

# Final Report of the Library Planning Committee

April 12, 2002

## *Overall Summary*

Satisfaction with the Wayland Public Library (WPL), its staff, services, collections and programs is high among those who participated in our work. Still when asked, focus group participants, survey respondents and staff had suggestions for the WPL to become the "perfect library." Few people explicitly said that a larger facility is needed, and most expressed affection for the present building. However, everyone participating in this process asked for more - more collections, computers, shelf space, quiet work areas, meeting rooms of various capacities, storage, seating, more space in the children's room, teen space, community programs as well as other requests. Our report shows that the desired uses of the Library expressed by our community cannot be achieved within the present facility. Choices will need to be made to balance the community's desired growth in services and the potential of the Library facility.

## *Purpose*

On April 27, 2001, the Library Trustees formed the Library Planning Committee (LPC) for the purpose of developing an assessment of our community's vision of needs for Wayland's public

library of the future. This assessment is one evaluative tool for use in developing a long-range plan for the Wayland Public Library.

Members of the LPC were Co-Chairs Aida Gennis and Cherry Karlson, Bev Daniels (resigned November 2001), Karl Geiger, Elizabeth Sweitzer and Jo Wilson. We were supported with the regular attendance of Louise Brown, Director of the Wayland Public Library, and three Library Trustees: Anne Heller, Lynne Lipcon and Ronnie Swain. The LPC held fourteen committee meetings, five focus groups and multiple subgroup meetings to accomplish our tasks. We gathered background information to better educate ourselves, developed methods to gather information from the community, and assessed our results to finish our mission.

## *Background Informatio*

The committee collected information through:

- Statistical review of usage trends;
- Review of other communities' needs assessment methods and processes; and
- Discussions with WPL staff and Trustees.

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The statistics were drawn from the WPL's records of June 30, 2001. They show Wayland Library's attendance and circulation increasing during the prior year – against statewide trends. Attendance at adult and children's programs was up; growth in circulation of non-print materials increased while circulation of juvenile books decreased.

The LPC interviewed library trustees and/or directors of local community libraries to establish their methods for determining need, planning for new libraries and surveying constituents. We contacted Acton, Lincoln, Natick, Sudbury, Wellesley and Weston. Collectively, their advice was to conduct a combination of focus groups and surveys to collect community data. They also all engaged third parties at some point in the planning process to provide further objectivity, architectural advice or space analysis.

We gathered feedback and ideas from the WPL Trustees and staff on what they wished to see in a library – now or in the future. Six sessions were held, and ideas clustered around

improvements in the physical plant/furnishings and enhancements to services.

## *Methodology*

We used multiple methods to contact the residents of Wayland and other WPL users to inform them of the opportunity to participate in our work. The LPC was the focus of two articles in the *Wayland Town Crier*, and the Library Notes column of the *Town Crier* contained regular updates on our progress. We included an insert in the October 2001 tax bill informing residents of our project and inviting them to attend our focus groups or to complete a survey. Two primary methods of gathering community data were used: focus groups and surveys.

Five focus groups were held in October and November, 2001. The League of Women Voters provided a scribe for each session, and Vicki LaFarge, Wayland resident and Associate Professor of Management and Chair of the Management Department at Bentley College, donated her time as the facilitator. This provided consistency in record keeping, questioning and managing the focus groups. Finally, a Library Trustee and a member of LPC were present at each group. We invited attendance through notices in the *Town Crier*, the tax bill insert, posters in public locations, notices in parent newsletters at the public schools, and telephone invitations to community groups in Wayland. Members of the LPC also personally recruited attendees. Total attendance at the focus groups was 34 people.

Surveys were available to the Wayland community during the month of October, 2001. Notice of the surveys occurred as mentioned above. We distributed surveys to the community at large, to teachers at the five public schools in Wayland, and to a group of Middle and High School students. The community surveys were available at four public locations (Town Building, Senior Center, WPL's Children's Room and WPL's main circulation desk) and on the Library's Web site. Teacher surveys were delivered to teachers' mailboxes at the schools, and the student surveys were administered through the Social Studies Department at the High School and through Tag Group discussions at the Middle School. All surveys were coded to track the location where they were completed. We collected 638 surveys: 240 community members, 99 teachers and 299 students.

We asked community and patron participants whether they were registered borrowers at the WPL; 95.3% indicated that they were. We estimate that our 638 participants represent 7% of the number of registered borrowers at the Wayland Public Library (8,883 as of June 30, 2001). The WPL's registered borrowers represent 64% of Wayland's population of 13,806 at the time of the

town elections in April 2001 (Wayland Town Clerk's information). The statistical information we used for this report is dated June 30, 2001.

Six interviews were held: one with all the Library Trustees and five individual interviews with Library staff. Interviews were conducted early in the LPC project to gather background information. Louise Brown, Director, told staff about our process and offered them the opportunity to speak with the LPC. We wanted the Library staff to have the occasion to give us information about improving the existing library and to discuss their ideas for the library of the future or "perfect" library. We also thought their comments might address issues not considered by patrons. All staff members interviewed were told their comments would be kept confidential and reported as a group.

Christopher Clark of Boston Information Systems assisted with the analysis of our survey data on a pro bono basis. He constructed a Web site where the LPC members input all survey data. Input was completed in February, 2002. From this data, Clark ran standard reports, which the LPC and Library Trustees analyzed and summarized. These reports were essential to being able to utilize the survey data.

We listed the URL of the Library's Web page in error in our printed materials. We realized our error once the printing of the materials was completed. We addressed this by posting the corrected URL, <http://www.wayland.ma.us/library>, at: the four distribution sites of the surveys, in the teachers' mailrooms at the schools (the site of dissemination and collection of their surveys), in the Library News column of the *Town Crier*, at the focus group sessions, and by informing the teachers disseminating the surveys to the students.

## *Results of Needs Assessment*

We decided to approach all the data by identifying recurring themes in the focus groups, surveys and staff opinions. The focus groups provided free-flowing discussions that touched on topics not covered by the survey questions. The surveys and focus groups largely attracted respondents over the age of 50; therefore, the student surveys take on more importance because they provide information from another age segment and represent the opinions of the future users of the Library. The staff's opinions indicate their thoughts about the tools needed to provide today's level of service and their ideas for the future. We have highlighted the themes that recurred throughout all these data sources.

## Analysis of Focus Groups:

Each focus group illuminated different ideas. The following bullets outline the responses to the four focus group questions. This list is not exhaustive, and we encourage you to read the Focus Group Summary (Appendix item a) to appreciate all the comments.

- Reasons people come to the Library include tangible items such as: reference materials, general circulation materials (videos, music, books, magazines, newspapers), the children's room, computer use, and museum passes. They also come for materials not available at school libraries, items they don't want to purchase, and because of the helpfulness of the staff. The Library is also seen as a cultural and social resource. For example, people come for children's programs, Friends' activities, a quiet place to read, meeting friends/community center, and "food for the mind."
- Issues that made the Library less useful included educational and physical concerns. Attendees felt that the WPL resources were not well known and could be better marketed. Other issues included: hours are too short; layout of materials is confusing; shelving (high and low) is crowded and hard to reach; space throughout is tight; parking and egress from the parking lot are difficult; and location of the Library in town is inconvenient. Several people commented that the Library should be accessible to all residents using various transportation modes.
- Ideas for making the Library more useful were plentiful. It became clear that attendees wanted to improve a valued resource. Their ideas included: better publicity of programs and classes; a map of the library and collections; improved labeling and displays; longer hours; easier computer searches; and a better customer service orientation. Physically, focus group attendees asked for more space for children and teen services, separate rooms or carrels for study with computer ports, a better driveway, a library branch or a new location of a main library.
- Imagining the Library in ten years elicited many ideas. These included: more outdoor spaces; larger spaces for group and individual work; inviting spaces and furnishings; computer ports; more computers for research; increasing the loan period (accomplished); programs to draw in teens and college-age patrons; increasing audio/video collections; and featuring local authors. Other ideas addressed the physical location of the Library and areas within it: having a facility closer to children's locations during the day (schools);

connecting school and public libraries; relocating or expanding the Children's Room; and improving the parking and egress.

## Analysis of Survey Results:

The survey results support and enhance the focus group findings. Again, the information below is summarized, and we encourage you to review the survey results (Appendix item b,c,d).

- The community and patrons' general statistics indicate that 36% of respondents were 61+ years of age, 73.9% were female, 93.6% live in Wayland and 87.6% visit the Library at least three times a month. People come to the Library for books for leisure reading (91.7%), videotapes (61.7%), resources for research/homework (46.3%), magazines/newspapers (40%), and books-on-tape (35%). Although most patrons have computers (88.1%), it has not generally affected how they use the Library (34.3%) and only 43.6% have used the WPL's Web site. They use other libraries (66.7%) but are well satisfied with the overall level of services at the WPL (on a scale of "1" to "5" where "5" is "extremely satisfied," 47.5% rated the WPL a "4" or "5"). When listing strengths of the Library, 66% indicated a responsive, helpful staff. The following categories received a rating of "5" or extremely important by over 40% of the respondents: librarians/reference materials, fiction and popular demand books, videos/CDs/books-on-tape, non-fiction collection, homework materials, and children's programs. The categories receiving marks for the highest levels of satisfaction include: librarians/reference materials, fiction and popular demand books, and videos/CDs/books-on-tape.
- The community and patrons' written comments describing the "perfect library" express a desire to have: a variety of spaces available for quiet and group study/or work such as carrels, quiet rooms, meeting rooms, teen space, and larger children's room; space for socializing, events, classes, and refreshments; computer ports; additional computers and classes for use; extended hours; better lighting over reading areas; and stools/seating among the stacks.
- The teachers' general statistics indicate that 88.9% of the teachers responding were not Wayland residents, and 94.5% go to the WPL about once a month. Teachers visit the WPL for books for pleasure (56.6%), reading (56.6%), videotapes (45.5%), and books-on-tape (33.3%). Teachers would consider notifying the WPL staff about assignments so that the staff could locate and set aside relevant materials for their students (87%). Only 14.4% have recommended the use of the Homework Center to their students. Their computer use is primarily for the online library catalog (59.6%) and online databases (27.3%). They

use other libraries (91.3%) and the MLN (82.1%) as a source for materials. Although only two-thirds of the students indicated the WPL had enough materials to support their school projects, 94% of the teachers felt that the Library had enough supportive materials.

- The teachers' written comments describing the "perfect library" express a desire to have: lots of books including books-on-tape; comfortable seating; reference materials, especially related to school work; help with study tasks for students; computers and online technology; and CDs and videos. Teachers indicate that the WPL should provide assistance and materials for after-school homework help. They also support a role for the WPL in providing programming to benefit students such as: novels for middle school students set in countries around the world; novels for high school students; historical fiction; books dealing with tragedy; and books dealing with lifestyle choices.
- The students' general statistics indicate that 63.6% students use other libraries in addition to the WPL, and 93.6% use the WPL about once a month, generally for homework and pleasure reading. Only 35.1% are interested in the Young Adult books, and 15.1% use the Homework Center. They most frequently use the computers at the Library to access the online library catalog (44.5%), the Internet (39.1%), and online databases (26.1%). A majority (86.1%) indicated that they know how to use keywords for research. They would like the WPL to know their assignments and to put materials aside (78.4%), and most ask librarians for assistance (72.9%). A majority (65%) indicated that the WPL has enough materials to support their school projects, although 63.6% also use other libraries to obtain materials.
- The students' written comments describing a "perfect library" express a desire to have: lots of books; textbooks and school materials available; study areas; comfortable seating; video games, candy, game rooms; CDs, DVDs, videos; computer and internet access, software; more help with assignments; areas to talk; separate areas for teens; and means of delivering books to them.

### **Analysis of Staff Opinions:**

The WPL staff opinions outline different but supporting topics. Again, the information below is summarized, and we encourage you to review the Summary of the Staff & Trustee Interviews when reading this section (Appendix item e.).

- The most frequently mentioned desires concerned better space for community programs (adult and child), improvements to the Children's Room, storage for books and supplies, and other means to attract more young adults to the Library. Most staff/Trustees mentioned that the WPL should have a community center feel and also provide quiet study areas. Their ideas for improving services were varied, but included an expanded young adult collection, the possibility of a café, more shelf space for DVDs and books-on-tape, and dependable funding for reference services rather than relying on short-term grants.

## *Conclusion*

Overall, there was a very positive, constructive response to the questions posed in the focus groups, surveys and conversations with staff. All groups indicated a desire for their "perfect library" to include more space for many types of use: individual study, group work, meeting spaces for larger groups, teen space, larger children's area, and a more spacious and less crowded feeling throughout the building and rotunda. All also indicated that community meeting spaces and activities are important, that the social and cultural opportunities that the Library offers are valuable and should be increased, and most mentioned a more casual area where individuals can relax, chat, and have refreshments.

When describing the physical aspects of their "perfect library," they all spoke of comfortable and inviting seating, computer ports, less crowded shelving, more inviting displays, a map of the library, and the locations of the collections clearly marked. All described the "perfect library" as a place that contained expanded collections with more high demand books, more books, more books-on-tape, more audio and video (videos, DVDs) materials available, and more computers and computer ports. Students and teachers indicated that the Library can serve as an after-school resource and repository of information for students' class work. Students indicated that it would be helpful to have copies of their textbooks located at the Library and the resources needed for their assignments available as well. Some even suggested that there should be computer connections between the WPL and school libraries. Many survey participants suggested that they would like more parking and safer entry and egress from the parking lot.

Overall satisfaction with many of the services and collections that currently exist at the Library is very strong. However, when given the opportunity to identify reasons for not using the Library resources well or to state desired enhancements and reasons to come to the Library



more frequently, respondents uniformly indicate a need for longer hours, larger collections, and a larger facility.

## *Supporting Documents*

Copies of all reports and data are included with this report to make it a stand-alone document for future use.

### **Appendices:**

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These documents are to be referenced while reading the Final Report of the Library Planning Committee. (Copies of appendices are available with printed report in the library.)

- A. Summary of Focus Group Discussions, dated 3/2002
- B. Summary of Community Survey & Statistics 4/2002
- C. Summary of Teacher Survey & Statistics 4/2002
- D. Summary of Student Survey & Statistics 4/2002
- E. Summary of WPL Staff and Trustee Interviews, dated 3/2002

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### **Documentary Support:**

The following items are appended for reference when needed:

- A. LPC Mission Statement, dated 8/2/2001
- B. Statistical Information provided by the WPL, dated 6-30-2001
- C. Summary of Neighboring Communities Methods of Assessment, LPC document, dated 6-26-2001
- D. Town of Wayland Tax Bill Insert, dated 9/2001 and distributed with the October 2001 tax bills
- E. Focus Groups: All information from October and November 2001.

1. Flier announcing Focus Groups, dated 10/2001
2. Questions asked at each session,
3. Samples of letters sent to attendees,
4. Session notes from the League of Women Voters' scribe and the attending Library Trustee,
5. Handwritten tear sheets with notes from each session.

F. Surveys: Copies of cover letters distributed with surveys, dated 10/2001

G. Surveys: Copies of Community, Teacher and Student surveys.

H. Survey results: Hard copy and on disc

I. Interim Status Reports (3) to the Trustees, dated 7/26/2001, 9/20/2001 and 1/14/2002

J. Boston Information System contract, dated 1/17/2002 and 2/20/2002

K. Minutes of LPC Meetings, dated

1. 4/27/2001

2. 5/6/2001

3. 5/22/2001

4. 6/26/2001

5. 7/2/2001

6. 7/23/2001

7. 8/15/2001

8. 8/27/2001

9. 9/15/2001

10. 10/11/2001

11. 11/29/2001

12. 1/14/2002

13. 3/27/2002

14. 4/8/2002

We are available to answer any questions that may arise and to report verbally on our work. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in planning for the future of the Wayland Public Library.

Respectfully submitted,

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