

Reaching for the Future: Connecting People to a World of Discovery

**A Strategic Plan for the
Rutland Free Library
January 2012 – December 2016**



Paula Baker, Director

As Yogi Berra is reported to have said: *If you don't know where you are going you will end up somewhere else.* While not an elegant comment, it has the virtue of clarity, something all businesses and institutions require if they intend to flourish. The plan which follows is distinctly different from the three previous long range plans (1996, 2000 and 2005) because it not only lays out the agreed-upon goals, but sets down a strategic path for achieving those goals by looking at the infrastructure and financial supports as well as the desired service outcomes. There is no question that the strategic plan which follows is ambitious, but trustees, Friends of the Library and staff are all in agreement that we can do no less than our best for the community we love and serve. Public libraries are the great equalizer in this country, and as such, bear a great deal of responsibility to help their communities thrive. That is, Mr. Berra, where we are going.

Maureen White, President / Board of Trustees

On behalf of the Board I would like to thank the members of our community for your input and support as we developed this plan. In particular, thank you to the Vermont Community Foundation for a grant to underwrite part of the project's cost, and to Berkshire Bank for your sponsorship / donation in support of this work.

Sincere thanks to our Library Director, Paula Baker, and to our staff for your input in creating this plan. We appreciate your guidance and insights, and your passion for providing for the needs of the community.

This has been a major undertaking and yet we know that it serves as just the beginning of a 5-year process. Together we can use this plan as a guidepost to ensure the success of this dynamic organization.

Pat Hunter, Chair / Planning Committee

The process and the input, that went into creating this document is as important as the final written plan itself. It took the efforts of many people working in concert, sharing their ideas and their passion for the library to make this project possible.

Thank you to community members who participated in telephone interviews, who completed online surveys, and who attended meetings to share their ideas and concerns. Thank you to Board members and Planning Committee members who spent many hours reviewing ideas, debating priorities, and determining direction.

Very special thanks to Himmel & Wilson, Library Consultants, for your guidance and direction in this entire process. Your depth of knowledge, clarity, and exceptional capacity to truly listen has made this a remarkable experience.

Appreciation is extended to the following people and entities for their contributions, hard work and dedication in creating this plan for the Rutland Free Library:

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INTRODUCTION

The Public Library has been an important part of American life for well over a century. Dating back to 1886, the Rutland Free Library has endured through two World Wars, the Great Depression, countless military actions and recessions as well as numerous shifts in the nation's political landscape. The Library has provided essential services and resources that have inspired citizens of the Rutland community for over 125 years.

The Library has served as a “door to learning” for generations of children, as the “people’s university” for knowledge seekers of all ages and as a dependable source of access to information for thousands of individuals seeking to better themselves and their community. The Library has been the place that people could turn to for answers to their questions, for a good book to read or a good movie to watch for pleasure and, in recent years, for a connection to a world of online resources. The Library has served as a center of community life where people of the community come together for informative programs or simply to meet their neighbors and friends.

The Rutland Free Library is facing significant challenges in 2011. Tax dollars are hard to come by at a time when record numbers of individuals are turning to public libraries for access to job-seeking resources, affordable recreational opportunities and answers related to important life decisions. The Internet and the proliferation of laptop computers, smart-phones, tablets and e-readers are changing the way a new generation of readers, listeners and viewers acquire content. While some of the mechanisms used to acquire content are changing, the public library service model of acquiring once for the benefit of many is more vital than ever. Opportunities for lifelong learning are essential to the development of a prosperous economy and a thriving community. Libraries must embrace change while preserving fundamental print-based services that will continue to be valued well into the future.

The plan is designed to ensure that the Rutland Free Library continues to be an innovative and inspiring presence in the community and that it is sustainable well into the future. The plan that follows is built on two key concepts that are characterized as “envisioned futures.” The first of these envisioned futures is **DYNAMIC**; the Library wants to be a changing, vibrant, transformative force that has a positive impact on the quality of people’s lives. The second envisioned future is **SHARED COMMITMENT**. It speaks to a shared covenant between the Library and the community. The Library pledges to be an exceptionally good steward of funds and to deliver high value for every dollar invested in library services. The community in turn endeavors to support the Library at a level that will enable the Library to be effective. The contribution that the Library makes to the quality of life in the Rutland community is incalculable. Join us as we discover a new future for one of Rutland’s oldest and finest institutions.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Library Board of Trustees began working on the planning effort that resulted in this plan in the autumn of 2010. The planning effort started in earnest in January 2011 with a public meeting that looked at how public libraries are striving to thrive in the 21st century. Since that time, the Board and the Library's Strategic Planning Committee have met on numerous occasions, including an all-day planning retreat. A web-based survey gathered opinions and ideas from nearly 300 individuals and personal interviews solicited opinions and ideas from 25 community leaders.

The Library wishes to thank the 300 individuals who completed the survey and the 25 individuals who participated in the personal interviews. Those interviewed are listed below:

Dave Allaire, President, Rutland City Aldermen
Larry Bayles, Executive Director, Boys and Girls Club
Mark Blucher, Executive Director, Rutland Regional Planning Commission
Nancy Burzon, Director, Workforce Investment Board
Teri Corsones, Chair, Mendon Planning Commission
Steve Costello, Vice President, Central Vermont Public Service
Jack Facey, Chair, Rutland City Planning Commission
Mark Foley, President, Rutland Redevelopment Authority
Rob Geiszler, Vermont Department of Libraries
Nan Hart, Director, Retired & Senior Volunteer Program
Glenda Hawley, President, Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce
Tom Huebner, CEO, Rutland Regional Medical Center
Lyle Jepson, Director, Stafford Technical Center
Tara Kelly, Executive Director, Rutland Area Farm and Food Link
Ann Lezak, former Library Board member
Frank Miglorie, President, College of St. Joseph
Mary Moran, Superintendent, Rutland City Public Schools
Sarah Narkewicz, Director, Bowse Trust
Chuck Piotrowski, Vice President, Rutland Historical Society
Deb Roy, President, Friends of the Library
Jim Sabatano, Executive Director, Sustainable Rutland
Pam Schambo, Development Specialist & Adm. Asst., Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council
Randall Smathers, Editor, Rutland Herald
Jamie Stewart, Executive Director, Rutland Economic Development Corporation
Dave Wolk, President, Castleton State College, Vermont

In addition to gathering information from the Library Board, Strategic Planning Committee and from the public, our planning consultants worked with the Library administration and staff to discuss the future and a possible course of action. This discussion led to several draft versions of the plan. However, in the end, the plan is not, and should not be the consultant's plan or even the Rutland Free Library's plan for itself. It is the **community's** plan for the Rutland Free Library. Consequently, a public meeting was held on June 14, 2011 to gauge public reaction to the final draft version of the plan. Subsequent revisions were made to the final draft before it was presented to the Library Board for adoption. The people of the community must be involved if the Library is to remain a vital asset in the greater Rutland area. The Library invites you to be a part of the Library family on an ongoing basis as a user, as a volunteer, as a contributor or as a Friend of the Library.

A FINAL NOTE TO READERS OF THE PLAN

The word "community" appears throughout the plan. It is used in an inclusive sense to reflect the fact that the Rutland Free Library serves a geographic area that extends beyond the five municipalities that provide direct support for the Library's operations. When you read "community," understand it to mean a broader, wide-reaching community that extends not only across the region but across entire globe via the world wide web.

Readers will note that a series of strategies are listed under each of the plan's goals. These strategies are organized using an approach that is loosely based on a planning methodology called "balanced scorecard" planning. Balanced scorecard planning was developed by Dr. Robert S. Kaplan and Dr. David P. Norton. Simply stated, Norton and Kaplan pointed out that successful organizations need to consider the implications of their actions from multiple perspectives. This plan looks at each goal from five different perspectives. They are:

- Customer
- Products & Services
- Organizational Effectiveness/Efficiency
- Human Resources
- Financial

The strategies that are presented represent a general course of action. A detailed plan, which breaks each of these strategies into specific actions (including how the success

of the actions will be measured) that are spread across the five years covered by the plan, has also been developed. This highly detailed document will be used as the Library's internal "action plan." The Library Board will review and modify the plan and will refine the measures used to evaluate success on an ongoing basis.

Readers may note that some of the strategies appear in multiple goals. This is intentional as goals are inter-related and implementation of one in many instances will necessarily impact others.

VISION

Building a better community by creating opportunities for people to connect with the world of information and ideas and with each other.

MISSION

The Library is a center of community life that ensures access to resources, services and experiences that stimulate the imagination, satisfy curiosity and enable a lifelong pursuit of knowledge.

ENVISIONED FUTURES

The future of the Rutland Free Library and of the Rutland community will change if the strategic plan is fully implemented. The future that the Library sees for itself and for the community can be summarized in two "envisioned futures" statements. The first of these envisioned futures is captured in the word **DYNAMIC**; the library strives to remain relevant to new generations of users; but more than that, it wants to be a changing, vibrant, transformative force that has a positive impact on the quality of people's lives. The second envisioned future centers on the phrase **SHARED COMMITMENT**. It speaks to a covenant between the Library and the community. The Library pledges to be an exceptionally good steward of the funds entrusted to it and to deliver high value for every dollar invested in library services. The community in turn endeavors to support the Library by funding it (through both tax and charitable sources) at a level that will ensure the Library's ability to be effective. The envisioned futures are summarized below:

DYNAMIC

- The people of the community are served by a Library that provides valued and relevant resources, programs and services that are constantly changing to reflect the needs and interests of the public.

SHARED COMMITMENT

- The Library is a good steward of the funds entrusted to it and strives to provide the public with the highest possible return on its investment. The community recognizes the positive impact that the Library has on the lives of individuals and provides the financial support the Library needs not only to remain a reliable source of information and resources well into the future, but also to become the dynamic center of community life as envisioned in this strategic plan.

THE PLAN

ENVISIONED FUTURE – DYNAMIC

The people of the community are served by a Library that provides valued and relevant resources, programs and services that are constantly changing to reflect the needs and interests of the public.

Goal – WONDER & DISCOVERY

Every child will experience a world of wonder and discovery at the Library

Rationale for pursuing the goal: Providing young children with opportunities to develop early literacy skills in a supportive and enjoyable environment is critical to their success in school and, ultimately, to the development of an informed citizenry and the preservation of a democratic society. The Library is uniquely suited to assisting with this important goal because it has resources and programs for pre-school children and is open evenings, weekends and during the summer when schools are closed. By enabling children to experience the joy of reading and by providing resources and guidance to parents and caregivers, the Library can play an important role in ensuring that children enter school ready and eager to learn and can foster a pattern of lifelong learning.

Strategies:

Customer

- Engage families and children

Products & Services –

- Refine children's services to maximize their appeal to and impact on families with children
- Enhance the children's area by making it more colorful, engaging and whimsical to increase its appeal to families and children

Organizational Effectiveness

- Adopt best practices to maximize impact of services to children

Human Resources

- Increase staff capacity through training, allocation of staff resources and the use of volunteers

Financial

- Increase ongoing operational support for children's services and supplement funding for programming and outreach with non-tax revenues and through strategic partnerships

ENVISIONED FUTURE - DYNAMIC

The people of the community are served by a Library that provides valued and relevant resources, programs and services that are constantly changing to reflect the needs and interests of the public.

Goal – INSIGHT & DELIGHT

People of all ages will be drawn to an attractive, inviting, comfortable Library facility that is a portal to a world of resources, programs and services that stimulate the imagination, satisfy curiosity and contribute to quality of life and personal and professional success.

Rationale for pursuing this goal: The public library serves as “the people’s university” where individuals, regardless of their economic status, can pursue lifelong learning without any direct cost. The library is a place of discovery where individuals can explore their personal interests, improve their employment skills, satisfy their curiosity and gather useful information on a wide variety of topics ranging from home improvement to investments and from formal education to entertainment. The role of the public library as a provider of no-cost/low-cost quality entertainment resources has grown in recent years as individuals and families facing economic pressures have sought out affordable, alternative leisure time activities.

Strategies:

Customer

- Expand customer base of users of traditional library materials
- Increase the awareness of digital resources among users of more traditional library materials
- Increase the comfort-level of users of traditional library materials in using digital resources
- Enhance physical access to the Library and to all public areas to ensure that the facility encourages use by the public
- Increase the amenities offered to the public to encourage individuals to visit more frequently
- Increase opportunities for civic discourse

Products & Services

- Enhance the comfort and design of all areas to encourage people of all ages to spend more time at the Library
- Enhance virtual and in-person readers’ advisory services
- Improve the “browsability” of adult collections
- Work to achieve and maintain a balance between popular offerings and substantive resources/collections

Organizational Effectiveness

- Implement new technologies such as self-check and automated materials handling that offer greater efficiency

Human Resources

- Increase staff capacity through training, allocation of staff resources and the use of volunteers

Financial

- Increase ongoing operational support for adult services and supplement funding for programming and outreach with non-tax revenues and through strategic partnerships

ENVISIONED FUTURE – DYNAMIC

The people of the community are served by a Library that provides valued and relevant resources, programs and services that are constantly changing to reflect the needs and interests of the public.

Goal – GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

People of all ages will consider the Library to be a dependable source of access to the online world (public computers and Wi-Fi access) and as an essential portal to digital content.

Rationale for pursuing this goal: Access to the Internet has become a necessity in a digital world with a global economy. A connection to the online world has become essential to apply for many jobs, to file many governmental forms and to pursue an education in many fields. Public libraries provide the primary access to the Internet for a significant number of people. Furthermore, as more individuals begin to acquire a larger and larger percentage of their information in digital formats, the library will play an increasingly important role as an aggregator of demand and as a supplier of high-quality digital content through licensing agreements with publishers and with suppliers of costly information databases. By providing connections to the online world and by offering access to quality fee-based digital resources at no direct cost to the end user, the Rutland Free Library can provide valuable services to a growing segment of the population that may visit the Library's online presence as much or more than they visit the Library's facility. By offering access to quality content all day, every day, the Library can position itself as a valuable resource that directly contributes to the quality of the personal and professional lives of a growing segment of the community.

Strategies:

Customer

- Engage young professionals, “digital natives” and the general public and increase awareness of digital content offerings and services
- Increase the comfort-level of users of traditional library materials in using digital resources

Products & Services

- Enhance the “electronic user friendliness” of the Library facility
- Expand digital content offerings
- Enhance web presence and content available through the Library's web site

Organizational Effectiveness

- Adopt best practices and piggyback on the development of digital applications and services developed by other libraries

- Digitize historic content when legal/feasible to preserve them and to improve public access to them (24 X 7 access)

Human Resources

- Expand opportunities for training and exposure to new technologies for Library staff

Financial

- Increase ongoing operational support for digital services and supplement funding for advanced technology-based services with non-tax revenues and through strategic partnerships

ENVISIONED FUTURE - DYNAMIC

The people of the community are served by a Library that provides valued and relevant resources, programs and services that are constantly changing to reflect the needs and interests of the public.

Goal – PRESERVING & SHARING OUR HERITAGE

History will come alive for a growing segment of the community as the Library partners with other organizations to expand access to print and digital resources that provide insight into their personal and collective history.

Rationale for pursuing this goal: Interest in local history and family history is at an all-time high. Surveys indicate that genealogy is among the most popular leisure time pursuits of adults across the nation. The Rutland Free Library already possesses valuable, and in some instances, unique information regarding the history of Vermont and the Rutland area. Improving the facilities in which historic materials are housed and research is conducted, digitizing important documents of interest to individuals in the Rutland area and collaborating with Rutland Historical Society and other organizations will serve to stimulate interest and participation in the community.

Strategies:

Customer

- Engage individuals who are interested in local history and genealogy
- Encourage the general public to explore their personal and community history through programs, displays and through the development of engaging digital resources

Products & Services

- Enhance both physical and online access to local history and genealogy resources
- Enhance the local history area to increase its appeal and usefulness to genealogists and local history enthusiasts

Organizational Effectiveness

- Seek an active partnership with the Rutland Historical Society and other organizations to coordinate and maximize public access to historic information and resources
- Digitize historic content when legal/feasible to preserve them and to improve public access to them (24 X 7 access)

Human Resources

- Increase staff capacity through training, allocation of staff resources, strategic partnerships and the use of volunteers

Financial

- Supplement existing funding for local history and genealogy services with non-tax revenues and through strategic partnerships

ENVISIONED FUTURE – SHARED COMMITMENT

The Library is a good steward of the funds entrusted to it and strives to provide the public with the highest possible return on its investment. The community recognizes the positive impact that the Library has on the lives of individuals and provides the financial support the Library needs to remain a reliable source of information and resources well into the future.

Goal – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The people of the community know about the Library, use and value its services and, because they consider it an essential community asset, contribute to its support.

Rationale for pursuing this goal: Many people in the community are unaware of the nature and scope of the services provided by the Library. A web survey conducted as part of the strategic planning process asked respondents to identify resources and services that could be added that would encourage them to use the Library or to use it more frequently. More than a few respondents mentioned services that are already provided. Making sure that the public is aware of services that are offered that are relevant to them will maximize use of resources and will therefore increase the public's return on investment of every tax dollar allocated for library purposes.

Public libraries also enjoy considerable support from individuals who do not regularly use them but who recognize the contribution that libraries make to the overall quality of community life. Ensuring ongoing support from all in the community is essential to the long-term health of the Library.

Strategies:

Customer

- Increase public awareness of relevant resources through focused efforts to reach targeted audiences
- Communicate the value of the Library to people who don't regularly use the Library through traditional media and new media outlets

Products & Services

- Enhance efforts designed to communicate the availability of existing services that may be relevant to people who don't regularly use the Library

Organizational Effectiveness

- Employ technology and social media as well as more traditional methods to communicate with targeted audiences

Human Resources

- Develop strategic partnerships and engage community resources to enhance public awareness efforts
- Extend staff capacity through the use of student internships and developing opportunities for student projects that further the Library's public awareness efforts

Financial

- Secure in-kind donations of professional services and seek grant funding to support public awareness efforts

ENVISIONED FUTURE – SHARED COMMITMENT

The Library is a good steward of the funds entrusted to it and strives to provide the public with the highest possible return on its investment. The community recognizes the positive impact that the Library has on the lives of individuals and provides the financial support the Library needs to remain a reliable source of information and resources well into the future.

Goal – SUSTAINABLE

The community will provide the financial support needed to provide a dynamic, efficient Library that adds value to the lives of the people of the community well into the future.

Rationale for pursuing this goal: A dynamic Library provides high-quality library and information services that enhance quality of community life and provide individuals with opportunities for personal and professional development. However, offering high-quality library and information services costs money. There are costs associated with purchasing and licensing resources and online content, with operating and maintaining a library facility and an online presence and with managing and staffing the Library enough hours to make it a dependable and convenient resource for the public. Multiple studies have shown that public libraries offer an excellent return on investment for every dollar allocated to them. The Rutland Free Library needs to develop and maintain multiple streams of funding (both tax-based and philanthropic/charitable-giving based) to ensure that it can acquire relevant resources, offer qualified staff assistance and operate without significant fluctuations or interruptions.

Strategies:

Customer

- Ensure high return on the taxpayers' investment in the Library
- Communicate the value of what the Library does to the public as well as to existing and potential funders

Products & Services

- Improve the Library facility to encourage use and seek funding from alternative sources for enhanced services
- Improve the virtual (web presence) service environment(s) to encourage use and seek funding from alternative sources for enhanced services.
- Enhance the Library's service offerings including collections, online resources and programming

Organizational Effectiveness

- Implement new technologies such as self-check and automated materials handling that offer greater efficiency

- Ensure that the building is well-maintained to ensure user safety and ongoing use

Human Resources

- Maximize human resource potential of staff, Board, Friends and volunteers by clarifying respective duties and responsibilities
- Maximize human resource potential of staff, Board, Friends and volunteers through ongoing program of professional development
- Develop community partnerships to ensure preservation/enhancement of the Library facility

Financial

- Adopt a “prospectus” approach that highlights a “value proposition” in seeking to secure funding from charitable sources
- Seek commitments for ongoing support for maintenance of the facility from tax-based funds and support for enhancements through charitable/philanthropic sources
- Stabilize tax support with participating jurisdictions and develop alternative sources of funding and support
- Develop capital and “rainy-day” fund raising/fund development campaigns