



# **Altoona Public Library: Serving a growing city**

**Strategic Plan 2017-2020**

**Prepared by Consensus  
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Consensus

PO Box 10252

Kansas City, MO 64110

816.531.5078

[www.consensuskc.org](http://www.consensuskc.org)

Consulting team:

Thomas Hennen

Jennifer Wilding

# Altoona Public Library engages more residents, more deeply, in developing its plan

The standard library strategic planning process features a small community planning committee and public input is limited to a few focus groups. In many instances, the model works well enough. The Altoona Public Library, though, realized that it and its community were at a crossroads. Altoona's population is growing rapidly; the library wanted a future-oriented strategic planning process that would help it prepare for the challenges ahead. It sought a strategic planning process with the following characteristics:

- It will engage more members of the public in more meaningful tasks than the typical library planning process;
- It will include more robust staff input;

- It will be driven by the board of directors, with the addition of some community members, rather than a separate committee composed only of community members; and
- It will include extensive data on the Altoona Public Library and on libraries of a similar size.

From March through May of 2017, the library worked with a consulting team from Consensus, a nonprofit consulting firm based in Kansas City, to gather information, engage the public and chart a course for the future.



# The context: Altoona, its library and its comprehensive plan

Miss Hick (1873-1968) bequeathed a property, which included a bungalow of 900 square feet, to be used as a library. At the time of her death, Altoona had no public library and it would be another three years before Miss Hick's vision would take shape.

By 1982, the library was loaning 1,200 books per month, excluding paperbacks. In December of that year, 83 percent of voters approved a \$175,000 bond issue for a new library to be built around the original bungalow. As Altoona's population increased, so did the demands on the library.

In May of 1996, again with 83 percent of voters approving, Altoona passed a \$3.4 million bond issue to build a new library and remodel the existing building for the police department. The current library has 19,400 square feet of space. It includes a children's area, computer room, reading area, several study/meeting rooms, staff facilities and parking lot.

Today, the Altoona Public Library has about 8 FTE employees, including 3.5 FTE of librarians with a masters of library science degree. In 2015, the library received \$15,000 in capital income and about \$642,500 in local government operating income and about \$24,500 in state government operating income. From one central library, it serves a city with about 17,000 residents. The library also serves rural Polk County and, as a member of Open Access, its materials are available to all Iowans.

## The population – a snapshot

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Altoona includes 9.35 square miles and has an estimated population of about 17,000 as of July 2015. That's a 17 percent population increase since 2010.

- 30 percent of the Altoona population is under 18 years old, and about 9 percent are 65 or older.
- 93.3 percent of residents are white alone, about 3 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and about 1 percent are black or African-American alone.
- A little more than 1 percent are foreign born, and a little more than 3 percent speak a language other

than English at home.

- Of the 5,702 housing units, about 73 percent are owner occupied. The median value of owner-occupied housing units is \$160,400.
- The average persons per household is 2.65.
- Of residents older than 25, almost 32 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, and almost 95 percent are high school graduates.
- About 9 percent of the population under age 65 has



a disability.

- Of people ages 16 or older, about 77 percent are in the civilian labor force.
- The median household income in 2015 dollars is about \$70,000, and the per capita income is about \$32,000.
- About 6 percent of local residents live in poverty.

Some Altoona residents express concern about a new outlet mall and other new businesses that pay retail or service-industry wages, not high enough for workers to afford the existing local housing stock. A 2014 comprehensive plan engaged residents in envisioning a future that may include rapid population growth.

## The Altoona comprehensive plan

In 2014, the City worked with a consulting team to create a comprehensive plan for Altoona. The plan lays out a vision for the future, with a focus on priorities for policy and investment in the next 20 years. The vision for Altoona includes four concepts that represent the “big ideas” of the comprehensive plan.

- **A community of neighborhoods.** Altoona is growing quickly and could double in population over the next 20 years. The plan uses the “neighborhood unit” concept to envision a growth pattern that maintains Altoona’s small-town character.
- **A “green,” active community.** Altoona has a history of preserving natural areas and constructing trails throughout its neighborhoods, both as an amenity and a stormwater management tactic. The plan proposes a system of greenways, natural areas that will provide stormwater drainage and become part of the city’s extensive park and trail system.
- **A regional economic center.** Altoona is a regional entertainment and commercial center, and has

great potential for continued growth. The city should build on its regional status, prime location, and growing population using strategies such as commercial diversification, encouraging spillover from existing attractions, investing in quality-of-life amenities such as the Altoona Public Library, and promoting housing diversity.



- **A distinctive identity.** Many residents noted that Altoona lacks a clear identity. The plan identified two main ideas this give the city a distinctive identity:
  - A small town with big city amenities.
  - A healthy, “green” community.

Community members echoed some of these themes from the Altoona comprehensive plan when the Altoona Public Library held a workshop to identify goals and



# The Altoona Public Library strategic planning process

The strategic planning process included four main elements:

- metrics, including comparisons with other libraries;
- a building assessment;
- a report on library trends; and
- public engagement.

Separate reports are available for each of the elements; this document provides a quick overview.

## Metrics for the Altoona Public Library

The metrics for this library and for other libraries are based on data compiled by individual libraries throughout the U.S. by state libraries and the federal government's Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

### Comparison of Altoona Public Library to its peers nationwide

Nationally, there are 814 municipal libraries serving populations about the same size as Altoona's. We compared Altoona to the 814 libraries in its population category over a period of more than 20 years. During that time, some new libraries opened, other closed, and still others changed population category. While 814 is the current tally, it varied marginally over the years.

Some of the metrics, such as internet use, have only recently been recorded.

### Historical lessons

We learned that book holdings, magazines, and reference are declining nationally but at a faster rate in Altoona. Electronic use and program attendance are rising. Staffing levels rose faster in Altoona until 2008, then fell faster. Public computer stations are growing nationally but not in Altoona. Circulation and visits are falling nationally and in Altoona, but programming and electronic use are on the rise for both.

| Type           | Measures                            | ALTOONA |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| <b>Inputs</b>  | Expend per capita                   | 47%     |
|                | Percent Budget to materials         | 85%     |
|                | Materials Expend Per capita         | 69%     |
|                | FTE staff per 1000 popul            | 35%     |
|                | Periodicals per 1000 residents      | 15%     |
|                | Volumes per Capita                  | 38%     |
|                | Square Feet per Capita              | 61%     |
| <b>Outputs</b> | Cost per circulation                | 82%     |
|                | Visits per capita                   | 75%     |
|                | Collection turnover                 | 84%     |
|                | Circulation per FTE Staff Hour      | 88%     |
|                | Circulation per Capita              | 73%     |
|                | Reference per capita                | 3%      |
|                | Circulation per hour                | 64%     |
|                | Visits per hour                     | 66%     |
|                | Circulation per visit               | 48%     |
|                | Electronic Resource Uses per capita | 98%     |
|                | Program Attendance Per capita       | 72%     |
| <b>Summary</b> | Input Average                       | 50%     |
|                | Output Average                      | 69%     |
|                | Output over Input                   | 19%     |

### Broad category peer lessons

Current per capita spending is lower in Altoona than for its peers, especially those in urban counties. However, Altoona spends more of its budget on materials than nearly all its peers. Perhaps because of the high materials spending, Altoona's staffing level is lower than most of its peers. Altoona bests its peer groups on circulation and visits, and its rate of visits per open hour is considerably higher than its peers. Altoona's attendance at library programs is on par with other libraries. We found that Altoona

gets what is basically 19 percent "profit" from the Altoona Public Library. That's because the input levels for

this library average at nearly the median, while the output average exceeds that by 19 percent.

On the input side, the range is from the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile for percent of the budget to materials to as little as the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile for periodicals. Staffing at the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile is also comparatively low. On the output side, the library ranks at the 3<sup>rd</sup> percentile for

reference and the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile for electronic use per capita. However, technical difficulties for the reporting year used resulted in a higher-than-actual rate of electronic use. The actual rate is closer to the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile.

## Best practice libraries: What can Altoona learn from them?

Consensus identified 16 libraries with performance measures that outpaced those of Altoona. We focused on three of the 16 for various reasons, and contacted the library directors to find out what they consider the secrets to their success.

### Verona (Dane County, WI)



This is a well-funded and well-stocked library with very high output measures. Even though residents there are paying more, they are still getting more bang for the buck.



### Delafield (Waukesha County, WI)

This library is far less well-funded or well-stocked than most of the libraries, but its output measures are far higher than expected, so its residents are getting a lot of value for the dollar.



### Hingham (Plymouth County, MA)

The library's low percentage of its budget devoted to materials is matched by a low rate of materials spending and high rate of staffing. Circulation per visit and per hour are high, and all other output measures are exceptional.

The library directors shared their lessons related to their exceptional results.

## “What helps your library produce exceptional results?”

| Library   | Factor                   | Explanation   |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Verona Public Library (WI)</b><br><br>Director: Stacey Burkart | Architecture             | We have a beautiful, fairly new facility with 35-foot-tall windows overlooking prairie park land. The building is a very nice place to be. It's a point of pride for people in the community and people truly enjoy spending time here. We make the most of our space by using the main area of the library to host large exhibits, many of them traveling museum exhibits. This brings lots of people in the door from our community and surrounding areas.  |
|   | Geography & demographics | Although our town itself is small, we are located very near a mid-size university town. We also have a large medical software company in our town that employs thousands of young professionals, many of whom have young families. Many people in our community are well educated and/or value education and lifelong learning.   |
|   | RFID                     | Six years ago we purchased an automated book sorter and RFID tagged all our books. This has increased efficiency in circulation tremendously.   |
|   | Leadership & staff       | I'm sure it is not unique to our library but our staff has a really strong work ethic. They take pride in what they do and like coming to work. Turnover is relatively low, even in part-time positions. Staff are encouraged to try new things and take on new challenges and responsibilities. We encourage professional and non-professional staff to go to conferences and trainings, we take staff meeting time to get out in the community and tour places like the food pantry, senior center, library delivery center, local businesses, etc. |
|   | Collections              | We buy multiple copies of popular titles and authors and try to organize our collections in a way that optimizes people finding what they want. A few years ago, we reorganized children's picture books into "neighborhoods" for easier browsing and saw a 16% increase in circulation in that collection the first year. If it's popular, we buy it. We also try to not be too far off technology trends, we circulate wifi hotspots, Chrome-books for home use and laptops for in-library use.   |
|   | Atmosphere               | We are not a quiet library – at least the children's half of the building. We welcome age-appropriate levels of noise and activity and encourage families to stay, play and socialize. We have a relaxed food and beverage policy and try to be generally welcoming and relaxed in our approach. No passive/aggressive signage is allowed.  |
|   | Events                   | We held more than 800 programs last year with 600 of them for kids and teens. The demand for story times are very high in our community and so we provide lots of them. Programs and events bring a lot of people into the building, who often then check out materials. We like to keep a full calendar so there is always something new to discover here.   |

|   |             |  |
|---|-------------|--|
| <b>Delafield Public Library</b><br><br>Director:<br>Stephanie Ramirez | Employees   | <p>We have 15 employees, both full- and part-time, and many have been here for a significant amount of years. From the shelvers to the circulation assistants to the youth librarians on up, I have never met a more dedicated crew during my career as a librarian. (I worked for years at the Los Angeles Public Library.) Each employee truly wants to make the library a core part of the community and a welcoming beacon to the citizens of Delafield, and beyond. From exceptional customer service to innovative programming, I am proud to say we have an excellent reputation in the community, much of which is due to this great group of people.</p>                            |
|   | Programming | <p>Although we have more “traditional” programs, such as children’s storytimes, we also have noteworthy speakers who tackle everything from local history to hot-button topics. We have a heavy senior population and we try often to help them with their technology needs. We have a whole two weeks out of the year dedicated to Tech Week and tackle many different topics. Patrons can set up one-on-one lessons with one of our librarians for tech help and also can sign up for our tech help mailing list. We also are participants in the Memory Café program with other local libraries, which targets those with dementia and early onset Alzheimer’s, and their caregivers.</p> |
|   | Collections | <p>We have a popular rental section for our DVDs as well as a browsing collection for our hot-off-the-press books that may have multiple holds on them and would usually be unavailable. Also, our children’s collection is really top-notch and our librarians do a wonderful job of really research the best books for kids as well as what they want.</p>   |

|   |                   |   |
|---|-------------------|---|
| <b>Hingham Public Library</b><br><br>Director: Linda Harper | Planning          | The long-range plan is used as an active document, and when planning for and deciding upon new initiatives, purchases, or programs, I make sure that decisions support LRP goals, and communicate this to staff. I also update the trustees regularly on what LRP goals are being achieved.   |
|   | Reference         | We added a small table with two chairs near the desk that the Reference staff can move to and sit next to a patron to work with them. We also utilize circulation staff to act as “reference support staff,” manning the reference desk as first point of contact to help with easy questions. This allows the reference librarians to move off desk, work on higher-level projects and functions.  |
|   | Collections       | We buy to meet demand, even if that means multiple copies. After the demand wanes, we give the extra books to the library bookstore to sell, and funds go to our materials budget. They raised more than \$16,000 last year.  |
|   | Staff             | Having trained, engaged, involved, happy, friendly and appreciated staff are the key to any library’s success, especially in achieving long-range planning goals. It’s a team effort and everyone in the organization is vitally important and has to be willing to do their part. Training is strongly encouraged, from asking questions to working one-on-one with someone more knowledgeable, to attending workshops, to going back to school. |
|   | Volunteers        | We have about 100 volunteers who worked nearly 6,000 hours for us last year in multiple capacities.   |
|   | Community support | We offer friendly service, good materials, and fantastic programs for people of all ages. Our non-resident circulation is as high as 25% of our total circulation. Patrons from other towns have told me they like us better because we’re so nice and friendly.  |

## “What advice would you give a library of a similar size?”

| Library   | Advice  |
|---|---|
| <b>Verona Public Library</b><br><br>Director:<br>Stacey Burkart       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide staff with continuing education opportunities and in-service training.</li> <li>• Hire great staff and trust them to do their jobs and give lots of positive feedback.</li> <li>• Invest in RFID or other technology that increases efficiency of basic tasks.</li> <li>• Have lots of events. Have as many events and programs as people will come to.</li> <li>• Make the most of the space you have. Build or renovate, if possible.</li> <li>• Host exhibits by partnering with other institutions like museums and nonprofits or through grants.</li> <li>• Cultivate community partnerships wherever you can.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Delafield Public Library</b><br><br>Director:<br>Stephanie Ramirez | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the user the primary focus. From the moment they walk in the building to the moment they leave, create a welcoming, positive environment. A simple greeting can go a long way. Our regular users feel like they are part of the family and we feel the same about them.</li> <li>• If we have one weakness, I would say it's reaching out to non-library-users who may not be aware of all that we have to offer. I have now hired two outreach librarians and I am hoping to combat those that may be uninformed. My advice would be to make sure you are attending community events, city council meetings, PTA meetings, etc., and always be marketing the library.</li> <li>• When it comes to programming, the best advice I have is to truly listen to what patrons really want to see and attend. Don't come in with pre-conceived notions. Be very adaptable.</li> <li>• Do constant collection development, listening to what people really want.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Hingham Public Library</b><br><br>Director:<br>Linda Harper        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can never have too many study rooms. I asked one of the building specialists from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners what was the one thing libraries wished they'd done differently, and she said that they would put in more study rooms, pretty much across the board.</li> <li>• Having a Technology Librarian has been great. She provides one-on-one technology help, and group classes on a variety of topics. We have included plans for a Makerspace as part of a construction grant, as well.</li> <li>• We have a number of internet computers, with no sign-in or time limits so they're easy to use. If they print, people leave a payment in a box on the way out. We want to simplify processes and eliminate pain points to users.</li> </ul>  |

# As Altoona grows, shows more library space is needed

The current building has 19,400 square feet and was built in 1998 at a taxpayer cost of \$4.7 million in 2016 dollars. The building served a population that was then at about 7,200. If we assume that the planners at the time projected that the population would double in 20 years, then they planned for about 1.4 square feet per capita. The cost per square foot was \$160.82, or about \$236.80 in 2016 dollars.

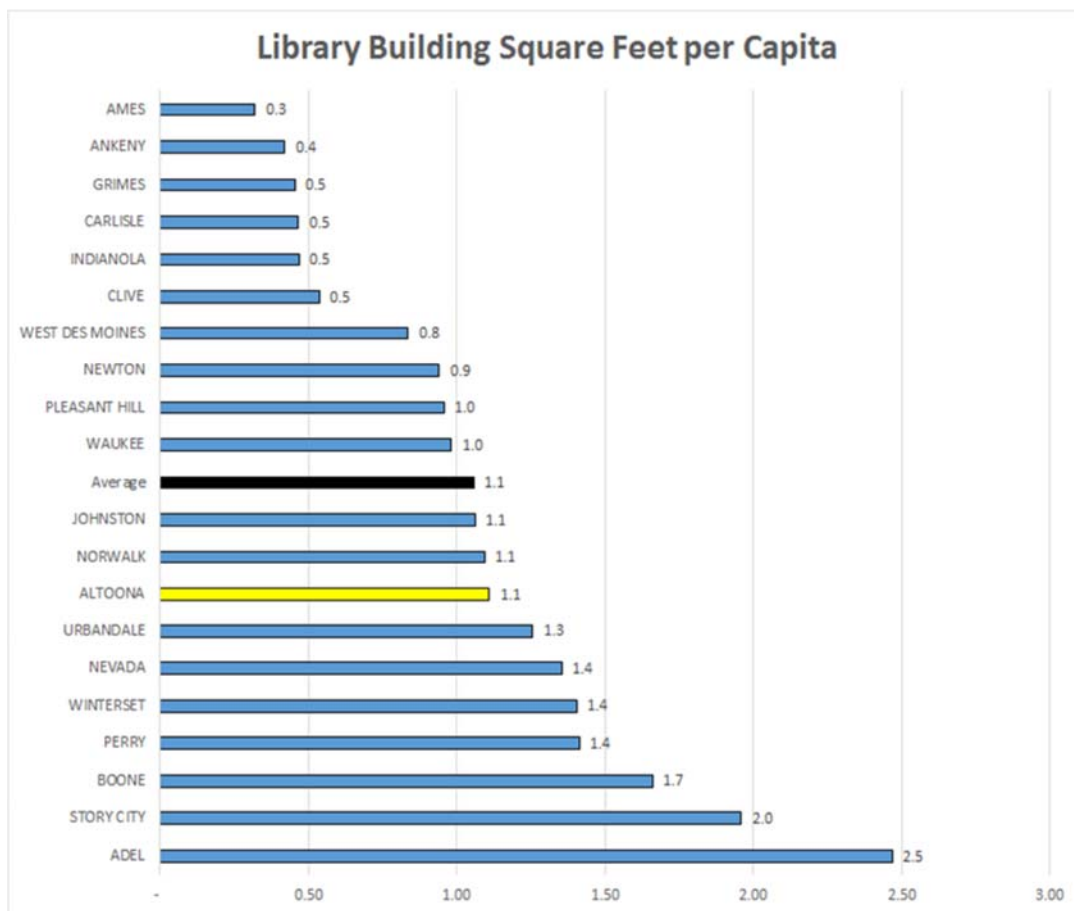
The Altoona comprehensive plan projects a 2035 population of between 16,188 and 44,412 with a planning target of 33,693. The city estimates the current population at 15,409, which doesn't include the 2,000 residents of surrounding towns that the State of Iowa estimates as part of the Altoona Public Library service area.

The current building site allows for an expansion to 40,000 square feet. This would provide an esti-

mated total of 1.14 square feet per capital 20 years from now. At \$227 per square feet, the cost would run about \$5 million.

## Comparison to area libraries

Assuming population growth and without added construction, the Altoona Public Library's space per capita will diminish substantially over the next 20 years. The graph below shows that there are 20 libraries in Polk and surrounding counties that serve community populations between 5,000 and 50,000. Altoona Public Library currently has about the average square feet per capita for this group. However, if the growth rate reaches the city's population target of about 33,700 by 2038, it will have a rate in the lower quartile, between Ankeny (0.4) and Clive (0.5) on the graph below.



### **Public space has some deficits that need fixed**

A review of the public areas of the current library building identified some deficits that should be remedied even without expanding the building:

- Lighting does not meet standards in some areas, especially in the book stacks, and the library would benefit from a scheduled replacement cycle by tiers of lighting to reduce fluorescent flickering and buzzing.
- The door to the basement requires better security, and there is a danger that it could be left open by accident.
- The circulation area would benefit from a notification system to call for additional staff for peak patron loads.
- The reference desk is greatly underutilized, but because the desks and shelving are bolted to the floor, removing them would be difficult. If removed, that space could house 8 to 10 public access internet computers.
  - \* Altoona has far fewer computer workstations than regional or national averages. The average of workstations per 10,000 visits is between 2.1 and 2.24; Altoona has 0.57. To meet the average would take another 27 computer workstations even to meet the needs of the current population.
- Additional shelving in the meeting room would enhance storage capacity for children's program supplies, additional chairs, tables and other supplies.
- In the study rooms, it would be useful to add electrical wiring, Cat5 wiring, USB jacks, and even dedicated video displays. One of the two rooms could be set up to allow gaming.
- The current space for children's materials does not include space for story time, so it is held in the meeting room, which is a considerable distance from the children's room.
- The book return that allows the public to place items into the building is a potential fire hazard. It should be fire retardant and there should be a

sprinkler system.

- The emergency exits are not equipped with alarms and security camera surveillance. This should be reviewed.
- The book and materials shelves are currently at about capacity. Expanding the shelving space to serve a larger population would require sacrificing some other current space. Since there is little storage or programming space, reader seating is about the only possibility.

The current building lacks space for much of the type of programming other libraries now provide, such as a dedicated children's story time area, a teen A/V and gaming room, a maker space, and many more public access workstations.

A review of non-public areas includes the following recommendations for the current space:

- Soundproof the director's office for privacy.
- Provide ergonomic furniture in the work area.
- In the server room, consider providing back-up batteries for climate control, and add shelving for a limited inventory of replacement computers, keyboards and so forth.
- Add shelving or rearrange items to augment the very limited storage available.

The assessment found additional concerns related to the windows, water runoff, and equipment (heating, cooling and mechanical) inventory that is at or above the current median life expectancy.

# People, place and platform: The future of public libraries

Too often, when people consider the future of public libraries, they base their picture of the future on their past experiences. Particularly with technological and other changes that libraries expect, it was important to share information to put the Altoona Public Library strategic plan into context.

Today's studies of library services rarely question whether libraries will survive the digital revolution. Instead, libraries are expected to continue to incorporate new digital technology as they meet the tech needs of their communities. Libraries have also carved out a new role as the platform where people come to create, as libraries become less like grocery stores and more like kitchens.

"We believe the library of the last century is the library of consumption, an institution that reflects the broadcast era of media, the place where you watch, read and listen passively from an armchair. The library of this century is the place where new social relationships are forged and knowledge is created, explored and shared," according to the authors of "Making Room for Innovation."

media, and of those surveyed, 73 percent prefer printed books to e-readers or audio books. A Pew Research Center poll in 2016 found that 87 percent think libraries should definitively or maybe help patrons learn to



use new creative technologies like 3-D printers. However, and this may be the important point, fewer said that books should be removed to make space for them, down to 24 percent from 30 percent in 2015.

The Aspen Institute, in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, convened the Dialogue on Public Libraries to examine the evolving societal role of the public library and to re-envision public libraries for the future. Library leaders involved in the dialogue said that public libraries should maximize their impact by focusing on four areas:

- Central principles of the library's mission: equity, access, opportunity, openness and participation.
- The library's capacity to drive opportunity and success in the knowledge-based economy.
- An emerging model of networked libraries that promotes economies of scale and broadens the library's resource reach while preserving its local presence.
- The library's fundamental people, place and platform assets.

The idea of the library as platform is relatively new. A "platform" is defined as a base upon which people create services, data and tools. The library as plat-



At the same time, Americans still read books, including books on paper. A 2017 Gallup poll found that people still consume books at about the same rate as they did in 2002, before smartphones and social

form, according to the Aspen Institute, shifts “toward a new vision of the library as a central hub for learning and community connections.”

#### **How do we measure the value of libraries?**

- Inputs are what a community provides to a library so it can provide services. They include things like total expenditure per capita, Full Time Equivalent staffing, book volumes, and square feet of building space.
- Outputs are the statistical measures of the services provided with those inputs. They include things like visits per capita, circulation per capita and per open hour, and program attendance.
- Outcomes are the value provided to library users. They are changes in the behavior, attitude, skills or knowledge of participating individuals. The Public Library Association is working to make it easier for libraries to measure the impact of library services such as childhood literacy, computer training, and workforce development.

#### **Libraries will be affected by social and economic changes including:**

- The knowledge economy and the digital era. With the half-life of a skill about five years, most learning won't happen in schools. Libraries clearly have a role to play in making learning resources available. The future of the planet, including climate change, means that libraries are using regenerating design to make their buildings good for the site.
- The future of connection, such as gigabit tech, big data and the rise of ride share.
- The future of commerce, including the rise in income inequality and its impact on the gap between rich and poor students on standardized tests. Libraries programs can help reduce the gap, particularly if they focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) skills the economy needs. Other trends include labor shortages from Boomer retirements, the rise of the gig economy, and the

need to support business start-ups.

- The future of play, including the increasing social dimension of play and the use of game mechanics in everyday life.
- The future of reading, which will be increasingly multiformat and interactive.



- The future of government, including data transformation, transparency and resident input.
- The future of learning, which is becoming increasingly self-directed while at the same time using more social learning environments to engage groups in projects. Other trends include badges for adults, flipped learning, and game-based learning.
- The future of stuff, which includes libraries that loan out nontraditional items like tools, ties, musical instruments and other items.
- The future of the life cycle, with people marrying later, waiting to have children, and living longer.
- The future of communities, which are using collective impact efforts to encourage social change.

No one library can address all these trends. The Altoona Public Library engaged its community in looking for where the library could make a unique contribution to addressing community needs.

# Public engagement identifies community ideas and interests

The library appointed a core committee that included three board members and three community members, which oversaw the strategic planning process. As part of that, library staff suggested five individuals for stakeholder interviews, and the library convened a three-hour workshop with some 40 residents selected to represent diverse perspectives.

## Stakeholder interviews

Five individuals were interviewed in person and via email. They were selected because of their knowledge of the business and youth-serving communities in Altoona.

*How would you describe the role of the library in your community?*

Several of the individuals interviewed focused on services to children and families with young children, and mentioned that because their own children are grown, they don't come to the library as often anymore. Stakeholders also referenced the importance of providing computer access and staying current on trends in technology. Several said that the library was a central hub for the community and that the attractive building was an asset.

*In what ways do you think the library serves the community exceptionally well?*

Again, programming for children was seen as a strength. Some weren't sure if the marketing for children's programming was the reason for their positive impression, or if it was the programs themselves. One praised the variety of programming for children and teens. "It's a nice variety, not just strictly focusing on keep reading, keep reading, but they offer different, hands-on projects" such as the chance to take apart old computers or teaching make-up application.

Other strengths included having a good brand and being appreciated in the community, engaging the

community and assisting with things like Altoonapalooza and Altoona 150, reaching out to business community, and having a nice community room.

*In what areas would you like to see improvement?*

Subjects cited the need for better marketing, to update and maintain the facility, keeping up with technology, improving the website, and making sure consumer service is top-notch.

*When you think about the future of the Altoona Public Library, what one opportunity would you find most exciting?*

Comments included providing workforce training, using technology (or not) to engage children in reading, keeping up with tech trends, and getting the word out about the library using apps and other media.

In addition, subjects said it was important to empower staff members, pay attention to national trends in library services, and work to keep adults coming to the library after their children are grown.



## Community meeting builds energy

On April 22, the Altoona Public Library invited some 40 residents to take part in creating a strategic plan. The core committee selected individuals to reflect different perspectives. That Saturday morning, participants

worked in small groups led by a local facilitator. Each table developed goals, strategies and action steps for one of three service areas.

### Create a positive experience: Physical and virtual spaces

Residents will have safe and welcoming physical places to meet and interact with others or to sit quietly and read. They will also have open and accessible virtual spaces that support social networking. The library will provide information and outreach on services and facilities to the public.

**Goal: Altoona is a vibrant, full-service community that keeps its residents and patrons.**

#### Strategies

- Use social media to market the city.
- Offer classes that help residents find jobs, such as ESL/citizenship, computer, service and medical jobs, and job placement for veterans.

**Goal: Market Altoona as the entertainment capital of Iowa.**

#### Strategies

- Make the library someplace that people inside and outside Altoona would use. Add meeting space, provide better seating and updated technology.
- Hire an IT person for the City that would assist the Altoona Public Library.



### **Fostering curiosity: Lifelong learning**

Residents will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and enjoyment to continue to learn throughout their lives.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Goal: Create a digital story walk</b>  | Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Market and promote the story walk by reaching out to local groups, holding a launch, creating promotional videos, etc.</li><li>• Use a survey to identify audiences for the digital story walk.</li></ul> |
| <b>Goal: Create a community center</b>  | Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make the community center relevant to all age groups by identifying needs and using the space for programming.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Goal: Offer adult education “how to” classes –</b><br><i>Also a goal of an “Express Creativity” small group.</i> | Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct a survey to identify adult education needs and wants.</li><li>• Identify resources for providing classes.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Goal: Coordinate volunteers for local groups that need volunteer assistance</b>                                  | Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify programs that need volunteers.</li><li>• Recruit people willing to serve as volunteers.</li><li>• Match volunteers with appropriate jobs.</li></ul>  |

### **Express creativity**

Create and share content. Residents will have the services and support they need to express themselves by creating original print, video, audio or visual content in a real-world or online environment.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Goal: Create a local media hub</b>   | Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Convene a meeting with groups that would want to be involved.</li><li>• Identify a leader to create the hub.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Goal: Offer adult education classes –</b> See “Foster Curiosity” above.                    |   |
| <b>Goal: Offer dedicated creative space</b>   | Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify and meet space needs such as for a tech lab, music room, maker space and garden.</li><li>• Partner with others to offer materials and programs.</li></ul>                   |
| <b>Goal: Encourage two-way communication between Altoona Public Library and the community</b> | Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop outlets, such as a community calendar, billboard and program-based email lists.</li><li>• Use social media and other methods such as voting to encourage feedback.</li></ul> |

# Altoona Public Library Strategic Plan

## 2017-2020

Building upon the voice of its community, the Altoona Public Library board and staff members developed the following strategic plan.

| Goal  | Objective  | #  | Task   | Date      |
|---|--|----|--|-----------|
| <b>Library and Community PR &amp; Marketing</b> |  |    |  |           |
| <b>Promote the library and community</b>        | Participate in new app for events and businesses, if viable. Develop app if cooperative agreement app does not meet needs as identified in public meeting. | 1  | Assess existing app viability.   | 12/2017   |
|   |  | 2  | Either create cooperative relationship for current app or start development process for community-based app.                             | 2/2018    |
|   | Highlight local businesses.  | 3  | Develop strategy and guidelines.   | 6/2018    |
|   |  | 4  | Implement strategy.  | 6/2018    |
|   | Provide small business support and start-up collection.  | 5  | Evaluate cooperation with SBA for collection.  | 8/2017    |
|   |  | 6  | Provide physical or digital resources for small businesses.  | 7/2017    |
|   |  | 7  | Develop relationship with Chamber and regional groups to promote.  | 10/2017 + |
|   | Attend ribbon cuttings and other business-related events.  | 8  | Director attends at least half of all ribbon cuttings each year of the plan.   | 2017-2020 |
|   |  | 9  | Assistant director, circulation lead, and children's librarian attend at least 4 ribbon cuttings per plan year based on their job roles. | 2017-2020 |
|   |  | 10 | Member of the admin team attends one Noon Networking meeting per month per plan year.  | 2017-2020 |

| Goal   | Objective  | #  | Task  | Date           |
|--|--|----|---|----------------|
| <b>Library and Community PR &amp; Marketing, continued</b> |  |    |   |                |
| <b>Develop community relationships</b>                     | Admin team members promote the library in the community. | 11 | Offer library presentations to each Altoona service organization each plan year.                                      | 2017-2020      |
|  |  | 12 | Identify and pursue four potential business partnerships per plan year.   | 2017-2020      |
|  |  | 13 | Admin staff member serves as a volunteer (paid by the library) at a community event at least once each per plan year. | 2017-2020      |
|  | Identify and support local volunteer community.          | 14 | Develop database for volunteer opportunities.   | 12/2018        |
|  |  | 15 | Research products for maintaining database of organizations.  | 3/2017-12/2017 |
|  |  | 16 | Organize local volunteer fair once per plan year.   | 2017-2020      |
|  |  | 17 | Identify a library volunteer coordinator (unpaid).  | 1/2018         |
|  | Create a library-specific marketing plan.                | 18 | Create a survey to determine effective media outlets.   | 3/2018         |
|  |  | 19 | Send a staff member to marketing conference in 2017, 2 in 2018 and 3 in 2019.   | 2017-2020      |
|  |  | 20 | Members of admin team complete a total of 20 CE credits per plan year in PR/marketing.                                | 2017-2020      |
|  |  | 21 | Staff attends local workshops and networking opportunities focused on PR/marketing.                                   | 2017-2020      |

| Facilities – Physical and Virtual  |  |    |   |           |
|--|--|----|---|-----------|
| Provide physical and virtual spaces that serve as “third place” the library’s spaces become the hub of social activity outside of home and work. | Create a community center experience.              | 22 | Serve on the steering committee for city community center(s).   |           |
|  |  | 23 | Create a space for highlighting the arts.                       | 8/2018    |
|  |  | 24 | Investigate possibility of deposit collections / home delivery. | 12/2018   |
|  |  | 25 | Encourage local organizations to use library group-use spaces.  | 8/2017    |
|  |  | 26 | Incorporate community center elements into expand remodel plan. | 8/2017+   |
|  | Provide space and technology for maker activities. | 27 | Seek grants / donations for equipment.                          | 2018      |
|  |  | 28 | Remodel the library to include a maker space.                   | 2017-2020 |
|  |  | 29 | Provide hardware and materials for checkout.                    | 4/2019    |
|  | Expand and remodel library facility                | 30 | Identify steering committee.                                    | 12/2017   |
|  |  | 31 | Increase meeting space.   | 6/2020    |
|  |  | 32 | Continue architect contract.                                    | 7/2017+   |
|  |  | 33 | Identify funding options.                                       | 9/2017+   |
|  |  | 34 | Coordinate construction timelines with City.                    | 12/2017+  |
|  |  | 35 | Update furnishings in meeting spaces.                           | 6/2020    |
|  |  | 36 | Update furnishing in browsing spaces                            | 6/2020    |
|  |  | 37 | Utilize bookstore model of organizing collection.               | 6/2019    |

### Facilities – Physical and Virtual, continued

|  |  |    |   |         |
|--|--|----|---|---------|
| Provide physical and virtual spaces that serve as “third place” the library’s spaces become the hub of social activity outside of home and work. | Provide robust technology services.                    | 38 | Update meeting room technology.   |         |
|  |  | 39 | Increase internet speed.  | 10/2017 |
|  |  | 40 | Add mobile hot spots for checkout.  | 6/2018  |
|  |  | 41 | Launch new website (including mobile version).  | 7/2018  |
|  |  | 42 | Add mobile printing (part of the new website).  | 7/2018  |
|  |  | 43 | Add meeting space booking / management software.  | 9/2017  |
|  | Provide physical and virtual space for communications. | 44 | Create social media campaigns to encourage communication from the public.   |         |
|  |  | 45 | Provide a physical and online space for feedback.   | 5/2018  |
|  |  | 46 | Leverage existing options in the library computer system to increase access to community and library information. |         |
|  |  | 47 | Create group study rooms with networking and information-sharing technology.                                      |         |

| Programming  |                                      |    |  |  |
|--|--------------------------------------|----|--|--|
| Identify and provide formal and informal lifelong learning programs. | Identify program and service needs   | 48 | Conduct a community survey for library programs.   |  |
|  | Create Digital Story Walk framework. | 49 | Research creation of app.  |  |
|  |                                      | 50 | Identify purpose and use of content.   |  |
|  |                                      | 51 | Identify and outline timeline, staff responsibility, content creation.   |  |
|  | Develop learning courses (formal).   | 52 | ESL / Job training, technical, musical instruments, computers, financial courses.                                |  |
|  | Develop learning courses (informal). | 53 | DIY, outdoor programs, hobbies/arts, book discussion via Skype / tech, maker space, gardening, creative writing. |  |
|  |                                      | 54 | Create tutorials utilizing local experts and talent.   |  |
|  |                                      | 55 | Continue summer intern to focus on STEaM education.  |  |

**Thank yous to APL board, core committee, staff members and facilitators. Anyone else?**