



Woods Memorial Library Long Range Plan

Fiscal Year 2024 to 2028



The Barre Board of Library Trustees voted unanimously to approve and submit the Long Range Plan at their meeting on May 10, 2023.

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I. Mission Statement

The library's mission is to provide a welcoming community center to the Town of Barre, while serving as a resource for knowledge, information, education, and technology.

II. Top Service Priorities

- To serve as a community resource center
- To create young readers
- To inspire lifelong learning
- To stimulate imagination

III. Community Description

The Town of Barre is primarily a residential community with a strong rural character. It is located 61 miles from Boston and is geographically close to the center of the state. Barre is located in Worcester County. The total area of the town is about 44.3 square miles.

According to the United States Census Bureau (USCB), Barre's total population is 5,526. Currently, Barre's population distribution is similar to that of Worcester County. However, Barre's population consists of 18.3% children under 18, which is slightly lower than Worcester County (20.7%) and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a whole (19.5%). Children five and under make up 3.1% of the community, and persons 65 years plus make up 55% of the population distribution.

The median household income is \$92,206, which is just above the state average of \$89,026. Fourteen percent of Barre individuals live below the poverty level, which is higher than the state rate of 10.4%.

Barre is part of the Quabbin Regional School District, along with the neighboring towns of Hardwick, New Braintree, Oakham, and Hubbardston. Each town supports its own elementary school and shares the Middle/High School, which is housed in Barre. Students wishing to attend a vocational school travel outside of the community. According to the Department of Education, Ruggles Lane Elementary School in Barre has 392 students enrolled, and Quabbin Middle and High School have 533 and 619 students, respectively. In 2018, the school district spent \$18,553 to educate each student, which was below the state average of \$19,062 per student.

According to the school's report card from the Department of Education, the elementary school's student body is comprised of 44.1% low-income students, 26.3% students with disabilities, and 55.9% of students are high needs. A student is classified as high needs if they are designated as low-income, economically disadvantaged, is an English learner (or English is not their first language), or they are a student with disabilities.

IV. Library History

In 1857, Samuel Gates donated his collection of books to the Town of Barre, thus creating the community's first public library. In 1885, the Barre Library Association was incorporated to raise funds to build a suitable structure to house the growing collection, as temporary quarters shared with the Post Office were inadequate. Barre native Henry Woods came forward in 1886 to donate both the land and the building for a town library. Designed by Mr. Woods' son, Henry D. Woods, work began on the Woods Memorial Library in June 1886. The building was named to honor the donor's family. With construction complete, the library opened for business on Tuesday, August 30, 1887. The library also houses a small museum of historical significance, which is managed and maintained by the Barre Museum Association.

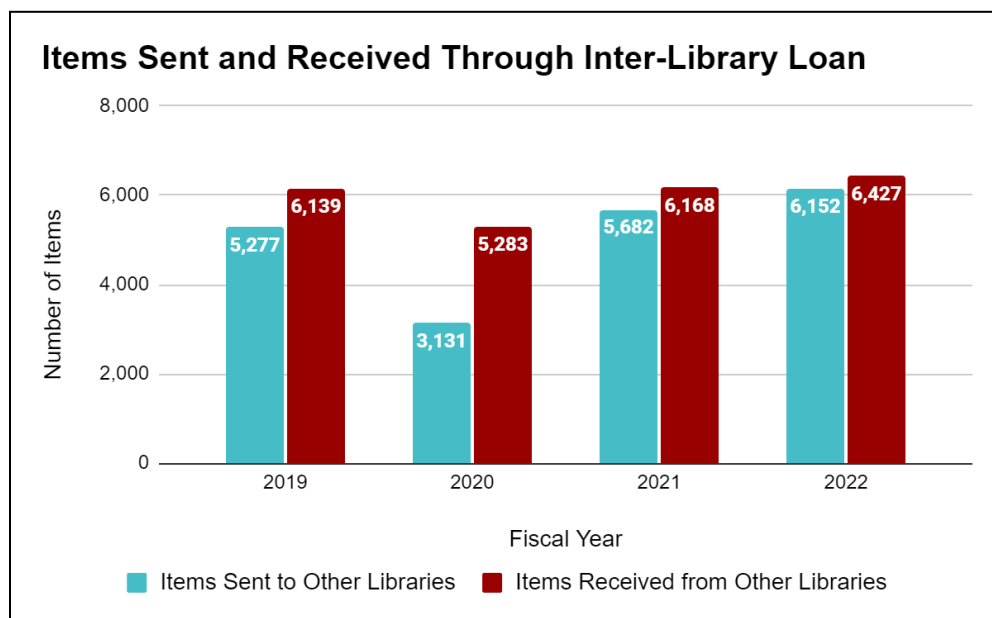
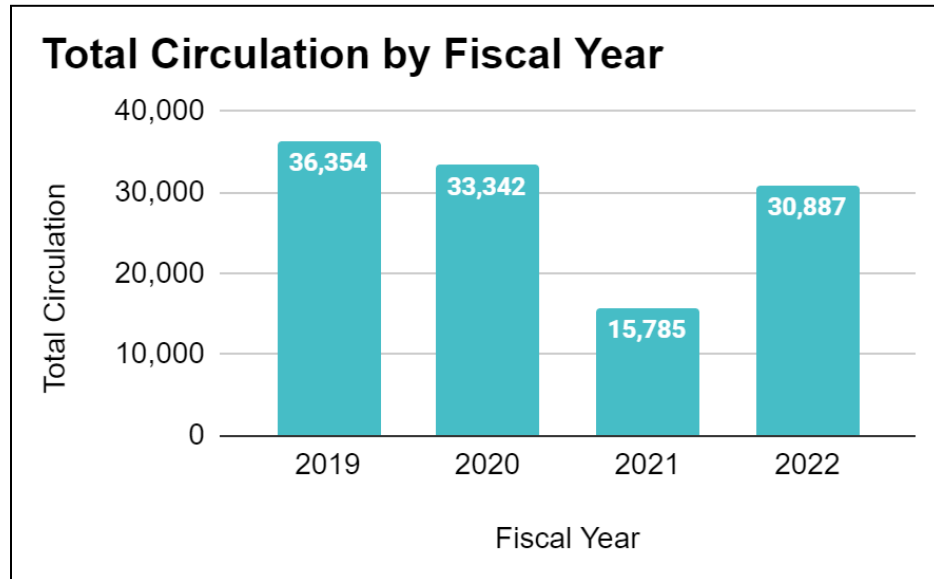
The building was renovated extensively in 1958, 1967, 1987, and 2000; the latter project doubled the library's size. Since 2015, the Town of Barre and the Library Association have worked to improve drainage that relieved major flooding issues, with more specific perimeter issues still needing to be addressed. The lower level of the library has been renovated to include new bookshelves, updated flooring in community spaces, and a handicap-accessible entranceway. In 2016, the building was wired with fiber and the internet access speed increased exponentially.

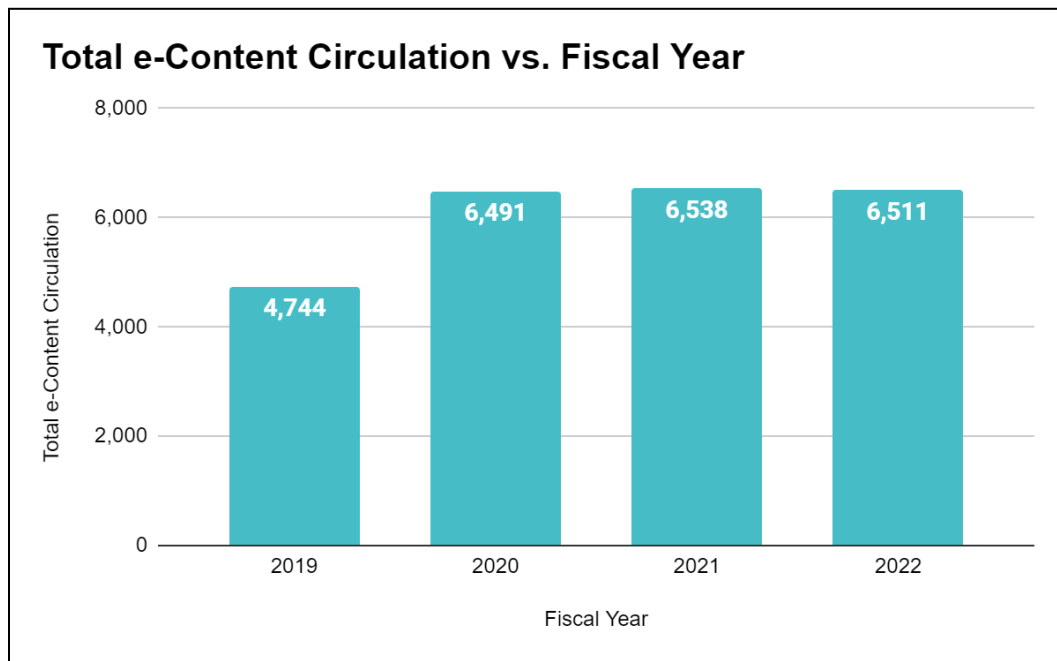
The library is governed by a six-member elected Board of Library Trustees and managed by a Director. The Trustees represent the town's interests in the library, which include management of the library's municipal budget appropriation, as well as establishing governing policies.

The Barre Library Association (BLA) owns and maintains the building and grounds, and pays for some repairs, building inspections, and insurance. The BLA is a private 501(c)(3) corporation composed of donors and volunteers. The BLA's funds are raised by the organization through fundraising, private contributions, and grants. The Town of Barre has contributed significantly to the general maintenance of the building and grounds, in partnership with the BLA.

V. Library Trends

Circulation

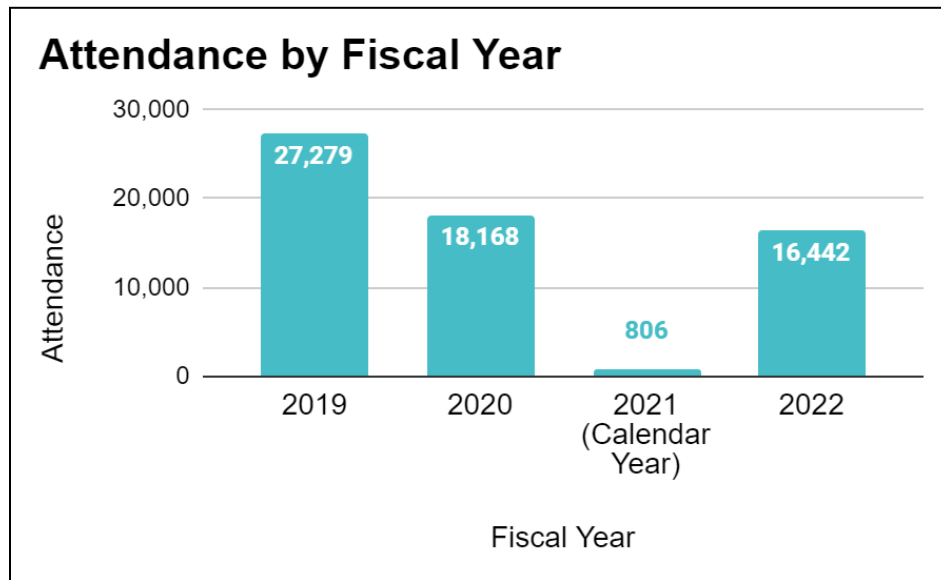




The library closed to the public in March 2020 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and remained closed for the majority of FY21. Staff continued to work through the pandemic, allowing the library to provide outdoor services, making it possible for items to circulate from our library and elsewhere. This accounts for the significant drop in circulation during FY21, and numbers were again on the rise in FY22.

In 2022, the Barre Library continues to be a member of the Central and Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing consortium (C/W MARS), which allows residents of Barre to participate in inter-library loan services and access e-content online. Patrons have shown satisfaction with these services, especially during the pandemic, and total users and transactions remain steady.

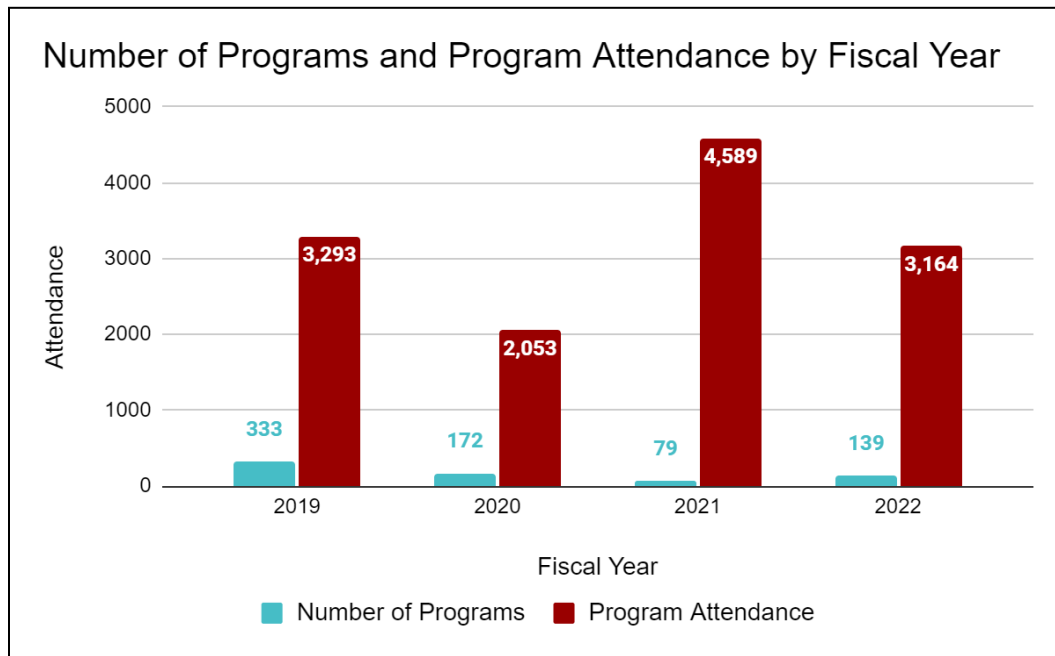
Attendance



The drop in library attendance in FY20 and FY21 can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent building closure. The building reopened in June 2021 to patrons by appointment only and reopened without an appointment a month later. The library remained closed on Fridays due to budget constraints. For that reason, coupled with the Centers for Disease Control's restrictive guidance on holding indoor events, our number of visitors did not rise to pre-pandemic numbers in FY22. Based on our current trends in visitors and program attendance, it is expected that the number of library attendees will reach or exceed FY19 numbers at the end of this fiscal year (FY23).

Services such as inter-library loans, ongoing programs, and free WiFi attract visits from the community. WiFi usage is currently not tracked; when the library is closed it is still available, and many patrons can be found outside the building using services.

Programming



Program funding is not supported within the Town budget, and all programs are funded through donations and grants. Staff hours were drastically cut in FY09 and remained that way until recently; in FY23, we were able to increase hours for part-time Library Assistants. This allowed full-time staff to spend more time on program planning. In addition to that, the library received a one-year grant to focus on outreach in the community, which led to an increase in the number of programs offered to patrons in FY22.

The pandemic made it impossible to hold in-person programs in FY21, so library staff focused more on recorded and live virtual programs, which were posted weekly or monthly on our website and social media pages. This resulted in fewer offerings, but more “views,” which we were able to count toward attendance. The library reopened in FY22 and in-person programming could once again be offered. As is the case with overall library attendance, it is expected that the number of programs and the number of attendees will continue to rise in FY23.

VI. Planning Methodology

The Library Director, working in conjunction with the Board of Library Trustees, undertook the task of identifying community needs and creating this Long Range Plan. A community survey was administered online via the library's website and social media pages, and paper copies were available at both circulation desks and the Town Clerk's office. A total of 65 completed surveys were collected from residents. The Director also gathered feedback from staff, discussing goals and long-term projects that they would like to see for inclusion. Data from these surveys were analyzed to determine the desired library service responses.

The library's previous plan (FY18-23) was reviewed and any goals that were not met in that time were updated and/or added to this plan to maintain the institution's community-driven focus.

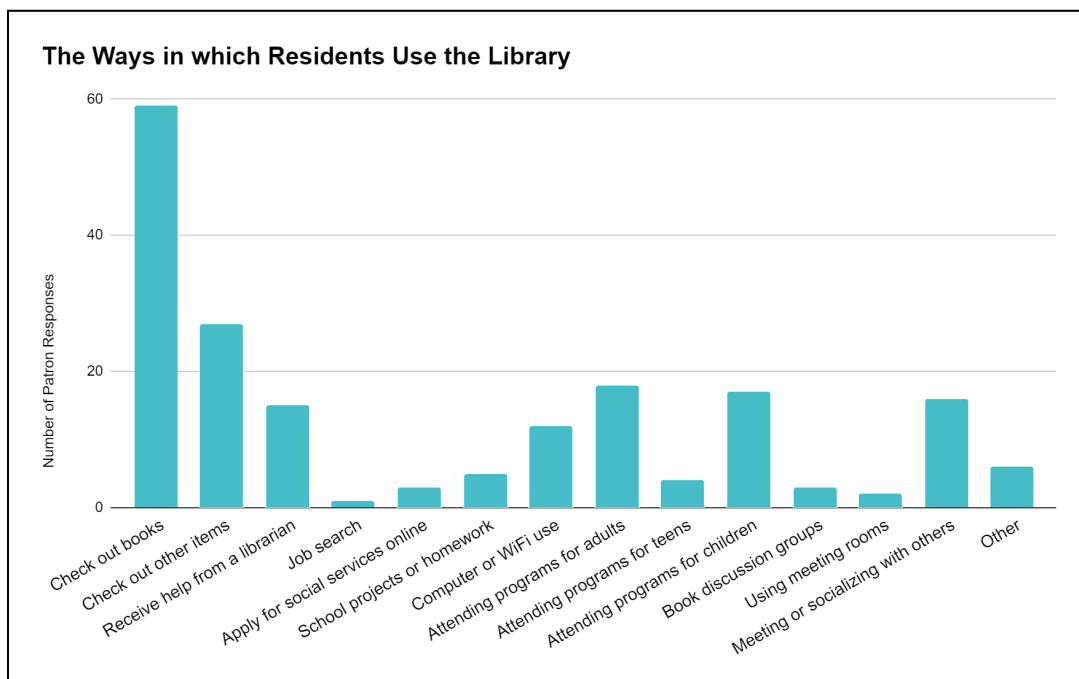
The Director attended a webinar entitled *Introduction to Strategic Planning for Public Libraries* in March 2022, offered by the Massachusetts Library System. The book *Strategic Planning for Public Libraries* by Joy L. Fuller was also referenced for planning and service response ideas. The Director then used all data to create the Long Range Plan to be approved by the Board of Library Trustees.

VII. Community Needs Assessment Survey

This community survey was available to all of our patrons, many of which live in surrounding communities. Ninety percent of the respondents were from Barre, and the remaining came from residents living in Oakham, Petersham, Gardner, Hubbardston, Rutland, and Hardwick. It should be noted that the survey responses reported as percentages are based on the number of actual responses to a particular question (some participants did not answer every question).

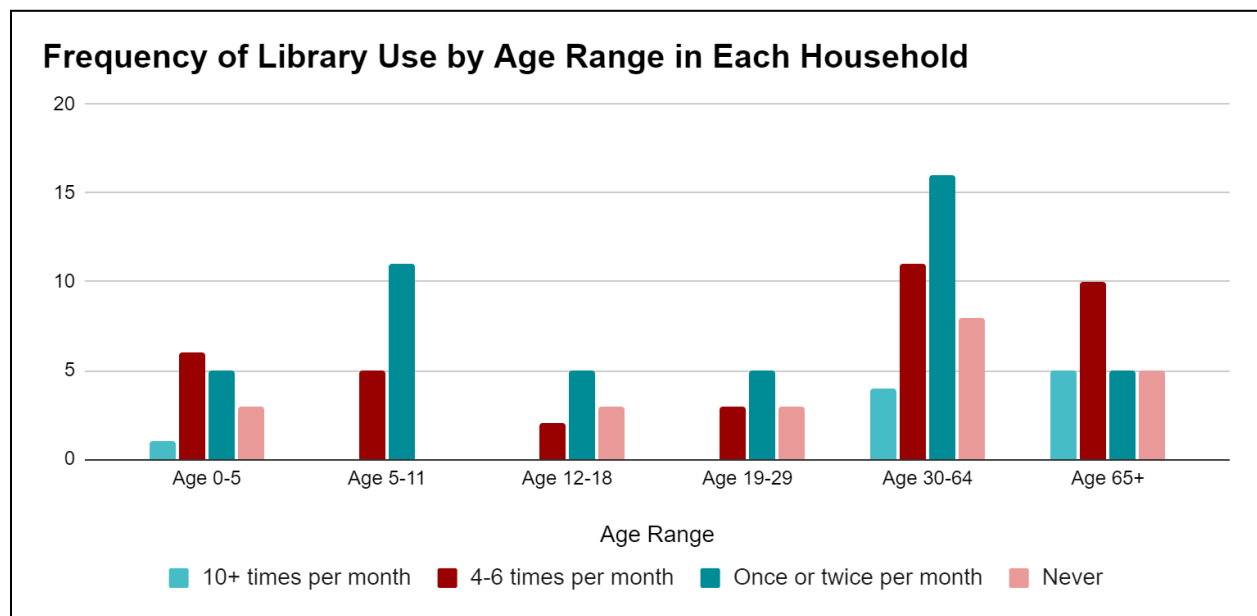
Within all surveys conducted, respondents added additional comments, many of which showed appreciation for staff members and their customer service work. A survey comment stated, "The hard work and dedication is seen, and is very appreciated. Thank you to the staff for adding to the Barre community in enriching ways!" Services like customer service must continue to be a top priority while changing or enhancing other services to meet the needs of our community. Encouraging staff to participate in continuing education, and creating targeted classes for residents through library programming will strengthen our future client service experience. Another comment stated, "We are lucky to have such an excellent library in Barre, it was a factor in our decision to move to this town."

Library Services

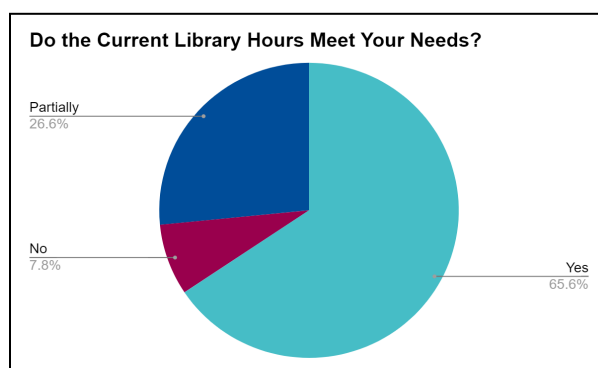


Residents use the library for a variety of services beyond just checking out books. While books continue to lead the way in popularity, other top choices include visiting to check out other items, attending programs for adults and children, and receiving help from a librarian. Respondents who selected “other” visit the library for services such as the use of the copy machine, picking up tax forms, borrowing a WiFi mobile hotspot, or utilizing online resources in-house.

Open Hours



Patrons were asked how often each age range in their household uses the library. Those who selected “never” were asked why they do not use the library, and the responses were split; half of the respondents indicated that the hours don’t meet their needs, and half of the respondents don’t visit the library in person, but utilize the library’s online offerings instead.



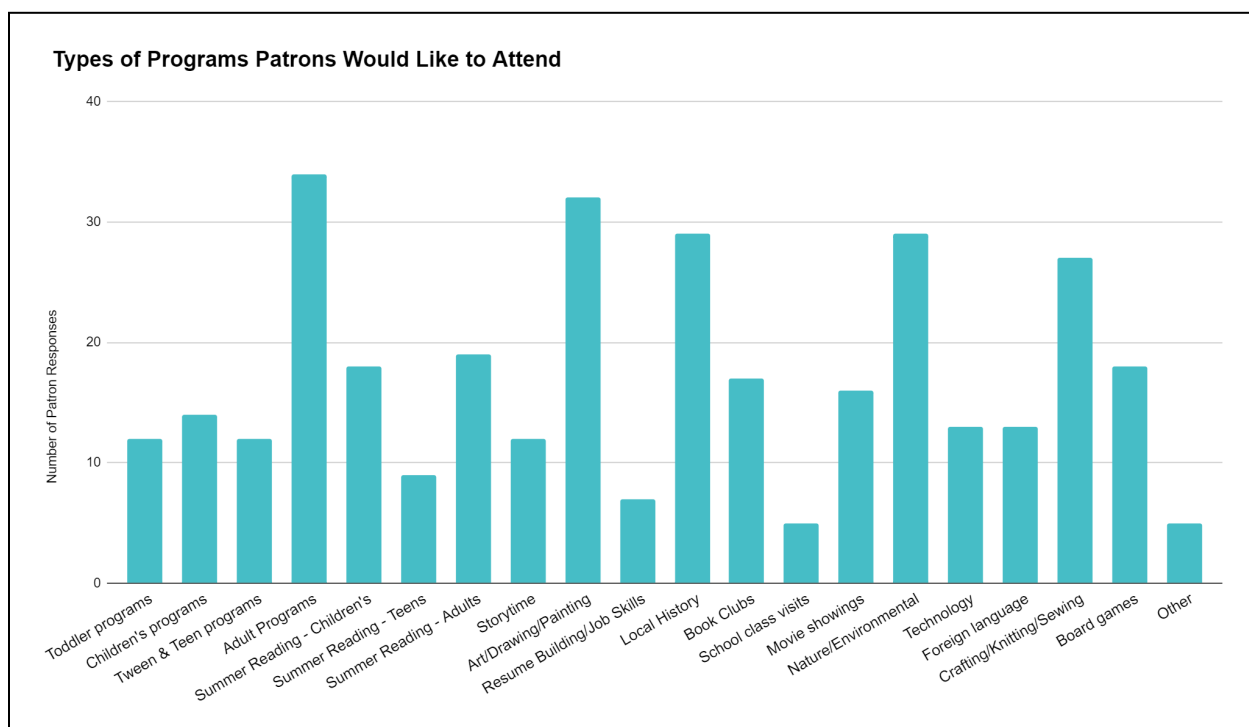
Another question asked patrons if the library’s current hours meet their needs, and the results can be seen in the figure to the left. A follow-up question asked patrons to select when they would like to see the library open or when they would most likely be able to visit. Looking at the top choices in which the library is not already open, respondents would like to see additional hours on Saturday

afternoons and Friday evenings. One patron commented, “[I wish the library was] open longer hours on Friday instead of 2-5[p.m.]. This is when many people end their

work week or work a 4-day work week and have Fridays off.” Patron attendance could increase if open hours are increased.

Programming

Ninety-six percent of respondents said that they were aware that the library offered free programs for all ages while 4% said they were unaware. When asked about the quality of programming, 53% said offerings were excellent, 17% said offerings were average, 3% said they needed improvement, and the remainder had no opinion.



The community was surveyed about the types of programs they would like to attend at the library, illustrated by the chart above. Top choices include art programs, followed by nature and environmental-based programs, crafting knitting and sewing programs, and local history programs.

When asked which age groups the programs should target, the results leaned heavily toward programs for adults (age 18+) at 55%, followed by programs for toddlers (birth to age 5) and children (age 6-10), both at 22%, and 16% of respondents chose events for teens and tweens (ages 11-17).

VIII. Building and Grounds

As mentioned previously in the Library History section, the Barre Library Association (BLA) owns and maintains the building and grounds.

The library is located in the town center, directly off of the Town Common. The library has its own parking lot adjacent to the building. The side entrance from the parking lot is handicap accessible. There is also parking along Church Street along North Common, directly across from the main entrance at the front of the library. The library is within walking distance of Ruggles Lane Elementary School. This advantageous central location makes the Library an anchor in the town center.

The library has three floors; the ground level and the first floor are used for the children's and main library, respectively, and the third floor has a room devoted to local history materials owned by the BLA, but available to the public for research; a museum room; multiple collections owned by the BLA, as well as a large lecture room used for BLA meetings and for public library programs. The ground floor also includes a small conference room available to the public and a Multipurpose Room used for library programs. The building's total gross square footage is 12,900. Of the total square footage, approximately half is net usable space for the public library.

The library's usable physical space is an operational obstacle. In 2000 the BLA doubled the size of the building with a large addition. Today, just over 20 years later, the current space has effectively stalled collection growth. Regular and sometimes aggressive weeding practices are necessary to create space for new items. As a result, the collection is current but lacks depth.

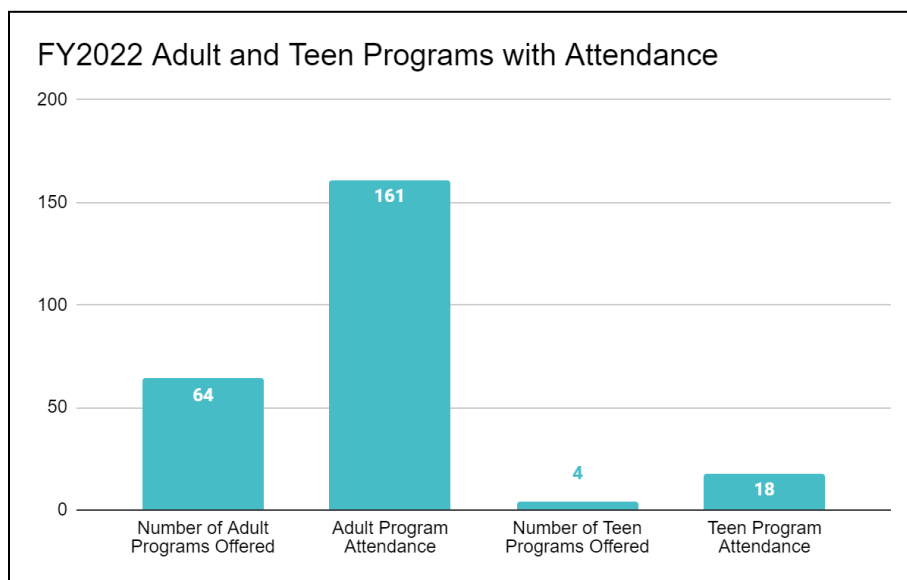
The Director works with the BLA and the Town of Barre to handle ongoing facility maintenance and to plan for capital improvements. The library's boiler and air handler units are not energy efficient and are well past their life expectancy. Updates to the HVAC system and a system to manage humidity control are overdue. On the lower level, space that is currently used for storage could become usable space, but considerable work to the library's foundation and drainage outside of the building is needed before that space can be renovated, furnished, and opened to the public.

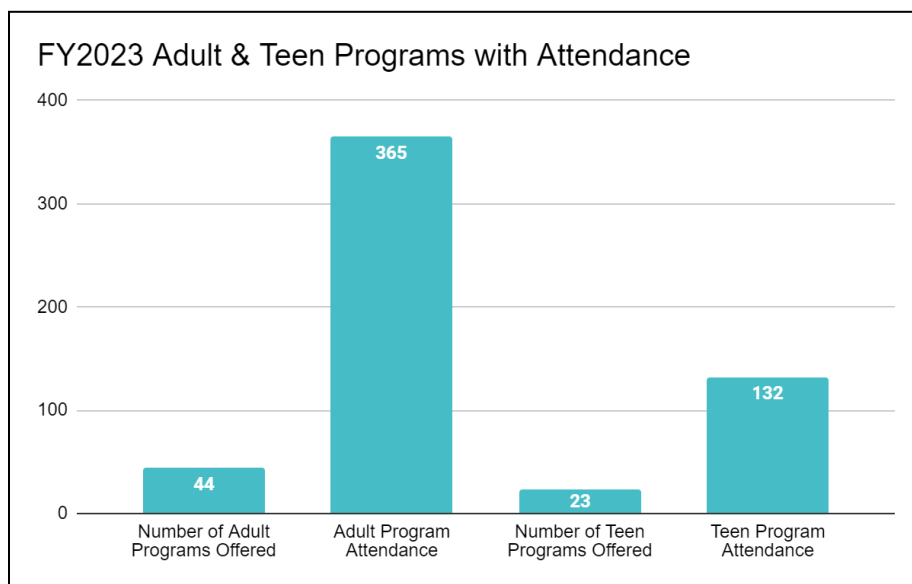
IX. Conclusion

The community survey provided library management with a great deal of information about the ways in which patrons use the library, and allowed for robust feedback on how they would like to see the library grow and change in the coming years.

Many respondents indicated that they wanted to see more programs for adults and teens. The library has already made strides in these areas following the creation of an Adult & Technology Services Librarian position in 2019, and a major focus of the Youth Services Librarian post-pandemic has been outreach to teens in the community.

From FY22 to FY23, the total number of programs for adults had decreased by 31%. This was due to several staff changes during the year and with the hiring of a new Adult & Technology Services Librarian. However, even with that decrease, we saw a 127% increase in attendance at these programs. For teens, we saw a 475% increase in programs offered and a 633% increase in attendance. This spike can be attributed to the hiring of a new Youth Services Librarian in FY23, who worked very hard to establish and maintain a collaborative relationship with the Elementary and Middle/High Schools in town. Class visits and information sessions were held to try to increase attendance, which was a tremendous success.





When library users were asked what they thought about the building (the library's physical space) and how it is currently utilized, many respondents said that although the building is beautiful and historic, work could be done to the outside to make the library look more inviting, and several comments suggested creating a new teen space. Comments included, "I would love to see a better teen space where tweens and teens could comfortably and safely hang out together for recreational and study purposes." Other comments included suggestions for additional seating, more power sources for patrons to charge their technology, and more outdoor accommodations for the community, such as benches and bike racks.

In the future, initiatives will be aimed at continuing to reach out to young people through ongoing youth outreach programs, new and updated programs and activities in the Children's Room, and expanding programming to reach more teens and adults. The demand for children's programming is seemingly endless. As the number of teen programs and participants continues to grow, it will be necessary to create a Teen Coordinator position. This position would relieve some of the demands of the Youth Services Librarian, which would allow that position to shift its focus entirely to juvenile services. Educating the public about the range of services available, raising community awareness about the library in general, and working with residents and community groups to actively participate in promoting and supporting the Library are essential priorities for the coming years.

X. Service Priorities

Goal: Serve as a Community Resource Center

Objective	Actions	Timeframe	By Whom
To expand upon the library's potential to serve as a community resource center where residents can access all types of media, technology, and information in-house or virtually.	Update library technological capabilities by adding new computers and other technologies for users to experiment with in the library.	FY23 - FY27	Director, Adult & Technology Services Librarian
	Regularly update the library's website to include short video explanations of how to access and use C/W MARS services, and to enhance the use of the online catalog for all types of learners.	FY24 - FY26	Director, Adult & Technology Services Librarian
	To use universally accessible principles to promote inclusivity with technological devices, and to maximize the potential of access to information.	FY24 - FY27	Director, Adult & Technology Services Librarian
	To assess the library space and users' needs within the space to develop future plans for comfortable seating areas and meeting room needs.	FY24 - FY25	Director
Continue to expand community partnerships with cultural, civic, and social groups, as well as businesses, associations, and organizations.	Co-sponsor programs and informational meetings in the library and within the community. Provide information to the public about opportunities offered by these partners.	FY24 - FY27	Director, Adult & Technology Services Librarian, Youth Services Librarian
	Continue to work with other area libraries, non-profits, and museums to provide shared training and networking opportunities.	FY24 - FY28	Director

Goal: Create Young Readers

Objective	Actions	Timeframe	By Whom
To motivate and inspire children ages 0 to 12 to read, learn, and feel connected with their library.	Work to expand and strengthen partnerships with local educational institutions and other community partners.	FY24 - FY27	Youth Services Librarian, Director, Community Partners
	Work with schools and homeschooling families to provide relevant materials for student projects and research through collection development and Inter-Library Loans.	FY24 - FY27	Youth Services Librarian, Community Partners
	Encourage new youth patrons by facilitating elementary school field trips to the library for activities and instruction, and staff visits to the elementary school.	FY24 - FY27	Youth Services Librarian, Community Partners
	Provide programming that meets the interests of children and families, including STEAM opportunities	FY24 - FY27	Youth Services Librarian, Community Partners
To provide parents, caregivers, and service providers of young children with the tools necessary to encourage and foster young readers.	Host speakers at the library to discuss topics like early literacy and provide dual programs for children simultaneously so parents may attend alone.	FY24 - FY27	Youth Services Librarian, Community Partners
	Provide readers' advisory lists by subject for various age groups by using the Novelist feature within the online catalog. Teach families how to use this feature.	FY23 - FY27	Youth Services Librarian
	To use the children's space to display informational posters and materials that support parents' roles in fostering their child's early reading skills, cognitive development skills, and social-emotional growth.	FY23 - FY27	Youth Services Librarian

To motivate and inspire young adults ages 13 to 17 to read, learn, and feel connected with their library.	Create a new teen space that encourages the emotional, social, and intellectual development of young adults. Begin small changes and additions in our current young adult section pending the creation of new space.	FY24 – FY27	Director, Youth Services Librarian
	Provide materials and programming that meet the educational needs and interests of young adults.	FY24 – FY27	Youth Services Librarian, Director
	Work to expand and strengthen partnerships with local educational institutions.	FY24 – FY27	Youth Services Librarian, Director, Community Partners
	Create a Teen Advisory Board, including older juveniles, to encourage the active engagement of young adults at the library.	FY24 - FY25	Youth Services Librarian, Director

Goal: Inspire Lifelong Learning

Objective	Actions	Timeframe	By Whom
To motivate all age groups to continue to expand their horizons, while maintaining a strong connection with their library.	Continue to provide programming and support for patrons, including readers' advisory services, academic support, and training using online resources.	FY24 – FY27	Director, Adult & Technology Services Librarian, Youth Services Librarian
	Encourage staff to take continuing education courses and/or participate in relevant professional development opportunities.	FY24 – FY27	Director, Board of Trustees
	Provide basic, intermediate, and advanced classes using the internet, experimenting with emerging technology, and searching proprietary databases.	FY24 – FY27	Adult & Technology Services Librarian, Director
	Provide one-on-one instruction to patrons when using library hardware and software to assist with information finding and/or empower patrons' continued usage.	FY24 – FY27	Adult & Technology Services Librarian, Director
	Support cognitive development and social-emotional well-being for ages birth to 5 years with library materials and programs for children and their caregivers.	FY24 – FY27	Youth Services Librarian, Director
To maximize opportunities to share a wide variety of art, nature, history, and culture with patrons.	Co-sponsor programs with other local institutions covering topics such as energy conservation, cooking/baking, local history, crafting/workmanship, the arts, etc.	FY24 – FY27	Director, Adult & Technology Services Librarian, Youth Services Librarian

	Continue to cultivate collections of materials specific to local historic people and places, and highlight the collections with relevant programs and community partnerships.	FY24 – FY27	Director, Adult & Technology Services Librarian, Youth Services Librarian
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Goal: Stimulate Imagination

Objective	Actions	Timeframe	By Whom
To provide materials and programming that excites patrons' imaginations and provides pleasurable educational experiences.	Continue to evaluate the collections, provide materials that meet popular demand, and create space for said collections with continued weeding practices.	FY23 - FY27	Director, Staff
	Provide access to e-content for online users through C/W MARS and other electronic resource vendors.	FY24 – FY27	Director, Staff
	Continue to create monthly displays that entice library users to experience materials they may not otherwise choose. Create displays on theme with library programs and events.	FY24 – FY27	Staff