

The Cultural Heart of the Community

A Strategy for Ensuring the Future of the Dobbs Ferry Public Library



Adopted by the DFPL Board of Trustees on December 16, 2019

Letter from the Director

Welcome to the Dobbs Ferry Public Library's plan to ensure a bright and sustainable future in the village of Dobbs Ferry. Please take time to read through this document, and contact the Board of Trustees if you have questions or suggestions.

Our vision of the Dobbs Ferry Public Library is built on the idea that the Library is a living, breathing organization that requires:

- a staff to be grown and nurtured—the lifeblood of the library;
- sustainable funding—the vital nutrients;
- a building to maintain—the physical “body”;
- a curation strategy—the “brain” that drives us; and
- input and participation of the community—the oxygen that breathes life into us.

We have updated the Library's Mission, Vision, and Values Statements to reflect our community's expressed desire for a place to learn and work together, a place of connection, a place that functions as the cultural *heart* of the Village.

The past five years have seen much change at the Dobbs Ferry Public Library and in the library community as a whole. Following a period of transition after the departure of our long-time Library Director in 2016, I was appointed Director in January 2018. I have gotten to know the Dobbs Ferry community, through many conversations within and outside of the library walls. The partnerships we have embarked on in the last two years— and the ones I see going forward—give me great hope for what our library could become in the next five years.

The function of a library is continually evolving. Readers adopt digital reading resources, audiovisual streaming services replace physical discs, and libraries provide technological and social services in addition to traditional print materials. As professor and library researcher, Kristin Fontichiaro, notes in *Library 2020: Today's Leading Visionaries Describe Tomorrow's Library* “To thrive in 2020, libraries need to make a ferocious and sustained shift in focus from collection to users.”

The advent of mobile computing has meant for many a decrease in personal contacts and, thus, a heightened desire for community spaces like the Library, where people can come together for learning, work, enlightenment, and entertainment. On any given weekday, the study tables on the Library's second floor are occupied by people working remotely, students of all ages doing research, and tutors assisting those in need. Children's services remain focused on fun activities that encourage parent-child reading, increasing children's connections to books and the love of learning.

In looking toward the future of the Dobbs Ferry Public Library, we have relied on the voice of the community—gathering input from residents and community leaders through surveys and open brainstorming sessions. This communication with all of our stakeholders has helped inform how we will plan for and secure the future of this critical institution.

Libraries are more valued and used now than ever before, despite predictions of their demise at the advent of the digital age¹. American libraries have centered their communities for almost two hundred years, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. They serve as gateways for people in their communities to connect, discover and grow. The Dobbs Ferry Public Library provides these expected, essential services and will, with the right strategies and unwavering commitment, help our village thrive for years to come.

Elizabeth Hobson, Library Director

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2016/09/09/libraries-2016/>

Letter from the President

"Today, as cities and suburbs reinvent themselves, and as cynics claim that government has nothing good to contribute to that process, it's important that institutions like libraries get the recognition they deserve. After all, the root of the word "library," liber; means both "book" and "free." Libraries stand for and exemplify something that needs defending: the public institutions that—even in an age of atomization and inequality—serve as bedrocks of civil society. Libraries are the kinds of places where ordinary people with different backgrounds, passions, and interests can take part in a living democratic culture."

—Eric Klinenberg,

Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life

I joined the board of the Dobbs Ferry Public Library in 2017. Having moved here from the city three years prior, I was looking for ways to give back to the community I had come to call home and deepen my ties within it. Since I was as young as my daughters are now, I have been an avid user of libraries, and this board work seemed a natural fit for my skills and interests.

Until I became a trustee, however, I hadn't thought much about the central role libraries play in any community, or about the ways in which public libraries are transforming in response to a wide array of global forces shaping us on the individual and societal level. I was amazed to discover they were about far more than just lending books and media.

As a recent transplant, I was also shocked to learn that the Dobbs Ferry Public Library budget had been cut by 14.5% in the fiscal cycle immediately before I had joined the board. While Dobbs Ferry continues to grow, our library has shrunk—in terms of the number of programs offered and the size of the staff serving our community. While the Village tax levy also decreased that year, cuts to the Library's funding were disproportionately large, and the Library lost its allocation for a full-time teen librarian as a result. In addition, there were drastic reductions in spending on collections and programs.

These cuts continue to reverberate today, creating challenges with hiring, retaining, and training our staff; maintaining, upgrading, and renovating our physical spaces; sustaining and updating our collections; continuing and expanding our programming to meet the needs of the community; and, more generally, being a responsive and accessible library that serves as a conduit for learning, growth, and human connection. Though the current staff is both resourceful and entrepreneurial, the financial constraints are preventing the Library from reaching its full potential.

The Dobbs Ferry Public Library is, as Director Elizabeth Hobson notes above, the *cultural heart* of this Village—as critical a piece of infrastructure as our roads and sidewalks; as crucial for entertaining and engaging our youth and seniors as our pool, parks, and recreation programs; as vital to our community's success as our unparalleled schools. We recognize and acknowledge the strong and constant pressures on the Village budget. However, for the quality of life of all those who live and work here, and for attracting those who may one day seek to do so, it is imperative that we invest in the Library to ensure it meets our needs well into the future.

Ali Moss, President, Board of Trustees, DFPL

THE DNA OF THE LIBRARY: Mission, Vision, and Values

Our Mission

We are a responsive and accessible library that serves as a conduit for the pursuit of learning, growth, and human connection.

Our Vision

We aspire to be the cultural heart of Dobbs Ferry, reflecting and fostering the vitality and diversity of our village.

We will accomplish this in the following ways:

- Our expert, trusted staff will continue to help people access the information they need, the programs they enjoy, and the content they love.
- We will create a common and inclusive space that welcomes and cultivates diverse interests, strengths, and needs.
- We will encourage our community to make frequent use of the library's resources, participate in our programming, and help to shape it.
- We will stay current with advances in technology required to remain relevant in our constantly changing world.

Our Values

Access: Information, programs, and services are open and accessible to all.

Connection: We build connections within the community.

Engagement: We seek input and participation from the community.

Inclusion: Everyone is welcome and comfortable in our library.

Quality: Library professionals curate content and programs to meet the community's needs.

Service: We always strive to provide everyone with friendly and professional service.

Sustainability: We are good stewards of our financial, material, and human resources.

THE LIFEBLOOD OF THE LIBRARY: Appropriate Staffing

The most critical resource for any library is its staff. That is especially true at the Dobbs Ferry Public Library. Our strategy of cementing the Library as the cultural heart of the community requires the cultivation of an experienced, well-trained, highly satisfied staff, both full-time and part-time.

To accomplish this we must find ways to stay competitive with county-wide salaries and current with new New York State minimum wage requirements. The challenge in recent times has been in hiring, retaining, and developing excellent staff with significant financial constraints. A well trained, adequately compensated staff will enable the library to preserve and retain an intimate knowledge of Dobbs Ferry and better serve its community.

Appropriate Staffing Imperatives

- 1. Increase ability to recruit and retain staff**
- 2. Increase training and development opportunities**



FerryCon 2019, created and curated by DFPL staff

[in online version will include a small link how you can help to appendix]

NOURISHING THE INSTITUTION: Sustainability & Awareness

It is remarkable what the Library has been able to accomplish in the past two years, given that it has been operating on a budget that is 14.5% lower than it was four years ago, and with one fewer full-time staff member devoted to the teen population. Despite these deficits, our circulation is up: eBook usage alone is nearly twice what it was in 2018; program attendance is up 20%; and the community has taken note of the Library's resurgence, with more than five articles recently published in *The Enterprise* about Library programs and events.

However, it is unreasonable to expect that such high-quality programs and services can continue to exist at this volume without at least a return to the 2015 budget level (inflation-adjusted): \$858,903.² The Library staff, Board of Trustees, and Friends have all taken steps to increase revenue generation. For instance, in 2019 the library began to generate additional revenue and fill a community need by providing local passport services and becoming a distributor of EZ-Pass. However, these efforts provide commendable secondary revenue sources meant to supplement the far more substantial and essential contributions from the Village and community at large.

Beyond the pressing need to increase revenue merely to maintain existing levels of service, the Library needs to find additional funds (whether from the Village, New York State, grants, increased revenue generation, and further fundraising by the Friends) to secure our efforts in establishing the Library as the cultural heart of Dobbs Ferry and to prepare it for the future.

Sustainability & Awareness Imperatives

- 1. Increase collaboration with the Friends of the Dobbs Ferry Library**
- 2. Grow our partnership with the Village government**
- 3. Continue to explore innovative methods of revenue generation**
- 4. Create a marketing and communications strategy to increase awareness of DFPL and its programs**
- 5. Continue to grow our community programming partnerships**



In 2019 DFPL began offering EZ-Pass and Passport services.

² \$844,463 + \$14,440; 1.71% inflation since 2016

STRENGTHENING THE BODY: Optimizing Library Spaces

When the current Dobbs Ferry Library building first opened in 2003, it was a top-of-the-line, traditional library with stately custom shelving units, easy-to-maintain cinder-block walls, and clearly delineated spaces for the different collections of materials the library loaned out. Who could have guessed that, in the years since the building's inauguration, print material usage would decrease dramatically, eBook usage would be booming, and our computers would have gone from being plugged into a static wall outlet to being completely wireless and mobile.

The old vision of libraries, as defined-space storage facilities with areas for quiet study, has been radically updated to include flexible spaces for different types of group work. These spaces range from small rooms for study, tutoring, or meetings, to large areas for learning activities that require space for movement and active participation. The world of library services is rapidly changing, and it has been difficult for our traditional library building to keep up.

In the short-term, the library will create innovative ways to utilize the library space in ways more conducive to the village's current needs. We might, for example, create more work areas for students and freelancers, for discussion and socialization, or reconfigure the children's room for larger group activities and events. At the same time, planning for the longer-term, a committee made up of Library trustees, staff, and community members will conduct a space audit and plan how to shift our current space to one that will be flexible and adaptable to the changing services and programs that the community needs.

Optimizing Library Space Imperatives

- 1. Form a committee to investigate a longer-term library redesign**
- 2. Create an interim plan to optimize the library space in the shorter-term**

The Possible Futures of the Dobbs Ferry Library Space



Updated Teen Space



Meeting/Tutoring Spaces



Better flow in Children's

[in online version will include a small link how you can help to appendix]

EXERCISING THE BRAIN: Curation of Library Materials

The library exists as a free and unbiased resource for information and learning materials in the community. Our professional library staff's curation of library content extends beyond collecting physical objects to providing knowledgeable reference assistance and a point of contact for finding others with similar interests to learn with and from. The Library is in a unique position to collect not only traditional shared resources (books and magazines, for example), but also non-traditional items such as seeds, tools, computer software, and hardware for a community that values sustainability and low-waste initiatives. Our recent purchase of a 3D printer is an example of non-traditional services we offer that might be prohibitively expensive for an individual to purchase.

To meet the contemporary needs of Dobbs Ferry, we need to reassess and understand what critical materials should live inside the library. As the curators of what is included in the library collection, the staff will need guidance—both philosophical and practical—on how to build the library's collection, how to curate physical items as well as services and programs. Over the past two years, the library has begun to deliver services that fill gaps in government services, and to bring people into the library who hadn't previously visited the library for more traditional purposes.

Finally, it is clear that Dobbs Ferry residents are hungry for events and experiences to be available locally, right here in the Village. Library staff have made efforts to provide a wide array of programs that respond to and are driven by community interests, and we hope to grow such programming in coming years.

Curation of Library Material Imperatives

- 1. Create a Collection Development Plan**
- 2. Identify and provide non-traditional services to respond to the needs of the community**
- 3. Strategically curate programs to respond to community interests**



Ebooks and streaming services are expected library services now.

[in online version will include a small link how you can help to appendix]

THE AIR WE BREATHE: Input & Participation of the Community

Libraries are “where people with different backgrounds, passions, and interests can **take part in a living democratic culture**... where the public, private, and philanthropic sectors can work together to reach for something higher than the bottom line.”

— Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People*

If the library staff is the lifeblood of the library, then our community is the air carrying the oxygen giving the library life. To fully understand the diverse needs of the community, we must remain in constant communication with its citizens. Whether through surveys, in person interviews, or open houses the library is working to increase its understanding of the entire Dobbs Ferry community in order to provide the best services possible. The development of this strategic plan began with the library reaching out to the community through surveys and public forums. Additionally, we drew on the work of other village groups, including the Downtown Improvement Task Force’s community survey, to understand underlying values and gaps in services that the library could support and fill.

Since Elizabeth Hobson has taken over as Executive Director, the library has continued to solicit more feedback from community members who use the library and those who are not yet users. As we continue to grow, we will need to sustain and improve our strategies for soliciting feedback from library users and the town. Better information will enable the library to respond even better to the community as it evolves.

Feedback is one form of input that the library values, and volunteerism is another. The library has increased its volunteer participation in library programs and services— essential momentum we must build upon as we move forward. Many of the library’s innovative programs over the last two years, such as our Cultural Explorers program, have been driven and shaped by members of the town. We have introduced a Local Authors Series to showcase the literary work of local residents; we regularly review community suggestions for programming (such as WCC Gateway to Entrepreneurship’s Starting Your Own Business workshop); and we host a weekly meeting of a popular role-playing game initiated by a group of local teens. When the library works together with village members, we ensure its use and efficacy for all residents.

Input and Participation of the Community Imperatives

- 1. Create a plan to enhance communication pathways between the DFPL and community.**
- 2. Create more opportunities for community involvement in the library**



Cultural Explorer's Diwali Celebration 2019



Tree Commission Collaboration

[in online version will include a small link how you can help to appendix]

HOW WE GET FROM HERE TO THERE

The aspirations for the Dobbs Ferry Library are intimately tied to a vision of a thriving future for the Village of Dobbs Ferry. Each of the five strategic imperatives have arisen from discussions that attempted to reach every corner of the Dobbs Ferry community. And each of these imperatives has been designed to accelerate the actualization of the library's vision to become the cultural heart of Dobbs Ferry—to become a place where anyone can pursue their desire to grow, learn, and connect with others.

Imagine what our Library could look like three years from now... Envision an expanded children's area to serve all children, from birth through high school, perhaps relocated to the second floor of the library, with space for pre-teens and teenagers to congregate, relax with a recent novel, or study in groups. Envision an open area for storytime, within the picture book collection, and another area for creation and hands-on experimentation. Perhaps there are quiet, glass-enclosed pods for one-on-one tutoring or individual study.

Envision a renovated downstairs with a technology petting zoo, where everyone can try out the latest gadgets. Perhaps there's a "Library of Things," from which it's possible to check out tools such as cake pans or a circular saw. Envision the Community Meeting Room being known as a center for cultural events in our community, with programming for all ages.

Farther out on the horizon, we envision the Dobbs Ferry Public Library being the place everyone in town thinks of for community connection. It is a primary draw for visitors considering moving here. It is where people find out about all the goings-on around town. It is where local businesses access research applicable to their needs. The Dobbs Ferry Public Library is a place of pride for our community—beloved, used and cherished.

For this library—our library of today and, more so, our library of the future—we can achieve the shared goals laid out in this plan only with the complete support of everyone in Dobbs Ferry—from our local government to each and every citizen. The library, a Dobbs Ferry institution, is only as strong and significant as we all make it.

Letter from the President of the Friends of the Dobbs Ferry Library

For over thirty years, I have been engaged with the Dobbs Ferry Public Library. First as a patron, a young mother looking to share the wonders of the Library, I took my two small children to story time to meet other children in our community. Later, I joined the Friends of the Dobbs Ferry Library to help support its work and meet other neighbors. I continue to meet and enjoy this association that provides the opportunity to make new friends, meet new residents, and serve my community.

The Brookings Institution has recently defined public libraries as “third-places”—neither one’s home (first place) nor workspace (second place)—that serve to build and strengthen communities. A range of such third-places, from churches to beauty salons, plays an important role in building our community. And under the new leadership of Library Director, Elizabeth Hobson, the Dobbs Ferry Library is leading the way to provide unique cultural, educational and entertainment opportunities that meet our own community needs. Our library is thriving now in ways we never knew possible.

Our library has grown to become an important “third-place” institution, gradually taking on significant functions well beyond lending books. Our expanded library functions as a meeting spot for our Senior Citizens, provides temporary space for yoga and exercise classes, shows movies, and offers lectures and other cultural programming. New services include AARP assistance with the preparation of tax returns, purchasing an EZ-Pass, and even obtaining or renewing a passport.

In many communities, librarians are also *ad hoc* social workers and navigators. They help local people figure out the complexities of life, from navigating the health system to helping those with job search needs. This “go-to” role has influenced library programming and events, with libraries providing connections to health, employment, literacy, and more.

The budget cuts must be returned and salaries must be reflective of those paid to other village departments and competitive with our neighboring libraries. The role of the Friends of the Library is to provide support to the library through our advocacy—to raise awareness and funds to *supplement*, not replace, the village budget.

By making an investment in libraries, we help our neighbors gain access to information, services, and other community enhancements in a way that is equitable and just. For these reasons, I ask us all to increase our funding and support of the Dobbs Ferry library.

Vikki Jones, CFRE
President of the Friends of the Dobbs Ferry Library

Acknowledgements

This strategic plan is the result of a two-year process that has benefited from the work invested and contributions of many people. We wish to acknowledge and are grateful for the contributions of the following:

- Village Board of Trustees
- Mayor Bob McLoughlin
- Village Board Liaison Nicole Sullivan
- The DFPL staff
- The Friends of the Dobbs Ferry Library
- Members of the Downtown Improvement Task Force, Sustainability Committee, and Dobbs Ferry Senior Program
- Superintendent Lisa Brady and Dobbs Ferry School District
- Dobbs Ferry Middle School Junior Honor Society
- Dobbs Ferry Historical Society
- Village Recreation and Public Works Departments
- The people of Dobbs Ferry

- The DFPL Board of Trustees