

Prepared for

Athol Public Library
568 Main Street
Athol, MA 01331-1888

June 4, 2010

Focus Groups

Athol Public Library

- Young Adults
- Staff
- Trustees, Town Officials
- One Library User Group
- One Combined User/Non User Group

Prepared by

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Westminster, MA 01473

I. Executive Summary

Methodology

Five focus groups were held at the Athol Public Library (hereafter called “the library”) on the following dates:

April 27 th	Young Adults
May 3 rd	Staff
May 5 th	Trustees and Local Officials
May 19 th	Library Users
June 2 nd	Combined Library Users/Non Users

Approximately forty-five people attended the sessions. Each group was read a series of questions and the facilitator recorded and projected these answers on a screen for all participants to see. All responses on included in this report.

The Preparation for Planning was done by Athol Library Director, Debra Blanchard. She prepared her Board, Staff, Committees, and Library users explaining the process and inviting them to participate in focus groups. Originally, six focus groups were planned to identify possibilities for change and determine Community Vision. Five focus groups were held: Teens, Staff, Board of Library Trustees and other Town Board Members, and two Users Groups. The focus groups were conducted by Barbara Friedman, Consulting Librarian, and held over a five week period from April 27th through June 2nd 2010. The key responses from these groups are listed under the standard PLA Services Responses and given in raw data form. After a review of the responses, the Library Director will review the responses, write goals and objectives, identify future activities, write the plan, and submit to Library Trustees and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.

Summary

The participants overwhelming like visiting the library and the staff, but feel it should be bigger, and open more hours, including evening and weekend hours. One teen expressed “space envy” saying that the adults have more space than they do, but generally space is desired for all groups and all library functions. Comments about the collection were few, but these reflected the need for bigger collections with broader depth making it less likely to require interlibrary loan. Both the quality (no scratches) and the quantity of DVDs and CDs are important, especially to young adults.

Both young adults and staff agreed that a larger teen space where young adults could be noisier is important. Comfortable seating, more storage space and shelf space for books, more computers, sturdier step stools, and less clutter in the history corner are seen as needs. The staff is viewed positively for their dedication and friendliness, however both staff and the public see a need for more staffing, continued training, especially in technology, and the reinstatement of the Assistant Director’s position.

What has changed in the Athol Public Library in five years? The level of service has remained high. The staff commitment to strengthening the community is solid. Trustees, Town Officials, and Library Users recognize the quality of service, but also consistently identify the library's needs: space, shrinking staff, and limited hours.

Trustees are well versed in these needs and are articulate in discussing these with Town officials. They are also aware of potential looming issues of decertification, neighboring libraries being decertified, and the challenges of a building project.

Although the solution to all of these problems was identified as more money, increased funding depends on public support. The groups clearly identified a need to connect with community businesses, and town, state, and federal officials to solve these funding issues.

All groups felt that the staff was sensitive to the pulse of the community and responded to needs. Programming was mentioned as a strength of the library with the variety and frequency of programs being important to both adults, young adults and children.

Participants expressed belief that there was significant support for the library, but competition from other demands of the community, apathy, and the economy were threats to the building process, the re-establishment of the assistant director position, and extending hours.

In the last five years, the Athol Public Library has increased its level of service for young adults through staff efforts, grants (USDA & LSTA), and volunteer efforts. The Library has an impressive young adult program, a teen advisory board (ATAC), and staff committed to this population.

Although the Athol Public Library faced many of the same issues five years ago, namely space, hours, and funding, focus group attendees more easily defined solutions: grants, partnerships, networking, lobbying, and fundraising.

The Director has moved the building process forward. In 2005, the Library was granted a planning and design grant for \$20,000, half of a \$40,000 project and is committed to continuing to seek a library construction grant.

The focus group attendees expressed a desire for a larger library, and many expressed a desire to keep the ambiance of the old building. A list of reasons for keeping the library in the center of town were given, which included the mutually positive relationships with businesses in the downtown area, transportation issues, and a sense of tradition.

The concept of an "ideal library" varied from participant to participant, but there was universal agreement on the need for more space for library staff, for storage, for programming, and for the collection. Quiet space and noisy space (young

adult area and children's areas) were mentioned as important needs, as well as expanded services, including more library hours.

The overall impression given by participants is that Athol Public Library is a thriving, vibrant, essential service in town, now used by more people than ever. Increased service, technology, and lack of funding have put a strain on the staff, but they continue to offer great service.

The "dislikes" or suggestions for change expressed don't neatly fit into categories. They are listed here, but are also found in the group comments.

Only one person per computer
Hours (Closing time is too early)
Not open weekends
Only "fine free" day is Wednesday.
Adults have a bigger space
Need a bigger selection of movies (DVDs)
Want people to be accountable for scratched DVDs.
Need a scratch remover for CDs and DVDs (they know it is expensive)
Teen space is out in the open...in the back would allow teens to be a little louder
A private space
Don't like people that steal things: Alarm the books to prevent loss.
Comfortable seating
More shelf space for books
More and sturdier Step stools
Less clutter in the history corner
Needs more shelf space
Like to get more books in the library vs. Interlibrary Loaning
More historical, non-fiction
More medical books with new concepts
Balanced collection of political thought
More computers
Library should be for serving the community, including student needs
Stay open later than 5:30 (especially for workers and those who commute out of town)
Open on Saturdays
More volunteers to keep the library open

GROUND RULES FOR PARTICIPANTS

This is an opportunity to participate in a forum for positive change. Use it, and have fun with it!

1. There are no right or wrong answers. It is not necessary to reach a consensus.
2. Participate in the discussion; express your opinions, examples, and ideas freely yet briefly.
3. Give others your attention. Limit side conversations and interruptions.
4. Be open-minded and respectful of your colleagues.
5. Engage in discussion, not argument. Stay positive!
6. Allow others to voice their opinions and ideas.
7. Stay focused and on topic.

Focus Groups are not to be used for:

1. Personnel issues
2. Conflict resolution
3. Consensus building
4. Attitude modification
5. Numerical data gathering

Library Information

Athol Public Library

Address: 568 Main Street
Athol, MA 01331-1888
Phone: (978)249-9515
Fax: (978)249-7636
Web Site: <http://www.athollibrary.org>
Email: info@athollibrary.org

Main Library Hours:	DAY
MONDAY	9:30-5:30
TUESDAY	9:30-7
WEDNESDAY	9:30-5:30
THURSDAY	9:30-5:30
FRIDAY	9:30-5:30
SATURDAY	Closed
SUNDAY	Closed

Wifi Internet Available: Yes

Search Catalog: <http://www.athollibrary.follettdestiny.com> or www.cwmars.org

Special Collections: Local History / Special Collections and Archives / Manuscripts

Library Staff:

Debra A. Blanchard –
Director
Assistant – vacant
position
Marie Lehmann -- ILL
Brianna Haskins –
Cataloging, Webmaster
Anne-Cutler Russo -- YA
Jean Shaughnessy --
Children's Librarian
Karen McNiff --
Genealogy/Archives
Children's Assistant

Library Trustees:

Margaret L. Young -
Trustee Chair

Carol Ambrozy

Sharon Brighenti

Margaret (Susie) Feldman
- Clerk

Frank Foster

J.R. Greene

APPENDIX C: GUIDELINES USED BY FACILITATOR

1. Warm up as participants arrive, give each person the handouts and their nametag, and offer refreshments.
2. Start on time.
3. Preliminaries - introductions, review time frame and confidentiality of process.
4. Review the participant ground rules.
5. Conduct the focus group. Record brief comments and perceptions when possible.
6. Sessions are limited to 90 minutes (no break).
7. Conclusion and thanks at the end of 90 minutes.
8. Ask each question in turn; do not review the list of questions with the focus group participants beforehand.
9. Help participants to feel comfortable and relaxed.
10. Encourage different perceptions and points of view. Promote debate.
11. It is not necessary to reach a consensus. Draw out different opinions.
12. Try to keep the discussions on a positive track - what people want rather than what has not worked, what they do not like.
13. Try to keep the discussion flowing. Ask for examples or additional details where needed.
14. Keep the discussion focused and on track.
15. Encourage participation by everyone. Prevent the discussion from being dominated by one or two people, and try to get quieter people to talk; for example, you might want to go around the table.
16. Remind participants of ground rules, if necessary.

17. Keep time frames in mind so that all questions can be covered within the allotted time.
18. Help participants to conclude discussions and make smooth transitions to the next question.
19. Remain neutral - do not show approval or disapproval for ideas.
20. Avoid giving personal opinions.

LIBRARY SERVICE RESPONSES

1. Be an Informed Citizen: Local, national, and world affairs. Residents will have the information they need to support and promote democracy, to fulfill their civic responsibilities at the local, state, and national levels, and to fully participate in community decision-making.

Attendees talked about the Library being open consistent and longer hours than the Town Hall or other Town agencies. They also stated that the Library provided public access computers with a wifi connection, and information could be obtained by consulting a staff member and/or searching a computer.

2. Build Successful Enterprises: Business and non-profit support. Business owners and non-profit organization directors and their managers will have the resources they need to develop and maintain strong, viable organizations.

Attendees talked about cooperative efforts between the library and businesses in town that could forge partnerships. The library provides support in the form of reference services and helps other agencies with their informational and promotional needs. It was noted that the library staff is willing and able to provide support to other town agencies whenever asked. Many times focus group attendees mentioned the relationship between the Y and the library. The relationship between the library and town officials, local businesses, and especially the Y, seems to be a strong reason for keeping the library in the center of town when a building plan is developed.

3. Celebrate Diversity: Cultural awareness. Residents will have programs and services that promote appreciation and understanding of their personal heritage and the heritage of others in the community.

Attendees mentioned programming offered on many different subjects. The amount of programs and the choice of speakers were considered to be evidence that the library staff was willing to tap any resource to develop programming and knew that there were many different interests in the community. One focus group attendee gave examples, mentioning that cooking programs drew a very different audience than the book club discussions, and still other topics attracted new audiences.

Mentioned by all groups, including the young adult group, was the success of young adult programming at the Library. Young adults are given many opportunities to become aware of others in their community by participation and service projects.

One participant said: “Staff helps to welcome different people” (meaning people of all walks of life, nationalities, etc.)

4. Connect to the Online World: Public Internet access. Residents will have high speed access to the digital world with no unnecessary restrictions or fees to ensure that everyone can take advantage of the ever-growing resources and services available through the Internet.

The computer services are provided free of charge and appreciated by many of the attendees. More computers, time limits, and assistance from staff were mentioned. Keeping up with technology and keeping computers up-to-date were seen as challenges.

Users of the library realize that the time of the staff is limited, but also realize there is a need for more computer assistance and classes.

5. Create Young Readers: Early literacy. Children from birth to age five will have programs and services designed to ensure that they will enter school ready to learn to read, write, and listen.

The Children’s staff mentioned the need for more computer access, and some patron behavior issues that impede on providing services to children. The Library does maintain a separate collection for children and hires a staff to serve their needs. Regular story hours and other programs for children were mentioned as ways this need is met.

6. Discover Your Roots: Genealogy and local history. Residents and visitors will have the resources they need to connect the past with the present through their family histories and to understand the history and traditions of the community.

One of the library users mentioned using the library for genealogy and getting related books through interlibrary loan. In another session, the library was described as a source for teaching children about local history. One library user mentioned that the library helped “preserve the history of the Town’s affluent past”.

7. Express Creativity: Create and share content. Residents will have the services and support they need to express themselves by creating original print, video, audio, or visual content in a real-world or online environment.

Although some of these services for creating video & audio may be provided through AOTV, the local access channel, young adults described the library as a place for creative activities both online and as real-world experiences.

Some Young Adult Activities Described as Enjoyable during the Focus Group Sessions

- Bake Sales
- Car Wash
- Read to small children
- Cooking Class
- Pennies for Peace
- Cleaned up the Park
- Community Service
- Anime Club
- Movie Night
- Wii Tournaments
- Prom Dresses
- YuGiOh Game

Young adults would enjoy even more ways to express and enjoy the library creatively, they offered these suggestions:

- Dance competitions
- Yoga
- Exercise to Videos
- Art classes
- Karaoke
- Musical (Workshops-Learning more about music)
- Lessons (musical, etc.)
- X-Box
- Zumba
- Field Trips (to the Mall; Whale Watch, Fishing, White Water Rafting, Camping, etc.)
- Just Dance (Wii)

8. Get Facts Fast: Ready reference. Residents will have someone to answer their questions on a wide array of topics of personal interest.

The Library was among the top answers by young adults answering the question: Where do they find information? Others mentioned library staff as an important resource. The library users group mentioned that staff would go to any lengths to find an answer.

9. Know Your Community: Community resources and services. Residents will have a central source for information about the wide variety of programs,

services, and activities provided by community agencies and organizations.

Library Users felt that the Library did a good job sharing community resources and library services through the following:

- Website
- New books in the newspaper (Athol Daily News)
- Giant banners/signs
- For a small library they do pretty well
- Local television station

10. Learn to Read and Write: Adult, teen, and family literacy. Adults and teens will have the support they need to improve their literacy skills in order to meet their personal goals and fulfill their responsibilities as parents, citizens, and workers.

One focus group participant described the Athol Public Library as doing what they should do. In other words, the Library is providing contemporary and classic literature, computer facilities, and all types of media to support the Town's needs. Formal literacy classes were not mentioned as a need or current service.

11. Make Career Choices: Job and career development. Adults and teens will have the skills and resources they need to identify career opportunities that suit their individual strengths and interests.

The helpfulness of staff and availability of ten computers to find information related to jobs and careers were cited as filling this need.

12. Make Informed Decisions: Health, wealth, and other life choices. Residents will have the resources they need to identify and analyze risks, benefits, and alternatives before making decisions that affect their lives.

Again, the helpfulness of staff and availability of ten computers to find information related to jobs and careers were cited as filling this need. However a user expressed that it would be nice to get more books in the library, so interlibrary loan would not be so necessary, and that the library was in need of more historical and non-fiction books, including more medical books with new concepts, and a more balanced collection of political thought.

13. Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong learning. Residents will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives.

Both teens and library users expressed a joy of reading and the need to be around books. All groups were familiar with the availability of Interlibrary Loan and the willingness of the staff to get what they wanted fast!

14. Stimulate Imagination: Reading, viewing, and listening for pleasure. Residents will have materials and programs that excite their imaginations and provide pleasurable reading, viewing, and listening experiences.

The abundance of programming and the staff's willingness to provide Interlibrary Loans seems to be evidence that library is offering opportunities for people to expand their interests.

15. Succeed in School: Homework help. Students will have the resources they need to succeed in school.

Young adults mentioned the computer resources and staff help.

16. Understand How to Find, Evaluate, and Use Information: Information fluency. Residents will know when they need information to resolve an issue or answer a question and will have the skills to search for, locate, evaluate, and effectively use information to meet their needs.

The staff was praised many times by all groups for their expertise, professionalism, and people skills to provide information. However, every group mentioned that the staff was always busy, understaffed, and unable to provide extended computer assistance. The elimination of the Assistant Director was seen as a great loss to service to the public and imposing greater responsibilities on the Director.

17. Visit a Comfortable Place: Physical and virtual spaces. Residents will have safe and welcoming physical places to meet and interact with others or to sit quietly and read and will have open and accessible virtual spaces that support networking.

Young adults enjoy the teen space because it is comfy, a place of their own, and includes books that they like to read. However, young adults offered suggestions for making the Teen Space even better:

- *Make Teen space bigger*
- *Build a new library with a movie theater; more new books; three floors, one exclusively for teens*
- *Make it more colorful (paint it bright!) Too much white*
- *Sound proof*

Adult users and town officials expressed that the library was a comfortable, welcoming, “gem of the community” that was “wonderfully old-fashioned”. However, they also expressed that the library was cluttered, in need of space (mentioned emphatically in all groups), and that there was no “private space”,

18. Welcome to the United States: New immigrants will have information on citizenship, English Language Learning (ELL), employment, public schooling, health and safety, available social services, and any other topics that they need to participate successfully in American life.

None of the groups mentioned this service response.

**FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES FROM THE FIVE FOCUS GROUPS:
YOUNG ADULTS, STAFF, TRUSTEES AND TOWN OFFICIALS,
ONE LIBRARY USER GROUP AND ONE COMBINED USER/NON USER GROUP**

All Responses from Young Adults

1. Where do you hang out?

Home
Here (Library)
*Friends' Houses
Skate Park
*School
Park (Lake)
Sanders Park
*Mall (Leominster, Holyoke, Hadley, Rochester, etc.)
Playground
High School
Movies
Hospital (parent employed)
Bus Stop

2. Where do you find the information you need for school work?

Internet
Library
Mom & Dad
Teachers
Make it up as I go along
Books
Video Game!
(Primarily English. Brainage.)
Google
Can't use Wikipedia – School doesn't allow
Suggested websites

3. What do you like about the library? What do you dislike about the library?

Like
Open Computer for 1 hour
Sign up & wait

Wifi

Laptops

Copy to a flashdrive or extend time if you run out of time.

Teen space

Comfy

Space that is ours

Books

Activities

Bake Sales

Car Wash

Read to small children

Cooking Class

Pennies for Peace

Cleaned up the Park

Community Service

Anime Club

Movie Night

Wii Tournaments

Prom Dresses

YuGiOh Game

ATAC – Athol Teen Advisory Council

Books

Work off fines

Dislike

Only one person per computer

Hours (Closing time is too early)

Not open weekends

Only “fine free” day is Wednesday.

Adults have a bigger space

Need a bigger selection of movies (DVDs)

Want people to be accountable for scratched DVDs.

Need a scratch remover for CDs and DVDs (they know it is expensive)

Teen space is out in the open...in the back would allow teens to be a little louder

A private space

Don't like people that steal things: Alarm the books to prevent loss.

4. Why do you come to the library?

Friends

Books
Love reading
Printers
Copy Machines
Use the Internet
Summer Reading books
Place to get away from home
Summer reading prizes
Special event (monthly)
Wizard prize box
The Red Sox reading log and chance to win prizes

5. Are there any services/programs not now offered by the library which you think the library should provide?

Dance competitions
Yoga
Exercise to Videos
Art classes
Karaoke
Musical (Workshops-Learning more about music)
Lessons (musical, etc.)
X-Box
Zumba
Field Trips (to the Mall; Whale Watch, Fishing, White Water Rafting, Camping, etc.)
Just Dance (Wii)
Sound proof teen space

6. Do your friends use the library? If yes, for what purpose? If no, do you know why not?

Yes
Libraries are for nerds
Friends go to other libraries
Loses books
Transportation is a problem
Return Boxes around town
Friends work in the library

7. How do you find out about services and programs that the library offers?

ATAC
Mail

Emails
Come to the Library
Anne randomly stops me
Announce at school
Twitter (not used much)
Suggest a Facebook site

8. If you could design your ideal library, what would you do differently than what the current Athol Public Library does?

Teen space bigger
New library (movie theater; new books; 3 floors (one for teens)
Make it more colorful (paint it bright!) Too much white
Extend the hours
More computers
More laptops
Mobile lab
Computers on wheels
Computer class
Promote every service, so they know about laptops and other services
Bigger cooking area
Cooking classes
Separate rooms for different services
Daycare downstairs
People to help people & kids
Playroom
Assistance watching kids while adults select materials
Able to eat food
Snackbar
Better event room
Study hall/place to do your homework
Kiddie playground
Be able to use cell phones in the library without getting in trouble
ATAC would be able to buy CDs, DVDs, Books...unlimited credit card

All Responses from Staff

1. How could the Library improve?

More hours
Less clutter
More shelves

More space
More effective signage
Smaller group areas
Study areas
Quiet areas
Areas that permit noise
More space
Storage space
Joining C/W MARS
Work areas not accessible to the public
Staff bathrooms
Security-personal items need more secure location (public comes into "our" workspace)
Double wide stacks/handicapped accommodations
Handicapped accessibility (computers; less clutter, so handicapped can get around use services and browse)
Better climate control
Security for archives and the collection
Staff room separate from work space
More work space for pages, etc. to have
Large Main Desk area (2 desks & 2 small telephones, chairs to occasionally sit down.
Standing height workstations in the back
Better storage for the collection items (DVDs; CDs, etc.)
Circular public computer area
(Be easier for staff to monitor & help)
Parking lot
Better reading area for those who come in to read paper or other things
Designated food area
Fax machine for the public to use
Projector Room in addition to Activity Room
More space for everything!
With more space, still need expansion space.
More janitorial service
Steady consistent funding

2. In your view, and based on your experience, how have the expectations of the public changed over recent years?

More demanding
Want things yesterday
Free and Fast!
It's not just about books anymore

Social network capabilities
No fines
More computers
No restrictions on computer use
Respect is less than it once was; little respect for staff
Less comfortable waiting for ILL
Unwilling to bring materials back
Don't trust us to call; Don't pick up items on time
Expectation is that staff can do everything
Lot more expectation that the library staff is here to entertain rather than educate
Customers have become less respectful of each other
They use the library more
Less intimidated by staff
They know more about what the library can get
More aware of all that the library staff can do
Able to get things for free that once cost money
Know what's available, still expect staff to do it for them
Expect DVDs in better condition
Less people use the computer catalog than the card catalog (upstairs)
In children's room, people use the computer catalog more than the card catalog
1st or 2nd graders now use the catalog
Expect the newest and the latest (esp. DVDs)
Tend to believe the Internet over the Reference section
Disconnect between funding and services
Share how nice patrons & how grateful they can be
Change of hours didn't result in new patrons
Changing hours makes it hard for people to remember
Don't respect closing hours ("They think it's a suggestion")

3. In your view are you given enough training and support to deal with the customers?

Yes
More staff sharing time
Depends on who you are
People-person helps
Training not for dealing with customers (video???)
Staff Manual is given when staff start
Support from older people
Less training?
Regional training not available for younger members

Workshops at time evening workers could take advantage
Training area for online course
Sometimes bugs are not worked out for online users
No person is in charge of training
“Dorothy” was a detailed trainer, now inconsistent, trained by
person leaving
On the plus side not a high rate of turnover
Longevity makes for good training
Time is spent on using the computer system, but not enough
on dealing with patrons
You can’t be prepared for everything!
Good pool to pick from when hiring & good student workers

4. What things do you feel would improve the delivery of library services to the public?

More space for activities/ programs
Better DVD system
More computer classes, but no one to teach
Better book sale area
Spend more time working with the patrons; telling people how
to set up an account & place holds, renew, (Things that they
could do on their own)
More hours
More space
Less clutter when you step in the door
More ways to display things in a more inviting way
More parking
Drive through
Banking booth
Get a RED Box (DVDs)
Space for an instructional sign
Inform people where to get a C/W MARS card
More dependable newspaper advertising
Make behavioral expectations clear, so that patrons respect
each other (talk on cell phones; let babies cry while on
computer; ignore kids while using computer
Area is inconvenient for using computers, etc. for people with
children
People expect personal assistance on the computer

5. What do you think we provide that we no longer need to?

VHS...Weed...Don't add

Handicapped can't handle the DVD (Reason for keeping VHS)
Audio Books on tape (cassettes)
Reference now circulating (minimized)
Mass. General Law
Typewriters

6. What do you see as the biggest challenges the library faces in the next 3-5 years?

Keeping up with technology
Space
Funding
Adequate staffing
Staying valuable to all the groups of people
Staying valuable vs. what people can look up at home
Keeping programs that appeal to a wide audience

7. As a staff member how would you like to be involved in shaping library services, programs and policies?

Already are involved
Director keeps up to date
Staff can add to policy change
Policy changes reflect staff input

All responses from Library Trustees and other Town Officials

1. When someone says Athol Public Library, what do you think of?

Community
Books
Cultural Center
Key component to a well balanced community
Versatility
Place for all kinds of things go on for all kinds of people
Deb Blanchard
Very devoted staff
Quality
Opportunities for the community
Too little space for the needs of the community
Good programs
Important for youth
Used by youth
Used by children
Comfortable place to come for all ages

Well used place: Lined up at the door before opening
Public access computers
Internet access
For visitors as well as residents
Accommodate difficult situations
Delivery to the elderly
Interlibrary loan
Safe community space
Summer Meal program (grant program)
Library open to whatever can help community, esp children
Reach children & improve lives with food program
Open to all possibilities of service
Youth employment
Tax abatement for senior work program
Wonderful volunteer program
Limited budget
Renovation and addition in near future
Current website information

2. Aside from using the Library, where do you go for information?

Books
Internet
Newspapers
Periodicals
Websites
People
Library Staff
"The Source"
Agencies
Specialist (doctor, lawyer)
Police Department
Fire Department
Town Hall
David – Town Manager
Email
Ask the kids
Facebook
Cell phone
Schools
Internet but does not replace the importance of the public
library system

3. How could the Library improve?

- Space...lots of space...
- Larger staff
- Open more hours
- Assistant librarian
- Saturday hours
- Larger budget
- More & newer books
- Additional computers for the public
- Larger space for teens
- More space for other groups
- More meeting rooms
- Private areas
- Offices for staff

Enroll partners to meet goals:

- Library partners
- Town departments
- Increase support base to promote goals
- YMCA/Library

Regionalize Libraries (explained that the opposite was happening, but it was suggested that libraries pair up like regional school systems)

- Expand handicapped accessibility
- Expand flexible and different types of programs
- Education (computer classes) programs restored
- Business partnerships
- Grants and Foundation support
- School Systems and Library Cooperation

4. What do you see as the biggest challenges the library faces in the next 3-5 years?

And, how can the Library overcome these challenges?

Funding is the biggest challenge.

Ideas to get more money:

- More Grant applications
- Lobby for change of committee members or attitudes that serve on the Finance Committee
- Begging in the streets
- Volunteer services (limited by staff supervisors and abilities of volunteers)

State Funding (Changes in laws that would make regionalization easier & change the exact percentage requirement)

Seek Federal Funding

Fundraising events

“Let’s make a deal” with Dunkin’ Donuts (partner)(change men’s room into the donut shop)

Friends of the Library

Win the lottery

Funding the Expansion is the second major challenge

Ideas for funding the expansion:

Town support

USDA grant

Green Communities Grant

State Library Construction Funding (MBLC)

Private donors

Capital Campaign (competing with a “zillion others”/ non-competing)

Threaten closing (vs. working cooperatively

Gambling opportunity

Bingo Night once a week

Spaghetti Suppers

Dinner every night of the week (support different departments)

Selling men (auction their services)

Goods & Services Auctions (different angle from the AOTV)

Keeping Certification was seen as the third biggest challenge

Encourage State to loosen rules

Explain to local officials how the rules help to strengthen the library

Overall money increase

In the absence of the present Central Regional Library

System more burden will now be on the town budget

Work with the state legislators

Perhaps supply an extra courier system

Pool money from area libraries to pay for workshops

Find advocates for libraries & ask them to step forward

Serving non-certified library users from other

communities within the library also is a perceived challenge

Encourage community to assist with services in Athol

Send Carol to all of the Town Meetings to advocate for library support of Athol PL
Finding a way to open longer hours & weekends is a challenge
Assistant Director position; then open weekends (Trustee Priority)
Business Partnership to fund every other Saturdays
Finding resources to fund assistant director position is a challenge
Private funding?? & explore state and legal ramifications
Ask the town manager to put in budget
Encourage an altruistic community volunteer with an MLS and a computer degree to volunteer

Other Challenges:

Changing needs of citizens (ever-changing needs of community requires library to change to meet their needs
Providing enough DVDs; Computers; Electronic Books)
Additional staff
Trained staff (tech training)

5. Thinking of the variety of town services offered to Athol residents, what value or role does the Library have?

Information Resource
Education
Dissemination
Resource
Community Center
Training Facility
Computer & Internet access for the community
Safe gathering place
Job finding assistance
Value to youth (teens)
Programming for teens
Young for the school research needed to fulfill the educational needs for their future
Elderly to allow them the facility to keep their minds sharp
Directions & public information
Notary Service
More accessible than Town Hall
Fax Services
Consistently open
Friendly place in Town

Extraordinary staff

6. How important is it to have the library in the town center?

Extremely

Library is the center of the town

Convenient

On the bus line

Across the street to the YMCA

Destination location along with other places in downtown area

Convenient to group

Green Community

Location in center of town is important for LEED certification

Ten businesses within a ½ mile is suggested by LEEDS

Keeps the Downtown area vibrant

7. How much community support is there for the Library?

There is more support when there is matching support from other sources than town money.

Long sigh! (People can only afford “so much”)

A lot of support

Moral support although not financial

Not sure that the town would not support if faced with decertification; closing, etc.

There are non-users in the town and on the finance committee

Beginning to wane due to competition from electronic media

All Responses from Users

1. When someone says Athol Public Library, what do you think of?

A gem in our community

Excellent resource

Small

Doesn't have a large collection

Good choice of books

Affiliated with other libraries

Interlibrary Loan

Pleasant atmosphere

Peaceful

Everyone is very helpful

Wonderful staff

They really do what a library should do
Go out of their way
Never had difficulty with personnel
Courteous staff
Extremely helpful
Feeling of the “fifties” – wonderfully old-fashioned
Hometown
Not “in your face”
Not blaring music/technology overload
Old fashioned in the way that the world used to be
Comfortable atmosphere
Community Center
Resource Center
Place to get books
Welcoming & Joining opportunity
Information
Vibrant
Useful
Multi-generational
Needed
Service to the community
Friendly service
Interesting Programs
Comfortable place to ask a question
Internet connection
Find material
Fast service
Tax service
Offered to everyone
Staff will get back to you with an answer to question
Interlibrary Loan
If it’s not here they get it & fast!
Order if they can’t ILL
Learning opportunities
Variety of programming
Different groups & opportunities (Prom Gowns)
New technologies
Facilities for meetings
Lots of teen activities
Children’s activities (storytimes & casual play group)
Summer Reading
Winter Reading
Reading Buddies

Community Reading Day (School & Library Cooperation)
On the Same Page- Early nineteenth hundreds
discussion/Mass author
Most valuable service in town
Most valuable building in town

2. Aside from using the Library, where do you find the information you need?

Google
Dictionary
Internet
Look through old book stores
Antiquarian book stores for local history
NPR
Newspaper
Radio
News Magazines
Television
Speakers that speak to certain issues
Professionals (accountants, physicians, etc.)
Locker Room at the Y
Friends
Church
People

3. Do you see the library as having a role in strengthening the sense of community in Athol?

Absolutely, positively (Note that this was the first response of both library users groups!)

Brings people together in groups that might not necessarily group on their own

Neutral location

Inviting location

People can meet people that are different

Staff helps to welcome different people (people of all walks of life, nationalities, etc.)

Social aspect

There for a resource on Town projects (municipality & groups)

Try to improve town

Local staffing helps the sense of community...Staff are part of the community

Competent staff

Welcoming/Opening their door to Y groups and others
Collaboration/Networking with other town groups
Young people do not value books; they value what comes from handheld devices
Offers alternative to technology...towards reading
Elderly gather to read materials that they can't afford and then go to gathering places (lunch, etc.)
Coupons
Talks in the library-chance to get together
School children learn local history
Tax lady for elderly
Anne Teen Program welcomes this group of upcoming generation and involving them (ATAC)

4. How important is it to have the library in the town center?

Extremely
Crucial
Within walking distance of elderly housing
Sufficient parking in the center of town
Part of the fabric of community where we show "it" with pride
Center of town brings people in...with other destination locations
Saves gas to make one trip to go to the library and do another errand downtown
Makes it readily accessible to people
Holds the community together in a physical sense
Adds vibrancy to the Town with the Library in the Center
People see it as they drive through
Place where people come to spend hours to read and to socialize "downtown"
Keeps businesses in the center of town
One of many destination places in the center of town
We love our old building

5. What are the top reasons you come to the library?

Like to read books
Love to read
Atmosphere
Nice collection of atlases; topographic maps
Book groups
Magazines
Books

Videos
Talk to the Staff
To be a part of the Town
Classes/Speakers
Bring grandkids to play
Get things to keep the grandkids entertained
Museum passes
Christmas open house
Because the staff is always trying to do things & get things
to bring in more people and for the community enjoyment
Hear authors when they visit

6. Are there any services/programs not now offered by the library which you think the library should provide?

Open Saturday mornings
All day Saturday would be nice
Disappointing that it is not open on Saturday
More hours
Saturday hours
Computer classes (Excel & Other software)
Computer Classes on the beginner level/specific need
Training for different levels of computer skills
Offer classes on diverse group of beginners
Major entertainment for the elderly without cars
Finding ways to add more staff
Add Poetry Group/Yoga to things the library does

7. Do you feel the Library promotes/markets/publicizes its services effectively?

Yes, uses the following methods:
Website
New books in the newspaper (Athol Daily News)
Giant banners/signs
Local television station
Newspaper coverage in small town is shared by
different groups
Flyers & publicity
Advertising on the Internet
Newsletters go to the Friends
On Twitter & other social networking, Facebook
For a small library they do pretty well
Write-ups after the programs
Photos

Work with the schools / promote reading for schools
Increase use of the library in recent years due to the economy could be publicized to promote the value of the library

8. If you could design your ideal library, what would you do differently than what the current Athol Public Library does?

Comfortable seating
More shelf space for books
More and sturdier stepstools
Less clutter in the history corner
Would hate to see a modern building with contemporary furniture
Want the library to reflect childhood memories of the 1950s (this is a time when parents read to children and that is what would be nice to encourage)
Needs more shelf space
Like to get more books in the library vs. Interlibrary Loaning
More historical, non-fiction
More medical books with new concepts
Balanced collection of political thought
More computers
Library should be for serving the community, including student needs
Stay open later than 5:30 (especially for workers and those who commute out of town)
More volunteers to keep the library open
More parking space
Need more open facility
More modern facility
An addition
Technically up-to-date
Better financed
Bigger
Adequate staff
Adequate hours
Lot more storage space
Community space – So that there are no conflicts with Activity Room
This old building updated
Opening up spaces
Ability to stay open with more hours

Dedicated funds that cannot be handled by other
departments/or the town
Plans for a new addition
An up and out addition
Green expansion
Create a political environment that is pro-library
Zip up the apathy
Or a new library but central
Bit of nostalgia about old bookcase
Fireplace
A new site would solve problems of lack of land and parking
& other constraints
Preserve the sense of history of the Town's affluent past
Reuse what is already here
A room for teens to congregate
A place to socialize
Living Room atmosphere
MORE ROOM!!!
A room just with a TV for programs
Computer use room
Librarians' office space would be 40 times bigger
More storage