August 2016

Ten years ago, Howe Library’s 2007-2017 Strategic Plan laid out an ambitious agenda: to enhance and expand our role as a community gathering place, to promote Howe Library as a center for young readers and life-long learners, to increase public awareness of Howe’s services and financial structure, and to explore the role of Howe Library in relationship to other libraries in the region. A five-year Technology Plan, written in tandem with the Strategic Plan, was updated in 2012 as technology rapidly changed the ways communities access their libraries. Those goals led to tremendous accomplishments, and with those successes comes the responsibility to continually look ahead.

In 2016, the trustees and staff launched a new strategic planning process to chart a vision and create goals to guide us for the next five years. It is important to us that our community is an integral part of that vision, and the first step of our process was to engage the public in conveying their own hopes, needs, and ideas. More than 650 people of all ages shared their insights through a community survey that drew responses from as far away as Ascutney, Tunbridge, Cornish, and Sunapee – demonstrating that Howe is truly a treasured resource for the Upper Valley region as a whole.

We engaged many individuals in focus groups that fostered deeper conversations among representatives from the Town of Hanover, community organizations, frequent library users from Hanover and beyond, and librarians from nearby towns. From the survey and focus groups, we heard a number of key messages:

**Howe Library is building its strategic plan on a foundation of strength and an excellent reputation.** With the exception of parking, most people are having excellent experiences! Howe is a treasured resource, described as one of the most welcoming and user-friendly libraries people have encountered, with a warm atmosphere and helpful staff. Our job is to continue this tradition of excellence while keeping pace with evolving community needs and preferences.

**There are opportunities to make even better use of our wonderful facility.** Community members expressed a need to protect and increase quieter spaces for reading and studying, while still fostering areas for active conversation, socializing, and making children and teens feel welcome. We heard suggestions for diversifying the flexible use of our existing spaces and opportunities to make the library feel lighter, brighter, and more connected to our outdoor space.
Howe’s technology strategy has expanded people’s access to library resources. Hands-on technology support for library users is highly valued as well. There are some ways in which access to Howe’s online resources can be strengthened further, but overall people are very pleased with their experience.

Howe’s larger role in the community is very important to people. It is a safe place for children and teens and a wonderful gathering place with both social and learning functions - where different segments of Hanover and the greater Upper Valley come together to exchange ideas and build social capital. We are the “community’s cultural living room” where people come to read, work, learn, and relax, a welcoming haven for Appalachian Trail hikers who want to stay in touch with friends and families, and a place for self-expression through art displays, discussion groups, clubs, and presentations. At the same time, a number of people wish we could be more of a resource for other towns, including offering free library cards and expanding our sharing of resources.

What is your dream library? “You are the library of my dreams,” said many. “The residents of Hanover are blessed to have such an outstanding community institution.” Knowing that we said “dream,” we heard many exciting ideas – a green atrium with periodically-changing themes, a better café, additional cozy chairs, more integration with the outdoors, extended hours (particularly early morning), exploring maker-space options, creative program ideas, more public art and, of course, better parking! We may not be able to do it all, but assure you that your ideas are embedded in our thinking about the future as we carry out our plan.

After six months of community and internal conversations, the Howe Library staff and trustees have set a course built around four core initiatives:

Assessing Interior and Exterior Spaces to make even better and more exciting use of our indoor and outdoor assets and to meet the evolving needs of our community.

Adapting to new Technology needs and opportunities, not only by improving the current patron experience but also by supporting our staff and community to be at the forefront of new technologies.

Continuing the high quality of our Programs, Services, and Collections and being responsive to the evolving needs of our very diverse audiences.

Proactively Engaging the Community, here in Hanover and in surrounding towns, to leverage our collective resources and partnerships in ways that continually improve the quality of life in our region.

On the following pages, we present you with our vision and goals for 2017-2022. We hope you will enjoy looking ahead with us!

Mary H. White, Director
Howe Library

Bill Thomas, Chair
The Howe Library Corporation

Endorsed by the Town of Hanover Selectboard on August 22, 2016
A. INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR SPACES

In 2005, the architectural firm of Shepley Bulfinch Richardson & Abbott designed and built the addition to the Howe Library, beautifully integrating the new addition with the existing 1975 Shepley Bulfinch structure. The contemporary open-concept design has served us well for the past 41 years. However, much has changed in that time, both in terms of interior space needs in a changing community, as well as in matters of interest to the infrastructure and exterior. Focus group input from the greater Upper Valley, staff concerns, and trustee interests have coalesced to give direction to this element of the Strategic Plan.

Our goals are to:

1. Assess our current use of space and examine opportunities to provide flexible, multi-use rooms, quiet vs. active areas, and a light and welcoming environment.

2. Develop a long-range Master Plan to guide facility and grounds decisions and budgeting, including evaluating the potential to improve parking and outdoor spaces.

3. Explore strategies to “green” the Howe Library’s facilities and practices.

Timeline: We anticipate that facility assessment will be done in 2017 and a Master Plan developed by 2018. Some improvements can begin in 2017-2018, while others may require additional lead time for fundraising, design, and construction of any significant facility changes.

Resources: The first step will be to hire a space consultant to evaluate opportunities to use our facilities in ways that improve efficiency, better meet patron and staff needs, and enhance the experience for the public. That cost may be $5,000 to $8,000. Facility changes: Cost estimates will be determined through the Master Plan and could potentially be phased over several years. Financing facility improvements may require consideration of a capital campaign and/or use of a portion of the endowment.
B. TECHNOLOGY

The ability to adapt to the rapid changes in technology is critical to library service in the 21st century. Strengthening and expanding Howe Library’s position as a leader in technology will require a flexible and library-focused structure. Improved technology support for Howe staff is an important goal as librarians must continually learn new skills in order to provide excellent patron service. Survey results reveal that patrons often find it difficult and frustrating to navigate the library’s online resources, primarily the online catalog. Continuing financial support for development efforts to improve the catalog is critical to our mission. Based upon survey comments, we will also expand user education for downloadable e-books and audiobooks.

Our goals are to:

1. Improve patron experiences with the use of Howe Library’s online resources.
2. Position Howe Library to be at the forefront of supporting our staff, patrons, and community in adapting to rapidly emerging technologies.

Timeline: Ongoing

Resources: The fiscal year 2016-2017 budget includes $2,000 for emerging technologies; given the pace of change, it will be prudent to consider a regular budget line for emerging technologies. This same budget also includes $4,000 to update the website. Annually, $1,500 has been included for Evergreen online catalog enhancements but more will be needed to finance serious improvements.
C. PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND COLLECTIONS

Libraries across the nation are in a time of extraordinary transition. There is increased demand for digital collections but this has not supplanted the desire for print materials. People are becoming accustomed to on-demand services and their rapid delivery, but users still appreciate a personal touch. Fortunately, Howe Library is building on a position of strength. Our patrons report an overall satisfaction with what we currently provide for programs and collections, with a notable exception concerning the New Hampshire Downloadable Books Consortium. We listened to the survey respondents regarding expanding the collection of available titles in our downloadable books service. Howe Library will continue its history of constantly assessing what we offer in order to be a library that the community treasures.

Our goals are to:

1. Continue to evaluate and respond to evolving patron needs for our physical and online/virtual collections.
2. Maintain a vibrant array of programs and services to meet the needs of our diverse audiences.

Timeline for both: Ongoing

Resources: Since 2015, The Corporation has budgeted $2,000 annually to create foreign language book collections and The Corporation recently added $2,000 per year for more Spanish language story times. In fiscal year 2016-2017, $2,500 has been allocated for extra copies of popular e-books and audiobooks in Overdrive and the board is committed to adding more funds as needed. Enhancing our programs will be studied for any implications such as shifts in time of day, staff configuration, or space utilization. The Corporation might expect to see requests in the annual budget of an additional $10,000 to address collections and services.
D. ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Outreach and collaboration with other organizations in Hanover and the broader community are important goals for Howe Library. Survey respondents had many suggestions for programs and partnerships, many of which the library currently does, and some that are beyond the scope of what is possible; i.e. becoming a regional library. We are proud of Howe’s collaboration with seven area libraries that have joined our Howe/Evergreen Project so that they may offer a reasonably priced online catalog for their patrons, our work with more than 65 regional organizations, the Literacy Committee’s semi-annual book drives, and our offering of free library cards to those in need. However, because of the library’s abundant resources, many survey responders and focus group participants commented on the leadership role the library has in the Upper Valley and encouraged Howe to take on an even bigger role in the community.

Help Howe Spread the Word
Howe Library is collecting books for all ages
for three area non-profits.
PLEASE GIVE AT HOWE: APRIL 1 - 30

Our goals are to:

1. Strengthen Howe as a local asset by broadening our outreach to area libraries and regional organizations in the Upper Valley in order to share resources and enhance the quality of life in our communities.

2. Expand collaborations with other Town departments and Hanover organizations to leverage our mutual resources more effectively.

Timeline: Ongoing, but some steps are already in motion. In fall 2016, for example, Howe Library is partnering with local schools and the Circle Up! parent group on showing a film about teens and technology and the Literacy Committee will continue holding its semi-annual book collection drives for area non-profits.