

MIDDLETOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY LONG RANGE PLAN

FY2021-FY2025, Approved by the Library Board of Trustees, August 18, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Preplanning for this long range plan began in October 2019. A committee chair was appointed, a working committee was being assembled, and strategies for public input were designed. Just as the process was getting underway, we found that we had to close the library, practice social distancing and communicate electronically. It is not an understatement to say that this moment in time is an extraordinary time for public services. Just when you think you know what strong, responsive library service demands, an event like the coronavirus pandemic comes along and changes everything. Long standing processes that have come to define public libraries – in person reference service, loaning books/music cd's/dvd's, access to public computers/scanning/photocopying, children's story times, programming, using a community meeting room – are now put on hold. Digital streaming has become front and center. Moreover, the understanding that an event like this may happen again within the time frame of this plan, necessitates the need to rethink and realign priorities. This document represents the thoughtful, ongoing work to determine the way forward for library services, so very important to the Middletown community.

THE LIBRARY AND THE COMMUNITY: AN OVERVIEW

Middletown is a community of 17,075 residents, located on historic Aquidneck Island. It was incorporated in 1743, and possesses a rich cultural heritage, an outstanding quality of life, and access to pristine natural resources. The library is governed by a seven member volunteer Board of Trustees appointed for a three year term by the Middletown Town Council. It receives an annual operating budget from the Town of Middletown, annual Rhode Island Grant in Aid, as well as generous support from the Friends of the Middletown Public Library, local businesses, and the Rhode Island Foundation. There are fifteen employees, of which five work full time. As of July 1, 2020, there are 9,170 registered library card holders.

MIDDLETOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY – READING WITH YOU SINCE 1848

The library began as the Miantonomi Circulating Library in 1848. It consisted of a small collection of books that were kept in a locked bookcase at the Oliphant School. Borrowers paid \$1.00 per share annually. At the same time, another group of residents formed the Middletown Free Library. In 1875, the two libraries combined and the collection was moved into a small building on the Chase Farm. In 1903, the family of Joseph Bailey donated funds to erect a library building in his memory at the corner of West Main Road and Oliphant Lane. The library was open on Tuesdays from 2pm-4pm. It was heated by a coal stove and there was no running water or electricity. A furnace was installed in 1948 and running water in 1955. In 1978, ownership of the library was transferred to the Town. In 1979, the library moved to 700 West Main Road into the former Navy Anchorage Day Care Center. It was expanded and renovated in 2005 funded in part by a Rhode Island Public Library Construction grant. Currently the building

has outgrown its usefulness. In several areas, the slab floor is severely cracked presumably due to the weight of the book stacks. The mechanical systems are nearing the end of their life expectancy.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Middletown Public Library seeks to improve and enrich lives through information, education, and recreation. The library serves the community by providing:

- clean and inviting surroundings
- organized, up-to-date collections
- access to state-of-the-art technology
- friendly, professional service
- trained staff who are committed to excellence

VISION STATEMENT

The library will maintain its status as an exemplary provider of services that encourage the free flow of ideas to inform, educate, enrich, and entertain its patrons.

SERVICES IN THE TIME OF CORONA

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the library was open 7 days a week, a total of 61 hours, from September to May and 6 days per week during the summer. Services included free use of the meeting room by community groups and non-profits, free Wi-Fi, free scanning to email, free access to computers, free personal income tax preparation by trained preparers, art exhibits, low priced access to professional quality black ink and color printing, instructional workshops including 3D design and printing, programming for all ages groups, access to the Friends' gently used book store and a community garden in the rear of the property.

Gov. Gina Raimondo declared a state of emergency on March 9, 2020. The library closed to the public on March 13, 2020. All library staff continued to report to work. They were able to address collection management projects, specifically a complete inventory of the collection, weeding, and mending. Staff also spent considerable time updating the library's webpage, planning a revised virtual summer reading program, and installing a new online product, Beanstack, which was purchased in February with a Rhode Island Legislative Grant. Subsequently this product was made available to all Rhode Island libraries and so the grant funds will be used for another initiative.

In April, a literacy project was initiated to complement Gov. Raimondo's Reading Challenge. We named it, "Middletown Reads – Family Book Giveaway". It was supported by the Friends of Middletown Public Library and generous donors who made it possible for Middletown families to receive 2 free books for each child, age preschool to high school. In one month's time, 99 families contacted the library and 394 books were distributed to 197 young readers. We continued the program through June until the library's summer reading program was launched.

Also in April, the library initiated contactless curbside loans. This service became instantly popular and still continues. Contactless fee based printing also accessed by curbside pickup began in May.

In June, the library reopened to the public with restricted access when Reopening Rhode Island, Phase II was announced by Gov. Raimondo. In July, additional hours of restricted access were made available as the state entered Phase III.

More contactless public access is planned for September 2020 with the resumption of weekend service hours beginning October 1, 2020. The proposed schedule will be 7 days per week for a total of 54 service hours, dependent upon forthcoming directives from Gov. Raimondo.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

The library's collection is comprised of 76,854 books, periodicals, digital resources, and miscellaneous circulating equipment. Cardholders also have direct access to the 4.4 million items held in other Rhode Island public libraries through the library's membership in the Ocean State Libraries network. On a month to month basis, the library is a consistent net lender to other libraries in the consortium. Staff mediated interlibrary loan service provides additional access to the holdings of over 40,000 libraries worldwide.

Annual Circulation Statistics

FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
128,438	137,034	145,438	145,303	141,667	129,869	122,814	122,633

***library card holders use trends physical vs. digital**

*FY18		*FY19		*FY20	
physical	113,293	physical	118,985	physical	101,010
electronic	18,192	electronic	20,869	electronic	26,136
streaming	7,043	streaming	10,856	streaming	13,723
grand total	138,528	grand total	150,710	grand total	140,869

USER NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Data from the following community surveys and forums is compiled in chronological order.

Fall 2019 Middletown, RI Community Livability Report

The National Community Survey (NCS), conducted by National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) in collaboration with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA)

Conclusions: At least 8 in 10 community members gave high marks to the overall quality of life in Middletown, the town and their neighborhoods as places to live, and Middletown as a place

to raise children. Residents indicated that the facet of Safety was an important focus area for the Town to address in the coming two years. Respondents' assessments of crime prevention were exceptional and higher than the national benchmark.

Survey participants highlighted the Economy as a priority for the Town in the next two years. Similar to other comparison communities, at least half of residents positively rated the overall economic health of Middletown, Middletown as a place to visit and work, and the overall quality of business and service establishments. However, evaluations of the cost of living, vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, economic development and new development in Middletown were below average, with less than one-third of residents providing favorable ratings. Additionally, assessments of housing-related items were lower than the national benchmarks; less than 4 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the availability of affordable quality housing and the variety of housing options in Middletown.

Middletown residents also selected Education and Enrichment as a key focus area for the community. Community members' ratings of public libraries and special events were positive and on par with national averages. Conversely, reviews of K-12 education, opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities, availability of affordable quality child care/preschool, adult educational opportunities and overall opportunities for education and enrichment were lower than reviews observed in comparison communities.

February 11, 2020 Citizen Input Survey – Middletown Strategic Plan 2021-2023 – two week online survey on the Middletown website

There were two hundred thirty three responses: 86.96% from Middletown residents; 13.04% from people who work or own a business in Middletown.

Education and Enrichment including public & private schools, library services, preschool & child care programs, adult learning, art and music – rated third most important out of eight categories, with safety and natural environment placing first and second respectively. The remaining five categories in order of importance are economy, mobility, built environment, recreation & wellness, and community engagement.

Suggestions for Improvements for Built Environment: 1. Invest in green energy wherever possible, especially for public buildings like schools and the library.
2. Affordable housing where residents can walk to the store, library, post office, town hall.

Suggestions for Improvements for Recreation & Wellness: JFK should become a town athletic center to tie in with the fields on the other side of the library.

Suggestions for Improvements for Education & Enrichment: 1. Get the library their new building!
2. Add foreign language back to elementary schools. Expand the STEM programs. Offer public preschool for all. We are regulars at the library, and love it but wish the children's section were bigger.

3. There is no bus to the library.
4. Enable artificial intelligence & machine learning curriculum for all levels of society in town. Perhaps at CCRI Newport, the public library and all schools. Use high speed internet to enable access to “super computer” power (i.e. GPU’s etc.) from home... almost like a utility.
5. The main façade of our high school needs a facelift. We need to replace our library: it’s an old eyesore that is, literally breaking down. A library is a direct reflection of a community’s commitment to its people, and ours sends a clear message: “Eh!” Consider a public/private development similar to that of Silver Springs, MD. That city features a beautiful library that’s integrated into a shopping and entertainment complex. It’s a win for everyone!
(<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Library/branches/silverspring.html>)
6. The library could use more funding for updated books and more public computers.
7. The public schools could be better with more professional leadership from the school board and school administration. — Also, the library does a great job, especially since its building is falling down!!! The town deserves a first-rate library building to go along with its first-rate library services.
8. Providing the library the sufficient funds in the budget is important in order to maintain the building is beneficial for all residents, seeing as the library provides both resources and information to the town.
9. There seems to be a lack of preschool age and younger facilities that are affordable and high quality. Middletown should also look to Portsmouth for improving public schools. The library also could use updating and expanding, particularly the Children’s area.

Suggested Improvements for Community Engagement: 1. Have a town day just directed towards community involvement, joining town committees – people are hesitant as they are not sure of what the commitment is or what is the function of the committee. Town should support the library for fund raising – Newport library has great fund raising events that bring in lots of dollars.

2. Public art and displays are a benefit to Towns. Rotating displays of various types and forms of art throughout Municipal facilities would be a fun, engaging endeavor. Paintings and sculpture at the library and Town Hall would be a good, easy start. Someplace like the trails along the valley park could have “art pads” (solid cement pad for artwork) installed for a rotating sculpture installation and would be a good incentive to get people out and about. There could be a quarterly rotation which could be promoted.

3. Beach gatherings, commemorative events, enhanced opportunities for lectures and classes at the library and schools and senior center. Wouldn’t it be great to have a neighborhood guild like South Kingston has – a dedicated building for fitness, art, maker space, wood shop, etc. Bringing so many people together and enhancing interaction, creativity, and community. We are commuting over there (yes, to the other side of the bay!) To participate now. Why can’t that kind of community resource exist in Middletown? Visit – you will be impressed!

4. Utilize the library more for community social for outreach. Utilize what we already have in place.

February 26, 2020 Middletown Planning Dept. Community Forum West Main/Coddington Development Center

Thirty three people attended but only a handful spoke. Some advocated for planned development and others recommended the land be used for affordable housing. No one said that the library should remain where it is.

Feb. 29, 2020 Middletown Strategic Planning Meeting, Facilitated by the Middletown Town Council with all Town Dept Heads in attendance.

It was determined that the Library can support the Middletown Schools with digital access to resources for language learners, self directed learning, and career development.

GOALS FY2021-FY2025

FY21-FY25 GOALS/SERVICE RESPONSES

1. Library collections in multiple formats are organized, accessible, and up to date.
2. All library personnel are fully prepared to provide in person and remote services.
3. The library building and grounds are capable of serving a 21st century community.
4. The library's core is to engage, inspire, empower.
5. The library and Middletown schools are partners in students' ongoing success.
6. The library will provide virtual and contactless services as necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

ANNUAL SERVICE GOALS

- Establish an environment that nurtures early literacy development, self-directed learning, life-long development, and community engagement
- Provide materials and resources for information, entertainment, intellectual development, and the enrichment of the Middletown community
- Employ trained staff who:
 - select, organize, and make available books, audio-visual and digital materials
 - provide guidance and professional reference assistance to patrons
 - implement programs, exhibits, and displays that engage children and adults
 - acquire information beyond the Library's own resources
- Participate in resource sharing by lending materials to other libraries upon request
- Maintain service hours that best meet the needs of the community
- Provide access to public internet computers, printing, scanning, tablets, and Wi-Fi
- Provide opportunities for digital design and engineering through public 3D printing
- Provide access to meeting space during all the hours that the Library is open
- Host federal, state, regional and local events in the community room
- Host free personal income tax preparation facilitated annually by AARP
- Engage the Middletown Community by providing access to state of the art equipment, an

extensive collection of newly published materials, and a full schedule of programs that inspire, educate and entertain

CONCLUSION

The library is currently in Phase III of its reopening plan which coincides with the guidelines released by the Rhode Island Dept. of Health and Gov. Gina Raimondo's directives. Virtual services have risen to the top of the library's service model as dictated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Every first year goal of this plan is being reviewed and revised as necessary. Public meetings, workshops, digital literacy training, and programming are all on hold. Social distancing and an abundance of caution for staff and patron safety changed all aspects of how library services have been traditionally delivered and will continue to define those services going forward for the better part of this plan's duration. A plan to assess the building's structural condition is currently on hold but will resume at the appropriate time.

METHODOLOGY

Data from the following public surveys and community forums was used to develop this plan as noted in the User Needs Assessment section.

Fall 2019 The National Community Survey (NCS)*, conducted by National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) in collaboration with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). *Middletown, RI Community Livability Report.*

*The NCS is a comprehensive, statistically valid survey solution for local governments eager to find out what their residents think about their communities. The results, based on resident perceptions, describe the areas where community members themselves believe things are going well and shed light on the areas that could benefit from improvement. Pg. 1 NCS

September 2019 Postal survey mailed to 1,700 random residents; 470 responded.

October/November 2019 Website survey through a link on the Town's website: 223 surveys received

February 11, 2020 Citizen Input Survey – Middletown Strategic Plan 2021-2023 – a two week online survey on the Middletown website

February 26, 2020 Middletown Planning Dept. Community Forum, West Main/Coddington Development Center

Feb. 29, 2020 Middletown Strategic Planning Meeting – attended by the Town Council, Town Administrator, Town Solicitor, School Committee, School Superintendent, Town Department Heads, Library Director

APPENDIX

FY2021 Annual Performance Plan, submitted to Middletown Town Council January 2020

Outcomes	End Users	Strategic Goals	Measures
1. Prepare and administer a zero based annual operating budget.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Library users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library's tax based operating budget meets RIGL 29-6-3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middletown receives Grant in Aid for library services.
2. Maintain a weekly schedule of 7 days, 61 hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Library users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The schedule is responsive to community needs and convenient for residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual statistics reflect sustained use.
3. Meet all RI Public Library Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Library users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library operations comply with RI Public Library Standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middletown receives Grant in Aid for library services; residents have reciprocal privileges at other libraries.
4. Provide resources in all formats to support life -long learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Library users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library Mission: provide well-organized and up-to-date collections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual statistics reflect sustained use; feedback is positive.
5. Provide age appropriate programs to nurture literacy, critical thinking, and technological skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Library users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library Mission: enrich lives through information, education, and recreation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual program attendance statistics reflect sustained use; feedback is positive.
6. Provide free access to computers, printers, Wi-Fi, copiers, scanners, tablets, 3D design, wireless printing, and streaming services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Library users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library Mission: Provide access to state-of-the-art technology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual statistics reflect sustained use. Public printing is self sustaining.
7. Maintain the Library's web page as the primary point of access to information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Library users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Web Page Policy: the website will organize and provide access to resources integral to the Library's mission. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Web site statistics reflect sustained use. Web site is up to date, engaging and informative.
8. Organize and provide access to Middletown documents, RI State information and historical documents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Library Users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection Development Policy: maintains collection of RI sources: General Laws, historical documents, and Middletown publications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All information is catalogued and publicly accessible within 30 days of receipt.
9. Provide free public meeting space during all the hours that the library is open.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middletown Boards/ Commissions RI State/US Federal Agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting Room Policy: provide access to community groups and non-profits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual statistics reflect sustained use.

· Community Garden activity, chess club, volunteerism, donations remain constant; free income tax preparation; digital literacy workshops; bookstore activity; increased collaborations with Middletown Historical Society.

- Residents
- Library Users
- Friends of the Library

· Middletown Vision Statement: a future committed to building valuable partnerships.

10. Identify and develop opportunities for community engagement.