

Forbes Library

Strategic Plan
2012-2017



September 2011

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

**A Message From the Chair of the Strategic Plan Committee on Behalf of Forbes
Library Board of Trustees 3**

Mission Statement 4

Introduction..... 4

Methodology 5

Community Description..... 10

Library Description 13

Needs Assessment..... 18

Goals, Objectives, Activities 21

The report from the community survey follows page 24.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN COMMITTEE ON BEHALF OF FORBES LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

For more than a century, Forbes Library has provided library services to Northampton and surrounding communities. Over time, Forbes' collections, programming, and resources for learning and recreation have made the library Northampton's cultural community center, a meeting place that welcomes and encourages interaction with people of all ages and backgrounds.

Members of Forbes Library staff, the Board of Trustees, and Friends of Forbes spent seven months working with our community to develop a five-year strategic plan for the library. This plan will allow us to respond to the current needs of the community and be proactive to its future needs.

It is with great pleasure that the Trustees of Forbes Library present the *Forbes Library 2012-2017 Strategic Plan*, and express their great appreciation to everyone who worked so hard on this project.

Bonnie Burnham, Trustee
Chair, Strategic Plan Committee

The 2012-2017 Strategic Plan was unanimously accepted by the Forbes Library Board of Trustees on September 22, 2011.

Russell Carrier, President
Peter Rowe, Vice President
Jesse Adams
Bonnie Burnham

Marjorie Hess
Scott Morin, Treasurer
Elizabeth Sheirer, Secretary
Janet Moulding, Director



L-R, standing: Scott Morin, Russell Carrier, Peter Rowe, Jesse Adams; seated: Elizabeth Sheirer, Marjorie Hess, Bonnie Burnham, Janet Moulding

MISSION STATEMENT

Forbes Library exists to provide a wide range of information and materials to all of the people of Northampton, using traditional and innovative technology, and to encourage and support the civic, intellectual, and cultural pursuits of the community. It strives to meet these objectives with continuous sensitivity to the changing needs of the community, and adapts its services to meet these needs. The Library also provides a friendly physical environment which can serve as a community meeting place and in which it encourages curiosity, free inquiry and lifelong learning; and endeavors to make the community aware of its resources and services.



INTRODUCTION

Public libraries in Massachusetts write strategic plans for at least three reasons. Most importantly, a current strategic plan is required by grant-making organizations and agencies; federal, state, local, and private grants are an important source of funding to libraries. Secondly, a strategic plan provides an authoritative description of the needs and desires of the community for its public library. It also offers an informed projection of the library's challenges and goals for the next three to five years.

Finally, an up-to-date strategic plan serves as a valuable guide to library staff and Trustees as they allocate limited resources and services. A carefully thought-out document such as this is an immensely useful working document, one that will be referred to often over the next five years. As with the previous plan, this document will be formally reviewed annually, and the objectives and activities revised where needed.

This document follows the previous plan, which covered 2007-2011, and summarizes the results of a nine-month process. This procedure was divided into several parts: preparation, including research into current strategic plan practices and the formation of the Strategic Plan Committee; information-gathering; devising the goals, objectives, and activities; and writing and editing the strategic plan. The final plan was then reviewed and approved by the Forbes Library Board of Trustees, filed with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, and made available to the public.

The Strategic Plan Committee sought to place the library in the social and economic context of Northampton, and to recommend appropriate changes in library practices and policies to address the needs, and anticipated changes, of the community in the next three to five years. This document is the result of their dedicated efforts.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The Forbes Library Board of Trustees formally initiated the planning process in January 2011 by appointing the Strategic Plan Committee for 2012-17 and charging it with the task of developing the library's next five-year plan.

The 13-member committee, consisting of Trustees, staff, and Friends of Forbes members, plus a clerk, began its work in February and met, typically, twice a month, through July. Subcommittees worked between meetings. Prior to the seating of the committee, the director and assistant director attended several presentations about the strategic plan procedure offered by the Massachusetts Library System. The committee used *Strategic Planning For Results* by Sandra Nelson (Public Library Association, 2008), as its guide, with modifications.

The committee was firmly committed to producing a community-driven plan, so much of its early work involved getting input from the community. To that end, a comprehensive **survey** was written and distributed. In addition, each member of the committee conducted **interviews with stakeholders** in the community, including representatives from local government, social services, the arts, and education. Two **focus groups**, led by an independent consultant, were held with representative members of the community; a third, led by a consultant from the Massachusetts Library System, was held with library staff.

In addition to learning the needs and priorities of Northampton in 2011, it was important to learn who lives in this community. Committee members researched **municipal statistics**, including Northampton demographics, employment, education, the cost of housing, and other information. Another group examined the library's **entire collection**, with an eye toward its age and circulation. Finally, members of the committee conducted a review of the **library literature** to gain insight into what other similar-sized public libraries focus on in their practices, policies, and strategic plans.

The survey

A 15-question survey asked respondents for specific information about how often they use Forbes, their preferences for days and times, and which library services and collection materials are most important to them. The survey also allowed for open-ended comments about the library. The survey was publicized in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* and other local newspapers, on the library's website, and with bookmarks available in the library and distributed at businesses and schools.

Email announcements were made on school listservs and sent to stakeholders and city officials, with the request to forward the message to listserv subscribers and constituents. Printed copies of the survey were distributed around the city and volunteers staffed tables at various locations, including Thorne's Marketplace and the Northampton Senior Center. Staff at the Center For New Americans adapted the survey and worked with translators to query people who use the center's services.

In order to drive responses to the online survey, which facilitated accurate and speedy analysis of the data gathered, respondents were given the opportunity to enter an anonymous lottery for a Nook e-reader. The survey was available from March 5 to April 4, and the response was far beyond the committee's hopes, or what is considered statistically necessary: There were 919 responses, completed primarily online, compared to fewer than the 700 mostly paper responses in 2006.

Stakeholder interviews

In addition to the survey, committee members conducted interviews with 46 community stakeholders that the committee had identified. These individuals were asked their views on three basic questions:

- Do you see changes in the community that will affect your organization, and how is your organization meeting these changing needs?
- Would these changes affect the way you now use or might use the library?
- From the perspective of your organization, are there changes that Forbes Library can make that will help your organization?



Jing Farlow of Northampton won the Nook e-reader

The respondents provided valuable insight from their perspectives, along with suggestions for collaborations between their organizations and the library:

“More immigrants and refugees are coming into the area with limited English, and they are often undocumented. These people are unaware of the library, or are afraid to use its services.”

“I have always been impressed with the enormous resource we have in the Forbes Library, especially the wealth of local history books, images, and memorabilia.”

“The library is very committed and receptive to the needs of my students.”

“Northampton is an aging community, and increasingly a destination retirement community. It is important that it be easy for pedestrians and bicyclists to get around. Increasingly, young families and non-English speaking families are also starting to move into town.”

“It would be great if Forbes could help us promote our program, handing out materials, promoting us, and posting publicity, etc.”

“Mental health first aid training would be useful for the library’s staff.”

“To the extent that Forbes Library can continue serving the community as a highly accessible, well stocked, and relevant resource for youth, adults, and seniors, it will continue to enjoy the wide support of the community. In these economic times, this can indeed be challenging.”

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted, each led by a professional consultant who volunteered for that purpose. One of these groups was made up of library staff, excluding the director and assistant director. The other two groups, one held during the day and one in the evening, were composed of invited community members representing local organizations, educators, patrons, and business interests. All groups were asked about their vision for Forbes and the community for the next five years, trends that might affect this vision, and suggestions for the library’s priorities. Among their comments were these:

“The library is an information center, and since the Internet is the way people get information, the library has to work on letting people know how to get information out of the library and improve their Internet abilities.”

“I’m disturbed by articles asking if libraries are obsolete, because of the Internet age. No, they aren’t! A library is more than just a place for books.”

“The library needs to maintain its role for the community to come together to hear poetry, display artwork, learn something. It’s vital to maintain.”

“How do you keep people coming? I love this library, parking is great, but why aren’t I coming here? What would bring me here?”

“A lot of research is easy to do online but you don’t really know what you’re getting. It creates that sense of connection to the past. The book is important, the availability of old books, of resource materials. Of the connection to the past.”

“As humans we need a social connection, we have a human need to hear and tell a story. That’s the role the library can play, whether written or spoken.”

Research

The committee examined Northampton’s municipal profile in order to gather current information on the city’s demographics, economics, and educational levels. The 2010 census numbers were not fully available when this work was being done, but some preliminary numbers were released as the work progressed. Examining strategic plans and articles about similar libraries gave the committee a sense of common issues public libraries face, and how others are addressing them. Many libraries, for instance, are moving toward self-checkout, purchasing more media, renovating their buildings to be more environmentally efficient, and adding cafés.



Mando Mucho’s mandolin concert, Coolidge Museum

Compiling the plan

Using this collected data, a subcommittee identified needs and developed four major goals to be included in the strategic plan. The committee then divided into four groups, with each one developing the objectives and activities for a goal. Following a review by the entire committee, this draft action plan was presented to the Forbes Library Board of Trustees in June. Upon approval, the committee revised and clarified the action plan. Early in August, the clerk of the committee wrote and designed an initial draft of the plan. This version was edited by the director and assistant director, after which the plan was reviewed by the entire committee and approved in early September. The final draft of the completed plan was presented to the Trustees for formal approval before submission to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. Forbes will file an annual report and updated action plan after the fiscal year ends on June 30.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A project such as this one takes a great deal of effort on the part of many people. Forbes Library is deeply grateful to those who offered invaluable assistance, among them:

The Strategic Plan Committee

Trustees

Bonnie Burnham, chair
Marjorie Hess

Friends of Forbes

Kari Knapp
Serena Smith

Clerk of the Committee

Sasha Nyary

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The Trustees of Forbes Library

The staff of Forbes Library

Friends of Forbes Library

Mayor Mary Clare Higgins

Northampton City Council

Interviews

Cultural

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Penny Burke, Center for the Arts
Bob Cilman, Northampton Arts Council
Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop
Barbara Pelissier, Westhampton Historical Society
Richard Rescia, Lions Club; Pioneer Valley Opera
Steve Strimer, Ruggles Center
Stanley Zewski, Lions Club

Education

Laurie Fenlason, Vice President for Public Affairs, Smith College
Caroline Gear, International Language Institute
Julie Hooks-Davis, Northampton Education Foundation
Gail Terranova, Northampton High School
Nanci Young, Smith Archives

“That great wordsmith Unknown is credited with, ‘Knowledge is free at the library. Just bring your own container.’ Forbes Library sees every type of container: book bag, diaper bag, brown paper lunch bag, laptop bag, bag filled with references and résumé, Smartphone bag, bag of questions for the reference librarian, and a bag to hold everything in the world owned by a currently homeless person. Forbes is an information center, to be sure, but it is also a community center right at the heart of our city. I can’t imagine a Northampton without Forbes Library at its core.”

— Mayor Mary Clare Higgins

Government

Jesse Adams, Northampton City Council
Maureen Carney, Northampton City Council
Wayne Feiden, Northampton Department of Planning and Development
Mary Clare Higgins, Mayor, City of Northampton
Peter Kocot, State Representative
Marianne LaBarge, Northampton City Council
David Murphy, Northampton City Council
David Narkewicz, Northampton City Council President
Pamela Schwartz, Northampton City Council
Paul Spector, Northampton City Council

Legal

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David Sullivan, District Attorney for Hampshire County
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Religious

Eileen Sullivan, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish
Rich West, Unitarian Society

Seniors

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John Lutz, Highland Valley Elder Services
Patricia Shaughnessy, Northampton Senior Center / Council on Aging
Janet Shaw, Stavros Center for Independent Living
Sara Wright, Five College Learning in Retirement

Social Services & Medical

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Danielle DeBerry, Grove Street Inn
Matthew Engel, Disability Law Center
Eneida Garcia, Casa Latina
Rene Moss, Big Brothers, Big Sisters
Stephanie Osiecki, M.D.
John Paradis, V.A. Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System
Suzanne Smith, Tapestry Health
Kelley Woods, Northampton Emergency Dispatch

Focus Group Participants

Ellen Augarten
Michelle Joffrey
Heather Johnson, Northampton Human Rights Commission
Peg Johnson, The Center for New Americans
Chris Kennedy
Wolf Krakowski
Karen Ksieniewicz, school teacher (retired)

"I particularly value Forbes for its role as gatekeeper in the information tsunami we are experiencing. I would also like to see a kind of collaborative fundraising effort among cultural organizations in the city, since we are all fighting for the same resources."

— stakeholder interview

"My main interest is in how the library provides a place for children to find out what their passions are. As parents, we can't expose our children to all those options, that's why we need the library."

— focus group participant

Elizabeth Parker, Grow Food Northampton; Valley Time Trade
Barbara Pellessier, Smith College; local-history researcher
Stephen Petegorsky, photographer
Laura Reed, UMass Amherst professor of political science
Richard Rescia, Lions Club; Pioneer Valley Opera
Rahul Roy
Susan Roy
George Snook, Coolidge Advisory Committee
Julie Spencer-Robinson, JFK Middle School teacher
Graham Spencer-Orell, Northampton High School student
Dave Stern
Susan Stinson, Forbes Library Writer-in-Residence
Steve Strimer, Ruggles Center; Collective Copies
Sara Wright, Five College Learning in Retirement
Nanci Young, Smith College Archivist
Reina Schratte
Rufus Zogbaum

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

Introduction

The city of Northampton is situated in the heart of the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts, which in 2007 *The New York Times* called “arguably the most author-saturated, book-cherishing, literature-celebrating place in the nation.” Indeed, Northampton is known for its extensive resources for families, senior citizens, and those interested in the arts, historic preservation, and outdoor activities both recreational and agricultural, all of which Forbes Library seeks to support and augment. Smith College, a member of the valley’s Five College Consortium, is located directly across West Street from Forbes, and affords residents access to world-class educational

opportunities, entertainment, and cultural activities that belie its rural setting.



“Downtown Northampton” by Mat Matera, 2008
From the Forbes Library Fine Arts Collection

Northampton has what its city planners, writing in 1999, have called a sense of place: “The physical character of our buildings, the beauty of the landscape, and the passion for community we citizens hold dear makes this city livable and worth planning for” (Northampton Vision 2020). Located in the foothills of the Berkshires, on the fertile soil of the western bank of the Connecticut River, Northampton is a small city, with about 28,500 residents. The city was founded in 1654 and has a long history of small farms, factories, and mills, and today includes the villages of Florence, Leeds and Bay State.

The city’s active, walkable downtown, located just a couple of blocks from Forbes Library, is one of the most successful regenerations of a New England village. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the downtown is known for its large number of locally-owned businesses, many along its historic Main Street, that attract visitors and locals alike. The Northampton Business Improvement District (BID), which was founded in 2009, has worked to keep the downtown—with its wide selection of restaurants, shops, art galleries, and theaters, including the only municipally-owned theater in the state—clean and safe.

Northampton has frequently been named as one of the “Top 25 Arts Destinations” by American Style Magazine, most recently in 2009, as well as the “Top Adventure Town in Massachusetts,” by *National Geographic Adventure Magazine* in 2007. It has also won numerous city planning, governing, and transportation awards. The city has been the home of luminaries including Sojourner Truth, Calvin Coolidge, Leonard Baskin, Amelia Earhart, Sylvia Plath, and the fiery Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards.

The city is often known by its moniker, “Paradise City,” conferred on it by opera singer Jenny Lind in 1851. That this name has endured for more 150 years is not an accident. Northampton is a culturally rich, tolerant, and pleasant place to live with challenges similar to those faced by communities across the country: a weak economy, inadequate funding, increasing number of residents who speak English as a second language, rising veteran population, etc. The community is responding with creative and innovative approaches to meet the needs of all its residents.

Demographics

While Northampton closely follows the norms of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, it is slightly poorer and significantly whiter, according to the 2011 Northampton community profile:

	Median income	Household median income	White	Black	Latino of any kind	Asian
Northampton	\$24,022	\$53,769	87.4%	2.2%	6.3%	3.7%
Commonwealth of Massachusetts	\$25,952	\$59,732	80.4%	6.6%	9.6%	5.3%

Northampton’s current median age is 38.9 and there are 11,881 households in the city. While 11.2% of the population is under the age of 18, 8% is over the age of 65—indeed, the city was named “#1 Best Place for Retirees” by *The New York Times* in 2007, and one of the “Great Cities for the Simple Life” by *AARP* magazine in 2009. The number of retired residents is expected to rise in the next few years, especially in the areas within walking distance of downtown.

Northampton has 16,367 working residents, of whom 61% work in the city. The majority of residents, 63.5%, are employed in service industries, including education and health care. The retail trade employs 12.5% of the population, according to the city’s 2011 Community Profile. There are 700 homebound living in Northampton.

The ongoing wars in the Middle East have led to an increased veteran population over the last decade. Northampton is a regional hub for veterans’ services, and has the largest per capita population receiving veterans’ services in the Commonwealth. This is due in part to the V.A. Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System, and the nonprofit Soldier On, both located in Leeds, which together house more than 450 veterans.

Education & English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Northampton residents are roughly twice as likely to have completed postgraduate work than Commonwealth residents in general. In fact, they are more likely to have completed a graduate or professional degree (25%) than to have completed a bachelor's degree alone (21.1%). About half the population age 25 or older, 50.7%, has four or more years of college, according to the city's 2011 Community Profile.

While several private and charter school options exist in and around Northampton, most residents send their children to public school—the total population numbers 2,681, although some of these are school-choice students from other municipalities. Four elementary schools feed into the middle school, and most of those students continue to the Northampton High School in the ninth grade. English is not the first language for 7.7% of the population, and 1.5% have limited English proficiency; 20.5% of students fall in the special education category; 28.7% are considered low-income, and 28.7% of Northampton public school students receive free or reduced lunch. The high school graduation rate is 88.4%.

In the city overall, 6.5% of the population are foreign-born, and 12.6% speak a language other than English at home. According to the Center for New Americans, a local agency that serves the area's immigrants, the greater Northampton area is home to people from more than 50 different countries and 35 different languages. Spanish and Asian languages, including Chinese, are the most commonly spoken.

Housing & the Economy

Like elsewhere, the nation's economic recession has created a fiscal crisis that has impacted all levels of city government, including municipal budgets. Decreased property values and an increase in unemployment rates have been widely seen across the state. Northampton has fared better than average with an unemployment rate of 6.4% versus 7.8% statewide, and relatively stable property values. The city has a significant affordable housing gap. (The federal government considers housing affordable when it accounts for no more than 30% of household income.) The median sales price of a house is \$237,250, per the city's 2011 Community Profile, and the city has a vacancy rate of less than 5% on both rental properties and houses for sale. Rental costs are at or slightly above the affordable mark for the median income of city residents.

The increase in property values is also skewing age demographics, as older people with higher incomes and more savings move into town. The age group 45-55 has increased by more than 85% in the past 20 years, according to the city's Community Quality Indicators report, while the age group 15-34 has significantly decreased. If current trends continue, this has the capacity to reshape the demographics of the city towards the higher wage earning 45-55 year-olds, and towards gentrification in general. City planners have worked to create guidelines that will bolster what affordable housing exists by enacting dense zoning in the downtown area, and by adopting mixed-use zoning for new construction.

Green Northampton

The city's residents have long shown great interest in the environment:

- Northampton's Community Preservation Act imposes a 3% surcharge on city property tax after the first \$100,000 of value.
- The city has achieved "Tree City U.S.A." status from the National Arbor Day Foundation several times in the past decade.

- Northampton received an award for having citizens sign up for New England Greenstart, whereby residents pay a higher electricity rate to generate their power from renewable resources.
- The city's sustainability movement is very strong. For instance, Northampton has been acquiring land for preservation in excess of its goals. Its latest acquisition, the 181 acres of the Bean and Allard farms, in partnership with the Trust for Public Land, is a mixed-use project of this rich farmland. Some will be conserved, some used for recreation, including soccer and baseball fields, and some will be farmed, including a CSA and community gardens.

All of this points to a community that values quality of life and is willing to support those values fiscally and to organize around them socially. Forbes Library fits well in this context and, as such, benefits from broad community support.

Transient Northampton

Northampton is 20 miles north of Springfield, 100 miles west of Boston, and is situated in close proximity to Interstates 91 and 90. As the county seat of Hampshire County, it hosts the county jail and courthouse, two homeless shelters, a battered women's center, transitional housing, halfway houses, a center for immigrants, and a variety of subsidized housing complexes. Northampton is also home to 2,500 Smith College undergraduates. All this makes it a busy city with a lot of transient traffic. In 2010, for example, 81% of local auto crashes involved at least one out-of-towner, and in 52% of crashes, both drivers were not from Northampton. Nearly half of all arrests, 43%, were of nonresidents; 19% were of the homeless. Library staff call the police occasionally for assistance with distraught patrons, especially with regard to the public Internet computers.

LIBRARY DESCRIPTION

Introduction

The commanding Forbes Library sits alone on a grassy incline a short walk from the center of Northampton, Massachusetts, the gift to the residents from Judge Charles E. Forbes. The Richardsonian-style building was designed by William Brocklesby to be completely fireproof, and is constructed of steel framing, with a stone, slate, and copper exterior. The massive three-story structure opened in 1894 and is on the Register of Historic Buildings. The recently (2001) renovated interior is 42,000 square feet, with soaring vaulted ceilings, Guastavino arches, glass mezzanine floors, and a magnificent oak staircase. Known as the crown jewel of Northampton, Forbes Library embodies the judge's vision:

It has been my aim to place within reach of the inhabitants of [the] town. . . . the means of learning, if they are disposed to learn, the marvelous development of modern thought and to enable them to judge of the destiny of the race on scientific evidence, rather than on metaphysical evidence alone. The importance of education of the people cannot be overrated."

The lawns surrounding the building and trees beyond them offer sun and shade for picnickers in the warm months, a location for concerts offered seasonally by the library, and a place for temporary art installations by community members. The front of the building also serves as a gathering place for the community whether the library is open or closed. The library has 80 parking spots, mostly behind the building. Forbes began charging for parking in 2005, with all funds going directly to the library's book-buying fund.

Forbes Library is the only public library to house a presidential library and museum, that of Calvin Coolidge, the country's 30th president. In addition, the library houses an important historical archive for Northampton and Hampshire County. The first Librarian of Forbes, Charles Ammi Cutter, began his work on the Cutter Expansive Classification System in his previous position as Librarian of the Boston Athenaeum. He implemented his cataloging system at Forbes Library, which is one of only four libraries in the world still using Cutter as its primary classification system. Portions of several other collections are cataloged using the Cutter system, including libraries at Smith and Mount Holyoke colleges.

In addition to serving as a public library, Forbes was Smith College's primary library until 1909, and it maintains a close connection with its collegiate neighbor. Many students and faculty use the library to study and do research, and some students work at the library.

Northampton is home to two independent public libraries. The smaller Lilly Library, with its own board of trustees, endowments, and charter, is located in the Florence neighborhood of Northampton. Both libraries share city and state library support, and their combined hours fulfill the state requirement for certification. The libraries cooperate in many ways, and both are members of C/W MARS, the regional resource-sharing network, through which they share materials with other member libraries. Forbes and Lilly coordinate some programming and open hours, support each other's initiatives, and share certain resources, such as digitization software and staff training.

"There's a sense of place at Forbes that's so strong. It's a beautiful physical space, great place to work, to do research, it has great historical materials. In terms of information about where we are, it's outstanding that way. People come from all over to use it. The actual books are so important."
- focus group participant

Funding

Forbes is expensive to run, comparatively. With three staffed floors, a minimum of eight employees are required to open the library, at a cost of about \$1,000 a day. The library depends on the city for its operating budget, which was \$1,127,222 in FY2011. Its materials budget, \$139,800 this fiscal year, is supplied primarily by endowment funds: Per Judge Forbes' original bequest, the library has a separate endowment that must be spent—and can only be spent—on the purchase of books and other materials; it is supplemented by fundraising. Therefore, any shortfall of city appropriations can only result in reductions in staff, which translates into reduced open hours. As the building needs to be staffed on weekdays in order to accept inter-library loan pick-ups and deliveries, the only place to cut hours is on weekends. Because of these budget constraints, Forbes has been closed on Saturdays for the last two summers. The library's open hours typically are:

Mondays and Wednesdays from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Fridays and Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The library received a construction grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners in 1998 that paid for a significant portion of the interior renovation. Forbes has also received a substantial Community Preservation Grant for exterior restoration, locally-targeted grants for programming, and federal community block grants. Friends of Forbes Library also provides essential support. For instance, funds from the 950-member group contributed to the recent renovation of the Children's Department. The Trustees sponsor an annual fund drive that raises an average of \$15,000 each year.

The People of Forbes

Per the 1881 will of Judge Forbes, the library is governed by a five-member board of trustees who are elected every four years; there are no term limits. A paid board-appointed secretary and treasurer, also sit on the board, as does the library director, who is an ex officio member. Their monthly meetings are open to the public and the agendas and minutes are published.

Forbes employs 29 staff, 17 of whom work at least 35 hours a week. Ten are MLS-degreed librarians. Several speak foreign languages, including Spanish. Reference and circulation desks are partly staffed by part-time regulars. Forbes depends a great deal on Smith College work-study students, especially given recent budget cuts. They work primarily at public service desks in the circulation and information services departments; some have joined the library's staff after they graduated. As with other public libraries, volunteers provide a significant amount of service, especially with shelving. Forbes had 311 volunteers in 2011, who worked an estimated 6,759 total hours.



Renovations in the Children's Department included new carpets, technology, and furniture.



The staff of Forbes Library, 2011

The Collection and Circulation

Forbes has 17,880 cardholders, more than half of all city residents. An average of 1,000 people walk through the library’s doors each day. The print collection has 153,943 titles, and the median age for its books is between 20 and 30 years old. The library also offers:

- extensive collections of art, movies, and music—the second floor of the library is largely devoted to the arts and music collection, along with a public art gallery
- 310 print and electronic subscriptions, including museum passes
- 38 databases available to cardholders through the library’s website
- significant and extensive local history and genealogy materials for the city and region
- the Calvin Coolidge Presidential Library and Museum

In addition to books, patrons can borrow or access:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • audio books on CD & cassette • DVDs & videocassettes • music CDs • Playaways • e-books & e-audio books • periodicals • databases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • video & computer games • a Wii Fit • museum & park passes • electronic translators • Kindles & other e-readers • a variety of musical instruments |
|--|--|

The movie collection was increased by 8,000 DVDs this summer when a local business, Pleasant Street Video, was forced to close for financial reasons, and customers and patrons donated more than \$60,000 to purchase its inventory for donation to Forbes. This tripled the library’s DVD collection. In addition to its mainstream movies, Pleasant Street Video was also known for its many rare and out-of-print titles, all of which the local community will be able to borrow once the discs are processed.

Circulation	2001	2006	2010
inter-library loans received from other libraries	1,673	20,550	34,233
inter-library loans provided to other libraries	1,146	11,569	27,800
total inter-library loan activity	3,819	32,098	62,033
nonresident circulation	69,640	93,794	122,730
children’s books	50,038	67,960	66,598
adult & young adult books	148,062	118,891	130,840
total books	198,100	186,851	197,438
print periodicals	6,223	7,467	10,417
audio (CDs, cassettes, etc.)	34,830	54,509	53,237
video & DVDs	17,812	70,202	74,621
e-books	n/a	n/a	441
downloadable audio & video	n/a	n/a	1,153
miscellaneous	963	n/a	3,107
total circulation	257,928	319,029	340,414

www.forbeslibrary.org

In addition to linking to the library's catalog, and connecting cardholders to the C/W MARS audio- and e-book catalog, Forbes' exhaustive website includes information about the library's policies, practices, and general information, as well as many pages for patrons, including links to databases, links to local information, staff-created readers' advisories, and subject guides to the library's special collections. The Forbes site gets more than five million hits a year.

Physical Space

Open wireless Internet is available throughout the building and grounds. The library also has:

- 3 meeting rooms of varying sizes that can be reserved for as few as two or as many as 43
- 70 seats for patron use grouped around tables and workstations throughout the building
- 7 sofas and 9 easy chairs offer additional seating
- 27 public computers (with an average of 900 users a week)
- 4 public printers, including 2 color
- 7 computers exclusively designated for use as the library's online public access catalog
- 3 microfilm readers/printers

Programming

Forbes offers an array of programming for both children and adults, including author readings, music and dance demonstrations, dramatic readings and performances, computer classes, writing workshops, multiple book and poetry discussions, knitting circles, story time, yoga, and film series.

Services	2001	2006	2010
reference transactions	n/a	35,299	42,964
average weekly public computer users	n/a	1,886 (includes OPAC use)	879
children's programs	4	815	1,081
attendance	280	9,237	12,519
young adult programs	n/a	113	42
attendance	n/a	3,821	373
adult programs	57	213	361
attendance	556	3,821	5,312
meeting room uses	n/a	372	726
Internet computers for public use	8	21	27

Research Assistance

The library offers extensive research assistance to patrons. Two reference desks, one on the main floor and one in the arts and music department, are always staffed. The Hampshire Room and Calvin Coolidge Presidential Library and Museum are staffed on a reduced schedule. In addition to providing general reference assistance, the library specializes in providing research assistance in the areas of local history, genealogy, Calvin Coolidge, and the visual and performing arts. Forbes also supports patrons searching the Internet and provides instruction on a variety of topics.

Accessibility

The library runs a popular outreach service for shut-ins, and recently acquired three Kindles specifically for this use. The outreach program delivers materials to nursing homes and the homebound. Services for the disabled include adaptive computer workstations with Kurzweil scanning systems and learning disability software, and reading material in large print and audio

formats. Wheelchair accessibility is through a lift at the entrance and an internal elevator. Forbes also offers tours and educational opportunities to schools and community groups in order to connect them to the library's many targeted services.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Introduction

Forbes Library is highly utilized. Of the 46 libraries in similar-sized communities in Massachusetts (25,000-49,999), it ranks 10th in circulation statistics and ninth in attendance and reference questions answered. Our survey, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews indicate that the library is recognized as an important cultural and educational resource. When asked, "What do you like best about Forbes Library?" comments from survey respondents included:

"incredible depth of the collection in all areas, especially research, fiction and non-fiction. The beauty of the space. It is such a wonderful, welcoming space to spend time reading or researching in. I also love the ease of reviewing and requesting books online. I love the friendly and knowledgeable staff."

"Forbes is an anchor of stability for the city."

"I feel lucky to have moved to a town with such a great library."

"Kudos to the staff for an all-round great job! Access to a wide variety of books and DVDs in Forbes collection and through borrowing from other western Mass libraries."

"The online databases are excellent and the local history reference section is too. I love the fact that I can take out genealogy magazines. I have used the computers a lot, and also microfiche. The interlibrary loan program is essential—I use it all the time."

"It has become such a wonderful center of community and cultural life in recent years. So appreciate the community it creates for writers."

In a time when the importance of libraries is being questioned and their funding cut, the positive response from our community is very gratifying, and indicates that the library should continue to do many of the things it already does. The inter-library loan system, robust website, professional assistance by librarians, research databases, services for children, access to computers, art gallery, adult programming, and outreach programs were rated as highly important services that the library will continue to support.

As the community changes and the needs of its members shift, Forbes needs to adjust along with it. Survey respondents expressed some dissatisfactions: insufficient or unavailable services and resources, including too few open hours; limited services for teens; and accessibility issues. After careful consideration, the Strategic Plan Committee distilled its extensive research into four major areas of focus for the next five years:

Goal 1: Our patrons will find the library relevant, useful, and attractive to their changing needs.

Goal 2: Library services will be available, convenient, and accessible to all.

Goal 3: The library will establish sufficient and stable funding to maintain services and achieve goals while providing the staff with adequate compensation.

Goal 4: The library will have a higher visibility in the community through marketing and communications efforts.

The library has developed these goals to improve user experience, increase the degree to which the needs and interests of the community guide the growth and development of library services, and increase the awareness of library resources in the community at large.

Our patrons will find the library relevant, useful, and attractive to their changing needs.

Our first goal speaks to the library's continued task of providing appropriate services to the community in a changing environment.

In an effort to make the library more inviting and relevant to teens, we will establish a Teen Advisory Board and ask its members what they would like see at Forbes. In consultation with this board, we will create programming for teens, including a teen community read; seek funding for a part-time teen librarian professional; and explore the possibility of constructing a social area for teens.

Our research identified a variety of requests from the community, including a strong desire for more food options in addition to the coffee kiosk near the circulation desk. We will explore a way to serve more food inside, as well as develop more outside seating for warm weather.

Within its limited budget, Forbes always seeks to stay on top of the changes in technology. We will increase our web site's usability for users of handheld devices, which patrons are using in increasing numbers. We will also establish an internal plan that addresses technological needs of the library overall, including a maintenance and upgrade schedule. To that end, we will seek funding for a part-time IT assistant.

In the past year, library staff relocated the non-English print collection to a more central location near the reference area. To address the continuing needs of our non-English speaking patrons, we will add a budget line for such items and establish even more prominent shelving. We will also collaborate with local organizations such as the Center for New Americans.

Finally, we will designate additional quiet space and increase lighting for patrons where appropriate.

Library Services will be available, convenient, and accessible to all.

Our second goal continues the theme of the library's usefulness. Along this line, two major themes emerged from our research: open hours, and physical and virtual accessibility. Therefore, these objectives include reconsidering our open hours and coordinating with the Lilly Library in Florence to make a schedule that better suits our patrons. We will also address the needs of patrons with physical handicaps by developing a plan for funding and building a proper handicapped entrance. We will renovate the reference room in order to make it easier to use and more welcoming. And we will examine the bigger accessibility issues by meeting with outside experts to discuss both physical and intellectual accessibility. Additionally, Forbes Library grounds will also become smoke-free.

In order to make it easier for patrons to identify and locate materials in the library's virtual and physical collections, we will create a special collections website that includes digital collections, subject guides, and a searchable catalog for a portion of the collection. The library is in the final stages of migrating to the Evergreen integrated library system, which is expected to be more user-friendly for patrons. A committee to improve signage will be created; multiple languages will be used where appropriate.

The library will establish sufficient and stable funding to maintain services and achieve goals while providing the staff with adequate compensation.

Like every public library, Forbes has a critical need for increased funding, and at the very least, maintaining current funding levels. Use of the library has increased in every area, and while patrons are increasingly turning to electronic sources, they still need trained information professionals to help them find and evaluate the information they're seeking.

Therefore, Forbes will query patrons about charging for programming, and explore opportunities for adding new fees for some services. It will also examine its current fee schedule and consider each one to see if it should be increased, decreased, eliminated, or kept the same.

We will explore ways to increase the scope of our annual fund by adding members to our annual fund committee, adding to our annual fund mailing by 10 percent, and discovering ways to increase public awareness of the annual fund campaign. Other possible fundraising activities include offering sponsorship opportunities and asking library Trustees to support legislation to raise revenue for the library.



The new young adult area in the Children's Department

The library will have a higher visibility in the community through marketing and communications efforts.

Our research made clear that many in our community don't know a lot about what Forbes has to offer, so our final goal is to increase public knowledge of its current programming and services. To do this, we will create a marketing plan that addresses, in part, reaching out to the community through social media, including Twitter and Facebook. We will also develop an email contact list of stakeholders, community organizations, and educational groups.

Using traditional media tools, we will produce and broadcast public service announcements, and make podcasts available, possibly with the assistance of Northampton Community TV. We will pursue a regular column in a local newspaper, and otherwise find ways to better coordinate our use of existing media. We will also increase our communications with the city's K-12 teachers by distributing an annual newsletter at the start of each school year, and using their newsletters and listservs to announce our offerings.

Finally, one of the clearest messages that came out of our research was the interest that community and school groups have in collaborating and partnering with Forbes. We will target our marketing toward the schools by continuing and expanding our school tours, creating a Teen Advisory Board, sending an annual newsletter to teachers, and posting relevant announcements on school listservs throughout the year.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES

Goal 1: Our patrons will find the library relevant, useful, and attractive to their changing needs.

Objective A: We will make the library more inviting and relevant to teens.

Activity 1: We will establish a Teen Advisory Board (TAB) to advise the library on how best to serve the needs of teens. The TAB will meet quarterly. March 2012.

Activity 2: We will conduct a feasibility study on establishing a social area for older teens in consultation with the TAB. September 2014.

Activity 3: We will seek funding for a part-time teen librarian. July 2012.

Activity 4: We will create programming for older teens in consultation with the TAB and members of the library's existing programming committees. October 2012.

Activity 5: We will conduct a young adult community read program. October 2012.

Objective B: We will improve the quality and diversity of traditional and non-traditional library services and resources.

Activity 1: We will identify an area to sell food and beverages within the library, as well as possible outdoor seating areas for warm weather months. July 2012.

Activity 2: We will establish a technology plan for the library that includes a maintenance and upgrade schedule. March 2012.

Activity 3: We seek funding for a part-time information technology assistant. July 2012.

Activity 4: We will increase our non-English collection through collaboration with local groups such as the Center for New Americans. A budget line item and more prominent shelving location will be established. September 2012.

Activity 5: We will increase the usability of our web site by users of handheld devices. January 2012.

Objective C: We will improve the quality of the interior library space.

Activity 1: We will designate additional quiet space in the library. December 2012.

Activity 2: We will increase lighting for patrons where appropriate. July 2013.

Goal 2: Library Services will be available, convenient, and accessible to all.

Objective A: We will make entering and using the library more convenient for people of all physical abilities.

Activity 1: A committee will draw up a plan for funding and building a handicapped entrance. August 2012.

Activity 2: We will renovate the Doland Reference Room. The new room will be designed to make library service and facilities welcoming and easier to use. June 2013.

Activity 3: We will become a smoke-free property, making it healthier and more welcoming. July 2013.

Activity 4: Department heads and other stakeholders within the library will meet with outside experts to discuss improving the physical and intellectual accessibility of library resources and will conduct a review of the literature regarding accessibility in libraries. March 2013.

Objective B: We will consider alternative schedules of open hours and coordinate with Lilly Library to determine a schedule that better suits patron needs.

Activity 1: The labor-management committee will compile a list of potential improved schedules, informed by data from the customer survey undertaken as part of this plan. April 2012.

Objective C: We will make it easier for patrons to identify and locate the materials in virtual and physical collections.

Activity 1: The information services department will create a new special collections website with digital collections, pathfinders, and a searchable catalog for a portion of the collection. July 2014.

Activity 2: The library will migrate to the Evergreen integrated library system. The library will make this transition as seamless as possible for patrons by educating patrons about the change and on the use of the new catalog. January 2012.

Activity 3: All public departments of the library will make a coordinated effort to improve directional and informational signs throughout the library. Multiple languages will be used where appropriate. September 2013.

Goal 3: The library will establish sufficient and stable funding to maintain services and achieve goals while providing the staff with adequate compensation.

Objective A: We will examine our current fee schedule.

Activity 1: The library will survey patrons about charging for special programs. January 2013.

Activity 2: We will explore opportunities for adding new fees for some services and decide whether current fees on existing services should remain the same, be eliminated, be decreased or be increased. April 2013.

Objective B: We will explore ways to increase the scope of our annual fund.

Activity 1: We will increase the number of members on the annual fund committee by two. September 2012.

Activity 2: We will increase the number of names on our annual fund mailing list by 10 percent. January 2013.

Activity 3: We will explore ways to increase public awareness of the annual fund campaign. January 2013.

Activity 4: We will explore the possibility of having items to sell and producing events to raise money for the annual fund. January 2013.

Objective C: We will explore sponsorship opportunities.

Activity 1: We will survey other libraries, library literature, and other non-profits about sponsorship programs. January 2013.

Activity 2: We will develop a summary statement and recommendation for the Board of Trustees about utilizing sponsorship opportunities. May 2013.

Objective D: The Trustees of Forbes Library will support legislation to raise revenue for the library.

Activity 1: The Trustees will appoint one Trustee to monitor legislation relevant to funding and be a liaison to local legislators. February 2012.

Activity 2: The Trustees will indicate their position on pertinent legislation publicly and/or directly to legislators. March 2012.

Goal 4: The library will have a higher visibility in the community through marketing and communications efforts.

Objective A: We will increase the use of nontraditional and emerging marketing tools.

Activity 1: We will initiate a marketing plan based on a study of newer marketing materials and publications. June 2013.

Activity 2: We will explore using Twitter to contact and inform potential users. March 2012.

Activity 3: We will modify and streamline our Facebook event announcements to maximize impact. June 2012.

Objective B: We will maintain and expand our use of traditional media outlets and formats.

Activity 1: We will develop an email contact list of stakeholders, community organizations, and educational groups. September 2012.

Activity 2: We will begin producing and broadcasting public service announcements, also as podcasts, on local radio stations such as WRSI, WHMP, and WFCR. March 2012.

Activity 3: We will pursue a weekly or monthly column in a local newspaper. June 2012.

Activity 4: We will expand our involvement with Northampton Community TV. Ongoing.

Activity 5: We will find ways to better coordinate our use of existing media to maximize exposure for the effort expended, such as distributing and publicizing productions through multiple channels. Ongoing.

Activity 6: We will continue to keep our website content up to date through at least weekly updating. Ongoing.

Activity 7: We will develop a print and e-newsletter for teachers to be distributed annually at the start of each school year. September 2013.

Activity 8: We will utilize the school newsletters and listservs during the course of the year. September 2013.

Objective C: We will continue and increase partnerships with community and school groups.

Activity 1: We will begin meeting with those community groups who suggested collaboration in the stakeholder interviews and focus groups to plan collaborative projects with them. We will produce one project per year. September 2012.

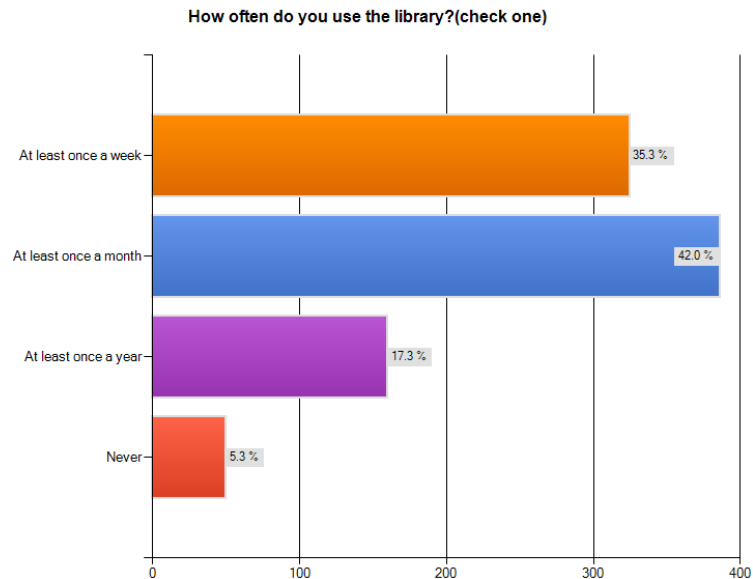
Activity 2: We will contact high school and college video classes to explore student-made videos about Forbes. September 2012.

Activity 3: We will seek out opportunities to speak to community groups and organizations to highlight our services and our role in the community. January 2013.

Forbes Library Community Survey Results

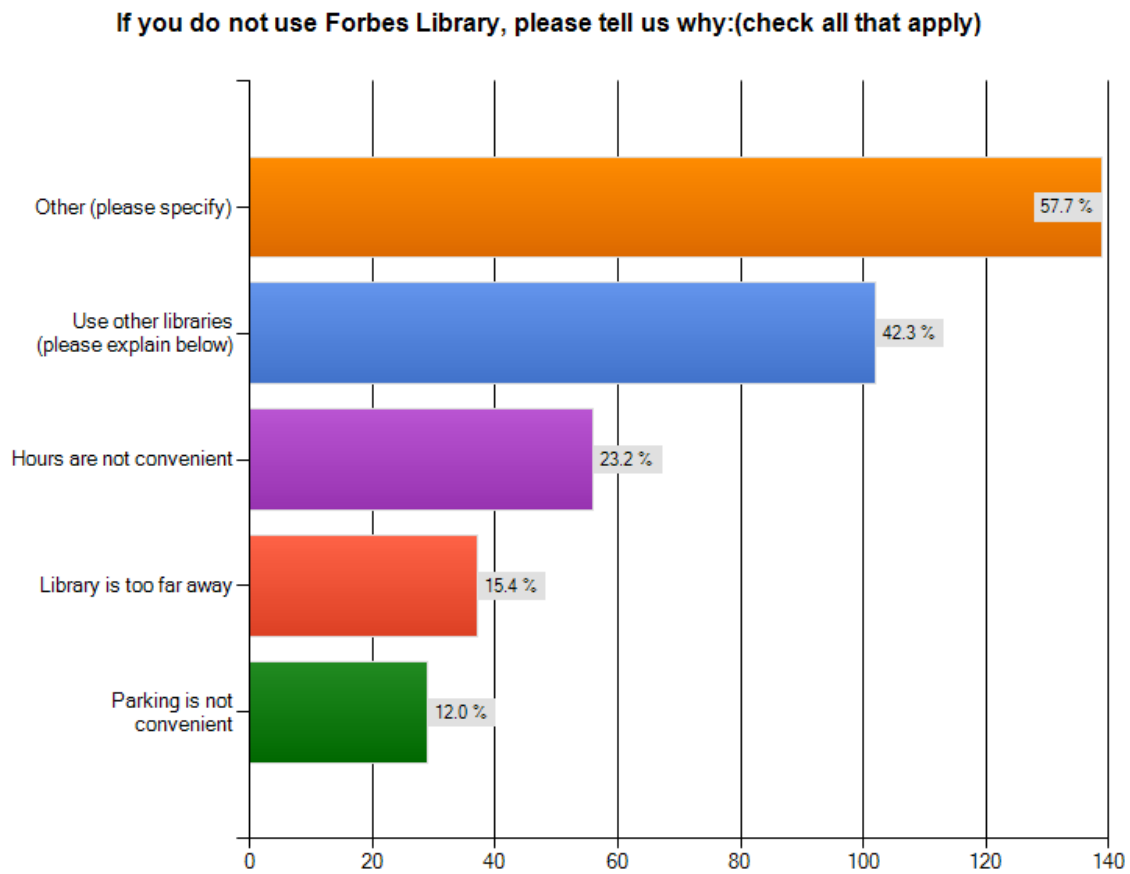
In conjunction with its strategic plan research, Forbes Library conducted a community survey from March 5 – April 4, 2011 and received 919 surveys. This excellent response rate exceeded the level necessary for statistical significance. Below is a summary of the survey’s results. This survey is one of several tools used by the Strategic Plan Committee to ascertain the community’s needs, and guide it in setting the library’s goals over the next five years. The Strategic Plan Committee of the Forbes Library extends its deep appreciation to everyone who participated.

Question 1: How often do you use the library?



The survey respondents were active patrons. Most used the library at least once a month (77.3%), and more than a third (35.3%) used it at least once a week. Only 5.3% never used it.

Question 2: If you do not use Forbes Library, please tell us why



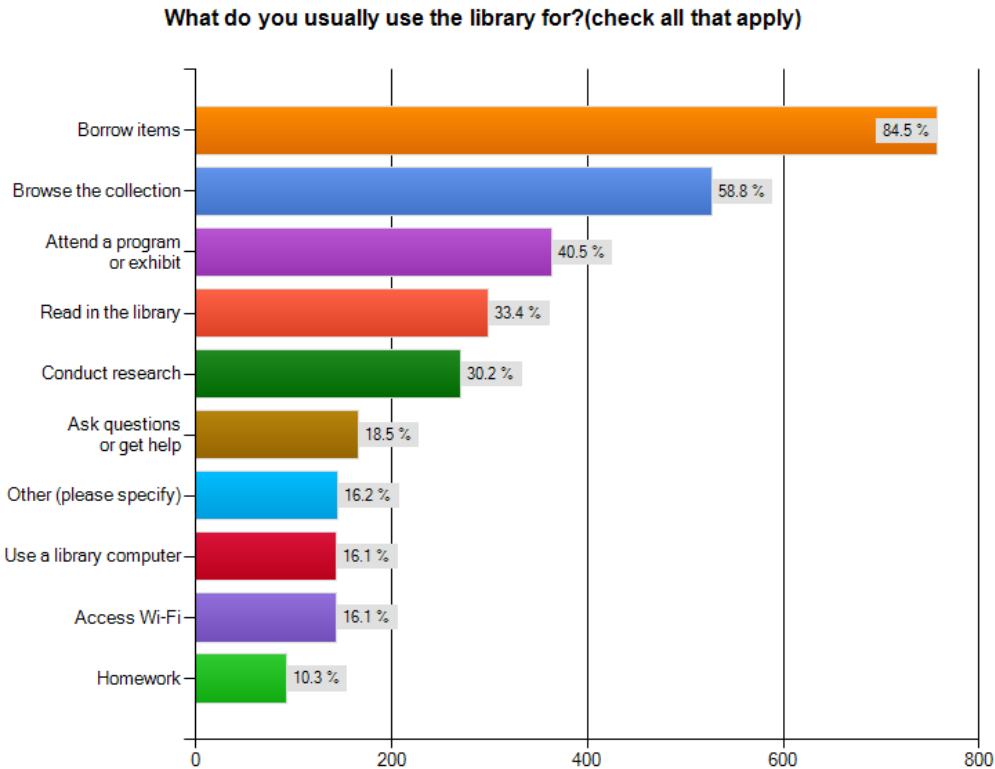
This question was answered by 241 respondents (27%). Of the 14 options that were given in the question, the four that were chosen by more than 10% of these respondents were *use other libraries* (42%), *hours are not convenient* (23%), *library is too far away* (15%) and *parking is not convenient* (12%). Respondents were asked to specify why they used other libraries, and more than 60% gave a reason that was not specifically related to Forbes Library. Most of these people lived elsewhere and used their hometown library, or were simply not library users (they bought books instead of borrowing, or were non-readers). Of the remaining 54 responses, 44% were about hours and parking issues. The remaining 17 responses were primarily specific concerns about or negative experiences with Forbes Library’s services or staff.

Question 3: At which times would you be most likely to use the library? (check all that apply)

	Morning (9am-12pm)	Afternoon (12pm-5pm)	Evening (5pm-9pm)	Total
Monday	30.9% (200)	49.8% (322)	54.7% (354)	647
Tuesday	25.7% (151)	58.9% (346)	48.4% (284)	587
Wednesday	31.1% (204)	53.2% (349)	54.4% (357)	656
Thursday	25.9% (158)	57.4% (351)	50.7% (310)	611
Friday	33.2% (194)	61.8% (361)	40.2% (235)	584
Saturday	54.1% (357)	80.3% (530)	17.9% (118)	660
Sunday	36.2% (195)	87.9% (473)	19.7% (106)	538

This is one of several survey questions that revealed the community's request for additional library hours. Many respondents selected times that the library was not currently open. Favorite times for the library to be open were spread fairly evenly over the course of the week, with afternoons and evenings being more popular overall, and weekend afternoons being the most popular. The single most popular time for the library to be open was Sunday afternoon, which was selected by 87.9% of respondents.

Question 4: What do you usually use the library for?



Many of the comments under *other* reinforced the specific answers (84% used the library to borrow books and 17% to pick up an inter-library loan item). The majority of *other* uses were to visit the children’s room or attend a children’s event (18%). Many came to write (14%), either independently or as part of a program, and the quiet atmosphere was appreciated by them and others.

Other uses that respondents mentioned were viewing art and attending meetings. A relatively low number of respondents indicated that they came to the library to *use a library computer*. Because usage statistics are quite high, this may suggest that the people who use the public computers on a regular basis were not survey-takers.

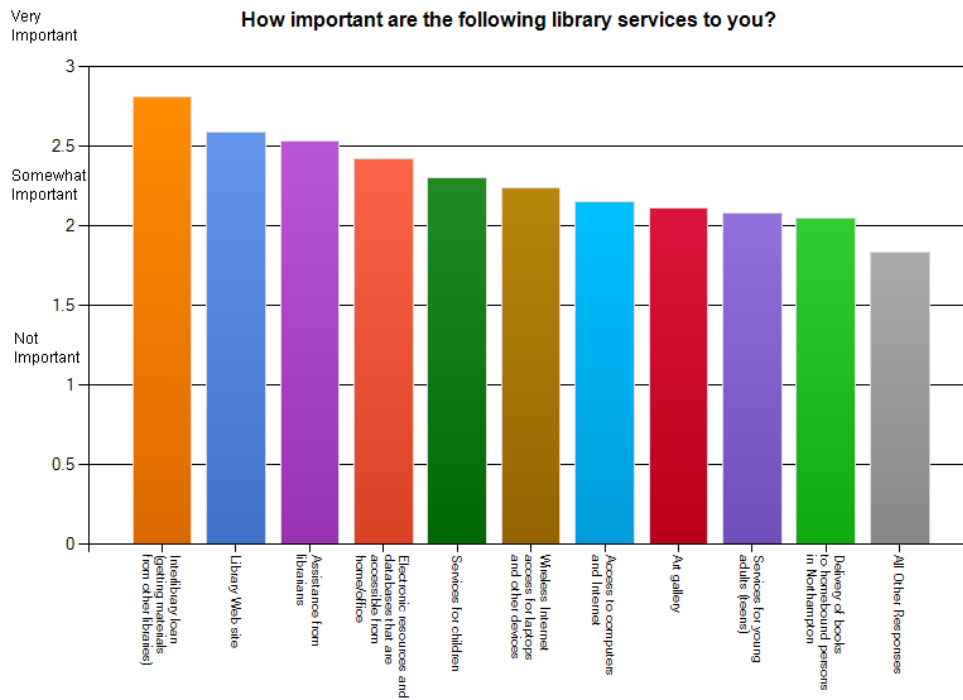
Quotes:

“The day just isn’t complete without stopping by the library after running errands.”

“It is a lovely space, and I find just visiting it and being around books brightens my day!”

“I go to the library as a place to work, read, or use the internet all of which I can do elsewhere, but I like a change of scene, especially in the Winter and Forbes has a nice atmosphere and is warm in the Winter.”

Question 5: How important are the following library services to you?



When answering this question, many people responded that they were indicating what services they personally used, but also that they were equally concerned with services they perceived as needed by others, such as adaptive services, services for seniors, and services for children. Most of the answers to *other* were in response to *programs (please list topics of interest below)* in the check-off section. The most popular services were presentations and readings, and children’s programs.

Readings, especially by local authors, were cited the most (21%), with more than half mentioning poetry readings. Lectures—especially those on history, and particularly local history—and health were important to 15% of respondents. Book groups and writing programs were cited numerous times. Children’s programs were cited by 14%. The responses covered such a wide range that it is clear all programs and services offered by the library were important. This reinforces what is evident from the number of people attending programs.

Quotes:

Many of the quotes reflect a concern for the community:

“I think a library is a critically important community resource.”

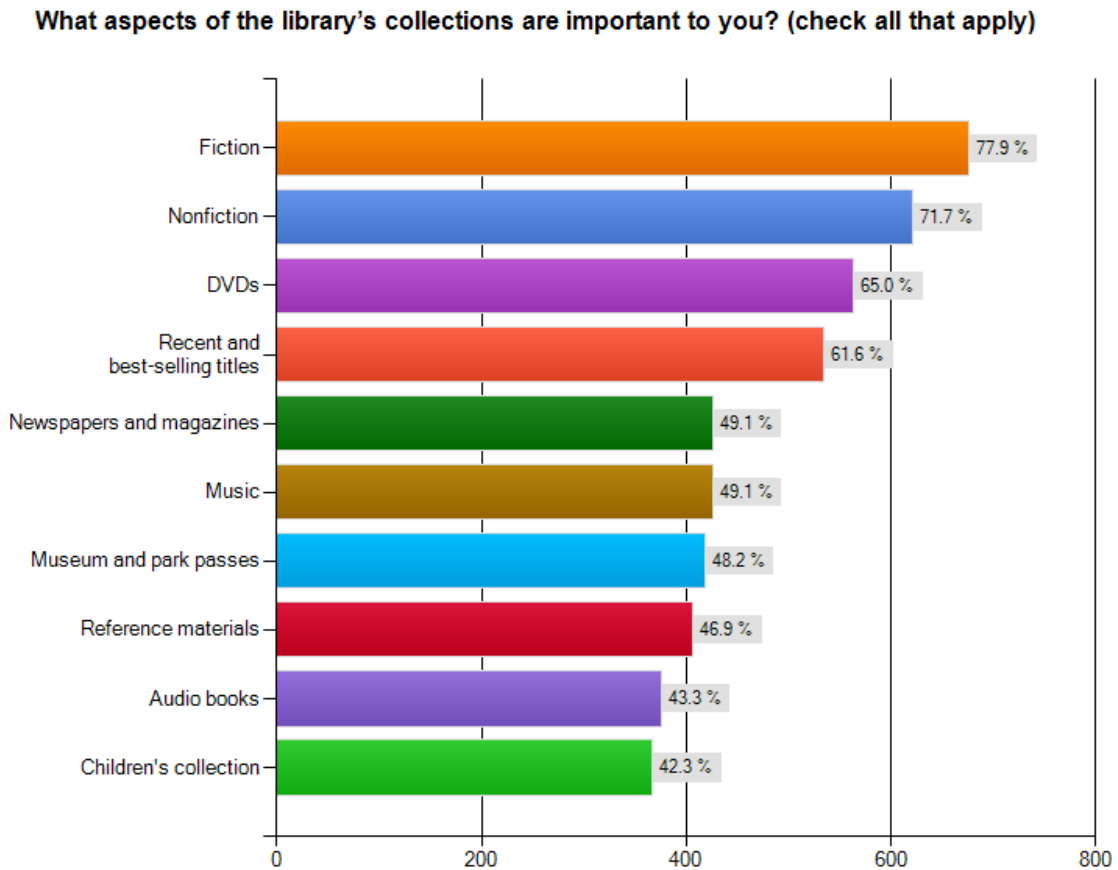
“I do not personally need adaptive services or book delivery, but it is very important to me that these be available for those who do need them.”

“I have other ways of getting what I need. What's important to me is good service, people who aren't snarky and generally a pleasant feeling in a location.”

“I enjoy the gallery and peace on a regular basis. Service people always have answers for me for when I get stuck on something I am looking for.”

“[Forbes] is the village green”

Question 6: What aspects of the library's collections are important to you?



Nearly everyone (868 people) answered this question. Most of the 63 people who wrote something in “other” chose to comment on their vote, or to narrow it to specific subject areas. Some of the most frequent comments were about materials on art, the children’s collection, fiction, and non-print media. It should be noted that there was some confusion on this question as to whether it applied to just those categories the respondent used personally, or to all categories the respondent felt the library should emphasize. A few people commented on the confusion, but it’s difficult to determine exactly how respondents interpreted this question.

Quotes:

“I particularly read the art and craft magazine on the 2nd floor”

“I had no idea how many children’s books the library has that are either out of print or hard to find. It is a wonderful resource for much better books than most of what’s sold. . .”

“materials from the library help my kids stay reading, which would be difficult to afford otherwise”

“would like the collection to focus more on literary fiction and less on popular mystery and romantic fiction”

“Forbes is a great library with a not so great contemporary fiction collection. Jones has much better fiction”

“downloadable audio books and e-books, e-book readers”

“I don’t know how to use most of the latest devices”

“Forbes has a great music collection that can only get bigger!!!”

“beginning to explore more e-books, love the Tumblebooks feature on the website”

Question 7: Are there types of materials that you would like to see the library have or have more of?

More than two-thirds of respondents skipped this question. Of the 246 who answered, three areas in particular stood out, non-print media, especially CDs, DVDs, and audio books; more current fiction and non-fiction, and more materials for English learners, and foreign-language materials in general. The responses were so specific, the staff will consider each one individually.

There were a few requests for Mac-compatible audio books and e-books, and for more information about technology in the library generally, such as this comment: “I would like for info about electronic resources to be more accessible. I don't really know what electronic databases are available, for example, or how to get an e-book reader, or how to access downloadable audio books. I know they exist; I just have no idea how to get them (and I'm a very frequent user of the library!)”

Several comments urged more serious literary titles. One patron wrote, “Library is somewhat weak on literary fiction and nonfiction. Books receiving favorable reviews in NY Times Book Review or ‘New & Noteworthy’ in the New Yorker: these should be standard acquisitions in Northampton.” Another said, “I would like to see more adult fiction titles represented – it’s a bit astonishing that you can go looking for a Nobel Prize winner like Naguib Mahfouz & not find it in the collection.”

Some patrons called for more foreign language books and periodicals when answering this question and also the previous one, in languages including Spanish, Turkish, and German. Many expressed great satisfaction with the library's collection.

Quotes:

"More great fiction in the audio collection. Most of what you have is mysteries or crime. I would like to see more classics."

"Rosetta Stone or Berlitz CDs"

"More books in Spanish for children"

"Resources for teachers/tutors of English learners"

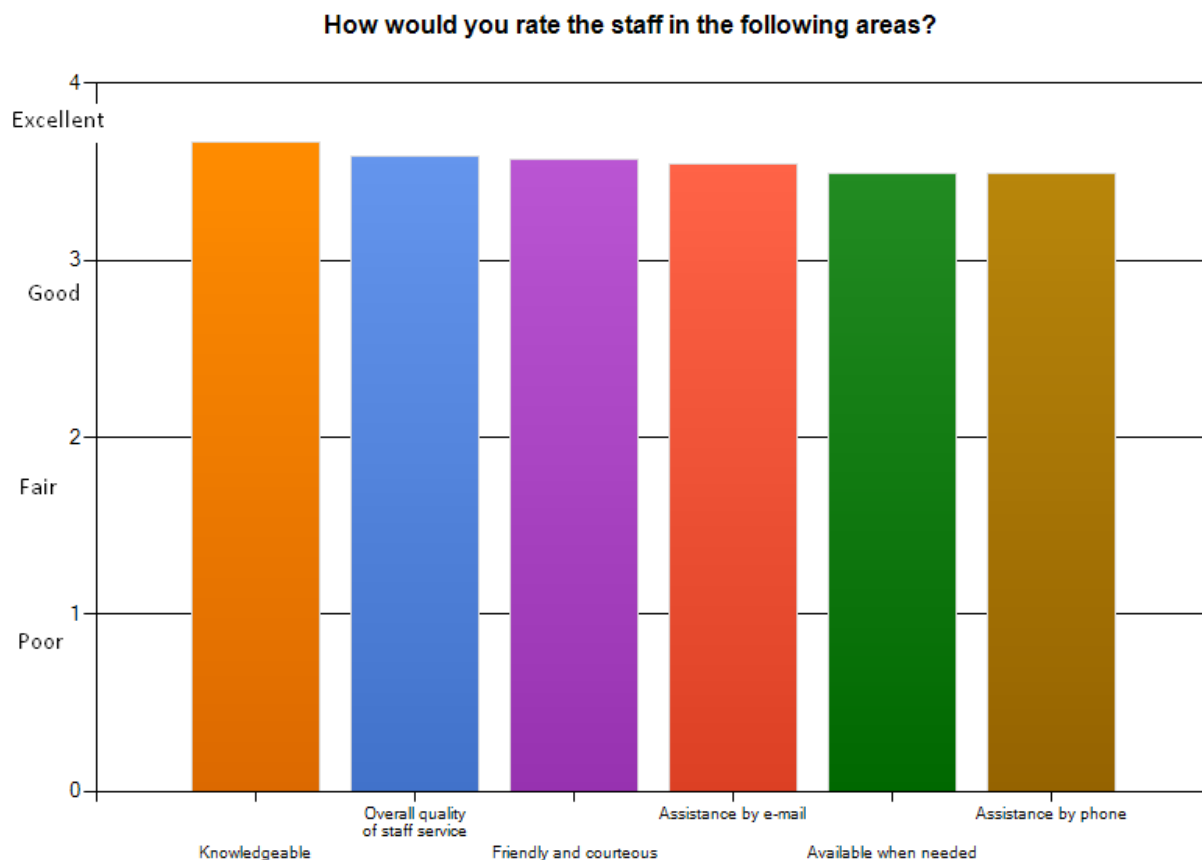
"Keep as current as possible on purchasing new materials."

"More recent fiction, though I understand there are budgetary restrictions."

"Recent/Best-selling titles. ILL is pretty effective, but it can still take a long time for popular titles to come in."

"More recent teen books."

Question 8: How would you rate the staff in the following areas?



Respondents felt very positive about the staff. With 864 people answering the question, and 141 leaving comments, the staff consistently ranked 88% to 93% in the excellent/good categories in all six areas of inquiry. In the *knowledgeable* category, staff scored 93.2% excellent/good, and 2.1% fair/poor. The majority of written comments were very positive. Some suggested that the knowledge of individual staff members varied. One respondent noted that sometimes there is not enough staff to served all the patrons and another suggested name tags. Numerous comments found the staff to be courteous, friendly, and approachable, although others described the staff as rude, angry, harsh, standoffish, and unfriendly. Some of these comments were qualified to suggest that the staff was overworked.

Quotes:

“I have always found the staff to be friendly, knowledgeable and helpful. They are very willing to help when I am looking for a book or DVD that may be found in some hidden location and have it delivered to Forbes. I enjoy working with the staff.”

“Some staff are very friendly and knowledgeable and are wonderful to interact with. A very few are less so.”

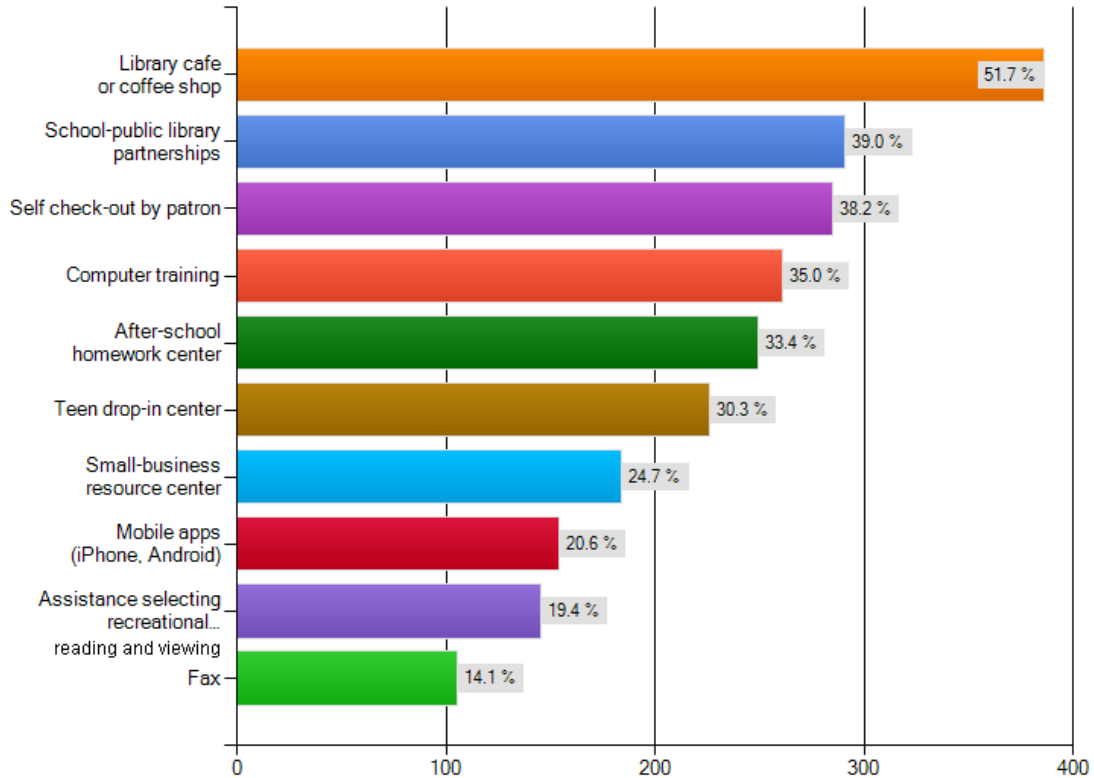
“Staff friendliness has improved significantly over the past 5 years.”

“The Forbes library staff is excellent all around! I have never had a question someone couldn’t answer or a problem that wasn’t solved with a minimum amount of trouble and no judgment (including fines and lost cards). And I’ve always been able to find someone when I needed them...and am always given the impression that there is nothing more important than helping me as long as it takes. Thank you so much!”

“Although library staff may not have known the answer to a problem or question, they have always persisted and asked fellow staff to help until my situation was resolved and needs were met.”

Question 9: Which of these services would you like to see the library develop?

Which of these services would you like to see the library develop? (check all that apply)



A café remained the most desired addition, although there were concerns about food and drink on library materials, as well as elevated noise levels. Computer help was important, as were services and programs for teenagers. Although self-checkout was mentioned, it was often more negative than positive, and there was a concern about long lines and staff losing their jobs. Many people felt the library needed no new services or felt it should make sure it kept and improved on what it offers now, before adding anything new. A few respondents requested that the library be quieter.

Quotes:

“I would like to first ensure that current services and functions are sustained. Then additional programming might be considered.”

“I think you have everything I need in a library.”

“It would be awesome for there to just be a little coffee shop that has things like pastries, bagels, hot drinks so you can just sit and read and eat.”

“One thing I'd like to see undevelop is the amount of talking and disturbance that numerous library systems have shifted into...a kind of over-liberal expressionist mode that often cuts into the silence I have always appreciated in libraries.”

“Absolutely not a self check-out”

“Wow, self check out...never thought of that.”

Question 10: What do you like best about Forbes Library?

Most survey respondents took the chance to respond to this question (743 or 84% of total survey respondents). The “beautiful” and historic” building was the thing mentioned most often (421 or 57%) followed by compliments about the collection (354 or 48%), the library’s staff (212 or 29%) with special mention being made of the Children’s Department staff. Many people mentioned favorite services, such as inter-library loan, the art gallery, access to computers, and online content.

The compliments for the building were effusive and covered the aesthetics, size, and atmosphere. The collection was given general compliments about size and selection and then many people mentioned specific favorite collections or media types with books, music, DVDs and magazines mentioned most frequently. Many kind words were said about the staff with “helpful,” “friendly,” “excellent” and “knowledgeable” most common. The Children’s Department was a favorite place for many in the library, with praise about the staff, space, and collections. Respondents liked that the staff remembered and greeted individual children. Technology was cited in several ways, with access to computers, the library’s website, the C/W MARS catalog, wireless Internet, and databases all receiving multiple accolades. There were many comments about programming and this was often referred to in conjunction with a mention of the library as a “community center.”

Quotes:

“It’s a lovely historic building which embraces me and my family every time we walk in. We are proud to have it be part of our community and we love the services it provides.”

“The building, the feeling that it is central to my community.”

“The quality of the materials you collect. I like the intellectual content in both the print and media collections.”

“The space is amazing, not just architecturally but because the librarians and staff are so courteous and helpful! They make the space!”

“The building itself is a phenomenal treat to walk into; it’s an oasis of calm and quiet lovely.”

“The building itself, the beautiful interiors, the helpful staff, its transition in the past few years from a traditional library to a community center.”

“When I walk around the library on Saturdays, and see the number of people of all ages and walks of life and observe the extent of the activities they are engaged in, I feel that Forbes reflects the best of Northampton as a community. “

11. What do you like least about Forbes Library?

There were 633 responses to this question, and most mentioned things that made using the library harder, such as too few open hours (66), parking issues, and difficulty with library doors. Respondents also mentioned that the library was too noisy, or too poorly lit, or too warm. There were complaints about not finding what they wanted on the shelves (58), but most qualified that by praising inter-library loan. Other than audio books and DVDs, with each receiving eight requests for more, no part of the collection got more than one or two mentions. The third-most mentioned complaint (25) was that the Cutter System was confusing. Others mentioned a lack of a rear entrance, and inconsistent wireless.

12. What would you like to tell us that we have not already asked?

These responses focused on areas where people felt the library could serve the community better, and expressed how important the library was to them; there were very few criticisms. Many people thanked the library for asking their opinions and what they thought was a good survey. Ideas for increased community support included:

More involvement with the Northampton school system.

Placing a bulletin board in the lobby with community events.

Increasing hours, especially in the summer.

More materials for young adults and afterschool homework clubs.

Utilizing the local newspaper to publicize library events and programs every week/month.

Utilizing more volunteers.

Other suggestions included increasing technology options at the library via PC classes, increasing books, such as more current arts/crafts, graphic novels, foreign language books, and audio books.

Positive comments involved all aspects of the library, including the Children’s Department renovation, being able to find and reserve books online, the lobby book sale, musical events, and the outside book drop.

Constructive criticism dealt with parking issues, such as the parking lot being too far from the front door, requesting a back entrance, and having more 10-minute drop-off parking spaces on the side of the building. One person stated the front door was much too heavy, especially for the elderly. A few found the Cutter system to be difficult and two felt the Calvin Coolidge Museum space could be better utilized.

Quotes:

“spectacular community resource”

”greatest treasure”

”anchor of stability”

“essential part of life”

Question 13. How old are you?

In this question, 856 people (97%) people responded. The library was disappointed with the low numbers of responses by people under the age of 25.

AGE GROUP % OF TOTAL RESPONSES

0-11	1%
12-18	2%
19-24	4%
25-40	21%
41-60	48%
61-79	22%
80+	2%

Question 14. Please tell us the zip code where you live.

Of the 857 people (97%) who responded to this question, 65% lived in Northampton, including Florence and Leeds. Most of the surrounding towns were represented in the remaining 35%, with Easthampton, Amherst, and Hadley being the most common.

Question 15. Please tell us the zip code where you work.

In this question, 780 people (89%) responded, and 83% of those worked in Northampton, including Florence and Leeds. Many of the surrounding towns were represented in the remaining 17%, with Easthampton, Amherst, Holyoke, and Hadley being the most common.
