

CITY OF ABERDEEN ♦ COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW: ABERDEEN BRANCH LIBRARY

Stakeholder:	Jennifer Jones, Aberdeen Branch Manager Mary Hastler, CEO/Director of Harford County Public Library Beth LaPenotiere, Senior Director for Public Services
Date:	Monday, April 11, 2022 1:00pm-2:00pm Teams Virtual Meeting
WM Team:	Lauren Good, Project Manager Nicky Davis, Planner
City Staff:	Phyllis Grover, Director of Planning & Community Development Stefani Spector, Senior Planner

STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION

Harford County Public Library has an Aberdeen Branch at 21 Franklin Street. Jennifer Jones currently serves as the Branch Manager. The stakeholder conversation was held with Jennifer, as well as Mary Hastler, CEO and Director of the Harford County Public Library, and Beth LaPenotiere, Senior Director for Public Services.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

CAN YOU PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF THE SERVICES AVAILABLE AT THE ABERDEEN BRANCH?

- The Aberdeen branch is 1 of 11 branches in the overall system.
- Available collections include traditional books, DVDs, special collections, American Girl dolls, superhero action figures, etc.
- Curriculum is provided for all ages.
- Outdoor story garden.
- Branch manager is out and about in the community. Participant in the community. If something's happening anywhere in the County, the Library feels that they should be there in support.
- "Opening the Gift" – licensed daycare provider program. Library would visit households for Storytime, drop-off books, train parents to qualify for MD program.
- Partner with many nonprofits in the community. "Lawyer in the Library" provides legal services to residents. Social workers through CAA. Work with school to provide free lunches/dinners. Provide food trucks/giveaways. MD health dept – worked to provide COVID vaccine distribution as well as test kit distribution.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE ABERDEEN BRANCH PLAY IN THE COMMUNITY? WHAT BENEFITS DOES IT PROVIDE TO THE ABERDEEN COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE?

- "Silver Reader" — outreach vehicle serving seniors in the County
- "Rolling Reader" — outreach vehicle serving after school and more vulnerable population, also visits Aberdeen Proving Ground as it can be scheduled
- In children's area (*birth through HS), STEM is an emphasis especially due to relationship with Aberdeen Proving Ground.
- 3D printing
- Big events bringing authors, activities to the public

- Go outside to the parks, festivals, outreach type events—go “out of the walls”
- Aberdeen has very good relationship with the City—evident when emerging from COVID seclusions. City accommodated for events

outside which allowed for more participants for outside Storytime than could fit within the library building.

- A lot of technology training. Computers heavily used. Upgraded on a regular basis.

WHO ARE THE MAIN USERS OF THE ABERDEEN LIBRARY?

- Community branch—many people walk to it.
- Have not only people who have lived in community for their entire lives but people more recent due to Aberdeen Proving Ground
- Some of the homeless population will come in but many haven’t come back after Covid—not sure where they’ve gone
- A lot of the kids not coming back after Covid—not sure where they’ve gone
- Pre-COVID, there was a very active teen group that would walk to and congregate in the library—just “hang out”. With 2 years of covid, expect part have graduated and moved

on. Others slowly making their way back. Emphasized virtual products. Some of those that would have needed to come in in person can utilize stuff virtually.

- Teens who were coming in would bring in others—this is not happening anymore. Interruption to continuity. Kids are tired. When they’re done with school, they’re just done. Used to have 20 teens generally but not that many in the building anymore.
- Older folks not quite ready to come back inside. Use curbside pickup.

ARE THERE ANY SEGMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY THAT DON’T APPEAR TO BE WELL REPRESENTED BY THE LIBRARY?

- Have fairly far-reaching system. Even if certain people don’t use, someone in their household does.
- Concern about seniors—have tried to continue to reach out virtually as much as possible. Covid has impacted some parts of

the community harder than others.

- Even though there’s an east/west split, people walk and use the busses. Get lot of people who walk from across MARC/Amtrak to visit.

WHAT ARE THE ABERDEEN LIBRARY’S STRENGTHS? WEAKNESSES?

- So embedded within community
- Flexible & nimble delivering services
- Known nationally for being creative
- Staff, live, work, go to school here. Fully embrace Harford county. Staff really do care. Most staff want to give back, help, make sure you have a great experience. This is what brings people back—they know staff is there to help them get what they need.
- Weaknesses? Biggest parking has always been parking. Staff parking. Outside book

drop in back took up a space. Street parking only other than little staff space. Outgrow meeting room if a big event. People don’t always realize they can park around on the street. Think the space is filled up.

- Need to let people know the library is there regardless of the fact they’ve been in the space for almost 50 years. Still this need to get the word out. Per Phyllis, there is plenty of parking around central park, LED/digital signs are permitted.

WHAT FACILITY NEEDS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS OR SO?

- Can't think of any. Looked at enlarging the building, but that didn't work. Neither did looking for annexes nearby. Will partner with someone in the community for larger events. Don't mind going out into the community.
- New recreation center being built by County (hopefully 2024. W Belair Ave.) Hoping to

partner and hold events there/support the City.

- Building built in 1975. Staff spaces thinking about some renovations/bringing outlets up to date, etc. to allow for computer usage.
- Would love to have better landscaping. At mercy of county landscapers.

ARE THERE ANY NEW OR EMERGING NEEDS THAT YOU SEE IN THE COMMUNITY?

- Not just in Aberdeen but seeing mental health issues throughout the community. During COVID, a lot of people going through change/impact. Uptick of people being angrier (especially in schools), not exhibiting

correct behavior in public. Make sure city can provide these health services. Some youth, especially some of the younger ones, don't remember what it's like not to wear masks.

WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE METHODS OF COMMUNICATION TO REACH THE COMMUNITY (E.G., NEWSLETTERS, EMAIL, TEXTS, WEBSITE, OTHER MEDIA)?

- All of these. Still trying to figure out the best way—it depends on the person.
- Social media posts, website.
- Haven't brought back "Headlines and Happenings" quarterly magazine.
- Being out and about in the community.

- Still struggle getting the word out to the community.
- Staff good when people are in the building, call, or ask questions online.
- City does weekly newsletter that picks up library events, specials, etc.

HOW HAS COVID IMPACTED THE LIBRARY?

- Completely renovated branch
- Some people haven't returned—teens, seniors—for different reasons.

- Taking longer to do and get everything (e.g., materials/building upgrades)

DOES THE BOOKMOBILE "ROLLING READER" GET OUT TO DIFFERENT PARTS OF ABERDEEN?

- Yes. Rolling Reader serves children through high school; Silver Reader for seniors
- Children's Library—filled for book drops throughout community for COVID
- Getting ready to start pop-up visits for vans to go out to visit community where people

will be able to get on the vans. Going to use for festivals, etc. similar to Amazon vehicle pop-ups in NYC.

- Rolling Reader has multiple stops in Aberdeen throughout the day. Park at Festival Park in between stops

THE CITY IS PREPARING TO CHANGE UP THE FARMERS MARKET, AND IT WILL NOW BE SATURDAY'S IN THE PAVILION AREA WITH A LIVE BAND AND MOVIE NIGHT.

- Staffing on Saturdays is a current concern but want to support if possible. Perhaps once a month. Farmers' market is going to be once

a month too. See this as an opportunity for partnership.

THROUGH RENOVATIONS,

- Children's gardens, sails installed. Outdoor story garden concept started in Brooklyn, NY. 1st official one within the Harford County

Library system. Ribbon cutting planned. Have used space a couple times but not yet as often as desired. Have held baby group, kids

escape room zoo theme.

WHAT HAVEN'T WE ASKED YOU THAT WE SHOULD HAVE?

- Appreciate all the support over the years whether it's the 5K for breast cancer or other events.
- Whatever's happening in the City, want to support and be involved
- Regardless of where staff may live, the library is part of the community

Meeting Notes:

Lauren Good, Project Manager

Nicky Davis, Planner

M:|PROJ|221035.0001|Planning|PublicInvolv|Stakeholder Interviews|2022-04-11 JJones_HCPLAbd.docx