

September 2024  
Carlisle, MA

# GLEASON PUBLIC LIBRARY FY2026-FY2030 STRATEGIC PLAN





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## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Gleason Public Library facilitates life-long learning and growth for all community members through free access to materials and services; collaborative partnerships; and opportunities to engage and learn from one another.



## **VISION STATEMENT**

The Gleason Public Library will be a vibrant and vital community space where people across the generations can explore passions, interests, and learning experiences.

# FROM THE LIBRARY DIRECTOR

I'm proud to present the result of several months of thoughtful work by staff, volunteers, and board members. This strategic plan distills the community's hopes and aspirations into a set of priorities and goals that will shape the Library's services, collections, and programs from FY2026 through FY2030.

The Gleason's previous strategic plan was developed in the spring and summer of 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the pandemic's significant impact on Library operations, 87 out of the 112 action items for FY21 through FY25 have been completed, 8 are incorporated into planned renovation designs and/or the Town's capital plan, and several more are underway. Thank you to the Library's staff, trustees, and volunteers for all of the hard work, creativity, caring, and dedication that allowed the Library to maintain essential services, develop new services, and also carry on with the planned objectives.

We find ourselves now in an exciting period of transition as we prepare for an interior renovation project.



In this strategic plan, we have laid out the priorities that will guide Library services for the next five years, based on what we learned from our months of community engagement and reflection.

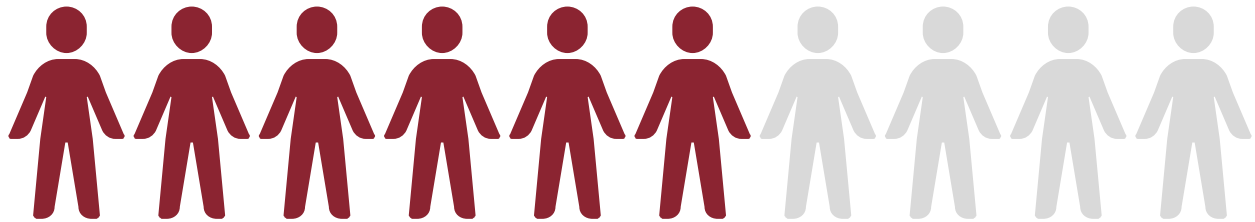
Each year the Library staff will develop an action plan that responds to developments since the publication of the strategic plan and maintains a focus on the plan's strategic priorities. The Gleason has a fantastic team of staff, trustees, Friends of the Library, Teen Advisory Board, and other volunteers and supporters, and I'm lucky to have the chance to work with them to put to these priorities into action.

*Martha Feeney-Patten*

# USER NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## Town of Carlisle Community Background

Carlisle is a 15.4 square-mile town located about 25 miles northwest of Boston, considered part of greater Boston’s metropolitan area, and bordered by Acton, Bedford, Billerica, Chelmsford, Concord, and Westford. Carlisle’s population is 5,237 according to the 2020 U.S. Census. The town is distinctly small and pastoral compared to other more developed, suburban towns in the area. Once called “city of the woods” by Henry David Thoreau, Carlisle is still a rural community, with over 30% of the land permanently protected open space.



The Town of Carlisle has an affluent, highly educated, healthy, active, and aging population that embraces its small town atmosphere. The total population increased by about 8% from the 2010 to 2020 US Census, and is projected to remain steady or increase slightly in the next 10 to 20 years[1].

Carlisle’s median household income from 2018 to 2022 was \$247,656, more than double Middlesex County’s median of \$121,304. 3.8% of the population is below the poverty line, about half of the rate for Middlesex County as a whole[2].

Carlisle’s population has an average age of 45 compared to the county’s average of 39. In the next 25 years, the number of residents age 65 and older is projected to grow by over 20%, with the greatest proportionate growth in the age 80+ group[3]. Recent projections also suggest that the school-age population will grow in the near future. “Carlisle resident John Ballantine presented data regarding future school enrollment numbers to the Carlisle School Committee (CSC) meeting on June 11[,2024...predicting] that by 2035 the enrollment at the school will be between 685 and 720, with the majority of new families having a grade-school-aged student.” [4]

[1] Population projections are from “FINAL Population, Household, and Employment Projections 2010 - 2050”, prepared August 11, 2023, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, retrieved July 10, 2024, from <https://www.mapc.org/learn/projections/>

[2] U.S. Census Bureau (2022). American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Retrieved from Census Reporter Profile page for Carlisle town, Middlesex County, MA <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/06000US2501711525-carlisle-town-middlesex-county-ma/>

[3] From Metropolitan Area Planning Council Projections

[4] “Long-term enrollment increase predicted for Carlisle School” (2024, July 10). The Carlisle Mosquito. <https://carlilemosquito.org/long-term-enrollment-increase-predicted-for-carlisle-school/>

Carlisle is predominantly (84.4%) white, but has become more diverse over the past 20 years, with growth particularly in the Asian population. As of the 2020 Census, eleven percent of residents were born outside of the United States. The majority of residents speak English only within the home, though 5.7% speak Indo-European languages other than Spanish, and 6.5% speak an Asian and/or Pacific Islander language. In the past five years, Carlisle Public School has developed an active Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Community Advisory Council.



Both Carlisle Public School (grades K-8) and Concord-Carlisle High School have a long history of ranking among the top in the state in terms of test scores, graduation rates, college preparedness, and other metrics[5]. Carlisle is one of the most highly educated towns in the state: of residents age 25 and over, 81% have at least a bachelor's degree compared to 59% in Middlesex County, and 49% of the population has a graduate degree[6].



Carlisle is a residential community primarily composed of owner-occupied single-family homes (about 95% of housing units.) 94% of people own their own homes, with 6% of the population renting[7]. Over 98% of the tax base is residential, with less than 0.5% commercial – the highest proportion of residential in the state of Massachusetts[8]. Due to zoning requirements, homes outside of the Town Center are situated on mostly wooded tracts of 2 to 4 acres, with many larger lots as well. New houses tend to be larger than the older houses, and home value has continued to increase. The median home value in Carlisle is \$940,300.

The percentage of Carlisle residents working from home has doubled to 32% since the pandemic. The mean travel time to work is 35.4 minutes, above average for the area, and about 86% of commuters drive alone, with smaller numbers carpooling, taking public transit, or walking[9].

[5] See e.g. <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/best-high-schools-massachusetts-top-100-us-news-ranking/>  
<https://www.niche.com/k12/carlisle-school-carlisle-ma/rankings/>

[6] U.S. Census Bureau (2022). American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Retrieved from Census Reporter Profile page for Carlisle town, Middlesex County, MA <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/06000US2501711525-carlisle-town-middlesex-county-ma/>

[7] Ibid.

[8] Massachusetts Division of Local Services Municipal Databank, Tax Rates by Class (Municipal) report, retrieved 7/26/2024 from <https://www.mass.gov/collections/DLS-databank-reports?topicid=91841>

[9] American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

# CARLISLE MASTER PLAN

The Town of Carlisle published a new Master Plan in April of 2022.

Community input during the Library's planning process largely confirmed the core community values identified in the Master Plan:

- **Carlisle Character:** Carlisle values its natural, agricultural, historical, cultural, and educational resources.
- **Fiscal Sustainability:** Carlisle values the long-term fiscal health of the community and prioritizes keeping property taxes manageable for its households.
- **Connectivity & Access:** Carlisle values physical, geographic, digital, and social connections across the community.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Carlisle values protecting the natural environment and minimizing its impact on the global climate.
- **Caring Community:** Carlisle values its sense of community and the well-being of its residents.

*“I hope that Carlisle can be a community where people can be their whole selves-- honored for multiple parts of their identities, welcome to express themselves openly, and interact with people who are different from themselves.”*

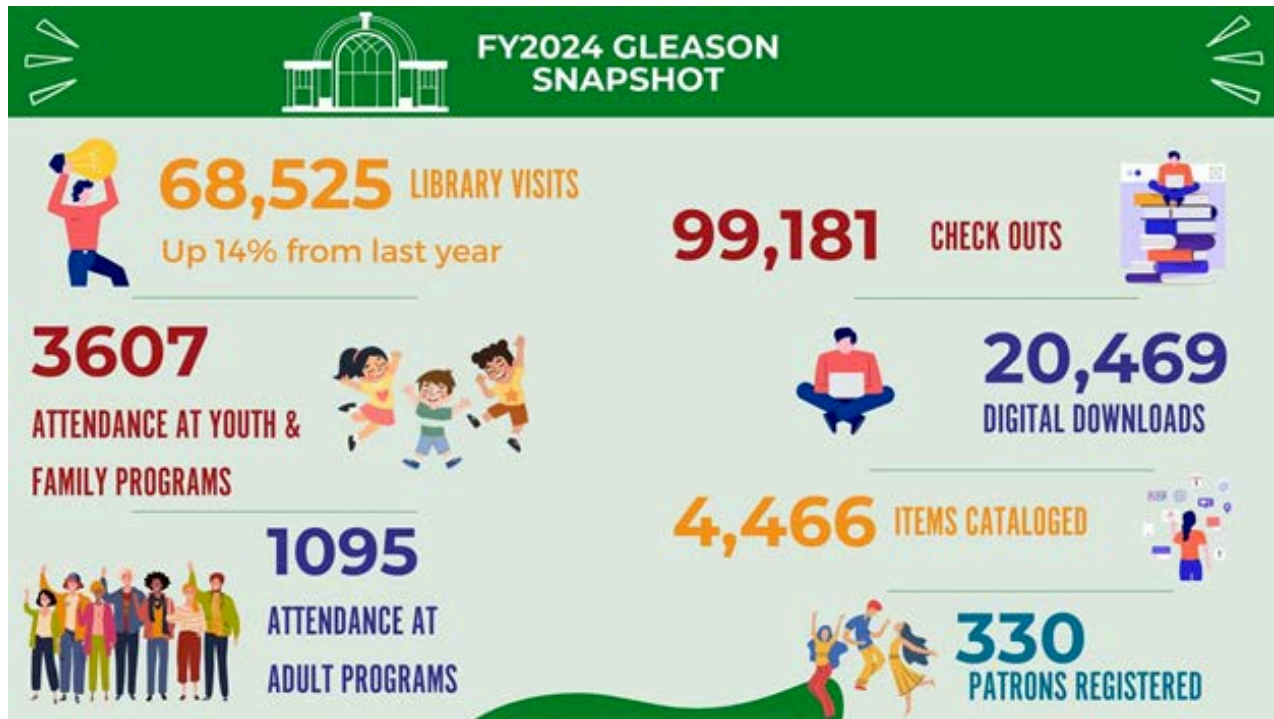
*-Resident comment*



Goals identified in the Master Plan where the Library is identified as a resource or leader include:

- Share programming among multiple town departments and organizations
- Coordinate available public and private space to meet the needs of community members and organizations
- Collaborate with and promote the efforts of community volunteer groups and non-profit organizations
- Conduct long-range planning for public facilities, infrastructure, and other investment decisions/capital improvements.
- Increase broadband internet access to all Town residents.
- Develop a comprehensive education program on behavioral practices that can lower environmental impacts

# LIBRARY BACKGROUND



The Gleason Public Library provides a wide variety of collections, programs, and services to meet the community's needs. The Gleason holds about 43,000 locally-held books, audiobooks, music CDs, DVDs, magazines, and newspapers, and access to about three million additional physical items via membership in the Merrimack Valley Library Consortium (MVLC). Gleason provides access to over 80,000 downloadable eBooks, eAudiobooks, and downloadable videos, mostly through the shared MVLC collection, as well as locally-held online resources such as newspapers, music, investment research tools, and more. Other special collections include circulating museum passes and a Library of Things with over 100 circulating tools, games, and other pieces of equipment for children and adults.

Circulation of digital downloads has grown 80% since the last Gleason planning process in 2019, now making up about 14% of total circulation.

During the same period, circulation of physical items reversed a prior decline and has remained stable since FY2022, with physical circulation totals for FY2022, FY2023, and FY2024 higher not only than during the COVID-19 closures but also higher than the years immediately prior to the pandemic.

The Gleason circulated a total of 97,459 items in FY2024, as well as lending 22,790 items to other libraries, putting its total circulation near the top of towns with similar population size. This total circulation, which includes both digital downloads and physical items, is also the Gleason's highest total in 10 years.

The Gleason is one of very few public spaces in town for people to gather and connect. The Library's two meeting rooms are used for a variety of meetings and public events (256 times in FY2024), and the Library is a social gathering place for people of all ages. In fiscal year 2024, there were 68,525 in-person visits to the Gleason, ranking in the top ten in per-capita annual visits in the state (excluding towns with large seasonal tourist populations.) The Gleason is open 55 hours per week during the school year and 51 hours per week in July and August.

In FY2024, the Library offered a total of 255 public programs, with over 4700 people in attendance.

The Gleason also provides access to computers, printing, online research databases, and the Internet. In FY2024, the Gleason answered 3400 reference questions; saw 2700 public PC sessions; registered 21,000 WiFi sessions; and had 3,592 registered borrowers.

More information is available in the Library's Annual Reports at [gleasonlibrary.org/planning](http://gleasonlibrary.org/planning)

The Library's operating budget is primarily funded by the Town of Carlisle, with a municipal appropriation of \$713,839 for FY2025. Additional funding sources, used for enhancements to library programs, collections, and services, include the Friends of Gleason Public Library, Gleason Library Endowment, State Aid funds, town-managed trust funds, grants, and private donations.

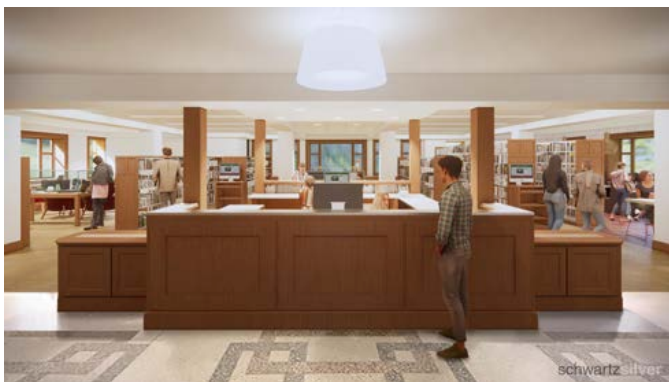


# RENOVATION PROJECT AND CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

In 2022, the Library Trustees hired Schwartz/Silver Architects to prepare schematic design concepts for a renovation of the Gleason Library interior space to meet needs identified since the previous renovation 25 years ago. Specific elements of the planned renovation include:

- More open floor plan on the first floor, with a centralized service desk to improve customer service, visibility, and safety
- Dedicated area for teens and tweens, for whom the Gleason is a top after-school destination
- Updated and additional spaces for programs, meetings, and gatherings, including a quiet booth for phone and video calls
- Improved acoustics to enhance quiet enjoyment of the space

The Gleason Endowment embarked on a \$2.3M capital campaign in 2023 to fund this renovation project. Through a combination of grants and private donations, over three quarters of the projected \$2.3M cost has been pledged as of mid-2024.



Lobby - Proposed



Teen - Proposed



Conference - Proposed



Reading Room - Proposed

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND GOALS

The following are the Gleason Public Library's strategic priorities and goals that will guide annual action plans from FY26 to FY30.

1

## **Foster connections and community**

We support and strengthen the community by fostering social cohesion and cultivating opportunities for Carlisle residents to come together through shared spaces, resources, programs, and events (both in person and virtually) that inform, educate, and entertain.

2

## **Reimagine access**

We continually review and analyze how our collections, programs, spaces, and services are used in order to identify opportunities to enhance our offerings. As a community resource, we commit to providing spaces, collections, and experiences that are welcoming, safe, and respectful of the Carlisle community. We are a place where everyone belongs.

3

## **Inspire minds and enrich lives**

We reaffirm our commitment to fostering learning, personal growth and discovery. We celebrate the cultural and intellectual vitality of our community, and serve as its center for arts and culture.

4

## **Focus on our future**

We are committed to continual improvement and renewal, providing excellent customer service that responds effectively to the changing needs of our community.

# 1

## Foster connections and community

**We support and strengthen the community by fostering social cohesion and cultivating opportunities for Carlisle residents to come together through shared spaces, resources, programs, and events (both in person and virtually) that inform, educate, and entertain.**

- a. Seek opportunities to represent the Library beyond its four walls. Encourage staff to build relationships in the community, expand collaborations with other town departments, and use their knowledge and experience to support in-depth community relationships.
- b. Seek out partners, in public, private, and non-profit sectors, with mutual interests to develop joint programs that will attract new populations and widen the Library's scope.
- c. Coordinate with libraries throughout the MVLC consortium and in neighboring towns to develop and publicize joint and complementary programs and services.
- d. Collaborate across Carlisle to promote volunteerism throughout the community and help connect volunteers with opportunities.
- e. Facilitate community discourse and informed civic involvement.
- f. Support and strengthen town-wide communication channels.
- g. Foster a community where everyone feels welcomed, valued, and represented.
- h. Celebrate diversity in the community.

## 2

# Reimagine access

**We continually review and analyze how our collections, programs, spaces, and services are used in order to identify opportunities to enhance our offerings. As a community resource, we commit to providing spaces, collections, and experiences that are welcoming, safe, and respectful of the Carlisle community. We are a place where everyone belongs.**

- a. Provide an attractive, friendly, and stimulating space that is easy to navigate, accessible, and offers flexibility to respond to changing user needs.
- b. Ensure that in-person and remote library resources are easy to access and use.
- c. Encourage the use of meeting rooms by community organizations and groups.
- d. Collaborate with town administration and stakeholders to think holistically about the Library and other public spaces in the town center and identify opportunities to optimize space use and offer aspects of "community center" experience. Support and participate in planning process for future Community Center.
- e. Explore opportunities to connect with members of our community who are not currently library users and identify ways to better meet their needs and interests.
- f. Identify ways to eliminate racial and social equity barriers in library services, policies, and practices.

# 3

## Inspire minds and enrich lives

**We reaffirm our commitment to fostering learning, personal growth and discovery. We celebrate the cultural and intellectual vitality of our community, and serve as its center for arts and culture.**

- a. Continue to celebrate books and reading in all formats, and continue our long tradition of nurturing readers.
- b. Showcase arts and culture through programs, exhibits, collections, and community partnerships.
- c. Facilitate skill enhancement and knowledge development for all ages through programs, partnerships, and access to a variety of high-quality materials.
- d. Maintain the Library's position as a "trusted resource."
- e. Support the freedom to read and the 1st Amendment rights of all community members, as detailed in the ALA Bill of Rights.

# 4

## Focus on our future

**We are committed to continual improvement and renewal, providing excellent customer service that responds effectively to the changing needs of our community.**

- a. Promote library services and offerings through new channels and formats to ensure that as many residents as possible are aware of our services and resources.
- b. Ensure that our collections and methods of service delivery evolve in response to user needs and interests.
- c. Recruit, train, and retain staff that are service-oriented, flexible, skilled, and knowledgeable.
- d. Seek out new & inventive programs & services.
- e. Identify and implement, as feasible, environmentally sustainable options for library facilities, materials, and services. Support and promote environmental sustainability efforts in the community.
- f. Incorporate new technologies in a mindful and responsive way. Provide opportunities for community members to explore new technologies.
- g. Work actively to ensure the availability of funding needed to implement the priorities identified in the strategic plan. Advocate for robust municipal funding while also exploring creative ways to ensure the ongoing fiscal sustainability of library services.

# PLANNING METHODOLOGY

The Gleason Public Library began the 2026-30 Strategic Planning process in early 2024. The core Planning Advisory Group (PAG) began meeting in April 2024. This group included the Library Director and Assistant Director, representatives from the Board of Library Trustees, Friends of Gleason Public Library Board, and Teen Advisory Board, and two community representatives. Consultant Ruth Kowal facilitated the planning process. The planning approach drew inspiration from the Harwood Institute "Planning Outward" process, centering the community's hopes and aspirations as a basis for the Library's priorities.

The PAG's first meeting was in April 2024. At this meeting, the PAG discussed the project scope and approach to gathering input. They reviewed focus group questions, and brainstormed key stakeholders and groups to invite to community focus groups. They also identified community events and locations for potential input gathering.

Community and staff focus groups were held in May. The first focus group was with the PAG to field test the questions and gather input. Three focus groups were open to the public in three different time slots: morning, afternoon and evening. There was also a focus group specifically for library staff. Many attendees of the public sessions were directly invited by the Library Director and PAG members, while others responded to general publicity through the library newsletter, social media, and the Carlisle Mosquito newspaper.



Altogether about 50 community members and staff attended 5 focus group sessions or provided detailed feedback in writing. Attendees ranged in age from 18 months to 80+, and represented a range of local demographics and interests.

The two discussion topics for each focus group were:

- What are your hopes and aspirations for the community? What would make this community a better place? What kind of community do you want to live in? What are some of the changes needed in order for the community to reach your aspirations?
- What could the Library focus on in the future to meet those aspirations, and help make Carlisle a better community? How could the Library support the community over the next 5 years?



Following the focus groups, Library staff created a spreadsheet compiling the comments and suggestions from focus group attendees, as well as other comments received by email and suggestion box. The PAG reviewed and analyzed this compilation to identify key themes to include in the strategic planning priorities.

Due to declining response rates for traditional surveys, the PAG decided to gather broad public input via two “survey boards”, pictured below. People could use stickers to indicate their answers to two prompts: “How do you usually use the Library?” and “Members of my household would use the Library more if there were...” The boards were displayed in the Library lobby for a few weeks and also at the Friends of the Library Book Swap on Carlisle’s Old Home Day. Old Home Day is Carlisle’s largest annual community event, drawing a broad crowd of attendees who are not necessarily frequent Library users.

Based on staff observations, the survey boards drew more input from teens, tweens, and occasional Library users, compared to past pools of survey respondents who were mainly adults who used the Library regularly.

For the first question, borrowing books, DVDs, and other materials was the top choice by far. Spending time with friends and family, quiet work/study, attending programs, viewing art exhibits, and getting help from library staff were also popular answers.

For the second question, the top choice was a dedicated space for middle school and high school students, followed by improved outdoor space. Several other answers clustered after that one: faster internet speeds, more/improved study/meeting space, improved selection of books, and more programs for ages 10 to 18.

Full survey board results can be found in Appendix A.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Gleason Public Library is greatly indebted to the people of Carlisle for their contributions to the planning process and for their ongoing support of the Library. In particular, we'd like to thank the following people for their participation in the planning process:

## **Planning Advisory Group:**

Martha Feeney-Patten, Library Director

Jennifer Pike, Assistant Library Director

Kaitlin Waterson, Library Trustee

Maxine Crowther, Friends of the Library Board

Helen Sutton, Junior, Concord-Carlisle High School and Teen Advisory Board member

Kelleen McGee, Carlisle Resident

Jenny Hart, Carlisle Resident

## **Gleason Public Library Staff:**

Rebecca Bromark

Jennifer Bulizak

Bárbara Carrera

Claire Gordy

Jane Iwanowicz

Helen Lyons

Seema Peterson

Tahleen Shamlan

Sinead Sinnott

Alexa Skrivanek

Joe Sorrenti

Kathleen Taffel





# GOVERNING BOARD APPROVAL

The final plan was approved by the Library Trustees on September 16, 2024. The approved plan will be submitted to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners and shared with the Town of Carlisle in the fall of 2024.

In the fall of each year, the Library Director will work with staff to develop an annual action plan based on the objectives and actions identified in this plan, the previous year's achievements, and newly identified needs. The Director will present each annual action plan to the Library Trustees for approval and then submit it to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.

Gleason Public Library Board of Trustees,

September 2024:

*Kaitlin Waterson, Chair*

*Karen Gettings, Treasurer*

*Christine Lear, Secretary*



# APPENDIX A: SURVEY BOARD RESULTS

## How do you usually use the Library?

Borrow books, DVDs, CDs, etc	81
Spend time with family or friends	27
Read, study, or work quietly	25
Attend programs and events	24
View art exhibits	23
Get help from library staff	19
Use a library computer	18
Borrow Library of Things items	13
Use meeting room space	13
Download ebooks, eaudiobooks, music, movies, etc	10
Use the library wifi	7
Use a library printer or copier	6

**Members of my household would use the Library more if there were:**

A dedicated space for middle school and high school students	30
Improved outdoor space	23
Faster internet speeds	16
More/improved space to study, work, or meet with others	15
Better/different selection of books or other items to borrow	14
More programs for teens and tweens (age 10-18)	14
Makerspace items, e.g. 3D printer, laser cutter, sewing machine	9
Different/expanded hours	8
An easier way to find what I'm looking for	7
More programs for school-age kids (age 5-10)	6
More partnerships with other organizations	6
More materials/services in another language	4
More programs for adults	3
More programs for younger children (5 and under)	1
More virtual programs	0

# APPENDIX B: NEW LIBRARY SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Services and resources added since the previous strategic plan was published 5 years ago include:

## **Collections:**

- Library of Things collection
- Statewide eBook and eAudiobook reciprocal lending through Overdrive/Libby
- Spanish-language books for adults
- World language books for children, including Spanish, French, Mandarin?, and Pashto
- Kanopy streaming movies
- Expanded eMagazines through Overdrive
- Online language learning
- Expanded online newspaper access
- Circulating hotspots

## **Technology:**

- MVLC Mobile app
- Redesigned, mobile-friendly website
- Upgraded wifi access
- Assistive technology for low vision
- Cybersecurity audit conducted
- Digital signage with promotional slideshow

## **Services:**

- Automatic renewals: physical materials renew twice automatically if the items have not been requested
- Self-service online meeting room booking system Self-service Library of Things reservation system
- Virtual Exhibits of Gettysburg artifact collection and Library history
- Eliminated fees for printing and photocopying
- Expanded program collaborations with other Town departments and local organizations
- Online ecard signup
- Assistive listening hearing loop systems at service desks and in Hollis Room
- Instagram account