



CHELSEA DISTRICT LIBRARY

Strategic Plan 2024–2028

Prepared by Bridgeport Consulting, LLC
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Chelsea District Library: Background

The mission of Chelsea District Library (CDL) is to engage, inspire, and equip through evolving services and resources. The library is now in its third decade as a *district library* serving the City of Chelsea, Lyndon and Sylvan Townships, and portions of Dexter and Lima Townships within the Chelsea School District. CDL's most recent strategic plan originally ran from 2020-2022 and was extended through the end of 2023.

Many elements arising from the 2020-2023 strategic plan's animating theme, "facilitating access," are visible across the library's operations today, including:

- Enhanced physical access to the building, remote access to the collections and materials, and "access to the world" via local, national, and international artists, performers, and authors whom the Library brings to the community;
- Elimination of fines in the interest of removing financial barriers to access;
- The introduction of Mobee - the much anticipated "mobile library," a modern version of the bookmobiles of the past - which has been met with resounding support (and an inspiring philanthropic response from the community!); and
- Finally, as broadband internet becomes more widely available across CDL's service area, the Library provides thoughtful tools and support for community members seeking to navigate this newly expanded access.

As CDL celebrates its 25th-year anniversary as a district library, it remains deeply committed both to honoring the past and to ensuring the qualities that have made the library so valuable to the community previously remain sustainable for many years to come. The staff and the Board of Trustees are committed to building upon the successes of the 2020-2023 plan with a new Five-Year Strategic Plan that focuses on sustainability, broadly defined.

Sustainability

The word "sustainability" often conjures visions of compostable paper products or the three-arrow recycling triangle. While environmental sustainability is indeed one component of how CDL views the topic of sustainability, the investments and priorities



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needed over the next five years to sustain CDL's success into the next 25 years and beyond can be organized by three themes: services, operations, and finances.

Services

CDL's role as a community leader is valued, especially as it relates to access to accurate information. CDL will be best suited to sustain its role as a leader in the community by investing in the resources and programming that supports a diversity of perspectives. In the information-saturated media landscape, CDL will support community members in finding and validating information, and will optimize its communications to connect its resources and programming to the people who will use them.

Operations

Over decades, the library has worked to establish and refine strong, smart, and streamlined operations. In the face of rapidly evolving change, however, continued investment is needed to ensure resilience in staff teams, environmental practices, and the data used to evaluate library services, such that these assets are poised to support the library's future success.

Finances

The sound financial foundation provided by the current ten-year millage is critical to the future of CDL. The next five years will serve an important purpose in laying the groundwork for a millage renewal in 2029, ensuring this foundational revenue stream is sustained. Other revenue streams will also be explored.

Together, optimizing services, operations, and finances via this new strategic plan will position CDL for long-term sustainability and success!

Process Undertaken

Chelsea District Library Director Lori Coryell engaged Bridgeport Consulting beginning in April 2023. Over the following seven months, Bridgeport consultants Brittany Galisdorfer and Kerry Sheldon:

1. Facilitated a half-day **staff** retreat to identify trends and opportunities that informed the plan;



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2. Met with the **Board of Trustees** to collect feedback on these trends and opportunities;
3. Met with the **Board of Trustees Outreach Committee** to support the design of the community engagement;
4. Gathered perspectives from a wide variety of **community members** to uncover strengths and opportunities via a series of questions posted within the library; alongside Mobee at stops out in the community; and on the library's website, social media, and eNewsletter.
5. Hosted a focus group with members of the **Friends of the Chelsea District Library and key community partners** to learn about their hopes for the future of CDL;
6. Synthesized **staff, Board, and community** input to produce a curated set of draft strategic initiatives; and
7. Facilitated a **Board** meeting and then a **staff** meeting to test and validate the draft initiatives before finalizing.

Chelsea District Library: Vision, Mission, and Values

The Chelsea District Library's vision, mission, and core values serve as the foundation for this strategic plan and continue to act as guideposts to both the strategic decisions and the daily work of the Library.

Vision

A vibrant hub bringing together and enriching all communities

Mission

To engage, inspire, and equip through evolving services and resources

Values

- Equal, uncensored access
- High quality, trusted resources
- A safe, secure environment for all library visitors



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- Privacy and confidentiality
- Fiscal integrity and accountability
- Free exchange of ideas
- Inclusion and respect
- High ethical and professional standards
- Superior customer service

Strategic Initiatives and Goals

Initiative 1: Reinforce Our Role as Community Leader and Convener

1.1 Provide a welcoming place for all.

CDL seeks to be a place where everyone feels they belong, regardless of your identity or whether you have a library card. It is unique as a gathering space in that any time it is open, all members of the community are welcome without purchase or membership. The Library will review and refine its collection and programming to ensure that a broad diversity of community members are reflected.

1.2 Elevate the Library as a location for community building.

Entering the library building for the first time can be a gateway to library use. Doing so with others offers an opportunity for community building that strengthens the fabric of our district. CDL has had success in using programs, activities, and exhibits to bring folks to the building and foster relationships. CDL will continue to create opportunities for community members to gather, engage in dialogue, and broaden perspectives on both ordinary days and during extraordinary events such as power outages, heat waves, etc. It will become increasingly important for CDL to balance its provision of online materials and services with opportunities for community members to connect with library staff and with one another, amidst the broader technological trends toward digitization.



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1.3 Be the go-to resource in the district for information access and validity.

CDL's role as a community leader is important and valued, especially as it relates to accessing information that is trustworthy. The Library will continue to serve as a trusted resource for up-to-date, accurate information amidst an overwhelming amount of information via television, social media, blogs, podcasts, radio, etc. What's more, as artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies become increasingly mainstream, Library services will be adapted to support patrons in engaging with the tools and with the information they generate. CDL will explore opportunities to use these technologies to advance library operations and services.

1.4 Get the word out about the great things happening at CDL!

A library of CDL's caliber is a tremendous community asset, particularly when many institutions are trying to do more with less. Over the next five years we will leverage key allies and strategic partners to ensure the public knows about the resources, programs, activities, and events we offer. We will investigate and test what information is most effective with whom and via what format(s), learning and refining as we go.

Initiative 2: Position Library Operations for Long-Term Success

2.1 Plan for staff succession, and cultivate future library leaders.

The CDL staff are the heart and soul of the Library. As key leaders prepare to transition out of the organization, continued development of the organization's existing bench alongside thoughtful positioning of the library as an attractive employer become critical imperatives.

2.2 Green the library.

CDL has long been committed to environmental consciousness. Over the next five years, CDL seeks to further responsibly reduce its carbon footprint by exploring opportunities for waste reduction and a green building initiative.



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2.3 Improve data used to evaluate library services and communicate value.

Decisions about library services are guided by sound data, professional expertise, and broad experience. Traditionally, measures such as the number of library cards, door counts, and reference transactions have been used to communicate the value of CDL to the community. Current practice, however, fails to capture key qualitative value of services, such as relationships and one-on-one interactions. CDL will explore how to advance its quantitative data and will add qualitative data to service evaluation. These data will also be used to communicate the value of services to the public alongside the website update.

Initiative 3: Set the Table for Future Revenues

3.1 Prepare a strategy for the 2029 millage renewal.

The Library's current ten-year millage will expire in 2029. Work will be needed to educate voters about the value of the Library and ensure supporters get to the polls. A documented strategy will help sequence and coordinate efforts.

3.2 Explore the viability of expanding Library space.

The Library basement offers an opportunity for new or expanded services. However, funding would be needed to construct, furnish, and staff the space. The Library will examine how the basement space could be used differently, and investigate a dedicated fundraising effort to understand the likelihood and parameters for success.