that many services and amenities are community-driven and/or community-led, which means ideas can be stood up quickly to meet community needs. However, that also means that many services depend on a shrinking volunteer base. There is not currently a central place, specific to Plymouth, where people can easily find and sign up for local opportunities. We also heard from conversation attendees that there has been a noticeable decrease in community engagement, coupled with an increased sense of isolation. We want to be part of a solution that brings people and community organizations together to build a stronger, more civically engaged community.

A critical role for the library is children's literacy and our partnerships with local educators is critically important. Our community agrees. In fact, when asked to rank their top service priorities, they told us their first priority was increasing coordination with local daycares and schools, followed by increasing our focus on education.

Getting the Word Out

Our library is filled with great stories that should be shared with our Plymouth community. We communicate the work we do, the collections we cultivate, and the spaces we provide widely and effectively.

Objectives:

- Create ways for the community to build their connection to the library.
- Develop and implement a marketing plan and/or communication plan to more strategically match messages and channels with our wide-ranging Plymouth audience.

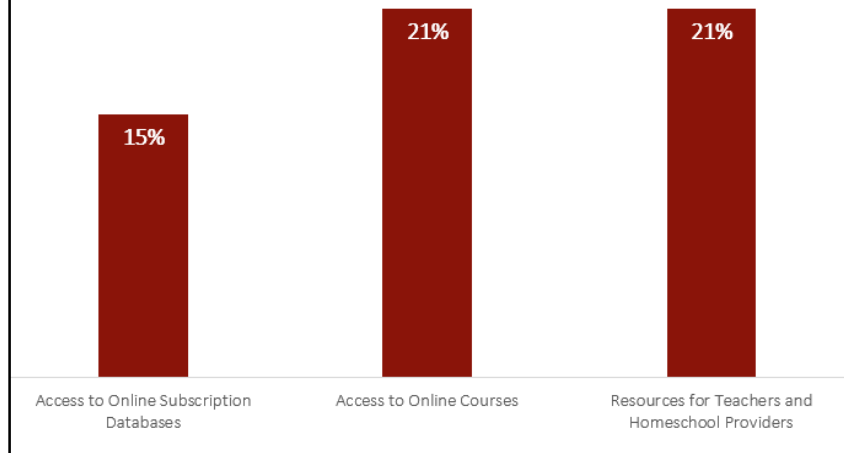
Examples of the work we can do to reach this goal and its objectives:

- Work to reintroduce the library to the whole Plymouth community post-pandemic closures, focusing on core library services.
- Include relationship building with local businesses so we can market events, get sponsorships, promote open houses, etc.
- Use data gathered in the strategic planning process as benchmarks to assess marketing and communication efforts as they are implemented.
- Include municipal, county, and state stakeholders in plans to clearly advocate for library needs.

Why this goal is important

Diminishing engagement caused by COVID-19 and the resulting closures has impacted many parts of our community, and our library is no exception. In 2020, people were not able to come into the building and explore our collections and spaces, interact with our staff, or take part in in-person events. Inevitably, awareness and use of our services and resources decreased. We need to spend some time re-introducing people and welcoming new folks to the library in the wake of the pandemic.

Regular Library Users indicated the least awareness around access to online subscription databases.



While eBook usage grew during the pandemic, there is room to increase awareness of downloadable eBooks, audiobooks, and magazines. About 40% of survey respondents, many of whom are regular users of the library, were unaware of these resources. And, more striking is the lack of awareness of other digital/electronic resources.

Finding Organizational Balance

As a modern library, the Plymouth Public Library has many priorities. Healthy internal relationships, achievable staff workloads, and a culture of learning help ensure a balance between growth and stability.

Objectives:

- Increase alignment between the library board, staff, and foundation to position the library for success.
- Strengthen the library's financial sustainability, focusing on ways to expand and deepen the library's sources of funding for discrete projects, beyond what is provided at the municipal level.
- Increase staff capacity and work to align job duties with community needs.
- Provide opportunities for staff to explore personal interests and share their talents.

Examples of the work we can do to reach this goal and its objectives:

- Work to improve internal communications, especially those between the different entities within the library ecosystem.
- Look for ways to rearrange staffing to focus on outreach and community partnerships.
- Perform a careful assessment of programs to determine how to deploy resources most effectively.
- Explore ways to increase the number of staff, including potential internships that are project-based.

Why this goal is important

The success of this strategic plan depends on all areas of the library functioning well together. The workings of any public library are an ecosystem, with each entity supporting and depending on the others. Cultivating relationships amongst and between our staff, board, and foundation through communication and culture building will be critically important to our success.

Our staff is excited to activate community partnerships; to develop services, collections, and spaces that are both modern and meaningful; and to get the word out about it all; but we know that means looking carefully at what work is done by the staff and how it is accomplished. Capacity finding, skill building, and staff wellness are important aspects of this plan.

Activating the Plan

Our community, staff, board, and planning team put an enormous amount of time and effort into the building of this plan and we are dedicated to accomplishing the goals and objectives it contains. To do this, the library director, with staff input, will provide the Library Board with a report on progress made toward implementing the plan through prioritized activities/projects.

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| Spring | The library director, with staff input, will provide the Library Board with a report on progress made toward implementing the plan through prioritized activities/projects. |
| Summer | The library director, with staff input, and the Library Board will review goal progress, and make necessary changes based on changes in conditions and capacities. Additionally, the library director with staff and board input will identify key priority activities/projects for the next year, in preparation for the library's budget process. |
| Winter | The library director, with input from staff, will provide the Library Board with a summary of the year's work and a report of activities/projects prioritized for the upcoming year. This report will be shared with other stakeholders, such as our community members and our foundation as well. |

Acknowledgements

Without you, our community, this plan would not have been possible. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the hundreds of community members who participated in this strategic planning process by completing the community survey, attending a community conversation, or just letting our staff know what you need from us.

The library would like to especially thank members of the strategic planning committee who dedicated their time and thoughtfulness to this process, ensuring that it reflects community needs and directs the library's efforts in a meaningful way over the next five years.

Members of the strategic planning committee:

Leslie Jochman, Library Director
Matt Kaczkowski, Community Member
Steph Pamperin, Library Staff Member
Rachel Searl, Community Member
Larry Siegert, Foundation Board Member
Julie Van Norwick, Library Board President

Members of the library board of trustees:

Julie Van Norwick, President
Amy Odekirk, Common Council Representative
Stacy Gloede, County Representative
Kathy Murray, School Representative, Vice President
Linda Tolman
Barbara McKnight
Sarah Britt
Paul Norlander

We would also like to thank Laura Damon-Moore, Kim Kiesewetter, and Melissa McLimans from WiLS for their plan consultation, facilitation services, and data collection and analysis.