LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

Bethel Connecticut has experienced steady growth and progress through its history. This growth has enabled the community to provide opportunities for its population that exceed those of its surrounding communities. Bethel is a town with a supportive, concerned, and active government; a public school system that has consistently produced students who achieve academic and professional success; and a citizenry that has never failed to take pride in its town and the potential held here. One needs only to explore Bethel’s neighborhoods, businesses, and downtown to experience a thriving community.

In the center of Bethel’s historic downtown area stands what is considered to be the ‘crown jewel’ of this or any town, the Bethel Public Library. Established in 1909, by a bequest from Maria Parloa that included both books and financial support, the library has experienced constant growth. In 1910, the library outgrew its original quarters and moved to a new facility. In July of 1914, the Bethel Library relocated again to the house and land of the late Hannah Seelye. The Bethel Public Library has remained on this property, with expansions, to the present day. In the late 1960’s, the library again was expanded to accommodate Bethel’s growing population. In 2000, approval was given for another expansion, and was completed in 2005. The final building project, completed in 2013, provides Bethel with a facility that is a landmark for the town and an example of what a 21st century library needs to be. If its public buildings define a community, Bethel, in her library, is a community rich in history, expansion, prosperity, and vision.

The present day Bethel Public Library is the result of a series of long-range plans; plans that, while honoring the past, maintained a vision for the future. The community rooms, technology center, communication and circulation systems, and most importantly, the Michele Arnhold Children’s Library, stand as a testament to the dedication of the Library Board of Directors – and especially the library staff. This plan was realized in 2013, with the completion of the physical library building. However, our work is not finished.
With the completion of the building project, the Bethel Public Library Board of Directors again turned its eye toward the future. This current plan is the result of a year’s effort. While continuing to honor the past, this new plan envisions a library that will be a destination for students and community members. We have focused on technology, establishing a Makerspace for the community’s use, and enhancing programs, collections, and services to children. This current plan, the result of the community’s focus on the importance of the library as a community center, is what we present to you here. We hope that as you, the citizens of the Town of Bethel, communicated your needs and desires to us, we realized them in this plan. Use and enjoy the library for the foreseeable future. Be curious, be enlightened, and most of all be inspired.

Sincerely,
Robert A. Zupperoli
Planning Committee Chair
Bethel Public Library Board of Directors
INTRODUCTION

Planning for the future of an organization is not something that happens in a moment. Nor does one person or even committees accomplish this work. When writing a long-range plan, three essential questions need to be addressed: What do we want? What do we need? How are we going to achieve our goals? From these three questions, others emerged. As a committee, we planned for the most important questions to be asked of the community. The long range plan presented here is the result of a year-long effort to address the needs of the library and the wants of the community, with careful planning to develop and attain measurable goals.

With the building project complete and the previous plan realized, focus on the future, solidifying the place of the Bethel Public Library as a source and center of pride for the community, was the guiding principle for the Planning Committee of the Bethel Public Library Board of Directors. The best way to gather the information needed for future planning was to conduct surveys (both online and using hard copies) and conduct a series of focus groups.

The focus groups addressed some basic questions designed to open discussion.

The questions were: What are the strengths of the library? What are the weaknesses of the library? If you could change one thing about the library what would that change be? What other changes would you make? What is your vision for the library? What else would you like to see?

We conducted focus groups with adults, parents of children and teenagers, teenagers, senior citizens, business owners, the school district, and the library staff. It was important for us to hear from these distinct groups, as each group has unique needs of the library specific to its population. For example, adults want more programs and access to e-books, parents of children want the services for children enhanced, teens (and their parents) want to be more involved in the library and want opportunities to volunteer, and business owners want to develop partnerships with the library as it relates to the technological services offered at the library. Seniors want better access, and the school district a greater relationship and partnership between the two organizations as it relates to the needs of students and fostering life-long learning. These are a few examples of what the community brought to the discussion. The staff was included in the discussion because this plan has a direct effect on the dedicated men and women working and volunteering at the library.

The survey questions were slightly more detailed, as they addressed demographic information and whether or not respondents used the library, but otherwise addressed similar topics and yielded similar results. Once the surveys went ‘live’ and the focus groups, which were open to the public, were conducted, waiting for the data to come back was met with the same expectation of a five-year-old’s anticipation of Christmas morning. Bethel residents were honest and sincere in their wants and needs for the library. With the information gathered, categorized, and prioritized, the work of writing the plan commenced. Writing the plan was a five-month process. The result here is for your benefit.
This plan includes the guiding principles for the library for the next three to five years. It addresses the major areas of concern articulated by the Town of Bethel: community partnerships, programs, collections, technology, public relations and marketing, and children’s services. This plan will guide the library staff and the Library Board of Directors in achieving the library that the community of Bethel desires. While at times specific and at others general, this is the plan that you the Town of Bethel helped to create. In realizing this plan, it is incumbent on all of us to hold each other accountable. This is your library. This landmark and destination center for the town is here for all of us to benefit from and to use. Libraries are no longer quiet, dusty repositories of antiquated volumes and yellowing papers. They are vibrant community centers, custodians of knowledge, information, and history and culture. They are staffed by talented and educated individuals who are curators of the same. Our library stands on the threshold of becoming an extremely vital community center and an example of a library for all of Connecticut.

CONCLUSION

In writing this plan our goal was to address the six major areas articulated by the community as the greatest needs and wants for our library – community partnerships, programs, collections, technology, public relations and marketing, and children’s services. As the plan states, each area has specific and general goals, objectives, and activities that will ensure that each goal is reached within a measurable time frame. This is the community’s plan for the library. This plan was not written by a committee or an individual, but by every contributing citizen of the Town of Bethel. This plan will guide the Bethel Public Library Board of Directors and the staff over the next three to five years. This plan will not be realized without your help, the help of the citizens of Bethel. We welcomed and appreciated all of your comments. We hope we have addressed your greatest concerns. Let us, now, work hand-in-hand to realize this vision for the Bethel Public Library.

VISION STATEMENT

The Bethel Public Library is a community center where people come to learn, create, do research, exchange ideas, enjoy cultural events and celebrate literacy in a friendly, welcoming atmosphere.

MISSION

The mission of the Bethel Public Library is to be a community information center combining professional library services, programs and material in both printed and electronic format that Bethel residents of all ages can turn to for discovery of ideas and the joy of reading. (Existing Mission Statement)
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Goal 1: The Bethel Public Library will strengthen community partnerships with local schools, organizations, government, businesses and the community at large to establish life-long learning opportunities for the collective benefit of the community.

Objectives:

1.1 Enhance and improve the relationship between the Bethel Public Library and the Bethel School System, including St. Mary’s Parish School.

Activities:

1. Establish active relationships with school officials and media specialists to coordinate efforts for resource sharing. (2015-16)
2. Attend orientations, open houses, Career Day and other school district events to promote Library programs and services. (2015-16 & ongoing)
3. Become guest speakers in the classroom to read, demonstrate online resources, or otherwise inform teachers and students of Library programs and services. (Begin 2015-16; continue 2016-17 & ongoing)
4. Establish active relationships with school PTO groups. (2015-16)

1.2 Enhance and improve the relationship between the Bethel Public Library and local organizations.

Activities:

1. Each department (Adult, Teen, Children) will invite two organizations to hold their meetings at the Bethel Public Library to inform the public of their mission and work. (2015-16)
2. Each department will hold one or more programs per year at an offsite location. (2015-16 & ongoing)
3. Library Staff/Department Heads will be guest speakers at an organization’s regular meeting to promote library programs and services. (2016-17)
4. Create mutually beneficial partnerships with youth agencies to increase awareness and attendance at programs. (2015-16)
5. Solicit co-sponsorships for Library programs. (ongoing)

1.3 Enhance and improve the relationship between the Bethel Public Library and the local government and the elected and appointed officials.

Activities:

1. The director and staff members will attend town department meetings as appropriate. (ongoing)
2. The Board of Selectmen and The Board of Finance will be invited to tour the Library prior to the annual budget process. (December 2015)

1.4 Enhance and improve the relationship between the Bethel Public Library and local businesses.
Activities:

1. Form strategic partnerships with local businesses and business organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, to promote mutual interests. (2015-16 & ongoing)

2. Library staff and the Bethel Public Library Board of Directors (LBOD) will participate in the activities of the Bethel Chamber of Commerce. The Library will be represented by a staff member and a board member. (2015-16 & ongoing)

1.5 Enhance and improve the relationship between the Bethel Public Library and the greater Bethel community.

Activities:

1. Establish a welcoming atmosphere by creating a community space for socializing and sharing ideas, and to foster learning without disturbing other library patrons. (2015-16)

2. Create a designated cell phone and beverage area where people can meet and socialize. (2015-16)
PROGRAMS

Goal 2: The Bethel Public Library will offer educational and entertaining programs for all age groups that provide greater opportunities for learning and enjoyment.

Objectives:

2.1 Provide a variety of programs for all age groups that will meet the needs and interests of the greater Bethel community.

Activities:

1. Annually review the program schedule and determine what programs will be offered in the coming year. (2016-17 & ongoing)
2. Provide programs on topics suggested by patrons in Bethel Library Survey 2014 and in the LBOD focus groups. (2015-16 & ongoing)
3. Solicit monetary support for programs from the Friends of the Bethel Public Library, local community organizations and businesses, and through grants. (ongoing)
4. Continue to offer programs at offsite locations to increase awareness and to foster improved Library/community relations. (ongoing)

COLLECTIONS

Goal 3: The Bethel Public Library will provide collections and services that satisfy the recreational and informational needs of Bethel residents and promote life-long learning.

Objectives:

3.1 Continually evaluate print, audio visual, and digital collections to determine usefulness, timeliness, accuracy and other criteria for keeping, adding to or withdrawing from the collection.

Activities:

1. Develop collections in areas where present resources are lacking, taking into consideration the availability of digital resources and new formats. (Ongoing)
2. Incorporate suggestions from Bethel Survey 2014 to acquire materials of interest to our patrons and in the formats they desire. (Ongoing)
3. Annually evaluate online databases offered and add/delete as appropriate, considering whether or not remote access is available. (Ongoing)
4. Have several ongoing displays throughout the library featuring books and materials on specific topics to promote circulation, programs, special events, specific authors, etc. (2015-16 & ongoing)
5. Continue to weed outdated and/or duplicated areas of the collection as needed. (Begin 2015-16 & ongoing)
TECHNOLOGY

Goal 4: Ensure Bethel residents have access to established and emerging information technologies as well as opportunities to achieve technological literacy.

Objectives:

4.1 Maintain a network of public computers that meets the essential technology needs of our patrons.

Activities:

1. Provide computer workstations for public use to access software programs, the Library’s catalog, online resources and databases, and the Internet. (Ongoing)
2. Provide computer access for all students to work on assignments. (Ongoing)
3. Provide the necessary peripheral equipment, such as printers and scanners, for public use to meet the needs and desires of patrons. (Ongoing)
4. Provide wireless access to the Internet from various locations within the Library. (Ongoing)

4.2 Create opportunities for patrons to have hands on exposure to current and emerging technologies.

Activities:

1. Continue the Technology Petting Zoo and Device Advice programs, and update these programs by purchasing new hardware and software as it becomes available and as funding allows. (2016-17)
2. Purchase technology equipment, such as tablets, as appropriate and relevant for circulation. (2016-17)

4.3 Provide relevant technology training opportunities by providing classes that meet patrons’ needs.

Activities:

1. Provide educational technology training for members of the community to enable them to understand and make use of currently available software. (Ongoing)
2. Provide instructional classes to the public on basic use of the software programs offered at the Library, how to use subscription databases, ICONN, and other online resources, as well as on searching the Internet. (Ongoing)

4.4 Establish a Makerspace for creating with technology.

Activities:

1. Establish an area, or areas, in the library for Makerspace programs. (2015-16; 2016-17)
2. Purchase a 3D printer, Raspberry Pi’s, makymaky, button makers, and other software and hardware for Makerspace activities. (2015-16)
3. Provide programs and training for the public for Makerspace activities. (Begin w/LSTA grant programs 2015-16; Continue with adults and children 2016-17 & 2017-18)
CHILDREN’S SERVICES

Goal 5: The Bethel Public Library will provide a friendly, welcoming environment and experience for children, their parents, and caregivers.

Objectives:

5.1 The Bethel Public Library will provide welcome packets from the Children’s Library for parents and caregivers, and for each child when he/she registers for his/her first library card.

Activities:

1. Each child will be given a new paperback book and bookmark when he/she receives his/her first library card. (2015-16)
2. Parents and caregivers will receive a welcome packet explaining the services and programs of the Children’s Library. (Ongoing)
3. Children’s Library staff will greet and offer assistance to all who enter the Children’s Library. (Ongoing)

5.2 The Bethel Public Library will enhance the programs and offerings for children and their families in order to encourage a habit of lifelong learning and reading.

Activities:

1. Offer more after school programs for elementary school aged children. (2015-16)
2. Establish a Children’s Art Show in the Children’s Library. (2015-16; 2016-17)
3. Offer programs to parents and teachers to discuss current children’s literature.
4. Partner with the Bethel Public Schools and St. Mary’s School in order to create a children’s literature event. (2017-18)
5. Involve older children (middle grade and high school aged children) with the programs offered by the Children’s Library. (2015-16; 2016-17)
6. Incorporate programs and events as suggested on Bethel Library Survey 2014. (Ongoing)

5.3 Enhance and improve the Children’s Library Collection.

Activities:

1. Display all newly acquired books for children within three weeks of receipt. (Ongoing)
2. Populate the Children’s Library with several displays using books and materials on a variety of themes and topics. (2015-16)
3. Develop the print collection with new and current literature for children. (Ongoing)
4. Develop the collection in digital resources and other formats. (Ongoing)
5. Incorporate comments from the Bethel Library Survey 2014 in order to enhance the collection. (Ongoing)
PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MARKETING

Goal 6: The Bethel Public Library will actively promote the programs and services offered by the library.

Objectives:

6.1 Review and revise the Library’s marketing plan to increase both awareness and usage of the Library’s collections and services.

Activities:

1. Review current public relations and marketing activities. (2015-16)
2. Analyze and recommend improvements to current practice. (2015-16)
3. Monitor and discuss with staff areas of responsibility. (2015-16)
4. Work with local organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Friends of the Bethel Public Library to advance the Library’s presence in the community. (Ongoing)
5. Consider and use all forms of media to promote the Library’s programs and services including local cable television, radio, newspapers, magazines, newsletters and fliers (electronic and paper), programs, and the Library’s web site. (Ongoing)
6. Post fliers and/or leave brochures at places in the community that people ordinarily frequent such as the train station, churches, banks, etc. (Ongoing)
7. Cultivate and maintain relationships with the schools and other local groups and coordinate and promote programs with same. (Ongoing)
8. Invite groups and individuals to host exhibits and displays at the Library. (Ongoing)
9. Create an ‘ambassador program’ for the LBOD members to promote the library to local groups, organizations and government officials. (2015-16)
10. Create a more welcoming environment by having each member of the staff wear name badges so patrons know with whom they are interacting. (2015-16)

Bethel Public Library Board of Directors
August 24, 2015