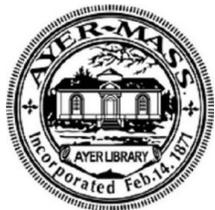


THE AYER LIBRARY



STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2023–2027

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The Ayer Library Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2023–2027

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INTRODUCTION

The Ayer Library's 1994 Strategic Plan helped win community support for the Library's most recent expansion and renovation in 1997. This Strategic Plan marks the first significant effort to solicit information from the Ayer community about Library services and to plan for the Library's future in more than 25 years.

Developing this Plan offered us the opportunity to take stock of the Library's status, to identify and prioritize new initiatives, and to determine how best to allocate resources in the years to come.

The success of this Strategic Plan, future plans, and The Ayer Library will depend upon our ability to connect with, inspire, support, educate, and entertain the community we serve.

OUR PLANNING PROCESS

In March 2021, we hired strategic planning consultant Barbara Alevras of Sage Consulting Services to guide us through the planning process, facilitate a series of planning exercises, oversee the collection and analysis of performance data and community feedback, and assist with drafting the strategic plan document.

To launch our strategic planning project, we established our planning goals, identified specific tasks, and scheduled deliverable milestones. Committed to focusing on inclusivity, objectivity, and transparency, we created a detailed process flowchart (see *Appendix A—The Ayer Library Strategic Planning Process Flowchart 2021*) to serve as a visual roadmap of our planning activities.

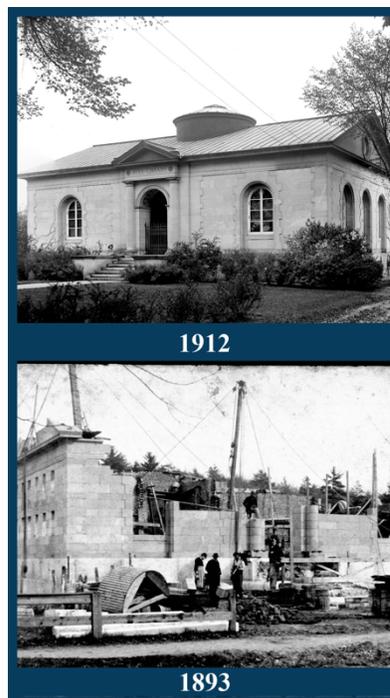
We invited seven community members representing diverse Ayer constituencies to serve on our Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC). During its four-month term, the SPAC met three times to:

- Assist in updating the Library's mission statement.
- Participate in an exercise to assess the Library's Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (aka SOAR).
- Review community feedback highlights and trends.

Several SPAC participants provided additional input and support by participating in various other strategic planning activities (focus groups, community survey, etc.).

Over the course of several months, The Ayer Library solicited feedback regarding the Library's current performance and future needs. We conducted a series of virtual feedback exercises, including:

- **One (1) Community Survey** (results presented in *Appendix C—The Ayer Library Community Survey Summary Report 2021*)



- **Two (2) Focus Groups** (results presented in *Appendix D—The Ayer Library Focus Group Summary Report 2021*)
- **Four (4) Strengths-Opportunity-Aspirations-Results (SOAR) Exercises** (results presented in *Appendix F—The Ayer Library SOAR Exercise Results Report 2021*)

Reports presenting each community feedback activity’s results are appendices to this document. To review the number of participants per feedback mechanism, please see *Appendix A—The Ayer Library Strategic Planning Process Flowchart 2021*.

It should be noted that our data gathering activities took place during the COVID-19 pandemic from April to July of 2021. Coronavirus vaccines were only beginning to become widely available and The Ayer Library building was closed to the public, only reopening in mid-June. As a result, our communications and data collection activities took place almost entirely online or via telephone.

We received a significant amount of input from almost three hundred people. This feedback, combined with an understanding of new and emerging local, state, and national library trends, enabled us to develop a Strategic Plan that is both aspirational and achievable.



OUR PLAN

Mission Statement

The Library’s Board of Trustees voted to approve the following mission statement at its June 24, 2021, meeting:

The Ayer Library connects the community to diverse educational, cultural, informational, and recreational opportunities that support lifelong learning.

Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal of this Strategic Plan is to ensure that the Library not only survives and remains relevant, but that it thrives and becomes even more important and valued by the community in the years to come.

In the time of COVID-19, the oft-heard hope is for life to go back to normal. In the aftermath of such a dramatic disruption, we can neither expect to go “back”, nor can we define what normal should be. Disruption brings opportunity...not simply to rebuild the things that one had before, but to **regenerate**¹, to create something newer and better suited to the new reality than what existed before.

¹ Aldrich, Rebekkah Smith. *Sustainable Thinking: Ensuring Your Library’s Future in an Uncertain World*. American Library Association. 2018. Chapter 15 describes moving beyond sustainability and resiliency and into regeneration as a more positive and adaptive concept.

GOAL 1: Ensure that the Library never loses touch with the needs and desires of the community it serves.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Collect and respond to data and stories regarding the use of the Library's collections, programs, and services.
- 1.2 Communicate so as to keep the Library in the minds and hearts of community members.
- 1.3 Eliminate ambiguity and build trust in the relationship between the Library's Board of Trustees and Town government.

GOAL 2: Invest in the people who give guidance, support, and life to the Library.

Objectives:

- 2.1 Define the role and support an environment in which the Library's Board of Trustees can provide the best guidance and advocacy for the Library.
- 2.2 Build a mutually supportive relationship between the Library Trustees, Library staff, and the Friends of The Ayer Library.
- 2.3 Provide competitive compensation and benefits for Library staff.
- 2.4 Instill a learning culture and develop coaching and training programs for all staff and volunteers (including Trustees and Friends) working toward the success of the Library.

GOAL 3: Strengthen the Library's ability to meet future needs in physical and digital spaces.

Objectives:

- 3.1 Prepare Library building and grounds for changing demographics, changing community needs, and changing climate.
- 3.2 Preserve and share institutional knowledge among Library staff, trustees, and Friends.
- 3.3 Make effective use of technology to improve service to the community.
- 3.4 Reduce resource use without compromising service.

GOAL 4: Increase community engagement with and knowledge of the Library.

Objectives:

- 4.1 Develop and propagate a clear and consistent identity for the Library.
- 4.2 Build strong partnerships with Town departments and community organizations.
- 4.3 Promote Library services and programs effectively online and throughout the community.

Annual Action Plans

Appendix G—The Ayer Library Action Plan for Fiscal Years 2023-2027 presents a list of specific tasks designed to help us achieve the strategic goals presented in this Plan.

The Action Plan captures new initiatives and tasks designed to achieve the Library’s supporting objectives through fiscal year 2027. It does not include ongoing operational or administrative activities.



Each Action Plan activity is assigned to a staff role and includes a target date for completion. This helps ensure there is accountability, and that progress can be monitored. It is designed to be flexible enough to accommodate revisions as needed to respond to unanticipated changes, evolving needs, and resource fluctuations.

Annually, The Ayer Library management team will work with the staff to review accomplishments from the prior year and develop an Action Plan for the coming fiscal year.

Measuring and Communicating Our Progress

The Library director will monitor progress toward the achievement of Plan objectives monthly, including identifying completed Action Plan tasks. Where necessary for the completion of a task or the measurement of progress, we will define what Library usage data is important and create a method to collect and analyze that data regularly. In addition to collecting usage data, we will conduct an annual Library satisfaction survey to gather subjective data regarding our community’s overall happiness with the Library.

Our director will report on the Plan’s progress in a separate section of their monthly report to the Library’s board of trustees. These monthly reports will be available at the Library and on the town’s website. Annually, at the end of the fiscal year, our director will report on overall trends and accomplishments. The annual report will be available at the Library and on its website.

Board of Trustees

- * Becky Campaner
- * Margaret Durand
- * Debra Faust-Clancy
- * Bob Gardner
- * Sue Kennedy
- * Cyndi Lavin
- * Rebecca Myers
- * Sharon Slarsky

PLAN APPROVAL

On September 16, 2021, the Library’s Board of Trustees unanimously approved this Strategic Plan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the valuable feedback we received from the nearly three hundred members of our Library community over the course of this strategic planning project. We’d like to thank The Ayer Library staff, trustees, members of the Friends of The Ayer Library, and the

Strategic Plan Advisory Committee members for their time, support, and insights they provided throughout our strategic planning process.

APPENDICES

1. **Appendix A—The Ayer Library Strategic Planning Process Flowchart 2021:** The flowchart visually depicts the Library’s planning methodology, including the timeline, assessment mechanisms, and process participants.
2. **Appendix B—The Ayer Library Community and Library Overview 2021:** This document presents key community demographic information and a summary of The Ayer Library’s history.
3. **Appendix C—The Ayer Library Community Survey Summary Report 2021:** The community survey was conducted in May and June 2021 via SurveyMonkey. A hard copy survey was also available at several local locations. This report presents a summary of the results, including helpful graphs and charts.
4. **Appendix D—The Ayer Library Focus Group Summary Report 2021:** This report presents feedback and ideas about the Library’s collections, programs, services, and staff generated in two virtual focus groups with community members.
5. **Appendix E—The Ayer Library Ideas and Input Report 2021:** This report presents an itemized list of ideas and miscellaneous feedback collected throughout the strategic planning process. It summarizes and prioritizes the input received based on each item’s relative significance.
6. **Appendix F—The Ayer Library SOAR Exercise Results Report 2021:** This report documents the results of an environmental assessment of the Library’s strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results.
7. **Appendix G—The Ayer Library Action Plan for Fiscal Years 2023-2027:** The Library’s Action Plan presents specific tasks scheduled for completion during the Strategic Plan’s five-year term.

Visual representation of community’s response to question: “What are the first two words you think of when you think of The Ayer Library?”

