



WATERTOWN PUBLIC
LIBRARY

STRATEGIC PLAN

2026-2030

STRATEGIC PLAN



WATERTOWN PUBLIC
LIBRARY

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
About the Library	2
About the Process	3
Key Takeaways	4
Our Strategic Plan	8
Increase Community Awareness and Visibility	8
Cultivate Community-Centered Services and Partnerships	9
Ensure Organizational Sustainability and Readiness	10
Support and Invest in Staff Excellence	11
Implementation, Assessment, and Communication	12
Acknowledgements	13



About the Library

For more than a century, Watertown's public library has been shaped and strengthened by its community's commitment. Well before a public library existed, local clubs, civic groups, and residents organized reading rooms, hosted lectures, and pooled resources to ensure that knowledge was accessible to all. Their efforts reflected a shared belief that learning should not be a privilege but a community asset.

That belief deepened as generations of residents rallied to bring a free public library to life. From early fundraising campaigns and door-to-door appeals to the collective work that secured support from Andrew Carnegie, the library is a testament to what a united community can accomplish. When the doors opened in 1903, the library quickly became a beloved gathering place, so well used that it quickly outgrew its first home and inspired the construction of our landmark building dedicated in 1907.

Since then, the library's story has been one of continuous expansion, adaptation, and partnership. In 2018, the Library Board of Trustees set an ambitious \$10 million vision for our future, committing to the city's bond offer and launching a \$5.6 million private fundraising campaign. This effort renewed the community's long-standing belief that the library is a vital civic anchor, worthy of bold investment, and opened the door to new collaborations.

Today, the Watertown Public Library is a vibrant, welcoming cornerstone that continues to evolve, keeping the community engaged, excited, and always learning. The remarkable Talk Read Play center, engaging teen space, interesting library of things, and our useful study rooms and large community room, complement the library's collection, and, critically, the work of our dedicated, resourceful staff.

Each chapter has been written, and will continue to be written, by the people of the city: those who advocate, volunteer, donate, dream, and visit. Our community's commitment ensures that the library remains not only a keeper of knowledge, but a source of connection, creativity, and opportunity.

About the Process

Because the community has been so foundational to the library, it only made sense to ensure the community, along with staff and the board, was at the heart of this strategic plan. The six-month process began with the hiring of the consulting team at [WiLS](#) and the formation of a strategic planning team of library staff and board members. This team guided the process and considered data gathered in the following ways:

- A review of community demographics, captured from different federal and state data resources.
- A Community and Library Landscape Questionnaire, completed by the planning team.
- A Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) questionnaire, completed by 11 members of the staff.
- A facilitated conversation with the full library board.
- A community survey, completed by 222 community members.
- Access to a dashboard that uses DPI Annual Report data to visualize the library's data and view the library compared to a cohort average of similar libraries, identified through statistical modeling.
- A donor questionnaire, completed by five individuals.
- A community leader's questionnaire, completed by four individuals.
- Individual interviews with representatives from the community.
- A community conversation.

After the WiLS team gathered the data, the planning team reviewed the datasets and a recorded webinar, then conducted their own analysis. Through this process, they identified a shared set of goals and objectives that reflect both community priorities and the library's future needs. The process concluded with a session attended by staff and board members to prioritize specific projects and set assessment measures with WiLS' data analyst.



Key Takeaways

Starting from a place of strength

"I admit I was skeptical when the library wanted to expand a few years ago because it seemed like a lot of money, but now I can't imagine not having the library we have now. My family and I use it in so many different ways - my teens use the study rooms after school, especially on the early release days, I have attended many meetings and presentations in your big meeting room, we all have your app on our phones and use them to check out books all the time (and your hold pickup and self check out is amazing). I love the makerspace. It's great that you let the garden people have their seed library there - that has been so helpful to us because food prices are high and this year we planted a little garden for the first time and didn't have to pay for seeds! This library is one of the best things about Watertown."

- 2025 Survey Respondent

The Watertown Public Library already offers a strong suite of services. The programming, space, collections, and staff are all resources that the library, with the appropriate funding and clear priorities, can grow to fit community needs. Staff aspirations focus on innovation and expansion of programs and collections to keep the library vibrant, relevant, and responsive. This includes continuing to develop a wide range of programs and collections, expanding reading programs, events, and playful experiences for children, and adding new materials like the Library of Things.

Questionnaires completed by city leaders and donors clearly show that the library is viewed as a hub for gathering and belonging. Cozy reading areas, meeting rooms, and programming strengthen its role as a safe, welcoming resource. People feel proud of the library and often invite visitors to experience it themselves. And, of course, the library space is newly renovated and literacy efforts and partnerships are always top of mind.



Community members' perception of the value of the library and its services was highly favorable with 100% agreeing that the library is a valuable city service and 98% agreeing that the library is important to the community.

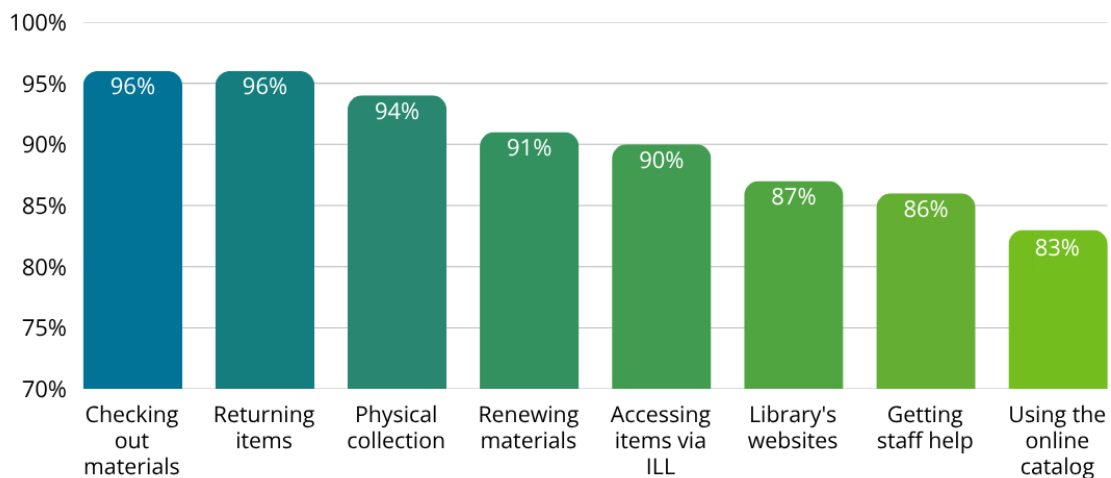
- 2025 Survey Findings

Staff are the heart of the library

Over the course of the planning process, one piece of information kept coming up. It is the library staff that makes the Watertown Public Library so special. One clear theme from the donor questionnaire was the importance of maintaining the facility and supporting staff to keep the library thriving.

Survey users certainly took advantage of the collection, but often with the help of a staff member.

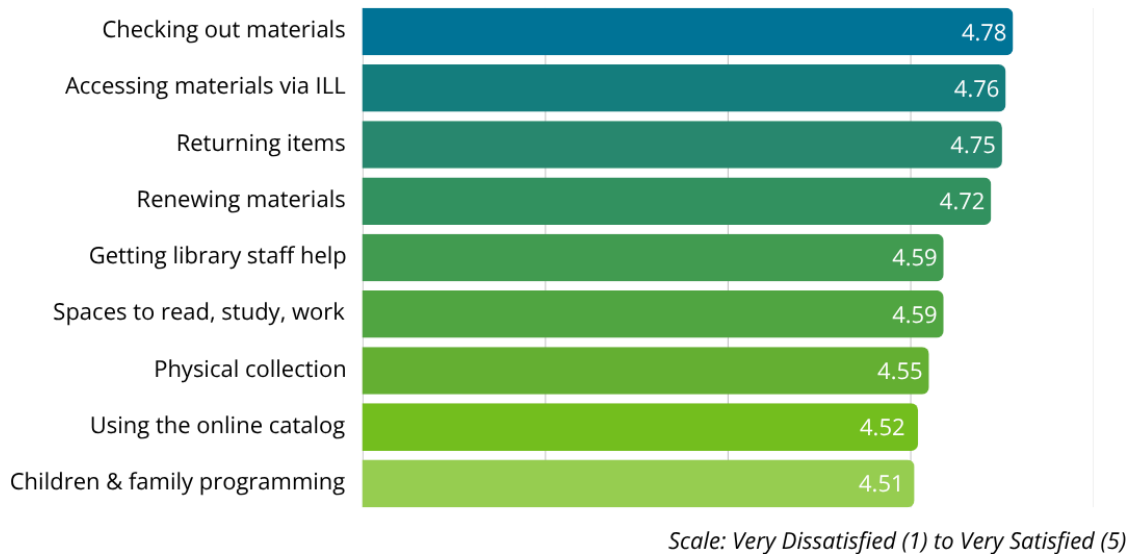
Percentage of library users who indicated utilizing a service



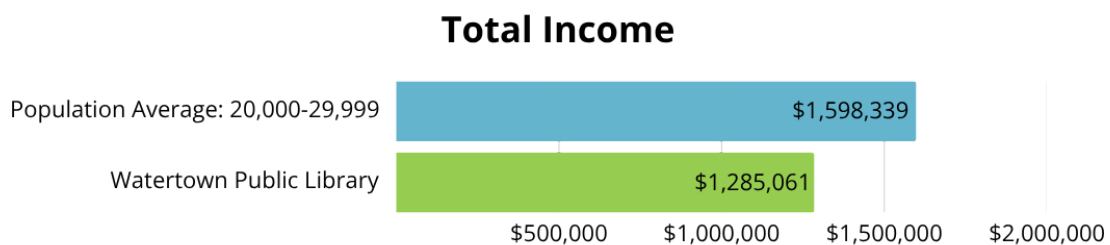
The community, especially community conversation attendees, identified several areas where the library could widen its impact, including building stronger partnerships to address shared challenges, increasing coordination with local schools, expanding technology learning for all ages, and offering more support for job skills and employment, which is especially important given the area's higher-than-average unemployment rate. Each of these opportunities requires dedicated staff capacity, time for relationship-building, planning, and delivering programs, beyond the daily work of desk coverage and in-building services.

Sustainable funding matters

Survey findings revealed that patrons clearly value their library. Satisfaction with library services was high across the board, with checking out materials and access to other libraries' materials topping the list.



However, the ability to provide these services is compromised by a notably lower budget when compared to peer libraries serving communities of a similar size. The average total income for peer libraries is \$1.6 million, compared to \$1.3 million for Watertown.



Public Library	Income Per Resident
Population Average: 20,000-29,999	\$64.85
Watertown Public Library	\$56.21

2024 Annual Report Statistics from DPI

Watertown Public Library has a larger facility size than its peer cohort, but a comparable number of staff members. This points to a challenging financial future that could affect factors such as the number of hours we can be open, the overall number of employees, and providing the services desired by our community. During information-gathering discussions, both community members and trustees voiced concerns about sustaining adequate staffing, especially in light of the recent city budget. At the same time, the city is preparing for significant growth through new housing developments and downtown revitalization, which will increase demand for library services and further shape future staffing and funding needs.

With this foundation of community insight and staff reflection, the library has outlined a set of goals and objectives to guide our work over the next five years, subject to adequate funding and organizational capacity. These priorities turn what we heard from the community into a practical path forward, helping the library focus its time, resources, and partnerships to strengthen services for everyone. Achieving these goals will depend on securing sufficient financial support and maintaining the staffing and infrastructure needed to carry this work forward.



Our Strategic Plan



Increase Community Awareness and Visibility

The Watertown community and surrounding areas understand what the Watertown Public Library offers and how they can support it.

Increase the library's physical and digital visibility through signage, branding, and community presence and utilizing a multi-channel communication approach.

Develop a clear, consistent messaging strategy that highlights lesser-known services.

Increase efforts to improve awareness of the library by non-users and underrepresented groups.

Grow library advocates in the community by regularly sharing high-impact stories to communicate how the library makes a difference.

Our Strategic Plan

Build and deepen mutually beneficial partnerships with schools, childcare providers, and community organizations to support youth and families.

Collaborate with culturally and economically diverse community members to co-develop programs, materials, and communication.

Expand technology learning, digital literacy support, and job and career development services through strategic partnerships and alignment with evolving community needs.

Grow inclusive programs and collections for teens, families, and lifelong learners based on direct community input.

Explore mobile, off-site, and outreach service models to reach seniors, commuters, and neighborhoods with limited access.



Cultivate Community-Centered Services and Partnerships

The Watertown Public Library collaborates with community members and organizations to expand access, support learning and economic opportunity, and deliver programs that reflect local needs.

Our Strategic Plan



Ensure Organizational Sustainability and Readiness

Through proactive planning, broad community investment, and strong, consistent advocacy, the Watertown Public Library has a vibrant and secure future.

Develop a sustainable funding strategy that includes municipal advocacy, donor engagement, grants, and community-supported initiatives.

Create scenario plans for financial uncertainty, city growth, and infrastructure changes.

Support staff and Board through training, communication, and leadership development, including cross-training and succession planning to ensure continuity and organizational resilience.

Build a coordinated advocacy plan that builds understanding, support, and investment in the library's mission.

Our Strategic Plan

Develop a staffing plan that aligns staffing levels with community needs and library capacity.

Support staff through training, communication, and leadership development, including cross-training and succession planning to ensure continuity and organizational resilience.

Strengthen internal communication and organizational processes.

Ensure staff feel supported, protected, and valued.

Increase Board engagement with the whole library team.



Support and Invest in Staff Excellence

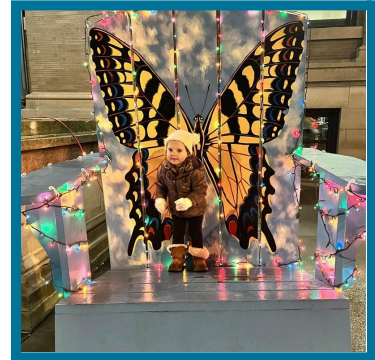
Watertown Public Library staff have the training, resources, and support they need to deliver exceptional service.

Implementation, Assessment, and Communication

A strategic plan should not be a document that sits on a shelf. It comes to life through the library's day-to-day work, guiding decisions, shaping priorities, and helping our organization focus on what matters most. Implementing this plan began as soon as the planning framework was complete and will continue throughout the five-year span of this plan.

Library staff and board members met at the end of the planning process to activate the plan by prioritizing activities and determining measures by which to assess their work. Assessment will include gathering input from staff and community members, reflecting on what's working, and making thoughtful adjustments along the way. This ongoing cycle keeps the plan responsive, relevant, and grounded in real community needs.

Clear, consistent communication is essential to keeping the community informed and engaged throughout the life of the plan. To stay accountable and transparent, the library will implement a communications plan that shares regular updates on progress, highlights stories and successes, and invites ongoing feedback. This approach ensures that community members, staff, library leaders, and our partners not only see the impact of the library's work but also have meaningful opportunities to help shape its future.



Acknowledgements

A strategic plan is the work of many, and we are deeply grateful to everyone who helped shape this one. Our community members, staff, board, and partners all played an essential role. The time you spent completing a survey, answering a questionnaire, or talking with us made a real difference, and we cannot thank you enough.

We would especially like to recognize the following individuals who served on the planning team and generously shared their insight, experience, and care:

Charity Chandler	Library Board Member
Andi Merfeld	Library Board Member
Beth Mueller	Library Board Member
Erin O'Neill	Library Board Member
Peg Checkai	Library Director
Cari Gunderson	Head of Circulation Services
Jamie Hernandez	Head of Adult Services and Technology Support
Tina Peerenboom	Head of Children's Services

We would also like to thank Melissa McLimans, Laura Damon-Moore, and Kim Kiesewetter from WiLS for helping us with the strategic planning process.