

Approved by Board 4/14/23

**KENT MEMORIAL LIBRARY
STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2028**

MISSION AND VISION

Mission

Kent Memorial Library provides a center for collaborative engagement, education and enrichment for the greater Kent community.

Vision

The Kent Memorial Library celebrated the centennial of its founding in 2022, and we are committed to continuing our role in the years to come as a dynamic community hub: a place where people of all ages and backgrounds can connect with each other and with ideas, information and programs, and find a resource for books, audio and visual materials. With a plan to expand and remodel facilities, we will host programs in a large, adaptable community room that will be outfitted with up-to-date technology, and audio and video systems. The Library will have full disability access, including entryways, restrooms and an elevator to a second floor, and will also incorporate energy efficient and sustainable building enhancements. Smaller meeting rooms will provide inviting places to read quietly, work away from home or meet in small groups, with high level computer connectivity. More outdoor spaces will be provided for patrons and visitors to gather and attend programs. The Library will play a vital role in strengthening and sustaining the attachment of families to the Town, with programs and activities that will attract children and adults of all ages who live in Kent and surrounding communities, while also serving a growing senior population. We will increase the staff as needed in order to deliver more programs and services and continue our focus on volunteer engagement to enable the Library to offer these enhanced services in a larger facility. We will grow our endowment to ensure the financial stability of the Library for the next one hundred years.



CURRENT SERVICE AND FUNDING MODEL

The Kent Memorial Library serves full and part-time residents and other patrons of all ages and backgrounds from Kent and surrounding communities. We are known for our extensive children's programming, including the stimulating environment of a welcoming Children's Room with books, toys and dedicated computer terminals, as well as baby programs, school visits, reading programs and summer Library Camp. Adults benefit from a robust mix of print and online materials, reading programs, lectures, art exhibits and business services.

The Library currently employs a full-time Library Director and seven part-time staff. To provide its services it also relies heavily on volunteers.

As is common in many New England towns, the Library is not a Town department that is fully funded out of the town budget. Rather, it is operated as a "private library association" by the Kent Library Association, Inc. (the "KLA"), a 501c3 non-profit organization, for the benefit of the Kent community. The KLA is funded by an annual membership drive, private donations, three primary event fundraisers, with approximately 30% of operating funds provided by an annually-requested Kent town grant. We recognize we are in a town and region of many non-profit organizations who have the same donor base and dependence on town support.

TRENDS

Several trends informed the focus of this Strategic Plan:

1. Libraries continue to be an important repository of physical resources while also serving as community centers for educational and cultural engagement.
2. The Town of Kent is normalizing after the impact of Covid-19, but certain changes caused by the pandemic appear to be here to stay. More adults work remotely now. People have become more comfortable interacting with others virtually using Zoom or other platforms. Some residents have curtailed their in-person interactions for the long term. Streaming and downloadable resources have become commonplace and in greater demand, and in some cases, all that is available.
3. The needs and interests of children and families, as well as the increasing senior population, should continue to be emphasized and further developed. For families, the Library can play an important role in an area-wide effort to attract young people and families as residents, as well as provide quality educational options and a breadth of community, cultural and health services. For seniors, creating opportunities for connection must be a priority as the isolation imposed by the pandemic has had far-reaching effects.
4. There is a growing demand for online access to a broader range of resources, particularly when physical access to the Library is curtailed for any reason, such as inclement weather or the recent pandemic-related closures. Training users in technology is an ongoing and key element in improving access.
5. Non-profits in general and libraries in particular need to consider reducing their dependence on event fundraising and diversify sources of revenue from donors by

direct contributions and bequests, as well as specific fundraising appeals. Endowment funding remains a critical need for long-term stability and is of special interest to some donors; others are more likely to donate for a particular program or participate in a campaign for brick-and-mortar improvements.

OUTLINE OF STRATEGIC PLAN

Part I of this Strategic Plan summarizes the Strategic Goals to achieve the Library's Vision, organized under specific area headings identified during the strategic planning process. Action steps and metrics for measurement of the Strategic Goals are set forth in Part II.

A brief history of the Kent Memorial Library is set out in Appendix A and the background of the Strategic Planning process, updated through 2023, is presented in Appendix B.

Part I: Strategic Goals

A. Community Engagement

The Board will revitalize a Community Engagement Committee (formerly the Outreach Committee) that informs and advises the Board. The Community Engagement Committee will continue to analyze the current demographic profile of the Town and surrounding communities. It will review data on program participation, collect participant feedback through regular program assessment and patron suggestions and continue to be responsive to community needs, for families with children, our older adult population and those working locally or remotely from home.

Traditional in-person communal offerings will include Library-sponsored book clubs, literacy and reading tutoring, and bilingual programs, and be supplemented with virtual programs in order to maximize access and opportunities for participation. Space and resources, including small meeting rooms with up-to-date technology, will be provided for quiet reading and work, adult and children's programs and literacy/reading tutoring classes.

B. Collection & Resources

We will expand public access through online, digital and on-site physical collection resources, based on needs and interests of patrons and demographic shifts. Services in partnership with local schools, volunteers, social service departments and other non-profit organizations will be explored to deliver books to people and improve and support program access.

With limited ability to expand shelf space, keeping our print resources current and of interest to the community will necessitate a clear plan for weeding materials as we continue to add new items. Such a plan will include timetables, storage, and criteria.

C. Technology

Technology has become critical to the functioning of libraries, as well as to the services they provide. Not only does it connect the public with library resources, both physical and virtual, but it connects members of the community with the outside world and helps strengthen the bonds within the community. Libraries have become a major force in introducing and providing public access to, and training in, new technologies.

The Library's strategic goals for technology will be to ensure that the Library provides the best technology within budget; provide training to staff and public to maximize usage of the Library's current resources; and provide staff and public training in new technologies as they develop.

Our plan for the renovated and expanded facilities will support our technology goals.

D. Facilities

The Library is planning to renovate and expand its current facilities for the first time in almost 30 years to meet new technology, administrative and community needs that have developed during that time.

The KML's original building was built in 1922. In 1955, the small space was doubled, and in 1994 the Children's Room and expanded book stacks were added. In 2009, the Kent Volunteer Fire Department donated its former Firehouse adjacent to the Library when it moved into a new facility. The old Firehouse building, which is two floors, is currently used as storage space for the KML's annual outdoor book sale that is operated between May and October for fundraising purposes.

In the current building, insufficient space underlies most of the Library's major challenges. For example, the Library has no dedicated space for community programs; its administrative and public meeting areas are non-existent or dramatically undersized; its technology component is badly in need of expansion; and the Library has only one room for adults to meet or read quietly.

In 2022, after extensive input from the Board, staff, patrons, volunteers and local community members, a Connecticut-based architecture firm with experience working with public libraries and historic buildings developed a design approved by the Board. The design addresses the KML's major challenges through a renovation and expansion plan that utilizes both floors of the adjacent Firehouse building, achieving the following service priorities:

- An adaptable event space for Library programs, lectures, community meetings and art exhibits
- A quiet adult reading room.
- Two new small meeting rooms for patrons and local non-profits
- A young adult room
- A new entrance with ample space to display new materials and art exhibits
- An ADA-compliant building fully accessible to patrons with mobility and special needs, with enhanced access for the visual and hearing impaired
- A Children's room with ample storage and a child-friendly, accessible bathroom
- New dedicated and more functional Technical Services and Circulation Desk areas
- Outdoor program spaces
- Designated areas for technology and learning opportunities

- Outdoor space for the used book sale, along with indoor space for intake and sorting
- An outdoor pavilion with covered shelter for expanded outside programs and book sale volunteers
- Maintenance of existing stacks and creation of new stack areas for the Library's collections
- A facility that is a model of energy efficiency and sustainability
- Preservation of the original 1922 building façade as a focal point on Main Street

E. Development & Fundraising

With the goal of raising funds for two-thirds of the Library's yearly operating expenses, we will pursue robust fundraising activities. Given current trends in fundraising, we will explore alternatives to events, including direct appeals and expanded use of digital media. To secure our long-term future we will also focus on funding the endowment and encouraging planned giving, including bequests. We will cultivate and strengthen the relationship with our donors through ongoing analysis of our donor database, along with thoughtful stewardship and opportunities for donor participation in the activities of the Library.

An immediate focus will be on securing funds for the Capital Campaign through private donations and grants.

F. Management

The Board will develop a financial plan for the long-term sustainability of Library services and resources; evaluate the best use of our facilities to meet the needs of the community now and in the future when the Library is able to expand and renovate its building; and better manage and support human resources, including our extensive volunteer network.

G. Governance

We will continue to advance the efficacy and transparency of governance; sustain an ongoing KLA Advisory Group to obtain diverse community input on priorities and strategy; maintain improved procedures for selection and orientation of Board members; and examine the existing committee structure to determine whether any committees need to be expanded or revitalized or additional committees created to address new initiatives outlined in this Strategic Plan.

Part II – Action Items and Metrics for Strategic Goals

A. Community Engagement

1. *Research and prioritize programs*

Actions (Community Engagement Committee)

- a. Revitalize a Community Engagement Committee (formerly the Outreach Committee), including community members and volunteers, that informs and advises the Board
- b. Research data sources about the greater Kent population, e.g., Constant Contact, census data and other sources to identify and fill gaps in knowledge about population and needs
- c. Consider whether the programming and events currently offered meet community needs and implement greater coordination of all programs and events
- d. Explore ways that the Library can offer and host a variety of book clubs and discussion groups in response to growing community interest
- e. Explore partnerships with literacy groups (such as Literacy on the Green), local schools and town departments to facilitate literacy and tutoring programs in the Library.
- f. Explore the need for children or adult bilingual programming and solicit volunteer participation
- g. Explore innovative ways to offer programs remotely
- h. Analyze available data on program and event attendance and use online resources and social media interaction to measure responsiveness to the Library's mission.
- i. Design evaluation forms for completion after each event that also requests ideas for future programming and solicits volunteer participation
- j. Have available online and at the Circulation Desk opportunities for soliciting patron feedback

Metrics

- a. Program attendance growth
- b. Increased social media postings and followers
- c. Increased volunteer participation
- d. Increased number of patron suggestions for programs
- e. Increased number of new library card holders.
- f. Increased use of Library by the bilingual community

2. *Improve community access to Library services and programs*

Actions (Staff)

- a. Partner and communicate with local organizations to provide information and coordinate access to programs, services and facility space
- b. Track space use by outside groups and individuals
- c. Introduce regular remote programming through Zoom or similar online platforms.

- d. Connect with schools and teachers to coordinate and develop relevant resource collections
- e. Study services to deliver books to people and people to the Library

Metrics

- a. Increased program participation

B. Collection & Resources

1. *Expand public access through online, digital and on-site physical collections resources, based on needs and interests of patrons and demographic shifts (Staff)*

Actions

- a. Expand funding for hoopla and research other streaming services. Improve outreach for streaming services
- b. Offer regular remote programming through Zoom or other online platforms
- c. Develop a plan for purchasing
- d. Improve the Library of Things collection
- e. Develop a deaccessioning policy, including storage procedures
- f. Increase training opportunities for patrons

Metrics

- a. Increased funding for streaming services
- b. Improve circulation statistics incrementally each year
- c. A patron resource survey is designed and delivered.
- d. Offer regular training opportunities for patrons to learn how to use their mobile and in-home technology
- e. Increase in-library print materials and online resources across demographics, subject to current space limitations for print materials
- f. Deaccessioning policy is established and implemented

C. Technology

1. *Ensure that the Library uses and provides public access to the best technology and resources it can afford (new Technology and Communications Committee)*

Actions

- a. Create a committee that informs and advises the Board. It will regularly review and update the Library website, and will recommend new technologies and resources that would enhance the Library's service to the public. The Committee will reflect the community and include representatives from all age groups, from children to seniors

- b. Assess all current technology, social media, and information resources, and investigate possible updates/enhancements to meet the changing needs of the community and staff
- c. Review the budget to identify potential resources for additional/updated technology needs
- d. Identify potential external funding sources to enhance the Library's technology budget, as necessary
- e. Research the lending of technology devices
- f. Evaluate and provide for staff training needs, as necessary

Metrics

- a. Library website is reviewed on a quarterly basis to ensure that it is up-to-date, easy to use, and accurate
- b. Identify and acquire technology devices to loan to the public, as deemed affordable and mission-enhancing
- c. Monthly public technology training sessions are provided, and timely and appropriate additional sessions occur when resources are available
- d. Staff is fully trained to use technology and able to train the public
- e. Technology needs are identified, and additional funding is requested when necessary, as part of the annual budget process
- f. Longer-term technology needs are identified, and the budget is revised accordingly

D. Facilities

1. *Manage a short-term plan for maintenance of current facilities (Facilities & Finance Committees)*

Actions

- a. Develop a short-term plan and estimated budget for each calendar year and a schedule for maintenance of each item
- b. Review short-term plan in the first quarter of the year for prioritization of maintenance items to be completed in next six months

Metrics

- a. Report a draft plan to Board in the Spring
- b. Maintenance items completed and reported to Board quarterly

2. *Manage a long-term plan for maintenance of current facilities (Facilities & Finance Committees).*

Actions

- a. Estimate life of major facility infrastructure and systems
- b. Plan a phased approach for maintenance/replacement/extension of items, with consideration of potential timing and implementation of renovation/expansion plans.
- c. Make a projection of "reserve" funds required
- d. Estimate by item the maintenance/replacement/extension needs

Metrics

- a. Draft plan reported to Board
 - b. Report provided to Finance Committee by October in advance of annual budgeting process
 - c. Plan with time-relevant estimates by item (by December prior to approval of annual budget)
3. *Implement a plan for renovation and expansion of the Library based on the 2022 architectural design approved by the Board (Facilities, new Building Committee)*

Actions

- a. Create a Building Committee to address pre-construction tasks and be in place to oversee construction when necessary funding has been achieved
- b. Work with the Development Committee and Capital Campaign Cabinet to coordinate information about the architectural design for purposes of private fundraising as well as applications for government and foundation grants
- c. Create a working group composed of Board members, staff, community volunteers and business stakeholders to study and plan for future space needs for the outdoor book sale, including identification of storage options during the book sale season and year-round and the potential design addition of a pavilion to shelter the books and volunteers
- d. Monitor status of Capital Campaign to determine when the Board needs to explore alternative space options for the temporary relocation of the Library and book sale if and when construction begins on the renovation/expansion

Metrics

- a. Building Committee established (Spring/Summer 2023)
- b. Book Sale Space Working Group established (End of 2023-2024)
- c. Information provided to Development Committee and Campaign Cabinet for grant applications focused on enhanced disability access and environmental sustainability/efficiencies achieved by renovation and expansion (2023 - 2025)

E. Development & Fundraising

1. *Maintain a plan for annual development activities, including promoting the endowment (Development Committee)*

Actions

- a. Develop annual fundraising plans to include appeals, fundraisers, and donor events
- b. Increase funding of the endowment
- c. Explore alternatives to current fundraising events (car raffle, book sale, annual summer benefit) and expand the Membership Appeal to become the major fundraiser endeavor

- d. Plan for inclusion of the Board in fundraising and development practices
- e. Carry out existing fundraising events, such as summer benefit, car raffle, book sale and membership drive
- f. Continue to promote and publicize opportunities for planned giving and bequests
- g. Continue to seek out grants from foundations and corporations
- h. Expand the Development Committee and create subcommittees to coordinate various development activities (fundraising, grant writing, stewardship, etc.)
- i. Continue to improve ease of donations through the use of up-to-date technology for online payments, on-site credit card transactions and QR codes
- j. Expand use of digital media in fundraising events
- k. Increase sustaining or recurring gift donations

Metrics

- a. Fundraising revenue increased
- b. Increased endowment
- c. Each major development activity reviewed and evaluated annually
- d. Board members are actively involved in development and donor outreach

2. *Maintain a plan for long-term stewardship of members and donors of gifts and bequests (Development Committee)*

Actions

- a. Identify more donors at higher levels of contribution and bequests, and develop a plan for better cultivation and stewardship of donors
- b. Maintain and update the donor database in Little Green Light (LGL) (with Staff)
- c. Investigate and develop options for giving categories and donor recognition
- d. Review and update process for acknowledging gifts and bequests
- e. Provide ongoing information and opportunities for donors to volunteer and participate on committees
- f. Century Society to be established for planned giving
- g. Develop new member orientation to encourage engagement and retention

Metrics

- a. Increased information on donors and prospects
- b. Increase in new members and retention of members
- c. Yearly analysis of donors across our fundraising platform to track donor retention and donor preferences

3. *Launch a Capital Campaign (Campaign Cabinet, Development Committee)*

Actions

- a. Launch quiet phase of Capital Campaign
- b. Apply for grants to supplement private donations

- c. Prepare and execute public phase of Capital Campaign
- d. Use the Capital Campaign Funds to build additional space and renovate the Library and Fire House

Metrics

- a. Raise up to 65-75% of funds from private donations
- b. Apply and obtain grant funding
- c. Library renovation and addition completed

F. Management

1. *Enhance Board and public understanding of financial status and available methods for giving (Finance and Development Committees)*

Actions

- a. Examine and identify what financial reports should be provided to the Board on a monthly and annual basis
- b. Annually review and update all methods in which contributions may be made to the KLA
- c. Update/redesign and regularly maintain the website to facilitate online contributions (Staff)

Metrics

- a. Improved understanding of financial status
- b. Quarterly report delivered to Board about amounts and fundraiser sources of contributions
- c. Improved availability and quality of online information about donations and ways to give
- d. Up-to-date contribution links
- e. Up-to-date IRS 990 filings and other financial reports made available to the public, both on the website and on non-profit information sites such as Guidestar and Charity Navigator

2. *Evaluate impact of capital campaign on annual operational revenue fundraisers*

Actions

- a. Assess impact of capital campaign on operating income fundraisers, such as the book sale
- b. Continue taking steps needed to separate financial records and reporting of annual operating revenues and expenses from funds received and expenses of the capital campaign

Metrics

- a. More community input and involvement in potential plans for expanded facilities

- b. In coordination with the Development Committee, quarterly consideration and reporting of impact of the capital campaign on fundraising for annual operating expenses

3. *Better manage and support human resources (Directors & Personnel Committee)*

Actions

- a. Enhance and better organize volunteer recruitment and participation
- b. Review and recommend any changes needed to formalize the evaluation process for staff

Metrics

- a. Formal procedures are implemented for annual staff evaluations
- b. Employee satisfaction and enhanced performance.
- c. Increased volunteerism and satisfaction with volunteer experience

G. Governance

1. *Enhance efficacy and transparency of governance (Directors & Personnel Committee)*

Actions

- a. Review and report on committee structure – whether any committees need to be revitalized, expanded and/or created to address Library needs going forward
- b. Review website and determine whether information should be added or updated to enhance transparency of governance and publicly available information about staff and the Board
- c. Post updated Strategic Plan on Library website

Metrics

- a. Improved and updated governance section is published on the website
- b. Report is provided to the Board on any recommendations for modifying committee structure

2. *Sustain an Engaged KLA Advisory Group (Board President, Library Director)*

Action steps

- a. Determine whether new members should be added or any existing members are no longer active or willing to serve
- b. Convene bi-annual meetings

Metric

- a. An active and engaged KLA Advisory Group meets bi-annually

3. *Enhance procedures for selection and orientation of Board members (Directors & Personnel Committee)*

Actions

- a. Annual identification of skills needed and potential new Board or Committee members
- b. Review and make recommendations for any changes in procedures for orientation of new Board members

Metrics

- a. Annual consideration of potential new Board and Committee members
- b. An effective orientation process is provided to new Board members

APPENDIX A: HISTORY OF THE KENT MEMORIAL LIBRARY

In 1850, Orinda Pratt recounted in her diary about a meeting of a Reading Club to which she and several residents of Kent belonged. Meetings were held in members' homes and the club was one of the regular social activities in town. In 1881, 103 book titles circulated from a single room at the house at 87 North Main Street, the first hint of a library in the town of Kent. Initially, the books were maintained in the home of "Miss Kate" Hopson.

As the years passed, with a growing need for a more formal library, a committee of book lovers met on February 8, 1915 in Bull's Hall — which, fittingly, became the House of Books. Those attending the meeting passed a resolution that read:

In our judgment a free Public Library is needed in our town. We find that quite a number of people feel the need of it and want it. We believe the town ought to provide for a free public Library as it does for public schools but the conditions are such in this town that we recommend a Library Association be organized and incorporated to establish and maintain a free Public Library for the people of Kent.

Thus the Kent Free Public Library Association was formed, with Mary Bacon as its first president. Other officers included Frank Peet, Hugh Mosher, Mary A. Watson, the Rev. C.H. Perry, Gilbert A. Vincent, and Nelson M. Watson, committee chairmen.

The group began the task of raising funds for a building, offering subscriptions to the library in 1916 to raise funds to acquire the lot where the current library stands (for \$1,500). After the land was acquired, the Kent Library Association agreed to allow the Kent Fire Department to build a firehouse on the back of the lot for a nominal annual rental fee. In 1921, construction of the Kent Memorial Library began, with a \$9000 cost of construction, raised by a fundraising effort, aided by a \$5,000 bequest from Mrs. Emily Judd Grainger. The building was completed and opened on March 25, 1922, and was dedicated to the veterans of World War I on November 11, 1925. This building remains the core of our home today, with the original fireplace and shelving still intact.

In 1958, the Kent Library Association constructed an addition that now houses the fiction book stacks. The building was further expanded in 1994 when the current front desk, additional stack and computer areas, and the children's room were added. An area for teens was carved out within the adult fiction section in 2015.

Having recently celebrated its centennial, the Kent Library Association is grateful for the efforts of those who have gone before us, and is passionately committed to continuing the legacy of its founders by ensuring that the Library remains responsive and available for free to all people—young, old and in-between—in the greater Kent community, while at the same time adapting to 21st century needs.

Appendix B - Background of the 2023 Plan

2008 Strategic Plan

The KLA Board adopted a Strategic Plan in 2008, just at the outset of a financial crisis and national recession. As a consequence of this difficult timing, many of the ambitious goals for the Library set forth in the 2008 Plan, including a proposed expansion of the Library facility into the adjacent Firehouse building that had been recently donated to the Library, were put on hold. In the years during and following the financial crisis and recession, the Board endeavored to maintain the Library's financial health and continue to offer quality materials, programs and services to the community. Between 2008 and 2018, the Library made significant changes in technology offerings and the availability of digital media, while remaining a vibrant community center for programs, print materials, art exhibits, services for local businesses, the annual used book sale and more.

2019 Fundraising Feasibility Study

In 2019, the KLA received a grant that enabled the Board to hire a fundraising consultant to conduct a "feasibility study" among board members and potential donors about the extent to which funds could be raised to support future plans for its endowment and a potential renovation of the Firehouse facility. The results showed that there was significant support for the KLA if it undertook a capital campaign to raise funds to re-develop the Firehouse building so that it could expand the Library's programs and services.

2019 Task Force to Examine Options for the Firehouse Building

Also in 2019, the Board commissioned a Firehouse Task Force, led by a Board member and composed of Board and community members, including a licensed architect, to examine options for the use and potential re-development of the Firehouse facility. At that time, the Firehouse property had been serving for many years as an essential element of storage and operations for the annual seasonal used book sale. The Firehouse presented both cost and maintenance challenges, while also providing a potential future opportunity for expanded programs and services. The Task Force presented options to the Board that included: continuing the use of the facility for used book storage; selling or leasing the land and structure to a third party; and re-developing the site for Library use if sufficient funds could be raised to renovate the physical structure. The Board voted for the option of pursuing fundraising plans to support a capital campaign for re-development of the Firehouse facility.

2019-2020 Strategic Plan

In the fall of 2019, the Board convened a Strategic Planning Task Force composed of Board members, members of the community and the Library Director to lead the development of a new Strategic Plan that would chart the course of the Library from 2020 to 2025. The Board retained a consultant to work with the Task Force and Board in shaping the structure of the Plan and to facilitate an all-day Strategic Planning Retreat that was held on December 14, 2019. Prior to the Retreat, the following six strategic areas were identified to form the organizational basis for the Retreat and the strategic goals outlined in the new Plan.

- Mission, Vision & Governance
- Management
- Community Engagement
- Facilities
- Development & Fundraising
- Collections & Resources

During the Retreat, the Board proposed a revised Mission Statement and then worked in break-out groups before reconvening as a whole to discuss and revise the goals, action steps, and metrics outlined in the Plan. The Retreat resulted in a new Strategic Plan that was presented and approved in early March 2020. The Board intended the March 2020 Strategic Plan to be a “living document” that would be periodically reviewed and updated between 2020 and 2025.

Pandemic Years 2020-2021: New Service Needs and Further Study of Plans for Renovation of the Firehouse

A week after the approval of the Strategic Plan in March 2020, the global COVID pandemic came to Kent. The Library stayed open and served the community in new and innovative ways, pivoting to live-streamed programming, curbside material pick-up and drop-off, enhanced WiFi access, outdoor programming for adults and children, and an online lecture series that actively engaged the community during the isolation of the pandemic. Pandemic-related closures created an immediate need to expand online programs, and the increase in new homeowners and remote “work from home” residents gave the Library many new ideas about how to adapt its existing service model, with the availability and community receptivity to new technological offerings and service delivery methods.

The Board also used the time during the pandemic to lay the groundwork for re-development of the Firehouse facility. Assisted by the architect who had worked on the Firehouse Task Force and who had now joined the Board, an Architectural Program Committee was formed, consisting of the Library Director and staff, Board members, Library volunteers and local business members, to provide input on how additional building space could be used for expanded programming and materials that would lead to greater service to the Town and surrounding communities. The Architectural Program Committee also examined the role of the seasonal used book sale in raising needed revenue for the Library; engaging volunteers; and supporting local businesses with Main Street activity for five months of the year. The Program Committee outlined options and made recommendations for how the book sale could be continued with the re-development of the Firehouse building.

As part of its study and recommendations, representatives of the Architectural Program Committee visited many other Northwest Connecticut Libraries to see how existing or renovated Library buildings were functioning to serve their local communities. The Board approved the space analysis and

recommendations of the Architectural Program Committee in 2021, laying the groundwork for engagement of an architect.

2022: Architectural Firm Hired and Design Developed

At the end of 2021, an Architectural Design Committee comprised of Board members and a community volunteer conducted an RFP process, leading to the engagement of Connecticut-based Wyeth Architects to create a design consistent with the Board-approved architectural program. For several months in 2022, Wyeth Architects conducted a series of focus groups in the Kent community to gather input on needs and desires for Library space that could be achieved with expansion of the Library and renovation of the Firehouse building.

The focus groups included particular demographic segments, such as families with children, the elder community, local business owners and work from home residents, as well as patrons and residents who might not frequent the Library currently. These focus groups provided extensive input to Wyeth and the Board about how increased space and renovations to the Firehouse building could benefit the community. Valuable recommendations were provided about: enhancing accessibility for patrons with mobility challenges (including use of walkers, strollers and wheelchairs and a less cramped and cluttered entrance); the benefits of having a large community gathering space for presentations and exhibits; additional small rooms for meetings and remote work; expanded technology offerings; a larger and more welcoming area for teens; and more outdoor play and meeting space for adults. The Board also received continued support for maintaining the seasonal outdoor book sale that enlivens Main Street, engages volunteers and attracts visitors to the Town.

2023 Strategic Plan

A special Board meeting to update the 2020 Strategic Plan was held on February 17, 2023. In advance of the meeting, the Board was split into seven working groups, following the structure of sections in 2020 Plan, along with a new section devoted to Technology. These subgroups met to discuss the then-current content of each section and prepare proposed revised sections (and a new Technology section) for consideration by the Board. Following the February 17 meeting, the Strategic Plan was updated to reflect the input of the Board at the meeting, and a revised draft of the Strategic Plan was approved by the Board on April 14, 2023.

