

Westerly Library & Wilcox Park

Strategic Plan

2023-2027



WESTERLY LIBRARY
& WILCOX PARK

Foreword

Westerly Library and Wilcox Park's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan provides a cohesive direction for the library and park for the next 3 years and beyond. The Strategic Plan outlines plans for community and patron focused service, accessible facilities, and enhanced features to best serve the greater Westerly-Pawcatuck area. In doing so, Westerly Library and Wilcox Park positions itself as a relevant, essential place in the community.

In this time of great change, challenges, and unpredictability across the globe, the Strategic Plan seeks not to forecast, but to prepare and position Westerly Library and Wilcox Park to adapt to changing market conditions and meet the needs and wants of its users and embraces the opportunity to change lives.

Mission, Vision and Core Values

Mission

The mission of Westerly Library and Wilcox Park is to strengthen community and enrich lives by stimulating intellect and sparking imagination through access to literature, information, technology, nature, and the arts.

Vision

Westerly Library and Wilcox Park strives to be a premier intellectual, cultural, and botanical asset for the region.

Core Values

Stewardship: We will make every effort to preserve the library and park to ensure relevance in the future with respect to our rich past.

Equitable Access: We promise to provide resources, technology, information, and facilities to all people regardless of race, sexuality, gender expression, ability, spirituality, or age.

Respect: We honor diversity, individual perspectives, and the right to privacy and confidentiality.

Collaboration: We will promote and facilitate cooperation and intellectual engagement.

Enrichment: We will strive to bring meaningful fulfillment through programs, resources, innovation, and nature.

Strategic Planning Process

In May 2022, Westerly Library & Wilcox Park (WLWP) engaged Empower Success Corps (ESC) in consulting services to guide the strategic planning efforts of the organization.

The objective of the engagement was to facilitate WLWP's strategic planning process to guide efforts over the coming three to five years. The Strategic Planning Committee, consisted of stakeholders from the library, park, and community. Members of the committee expressed their wish for a manageable yet effective strategic plan to forge WLWP's way towards a more innovative, collaborative, and inclusive future.

Information Gathering

In order to learn about our successes, areas for improvement, growth opportunities, and community impact our consultants conducted an environmental scan. The Environmental Scan consisted of research, interviews, focus groups, and surveys; specifically:

- Research on library trends, population changes, trends for parks and arboretums, review of the Town Plan, and social trends
- Interviews with eighteen (18) stakeholders identified by WLWP
- Three focus group meetings (two conducted by ESC, one conducted by the teen librarian)
- Community survey with 277 responses
- Staff survey

Key Findings

Westerly Library and Wilcox Park is very well regarded in the community and has been referred to as "the epicenter of the town" and a highly valued resource. The recent expansion of businesses and arts venues have attracted more people to the downtown area, creating valuable potential opportunities for new or expanded collaborations for WLWP. Westerly Library and Wilcox Park is particularly valued by families and is considered central to fond memories across multiple generations.

Wilcox Park is cherished by the community and will likely continue increased usage begun during the pandemic.

Summary observations from the information gathered are described below:

- Projected population of Westerly and surrounding towns is basically flat; however, the proportion of older people will increase over the next five to ten years.
- The Westerly Town Plan cites the library and the park as aesthetic and historic focal points.
- State and national library trends include the need for community engagement, information literacy, digital equity, fine-free libraries, mobile and outreach services, and increased use of eBooks. WLWP has already made inroads with regard to these trends.
- National trends for parks include increased use, especially as a safe place when the public is concerned about the pandemic. It is also expected that parks will need to continue to make strategic plans with key performance indicators for conservation, scientific research, and public engagement.
- Climate change will challenge the well-being of all natural settings.
- Wilcox Park is a treasured community asset but demands for more programming may require additional staffing.
- Social trends are placing libraries in the public spotlight.
- In interviews and the community survey, some respondents interpreted WLWP's openness to all groups and its DEI initiatives to be a political statement while others respected the willingness and efforts to engage the community on challenging topics. WLWP will need to address these conflicting positions during the strategic planning process.
- The influx of both retirees and remote workers from Connecticut and New York have put pressure on the local housing market making affordability an issue that impacts current Library and Park users as well as staff. A potential extension of the commuter rail to Westerly could exacerbate these challenges.
- WLWP is regarded as a community hub and may want to expand collaborations with nonprofit organizations, social welfare organizations, and schools.

While feedback was overwhelmingly positive, there will always be suggestions for improvement. The challenge for WLWP will be to build on successes; and anticipate and prepare for social, technological, and environmental challenges.

Strategic Planning Committee Work

A Strategic Planning Committee formed and met for a half-day strategic planning retreat to:

- Examine findings from the Environmental Assessment
- Conduct a Strengths-Opportunities-Aspirations-Results (SOAR) exercise (Appendix C)
- Review the current Mission, Vision, and Values
- Develop Goals

Strategic Planning Committee Work Cont'd

The Strategic Planning Committee felt that the current WLWP's Mission, Vision, and Value statements accurately reflected the current principles and initiatives. No changes were made. Using information presented by ESC, and the following definitions, four strategic goals emerged.

- A Goal is what you would like to accomplish. It's the Big Idea. It presents itself as a broad statement of what your organization hopes to achieve. It is more qualitative than quantitative in nature.
- A Strategy is the approach you take to achieve a Goal.
- A Tactic is a tool you use in pursuing a Strategy.

Goal 1: Continually strengthen financial sustainability and organizational stability.

Goal 2: Be resilient; be adaptable to change.

Goal 3: Build lifelong relationships.

Goal 4: Serve as the access point to resources that contribute to enhancing quality of life.

Following the establishment of goals, the Committee developed strategies for each goal. These strategies were then assigned to task groups made up of Committee members and key staff to further refine the strategies and develop tactics for each strategy.

One of the intentions for this plan was to be a manageable, realistic, yet forward thinking plan. Initial tactics for all four strategies totaled 137. The draft of 4 goals, 19 strategies, and 137 tactics was sent to members of the four task groups for feedback and to offer thoughts to reduce the number of tactics. The Executive Director and Assistant Director thoroughly reviewed the feedback to refine the tactics and finalize the goals, strategies and tactics (4 goals; 19 strategies; 94 tactics) of the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, which are presented in the following pages.

Goals, Strategies, and Tactics

Tactics that can be accomplished within the first three month of implantation of this plan are deemed “quick wins”. Those tactics have been tagged with an asterisk (*).

GOAL 1: STRENGTHEN FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL STABILITY

We will maintain and improve all organizational assets to ensure our longevity in the community.

Strategy 1: Increase funding

Tactics

- Make rental spaces more attractive to warrant higher room rental fees
- Develop a fundraising Special Events Plan
- Increase Wilcox Society membership
- Secure Town Council support of Town Appropriations
- Revise and Expand Memorial/Celebration Opportunities
- 100% Board Participation in Annual Fund*
- Broaden donor base

Strategy 2: Create structures and processes for board and staff to ensure business continuity

Tactics

- Increase staff and board diversity
- Develop a succession plan for every department head and their department.
- Improve wireless access and cell phone coverage to handle more users
- Strengthen new employee support at the department level with standard onboarding practices
- Provide educational opportunities for Board members so that they can be stronger advocates for the library and park
- Invest in manager trainings to ensure consistent oversight
- Add a position to Park staff to alleviate increased workload from programs and events*

Strategy 3: Strengthen our public image through outreach

Tactics

- Maintain and improve relationships with key community stakeholders
- Conduct listening tours to obtain pulse on business and community issues*
- Improve social media engagement with our followers*
- Increase marketing presence off property
- Utilize Coy Café as a satellite pop-ups to further outreach
- Cultivate a listener audience
- Develop a variety of tours of different types and for different audiences

Strategy 4: Optimize cost efficiency

Tactics

- Review all current contracts
- Advocate for going paperless where possible*
- Identify best price/value on all potential expenditures*

GOAL 2: BE RESILIENT; BE ADAPTABLE TO CHANGE

Resilience and adaptability are key traits for survival and with an ever-changing and unpredictable future, building strategies to be able to fit the conditions we must work in is of the utmost importance.

Strategy 1: Prepare for the impact of climate change

Tactics

- Collaborate with arboretums and public gardens on strategies to identify and meet the challenges of climate change
- Research and consider environmentally sensitive policies for the library and park to adopt*
- Develop a proactive plan to protect the building and other structures from climate related disasters
- Build programming to educate the public on impacts of climate change
- Prepare for the changing plant communities
- Investigate alternative energy generation that is independent of the grid

Strategy 2: Take measures to accommodate increased use of the park while protecting its resources

Tactics

- Increase electric power capacity and accessibility within the park
- Develop more resilient ground coverings
- Modify event contracts and guidelines to ensure the protection of park resources*
- Increase education on responsible use of the park
- Increase the number of park docents for education and preservation
- Achieve ArbNet Arboretum Accreditation for greater national and regional recognition and visibility*
- Develop plan to replace large vehicles and equipment with lightweight equipment to minimize damage to the park

Strategy 3: Actively pursue diversity

Tactics

- Identify and reduce barriers to becoming a board member
- Post job listings more broadly to recruit a more diverse staff*
- Identify the types of diversity needed to be a truly diverse organization
- Hire a third party to conduct a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion audit of existing policies and procedures
- Offer programs and services that encourage participation from diverse members of the community*

- Partner with community organizations that support diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Ensure physical spaces reflect the diversity of the community that uses the library

Strategy 4: Be forward thinking and proactive with respect to trends

Tactics

- Incorporate ALA trends and emerging issues into programs and services
- Establish a regular schedule of CPR, AED, and first aid trainings
- Develop internal and external emergency communication plans
- Increase the use of professional development opportunities by staff

Strategy 5: Build relationships with those who can support the organization when needed

Tactics

- Create a new comprehensive Disaster Plan (based on the old dPlan) that specifies crucial partners and resources

GOAL 3: BUILD LIFELONG RELATIONSHIPS

It is in our best interest to continue to work on maintaining and building our relationships with everyone throughout their lives with us. Relationships, good relationships, are everything to us. Without our relationships we have no one to provide services to, no one to support us, and no need to exist. Good relationships with our patrons are responsive and keep them coming back; good relationships with our donors provide us with consistent financial support; and good relationships with community partners help us remain vital to the success of our Town.

Strategy 1: Be a community hub for individuals and families in the Ocean Community

Tactics

- Expand programs and resources targeting new adults, teens, and tweens*
- Work with local assisted living facilities and senior center to perform outreach and bring programming to seniors
- Provide spaces equipped to meet the needs of patrons using the library to work remotely
- Develop multi-generational programs and services that connect seniors with younger generations
- Collaborate with community partners to connect with current library non-users

Strategy 2: Cultivate lasting relationships with schools and students

Tactics

- School, homeschool, and PTA outreach*
- Increase publicity through social media and newspaper with events such as author talks and Friends-sponsored book fairs*
- Utilize the Hoxie gallery and Pop-Up space for student projects
- Explore connecting extracurricular activities with library-sponsored clubs*
- Use the library as a connection point for mentorships between high school students entering college and professionals in their prospective career path.

Strategy 3: Engage with nonprofit organizations to enable growth and coordination

Tactics

- Identify all area nonprofits we want to collaborate with and for what purpose*
- Define role with various nonprofits
- Increase participation of nonprofits in the Ocean Community Collaborative
- Explore and expand relationships with other (nonprofit) libraries in Charlestown, Hopkinton, and Stonington

Strategy 4: Build relationships with businesses

Tactics

- Identify and develop mutually beneficial promotional relationships

GOAL 4: SERVE AS THE ACCESS POINT TO RESOURCES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ENHANCING QUALITY OF LIFE.

Westerly Library and Wilcox Park exist to enhance the lives of all. Serving as an access point, a connector, to all the information in the world, we can provide those we serve with access to opportunity, learning, and enrichment to make a positive impact on the quality of life of everyone that comes to the library and park.

Strategy 1: Bridge the digital divide

Tactics

- Become a recognized technology resource in the community
- Educate patrons about online safety and privacy (digital citizenship)
- Streamline printing and scanning for patrons*
- Provide information about low-cost home broadband access and device purchases*
- Investigate adding device charging stations in the library and park
- Consider expanding Wi-Fi in the park
- Help staff use technology to access internal information more easily*

Strategy 2: Make all library and park services more accessible

Tactics

- Establish and promote an accessible entrance to Wilcox Park on High Street at the Serpa gate, including a designated handicapped parking spot adjacent
- Provide a list/map of free parking & transportation options in downtown Westerly with handicapped spots noted
- Promote home delivery services and explore expanding service demographic
- Explore assistive technology and promote its use*
- Enhance resources on the website*
- Increase hybrid programming*
- Record in-person, virtual, and hybrid programs made available to the public

Strategy 3: Become the information hub for community resources

Tactics

- Further develop the OCC Website with a cooperative calendar and have it linked from other partners*
- Host a recurring Community Resources Fair
- Explore Community Navigators who can be a resource for the public
- Create regular, rotating display for community resources*
- Set up a Community Resources page on the website and SharePoint*

Strategy 4: Ensure that the library and park remain welcoming spaces

Tactics

- Provide collections and public programs that meet and respond to community needs and interests
- Promote patron-centered philosophy of service
- Improve/increase signage and way-finding technology in library and park*
- Enhance the signage in Library and Wilcox Park with QR codes that lead to textual and/or audio descriptions
- Pursue the development of supports that address the needs of people who experience “library anxiety”
- Consider ways to implement and transform the stereotypical image of the library and Librarian

Strategy 5: Build excitement in the community about the role the library plays in their lives

Tactics

- Build a mobile library
- Create a bookable popup space in the Coy Cafe
- Make it fun to get and have a library card*
- Offer practical, fun and, unique promotional materials (SWAG) to give away or sell*
- Hold atypical library programs out in the community
- Out-of-the-Box marketing

Next Steps

Using Westerly Library and Wilcox Park’s mission as primary rationale, its vision as the ideal, and its core values as guides to oversight, the library and park has a continuous, consistent process that ensures accountability, versatility, and balanced decision-making.

The Strategic Plan is a dynamic and flexible map that provides Westerly Library and Wilcox Park with tools for continuous improvement. We will maintain an ongoing program of oversight, resource development, assessment, and adjustment using an action plan matrix for internal use. This will allow us to track progress, measure success, assign responsibility, identify financial resources, and mark completion. Such will be updated accordingly on an ongoing basis.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to all who helped us to develop this Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Strategic Planning Committee

Betty-Jo Cugini, Board President
Brigitte Hopkins, Executive Director
Bill Lancellotta, Assistant Director
Peg Murphy-Bright, President of Friends
Jen Brinton, Chamber Board member
Maria Bernier, Board Member
April Dinwoodie, Community Member
Mojie Friel, Board Member
Marc Garceau, School Superintendent
Shawn Lacey, Town Manager
Alan Peck, Park Superintendent
Ruth Tureckova, Olean Center

Tactic Development

Tactics were developed with the support of the Board of Trustees, and the time and expertise of members of the Strategic Planning Committee and our invaluable Library and Park Staff.

Additional Thank Yous

None of this would have been possible without the individuals and organizations who contributed to the extensive information gathering process. Your opinions and ideas informed the creation of our new plan, and we are fully indebted to you for your help. Thank you!



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