Heath Free Public Library-Looking to the Future

Article printed in the Heath Herald - August/September 2021

The Heath Library Trustees with the help our librarian Don Purington and assistant Lyra Johnson have been working for years to make the most out of the space in our little library. After trying to first build a new library and then to buy a house to renovate, we have been considering ways to make the current library space better serve the needs of the community. Several years ago, Don created a plan to rearrange and upgrade the space to make better use of it. The plan addresses some immediate needs of the library, but does not speak to the future. In other words, it is a status quo approach. It also doesn’t fully address some of issues in Sawyer Hall that have recently come to light such as accessibility, social distancing and air quality.

 This past winter the Trustees decided to do some research and visioning about what the library offers the community of Heath now and in the future. As chair of the Trustees, Deb Porter also attended a State sponsored workshop on space planning for the future. It is important to note that libraries are changing due to the advent of the internet. These changes overall take into consideration other educational and service needs of a community beyond just books. In imagining our library for the next twenty years or so, but even more importantly in thinking about the needs of all of Heath’s citizens, we see both the need for some important improvements to our library and some exciting possibilities in what we could offer to our community.

 As the Town works on how to best utilize its buildings, the Trustees ask that the library of the future be considered, not just the status quo. Below is the list of the ideas we have generated in planning for the future. We see it as a beginning and invite others to share ideas about what they would like to see in the library in years to come.

*“ I see the library as a place to learn the joy of reading, of learning, and of community”*

 *Emily Cross, Library Trustee*

**We envision:**

 **The library as a resource that is accessible of all individuals:**

* To a collection of or access to current resources- books, DVD’s, books on tape, etc.
* To information with professional guidance as needed.
* To technology/tools
* To a broader range of resources such as checking out outdoor equipment, tools etc.
* A place to learn new skills and learning through workshops and community networking.
* A place to just sit and have a cup of coffee and read the paper, or do a puzzle.

 **A library as a resource that tends to the needs of our community as a whole:**

* A place that meets the needs and desires of all aspects of our community life.
* A place, both informal and formal, to gather with friends and get to know new folks.
* Community educational programs such as workshops on current issues, science or history nights, craft or cooking classes.
* Community recreational programs such as movie nights, potluck dinners, game nights outdoor activities, nature walks.
* Community cultural programs such as art shows, plays, book groups.
* Opportunity for inter and intra connections such as shared programs and resources with other town libraries and teaming with other town committees like the parks committee, the senior center, or the historical society.

 **A library that has the space to meet both community and individual needs:**

* **Fully accessible**
* Space for library materials, books DVD’s, books on tape
* A spacious area, with room to move around in.
* Places for a variety of activities, play spaces for children, quiet reading places, places for visiting and collaborating.
* Space for community events.
* Accessible Resources- connection to technology, printers, new materials
* Comfortable well-lit seating
* Storage for equipment to be used for community events and for materials to loan outside of the regular collection such as outdoor equipment, and art supplies for story hour, or other library needs.
* Outside program space for play or other informal and formal gathering.
* Staff work space

In addition, the State of Massachusetts Board of Libraries also recommends the following as critical in planning for the future.

* **Conforming to ADA regulations**
* Energy efficiency
* Flexible spaces with movable furniture
* Storage and staff spaces
* Plans for a pandemic with
	+ Proper ventilation
	+ Cleanable furniture
	+ Spacing that allows for good traffic flow
	+ Enhanced outdoor spaces