

Planning for the Future

2014 Progress Report



B. Docktor Photo

In 2013 the Library's Board of Trustees conducted an opinion survey of users and organized focus group meetings that convened more than 200 individuals from the business, farm, government, education and other communities in the towns of Ancram, Copake and Hillsdale. Based on the responses to the poll and the insights gained from the panels, the Board developed a five-year plan for the years 2014-2018. In 2014, the first year of this projected period, progress toward the achievement of these goals has been significant and generally on or ahead of schedule. The plan is divided into four main areas.

1. Secure the Library's Financial Stability and Local Support Systems

Finances: We set as our primary financial goal a significant reduction in debt, with the ultimate objective of retiring all mortgages and other obligations in seven years (when NYSERDA subvention of the mortgage ends). Secondary goals are equalizing our tax-based revenue streams from the three communities, establishing significant contingency and reserve funds, and streamlining accounting and fund-raising systems to make them more professional and transparent. Progress toward debt reduction, while not on pace, was significant.

Beyond making the regular payments on the mortgage, we were able to retire \$20,000 worth of promissory notes, reducing our overall debt (including scheduled mortgage payments) from \$709,000 to \$657,000. We took our first steps toward the establishment of contingency and reserve funds, depositing \$15,000 in the former and \$16,000 in the latter. Our failure to win the 414 referendum in Ancram was a major setback. Although its impact was ameliorated by cutbacks in operating expenses and an unusually successful fund drive, it seriously affects both our long-range financial outlook and the sense of common community support we have been working to establish.

As part of a long-running process, now nearly complete, the Board and its Finance

Committee have significantly streamlined the Library's financial reports and posted monthly reports on the website. The Development Committee purchased and set up a sophisticated software system for managing fund-raising operations that helped produce a record level of giving in the 2014-15 annual appeal. The Committee also established the Flavia Bristol Society, the Library's first systematic effort to implement a planned-giving program.

Strengthening Operations: Procedures and Services. The Human Resources Committee, created in 2013 and expanded in 2014, implemented a system of regular employee reviews and staff meetings. The Building Committee developed a clear schedule of basic maintenance and repair procedures with their associated budgetary impacts, began negotiating a long range contract for the alarm system, conducted a review of the Library's insurance, opened competition for a three year mowing and plowing contract, and installed a system of access to the fire door that will substantially reduce maintenance costs.

The staff, working with a subset of the Development Committee, successfully applied for grants from the Fund for Columbia County, an offshoot of the Berkshire Taconic Foundation; the Hudson River Bank, Bank of Greene County, Rheinstrom Hill Community, Stewart's; and Libri Foundations; as well as the Mid-Hudson Library system. And the Board of Trustees adopted a clear set of meeting room policies and rules to govern events co-sponsored with other groups.

Make the Board of Trustees Widely Representative of the Communities We Represent: The Board filled three vacancies in 2014, one replacing our retiring Treasurer with an expert in finance, one from Copake and one from Hillsdale. New Board members from Ancram and Copake Falls were also added, making the Board more closely reflective of our geographic base. The Board now includes six members from Hillsdale, five from Copake (the largest community in our service area), two from (2) the smallest of the towns, Ancram, and one from the nearby town of Ghent. There are six men and eight women, no Blacks, Latinos or Asian Americans. Nine of the Board's members are retirees,

but the new members have reduced the average age of the Board considerably.

2. Partnership with the Community

Basic Library Services: Moving to a new and larger building enabled us to expand the role of the library and to increase public access to books, periodicals, DVDs, computers and other basic library materials. In its first two years after moving from Hillsdale, the Library saw a doubling of visits, circulated materials and registrations. The five-year plan did not set any targets for growth, but it was assumed that further growth would slow, which it has. Thus although new registrations peaked at 725 in 2011, we continue to issue an average of thirty new library cards a month, with numbers from Ancram particularly robust.

The number of materials circulated— 34,000 in 2014— and visits to the building— just under 50,000— stabilized between 2013 and 2014. Surprisingly, computer usage was down slightly for the year, perhaps reflecting a need— identified in the five-year plan— for continued upgrading of our computer speeds and capacity; but there was an upsurge in December that has continued into 2015, suggesting that the slump was probably a weather-related or other kind of anomaly. Whatever the numbers, it is clear that a 21st century library relies heavily on its access to high quality, high speed internet service and that we must continue to work to improve our system.

Convene, Organize and Partner with Local Organizations: Early in the year, the Board of Trustees created a Community Outreach Committee, and established an Advisory Board to meet annually with the Board and provide an independent perspective on its work. In 2014 the Library partnered with Taconic Hills Central School Head Start and with Our Lady of Hope for outreach to new mothers through the Women Infant Children (WIC) Program. It played an important role in bringing together a coalition of groups including Taconic Hills and two other Columbia County libraries in developing a 2015 “Community Read” program. The staff also worked to develop ongoing partnerships

with the Newman Residence for outreach to veterans and with the local park commissions in Ancram, Copake and Hillsdale to include summer reading programs in their activities.

Special efforts were made to reach out to farmers and provide story and craft programs to the Farmer’s market, help job seekers with computer resources, and hold adult “ready to read” programs. With the addition of a full-time assistant librarian, we were also able significantly to expand children’s’ and young adult programs.

Serve as a Resource for Local Business and Other Groups: While there are a number of isolated individuals who frequently use the library’s wi-fi connections to conduct business, there has been little systematic effort to strengthen ties of this kind. In May, the Board hosted three well-attended classes on the basics of social media for business. The library’s first “dine out” program not only raised a little more than a thousand dollars, but— more importantly— gave the ten participating restaurants valuable exposure and a small lift during the slowest of their seasons. It has been continued and expanded in 2015. We also planned a volunteer fair day for a variety of local groups that depend on volunteers. A novelty outreach program, also initiated in 2014, has put “little free libraries,” free book exchange boxes, in each of the towns.

3. Enhance Programs and Collections

Expand the Library’s Role as an Information Center and Educational Hub Through Partnerships with Local Schools, etc.: Beyond the partnerships discussed above, connections between the library and Taconic Hills have been markedly strengthened by Board and staff efforts— particularly in reaching out to younger students. Effective liaison with young adults is difficult to sustain, but has been quite effective in such areas as the Community Read and an art exhibit featuring student works.

The move to the new building, with added staff has also seen a steadily improving system of material acquisitions that by working with the friend’s book store has enabled us to enhance our

collection at little extra cost. Working from this base, the next few years should see further efforts both to improve library’s resources and increase contacts with those potential clients not yet reached.

Provide Programs, Films, Art, etc.: The already impressive range of programs in place continued to expand both in number and kind in 2014. There were 14 well-attended concerts featuring the new piano and music ranging from classical to bluegrass. A newly donated grand piano has enhanced the quality of many of these performances. In addition to monthly brown-bag poetry group lunches, the literary committee hosted ten programs covering a wide variety of topics and genres.

New Programs, under the heading of “Adventures in . . .” included regular writing workshops (and a very well-attended all day workshop), music, and literature as well as open microphone poetry readings. Continuing events included programs for young adults and a hunter safety program. A new series on health issues was also introduced with programs on Medicare, cancer, caregiving, and flu shots. The art committee sponsored four shows and a studio tour that raised enough money to begin restoration of the second our Hudson River School local artist paintings.

4. Build Greater Awareness of All of the Above

One of the year’s quiet achievements was that of refining the work of the Communications committee in channeling all major events and information through it to a well-refined list of publicity outlets. The establishment of a formal Outreach Committee has also begun to regularize our communications with other groups serving the three towns. We began— as we improved our own internal financial accounting systems— to post these on our web page and to communicate the same to local governing bodies in particular.