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Welcome

The latest Ocean County Library strategic plan is the culmination of many months of hard work by our dedicated staff, the Ocean County Library Commission, our local government and stakeholders, and the many caring members of our community. The strong support of the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders for over 25 years has built the finest county library system in New Jersey. Through the assistance of our consultants, Library Development Solutions, many people made their voices heard when we asked them to help us “construct our future.” For that, we are truly grateful.

We began our process in the summer of 2012 during a year-long reimagining and renovation project at our Brick Branch. On the heels of the branch’s grand reopening, we found ourselves facing New Jersey’s largest natural disaster in at least a hundred years: Superstorm Sandy. We worked hard to reopen our branches to serve our battered communities. Two of our coastal locations, the Bay Head Reading Center and the Upper Shores Branch, suffered flooding; Bay Head Reading Center reopened on June 1, 2013 and Upper Shores in August 2013.

The Ocean County Library connects people, builds community and transforms lives through the power of information and the power of stories. We are essential to our community today more than ever. Public libraries support lifelong learning, sustainable communities, and economic development. The library serves as a portal of knowledge and strengthens civic involvement. It increasingly provides content that is digital in nature, as well as supporting our residents’ desire for personal development.

We will give our residents the tools to rebuild their lives. We will reinvent our facilities and design our website to serve as our virtual branch. We will cultivate an organizational culture of creativity and innovation to take us into the future. We will provide our residents with the very best in library services.

The Ocean County Library is one of our great local institutions. Our organizational culture of creativity, innovation, and partnership, as well as our prudent financial planning, will allow us to meet the challenges of the future. Join us as we continue our mission of Connecting People, Building Community, Transforming Lives.

Susan Quinn, Library Director
Henry Mancini, Chairperson, Ocean County Library Commission 2010–2012
Bonnie Peterson, Chairperson, Ocean County Library Commission 2013
Executive Summary

Since 1979, the Ocean County Library has produced seven master or strategic plans, each aimed at analyzing and defining the values that shape our service to the community. Plan development has historically been a collaborative task shared by library administration, library staff, and consultants. As a result of their efforts, the library attained its primary goal of becoming the focal point of the community.

In May 2012, Library Director Susan Quinn authored a document entitled Ocean County Library: A Vision for the Future. She called upon the library to embrace its facilitator role for the community “story,” providing customers with tools, resources, skills, and lifelong learning opportunities. To that end, Director Quinn announced a new strategic plan project—the eighth of its kind—in August 2012.

With the help of the Ocean County Library Commission’s Strategic Planning Committee, the library management team, and Library Development Solutions consultants Alan Burger, Leslie Burger, and John Blyberg, we worked to identify shared goals, objectives, and strategies for a new planning process. A central steering committee assembled eight subcommittees: Facilities, Technology, Public Services, Collections, Demographics, Community Input, Staff Input, and the Editorial Team. Each subcommittee engaged in essential fact-finding, which was then presented to the Library Commission. The efforts and contribution of all participants contributed to the final plan.

The role played by public libraries in the wake of Hurricane Sandy strongly influenced the re-imagining of our facilities as centers of information, communication, and connection. With this in mind, the Facilities subcommittee reviewed the physical space of our branches to determine how changing collections, floor plans, furnishings, and layout drive use. By taking trends and budgetary constraints into account, their recommendations focus on preserving the library space’s warm welcome while optimizing adaptability.

The Technology subcommittee analyzed the library’s existing data infrastructure and examined new and emerging tools, programs, and devices that will ultimately transform the user experience within our physical branches and through our virtual website portals.

The Public Services subcommittee reviewed the full range of existing library services, including in-house customer assistance, circulation, reference, branch & system programming, special events, and community outreach. It identified ways of expanding, standardizing, and promoting services that are both innovative and responsive to the needs of all county residents.

Tasked with imagining the library of the future, the Collections subcommittee conducted an extensive review of current selection practices to identify emerging trends in library materials and marketing. Patron surveys provided important clues as to the products and formats customers prefer.

In order to build an accurate portrait of the diverse populations we serve, the Demographics subcommittee reviewed statistics obtained from the United States Census Bureau, and the Pew Institute, as well as state and local government agencies. This information proved valuable to the efforts of other subcommittees, who incorporated this data into their recommendations.
During March 2013, the Community Input subcommittee launched “Help Us Construct the Future,” a public campaign consisting of multimedia surveys, focus groups, and informal conversations aimed at eliciting feedback from many segments of our population. With the assistance of library staff and customers, subcommittee members gathered over 6,000 responses to help the Ocean County Library shape its services.¹

At the same time, the Staff Input subcommittee conducted internal surveys to identify employee expectations regarding skill development, communication, diversity, and mentorship opportunities. More than two-thirds of library staff offered constructive feedback reflecting past experiences and future goals. The results will enable the Ocean County Library to create and sustain a productive, knowledgeable, and empowered staff for the future.

On April 12, 2013, the Strategic Planning committee and library management team met with consultants Alan and Leslie Burger for a full-day retreat entitled “Re-Imagining the Future.” Representatives reported from each subcommittee and discussed strategies for bringing the overall plan toward completion. Six breakout groups enabled attendees to network and brainstorm additional projects, services, and philosophies important to the library’s evolution over the next five years.

Our strategic plan is designed to be a living document used by the Library Commission and library staff to meet the challenges of the future with optimism, inspiration and innovation. The Ocean County Library will continue to be strong, essential, and the heart of our community for decades to come.

¹ Over one percent of the population of Ocean County participated in the online and print survey.
Ocean County Library’s Mission and Goals

**Connecting People,**
**Building Community,**
**and Transforming Lives**

**Library Goals**

- The Library is the Heart of the Community.

- The Library Nurtures Growth, Change, and Lifelong Learning.

- The Library Creates Advocates and Library Champions.

- The Library is Committed to Organizational Excellence.
The Ocean County Library employs 600 people in part-time and full-time positions throughout the system. It provides a workplace that respects the staffs’ contributions to the services they provide and creates an environment in which they can learn, grow and contribute.

This strategic plan recognizes many social trends, both in general and in Ocean County in particular, that will impact Ocean County Library operations and funding. The many trends, most of which are discussed in this plan, include:

- The swift transition to digital book, music and video resources supplementing or replacing traditional formats by publisher’s design or customer’s preferences
- The evolving options of providing library resources both in facilities and digitally
- The growing population of retirees (10,000 baby boomers retiring every day in the US) and their desire for a more active lifestyle than previous retirees
- The expansion of the healthcare industry and related services in Ocean County
- The growing population, as well as the growing diversity of populations throughout Ocean County
- Rural centers that remain within the county
- The effects of Hurricane Sandy (the Ocean County Library applied for and had received a community disaster loan to help meet financial challenges associated with the storm)
Changes and potential threats

There are a number of external threats and opportunities that can influence the Ocean County Library’s budget process and financial stability. These include:

- Changes in the tax base that funds the Ocean County Library, for a variety of reasons, both short- and long-term
- Changes at major employers
- Potential loss of a participating municipality in the Ocean County Library formula
- A more consistent role for the Ocean County Library Foundation in raising private funds for the Library to help close funding gaps. The Foundation has been active in the past in assisting the library in securing funds for capital needs and related projects
- Development of new funding and revenue streams through new public/private partnerships throughout the County with leadership from Library and the Ocean County Library Foundation
The Ocean County Library stands as a respected and influential institution in an era of rapid change. The traditional metrics with which we used to measure success—print circulation, program attendance, and desktop computer usage—are shifting with the advent of new technologies and customer behaviors. Print media, particularly newspapers and magazines, continue to decline while new media like eBooks and self-published materials flourish. The Ocean County Library will position itself as a leader in pioneering new technologies and methods for community engagement. Our mission of “Connecting People, Building Community, and Transforming Lives” is needed now more than ever.

This strategic plan outlines many methods for meeting our customers’ needs and improving the quality of life for Ocean County residents. We must continue to note the increase in our eBook circulation numbers and find ways to make these materials more accessible and user-friendly to our customers. We need to pursue “mobile app” versions of our databases and library products that work with the devices customers prefer to use. The Ocean County Library will promote library services and events through social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, as our customers already use these tools. As we implement this plan, we will measure new user statistics, such as the number of social network followers, mobile users, website visitors, and subscribers to our new email newsletter, along with the traditional metrics of library visits and circulation. Objectives will be evaluated against quantifiable targets.

The ideas presented within this plan will have a long-range impact beyond these initial digital efforts. We intend to build a framework in which the library is the catalyst for fundamental growth and change within the county. Our focus on literacy—traditional, financial, and digital—will have a measurable impact on our communities.

The Ocean County Library facilitates civic engagement. We do so by hosting events forums at our libraries where people discuss local and national issues. The Library can also encourage people to participate in government by holding voter registration drives at branches. We should assist immigrants in adjusting to their new homes by holding workshops and citizenship classes. By working collaboratively with our communities, our branches can help people feel more engaged with their government and their world.

The Ocean County Library is poised to meet these challenges. Though times change, the Ocean County Library’s commitment to customer service remains the same. Please join us as we “construct our future” and stand as an example of innovation and service to our residents.
A. Our Facilities: Re-Imagine and Adapt to Anticipate Tomorrow

The role of libraries in the community was a major consideration in the re-imagining of our facilities, especially with regard to peoples’ changing service and program expectations, Ocean County’s population growth, and the Library’s response to Hurricane Sandy. The goal for facilities includes regular building maintenance, and the re-imagining and repurposing of existing space. As our buildings age and fixtures reach the end of their useful lifespan, replacement or renovation are required. A new Master Facilities Plan will allow the library to take advantage of federal or state construction bond programs that may include libraries, especially as our communities rebuild after Hurricane Sandy.²

Building and Construction

The Ocean County Library facilities that our residents enjoy today are the result of a facilities plan conceived over 25 years ago. Today, 32 of 33 municipalities participate in the award-winning Ocean County Library and enjoy convenient and high value access to services at 21 modern and comfortable facilities. These locations are equipped with the latest computer technologies and a physical collection of 1.2 million items, including fast-growing digital resources, and a local history collection.

While the number of shelves needed to store physical books and materials is changing, other uses are claiming floor space in the 21st-century library. These include a desire for new technologies, collaborative community spaces, and self-service options. Library space is needed to provide programs and services customized to the need of individual customers—whether that customer is in a branch, or requesting library services via telephone, computer, or smart phone app. With that said, the Ocean County Library will continue to experiment with alternative models and sizes for library services, including the (temporary) Brick Express Branch in a strip mall setting and the recent low-cost renovation/modernization of the Brick Branch itself. Other innovative formats and models may offer flexible choices in the near future.

Facilities Maintenance Plan

As publishers increase digital book availability and decrease the quantity of print books, the Ocean County Library must provide physical space for literacy activities, lifelong learning, civil discourse, and cultural events. The Library serves as a welcoming and inclusive environment for all residents of Ocean County. The delivery of exceptional services is contingent upon the planned assimilation of each component into an all-inclusive system service plan.

² We expect this strategic plan will help in leading us toward a new facilities plan. The Ocean County Planning Board’s Comprehensive Master Plan (2011) was an especially useful resource for the strategic plan and may be accessed for further information at: http://www.planning.co.ocean.nj.us/final_master_plan_2012.pdf.
Strategy: Library facilities will be well-maintained, welcoming and lively community destinations

Objective 1: Enhance the customer experience through convenience and self-service options in each branch

Activities:
- Evaluate branch floor plans and prioritize renovation and reorganization projects
- Implement concierge service and one-desk service model, where feasible
- Identify strategic locations for additional points of service, if needed
- Install self-service print stations utilizing a smartcard system

Objective 2: Re-imagine and redesign entrances, lobbies, and facilities to attract visitors

Activities:
- Install TV screens in all branch lobbies for welcome messages, branch information, and program advertising
- Evaluate and upgrade acoustic treatments in all public meeting rooms and presentation spaces
- Evaluate and update parking lots for size, lighting, and condition, where possible
- Install security cameras on building exteriors to monitor local conditions
- Invite local businesses and organizations to collaborate with the library on additions such as technology labs and other spaces that engage residents in creating content and learning new digital skills, as well as alternative energy projects

Objective 3: Re-imagine and adapt library facilities for new uses and activities

Activities:
- Evaluate collection size and formats in all branches for strategic reduction to create more opportunities for study, conversation, and civic engagement
- Replace fixed/static floor plans with fluid/convertible spaces
- Install flexible or mobile shelving, where appropriate, to convert floor plans to other uses
- Invest in new, lightweight, and easily transportable replacement furniture

Objective 4: Increase the number of spaces for small meetings, quiet study, and children’s learning/play areas

Activities:
- Review the current meeting room policies
- Establish well-designed meeting spaces in every branch that will appeal to various age groups
- Develop pilot digital project zones at several branches
Objective 5: Investigate alternative venues for library services

Activities:
- Install branded, colorful library drop boxes in convenient offsite locations for item returns
- Investigate storefront/strip mall locations for non-traditional services, including computer access, story-time/craft programs, and collaborative digital learning labs and spaces

Objective 6: Accommodate emerging technologies

Activities:
- Accommodate increased use of mobile and portable electronic devices
- Redesign floor plans for increased laptop, tablet and mobile device use

Objective 7: Continue to collaborate with local and county organizations to offer disaster recovery resources

Activities:
- Use the knowledge gained from Superstorm Sandy to help our community and residents recover from the storm during the next three to five years
- Ensure that the Ocean County Library becomes part of the county’s emergency preparedness response system
- Inform the community that the Ocean County Library branches offer Wi-Fi, reliable power, and a safe and comfortable environment during storms

Objective 8: Develop future-focused plans for new and innovative library facilities to accommodate population growth in Ocean County; take advantage of potential construction bond funds and grants for library construction

Activities:
- Begin work on a new Master Facilities Plan
- Consider retail locations for reading centers to fill the void left by bookstore closures, especially in locations with high senior citizen populations
- Bring library services and county services closer to fast-growing populations
B. Our Public Services: Meeting the Needs of the Future

Library planners reviewed existing services, programs and outreach for customers of all ages and abilities, and recommended new, improved, or cutting-edge services. In addition, planners examined how best to promote the library and brainstormed the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities facing the library. They examined the 2012 America's Star Libraries as featured in *Library Journal*, the Pew Institute’s 2013 report *Library Services in the Digital Age*, attended webinars, and reviewed numerous articles and pamphlets.

**Strategy: Develop a 21st-century library service program to engage Ocean County residents of all ages**

**Objective 1:** Foster an engaged workforce to best serve the public need

**Activities:**
- a. Continue to evolve an organizational structure and chart that reflects current realities
- b. Develop a staffing model for routine branch/department work
- c. Reallocate staff between branches and departments as required
- d. Review and re-evaluate library hours to provide maximum public access

**Objective 2:** Evaluate, adapt and change the library’s existing services to reflect the community’s needs

**Activities:**
- a. Revisit, update and create new system-wide service standards
- b. Establish in-library “genius bars” to promote and increase digital literacy and teach customers how to get the most from their electronic devices
- c. Centralize reference service and reduce the size of the print reference collection
- d. Create a centralized programming department

**Objective 3:** Create a dynamic online presence for the Ocean County Library

**Activities:**
- a. Restructure the library’s website and make it easier to use
- b. Enable online payments for fines and fees, donations, and interlibrary loan requests
- c. Develop a mobile app that enables customers to easily use the catalog on a handheld device
- d. Establish the Ocean County Library website as a destination for people to learn about events, programs, materials, and services
- e. Perform virtual marketing via a robust online presence, and increased use of social media tools like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and YouTube, in both English and Spanish
- f. Provide instant messaging, chat and a “text a librarian” feature on the website
- g. Use YouTube to provide online access to story times, Library instruction, and programs
- h. Communicate with customers via their technology of choice, including email, text, and social media

**Objective 4:** Improve the quality of life for residents through a comprehensive literacy program

**Activities:**
- a. Identify areas of need throughout the county and partner with other agencies to provide life skills instruction for customers
b. Partner with local organizations to support a system of ESL classes, English conversation groups, and Spanish conversation groups

c. Develop and organize technology classes to provide a curriculum of digital literacy for all ages and abilities

d. Partner with local agencies and schools to improve reading skills throughout the county

e. Reach out to immigrant populations for literacy advocacy

f. Investigate developing and offering kindergarten readiness programs, job centers, homework assistance, and financial literacy programs

Objective 5: Create connections with the senior population through our physical spaces and online presence

Activities:

a. Investigate the creation of a senior and/or adult services department

b. Develop a mechanism to provide off-site connection and services to senior villages

c. Plan branch programs and services that enrich senior communities and develop a senior page on our website

d. Develop informal conversation groups for people who want to practice and use their foreign language skills in a group setting

Objective 6: Ensure that the public knows who we are, what we do, and what we have to offer

Activities:

a. Establish a centralized, professional marketing department and develop and implement a dynamic new marketing plan

b. Establish a clear social media plan with quantifiable targets

c. Use multiple marketing venues and techniques, including: billboards, electronic signs, traditional signage, airplane banners, and slogans to promote language learning, job assistance, Wi-Fi availability and other Ocean County Library services (“OCL has it!”)

d. Direct print marketing to diverse populations via advertisements in community newspapers and language publications, such as the Jewish Press, Impacto, and The Italian Voice

Objective 7: Increase understanding of the Ocean County Library’s customers and build a strong connection to the community

Activities:

a. Host annual focus groups inviting non-traditional parents, veterans, the formerly incarcerated, and recent immigrants

b. Establish a community advisory board made up of Ocean County Library Foundation members

c. Update and maintain a directory of local community-based organizations

d. Conduct a community analysis of every branch’s service area

Objective 8: Provide a service program that attracts existing and new customers to Ocean County Library facilities

Activities:

a. Offer a variety of public programs that provide opportunities for lifelong learning and civic engagement

b. Ensure that all Ocean County Library branches are open when people can get there

c. Continually review resources and policies in order to provide a safe and secure environment

d. Continue to offer in-person reference assistance, print and media collections, book discussion groups, story times, craft programs, and public computing
C. Technology: Transforming Libraries and Information Delivery

Emerging technologies will ultimately transform library services and collections as we know them. Infrastructure upgrades, social media usage, collection digitization, and the use of mobile technologies will change the way we provide service. Many library users told us that computing resources were scarce at certain times of day and they needed additional access to new devices.

The current Information Technology department will increasingly perform and market itself as a User Experience department within Ocean County Library. Every resident and staff member is a customer of the department. We will internally brand and market the department for all customers.

Strategy: Develop a culture of technology innovation that enables our customers and staff to become digital citizens

Objective 1: Expand the library’s wireless capacity

Activities:
- Collect and analyze data from patrons’ use of wireless devices in the library; use this information to strengthen and expand wireless access points in all locations
- Augment the speed and capability of the wireless network for customers; make wireless use easy and productive in every Ocean County Library branch
- Increase the library’s wireless bandwidth in response to demand from mobile devices
- Enable wireless printing from all mobile devices

Objective 2: Use technology to provide real-time and customer-friendly services on the library floor

Activities:
- Provide staff with tablets able to run desktop applications
- Equip tablets with barcode readers for mobile inventory and check-in/checkout purposes
- Equip tablets with wireless data connections for use at library outreach events
- Explore the feasibility of a touch-friendly interface for the library’s computer system

Objectives 3: Increase easy-to-use automated services

Activities:
- Explore the use of an automated sorting and return system that automatically updates customer accounts
- Add self-service check-out stations
- Consider the installation of a self-service kiosk that would enable customers to pick up their holds and/or bestsellers 24/7 and at select locations
- Investigate an RFID-based system or equivalent that includes item inventory functions, automated checkout and check-in, and theft prevention
- Install self-service kiosks in high traffic areas, such as bus stations, strip malls, train stations, schools, county agencies, and community centers

Objective 4: Transform traditional fine and fee payments to modern payment methods

Activities:
- Implement a credit card payment system at all Ocean County Library locations
- Add online credit card payments system to the library’s website
Objective 5: Keep pace with rapidly changing technologies

Activities:
a. Review and ensure policies and practices designed to promote and deliver Internet security and a safe environment for library users of all ages
b. Appoint a “technology trend-spotters” team to identify new trends and suggest new devices and software programs
c. Create a technology innovation fund to purchase new devices and software for staff and customers
d. Create a digital media lab to assist Ocean County residents in creating content
e. Purchase laptops and recharging carts to expand public computing capacity in each Ocean County Library branch
f. Provide staff training for new devices and software platforms
g. Offer one-on-one support and classes to customers on how to use library services through their devices
h. Continue the Technology Department’s current “test playground” to evaluate new devices and software programs among customers and staff
i. Provide access for staff members to edit content on the public website via SharePoint or another content management system
j. Research and implement the use of software designed to increase staff connectivity, such as LYNC conferencing, Instant Messaging, and Go-To-Webinar

Objective 6: Increase the Ocean County Library’s presence on social media to reach more customers with information about library programs and services

Activities:

a. Broaden social media policy and procedures for staff that allow for a consistent online image
b. Explore and implement book discussion groups and readers’ advisories through social media
c. Put the library’s Teen Advisory Board newscasts online
d. Create how-to videos for downloading eBooks, and post on the library’s website and/or YouTube
e. Digitize and post our unique local history collections onto the library’s website
f. Provide online forums for special interest groups where they can update their contact information and announce meeting times
g. Conduct national issues forums online

Objective 7: Decrease barriers to information access for people with disabilities and people who speak foreign languages

Activities:

a. Respond to the demand for more computers by providing increased access to computing devices throughout all branches
b. Install accessibility software on at least one public computer at all branches for patrons with a broad range of abilities and disabilities
c. Install language translation software on the library’s website
Objective 8: Provide consistent access to technology during volatile times

Activities:

a. Secure the Ocean County Library as a “disaster recovery hub” during times of natural disaster and other unpredictable events
b. Continue to invest in and upgrade the library’s network to increase disaster recovery reliability
c. Offer local governments and municipalities library network resources for offsite disaster recovery
d. Investigate security system options to alert staff and patrons of immediate emergencies
D. Library Materials: Something for Everyone

What is the future of current library materials in an age when publishers are responding to changing demand? Library planners examined the Ocean County Library’s current collections and how they are likely to evolve with respect to the assortment of print books, media, eBooks, downloadable content, databases, and licensing restrictions. They considered the purchasing and borrowing of materials and how customers share information. Access and relevance are more critical than collection size. We will curtail collecting obsolete or dated formats, and purchase additional high-demand materials. The Ocean County Library will anticipate and respond to customers’ expectations by being a leader in meeting their collection needs.

**Strategy:** Build a relevant, high-demand and dynamic collection that meets the needs of all residents; increase public use and awareness about our collections and related services

**Objective 1:** Build a sense of community among readers

**Activities:**
- Host opportunities for readers to connect with each other, in-person or by using online book discussion groups
- Offer a venue for customers to share ratings and reviews about materials, preferably within our catalog
- Focus on bestsellers and popular materials to meet increasing demand for current content
- Develop readers’ advisory competencies for all staff and provide training

**Objective 2:** Continue to keep pace with rapidly changing media formats

**Activities:**
- Analyze circulation figures and collection size and reduce the unused and dated parts of the print collection to meet changing needs
- Review, revise and continue to experiment with the Brick model to make collection size decisions
- Repurpose captured space from old stack areas for newer uses and new fixtures and displays for popular materials
- Remove dated and obsolete formats from the print, video and audio collection in order to take advantage of newer choices
- Support the expansion of the library’s digital media collection and stay informed about new eReader devices and eBook file formats
- Link the library’s eBook services with Polaris 3M Cloud so users can search for eBooks directly in the catalog
- Offer downloadable music to patrons through services like Freegal Music
- Explore and implement Magazine services such as Zinio
- Identify existing services for streaming videos, and investigate their potential use at the library
- Monitor the development of new movie/television streaming services and experiment as needed

**Objective 3:** Improve display, marketing and readers’ advisory services specific to collections

**Activities:**
- Offer in-house resources (print and digital) that promote new or highlighted materials
- Train all staff on using these resources to connect customers with content
- Streamline publicity for other collection-related services that customers value
Objective 4: Support the management and use of materials in electronic formats

Activities:
- Offer increased access to high-demand and local content in all e-formats
- Diversify sources of e-content
- Replace hard-copy reference collections with digital resources for reference databases, music, eBook downloads, and other digital content
- Improve catalog and database access via federated search capabilities
- Improve customers’ ability to search, request and borrow materials remotely, and streamline their ability to access and manage accounts
- Update and post clear instructions for requesting materials in emerging formats

Objective 5: Improve access to materials in physical formats

Activities:
- Consider using alternate systems to the Dewey Decimal System for organizing collections in the branches
- Pilot the best organizational practices from other libraries at select Ocean County Library branches to evaluate their use system-wide
E. Our Staff: Maximizing Creativity and Productivity

To connect people, build community, and transform lives, an excellent staff is essential. To solicit feedback, a staff survey identified the needs and expectations of our internal customers regarding new and existing services. More than two-thirds of our staff completed the survey, providing suggestions and comments.

Residents told us in the survey and focus groups that they have high expectations for staff assistance; therefore, the Human Resources department will increasingly focus on selection, skills training, and retention practices to meet staff and customer needs.

Strategy: Provide a dynamic, engaged and talented workforce committed to meeting customer needs

Objective 1: Foster a culture of learning for all staff

Activities:
   a. Undertake a system-wide skill inventory to determine areas needing greater development
   b. Provide customized training through the Training Office
   c. Review existing training and create new modules based on ongoing staff needs and new organizational initiatives
   d. Develop core service competencies for all staff job titles, paired with appropriate training
   e. Develop methods for supervisors to monitor and evaluate employees’ core competencies
   f. Develop a set of new customer service standards and communicate them to staff
   g. Hold all staff accountable for performance

Objective 2: Promote the development of consistent technological skills for all staff

Activities:
   a. Establish technology competencies for all staff, including Polaris user techniques, mobile devices and apps
   b. Establish consistent guidelines for assisting customers with technology questions
   c. Establish a “trending” team to keep the library abreast of topics, equipment, services, and technology in the professional field and in the lives of county residents

Objective 3: Streamline communication to ensure that the staff and administration are informed quickly and consistently

Activities:
   a. Make the best use of current and emerging internal technology-based communications tools, including email, SharePoint, and instant messaging
   b. Create and implement an Emergency Communication Plan to ensure timely dissemination of emergency information to all staff
   c. Analyze staff survey results to identify communication development needs
   d. Update the existing Communication Plan to guide internal and external communications
   e. Update the library’s personnel policy manual
   f. Facilitate communication at all organizational levels via staff meetings, videoconferences, blogs, a weekly e-newsletter, organization-wide text messages, apps, social media, and photo-sharing sites to better link management, staff and the community
Objective 4: Empower and mentor staff to provide opportunities for growth and development and create cross-training programs

Activities:
- a. Review the current organization chart to determine appropriate staffing levels for routine branch and departmental work and develop new staffing models
- b. Reallocate staff as required to meet customer needs
- c. Allow staff to be trained across departments for greater understanding of functions and policies
- d. Offer staff the opportunity to work in multiple areas of the libraries to gain more expertise and prepare for promotion opportunities
- e. Review the Ocean County Library’s current succession structure and identify practices requiring immediate change or improvement
- f. Encourage professional development programs for all staff

Objective 5: Foster a diverse workforce

Activities:
- a. Communicate the Ocean County Library’s diversity mission and plan to all staff to build and sustain an inclusive workplace environment
- b. Offer career planning and professional development to all staff
- c. Provide all employees with the tools to enhance their effectiveness through training
Acknowledgments

OCEAN COUNTY LIBRARY COMMISSION 2012
Henry J. Mancini, Chairperson
Bonnie R. Peterson, Vice Chairperson
Sal Baglio
Susan L. Hutler
James F. Malone
James T. Mullins
Ruthanne Scaturro

OCEAN COUNTY LIBRARY COMMISSION 2013
Bonnie R. Peterson, Chairperson
Sal Baglio, Vice Chairperson
Susan L. Hutler
Henry J. Mancini
James F. Malone
James T. Mullins
Ruthanne Scaturro

OCEAN COUNTY LIBRARY MANAGEMENT
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Valerie Bell, Assistant Director of Public Services
Sara Hansen, Assistant Director of Operations
Joseph Cahill, Facilities Manager
Jennifer Doderer, Training Coordinator
James Ellis, Human Resources Director
David Evans, Technology Manager
Jessica Lynch, Senior Accountant
Zarita Mattox, Chief Librarian, Toms River Branch
Rita Oakes, Chief Librarian, Branch Services
Michael Bobish, Chief Librarian, Administration (2013)
Christine Matteo, Chief Librarian, Administration (2012)

OCEAN COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS LIAISON
Joseph H. Vicari

LIBRARY COMMISSION STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
Sal Baglio
Henry J. Mancini
Ruthanne Scaturro

STRATEGIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE
Marilyn Bass, Volunteers
Michael Bobish, Berkeley
Meagan Denigris, Brick
Kathy Falco, Lacey
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In order to assess community perceptions of the Ocean County Library, the following methods were used to gather information from county residents:

- An online and print survey was conducted over the course of 30 days in March 2013
- Thirteen traditional focus groups were held in April 2013 with 141 participants
- Multiple data-gathering moments were held among 17 groups of children, 14 Teen Advisory Board members, and two emerging adult (ages 18-29) groups

**Online and print survey**

A 13-question survey was posted on the library’s website for four weeks in March. The survey was also available in all branches in print, as well as Spanish and large-text formats. The staff publicized the survey with an inventive “Construct the Future” campaign, using posters, hard hats, and buttons. Staff directed customers to available print and digital surveys. The excitement and conversation with customers helped produce a dramatic response to the survey. The surveys provided customers with the opportunity to leave comments about the library. A total of 6,179 individuals, or over one percent of Ocean County’s population, responded to the survey. Ninety-five percent of the respondents said that they have library cards.

Many respondents took the time to comment on their own branches as well as their hopes for the future. The results assisted in the development of this plan and will contribute to future discussions about the library branches.

The survey participants most commonly used these words to describe the Ocean County Library:

- **Friendly**
- **Wonderful**
- **Excellent**

Participants also rated the importance of the Ocean County Library in their lives and in the life of their communities as follows:
Some of our customers’ comments included:

“I enjoy time with my 6 yr old daughter at the library.”
“I look at art on the walls & displays in cases and meet artists.”
“I bring my children to read and borrow books.”
“I come for the snakes.”
“I come to the library to attend family programs.”
“I bring my children to use the children’s computers.”
“I find home schooling materials.”
“I primarily use the eLibrary.com (formerly ListenNJ) for my kindle and mp3 audio books.”

99.5 percent of respondents believe that the Ocean County Library is important to the county, 91 percent that it is important to their town, and 92 percent that it is important to them and their family.

It is also worthwhile to note the high frequency with which participants report engaging in economic activity (40 percent) either before or after their trip to the library. Of that 40 percent, their activity can be seen in the following chart:

Many people report that they go shopping, out to lunch or dinner and run errand to the doctor, dentist or get gas for the car before or after a trip to the library. Many report making a stop at the local mall or other shopping area as well.
It is also interesting to note that:
• 69.7% of respondents borrow books
• 47.8% of respondents borrow DVDs
• 36.5% of respondents like to browse
• 35.5% of respondents borrow bestsellers
• 32.2% of respondents ask for staff assistance

Below is a sampling of comments by residents about how they use and depend upon the library:

“I have Parkinson’s disease and the library is an import source in keeping me supplied w/books and out of wife’s hair.”

“I’m a school bus driver. I create high honor roll prizes, awards, etc at the library. Great fun!”

“I play mahjong, attend seminars and go to blood pressure screenings.”

“I go to the library...because it’s fun.”

“I pick up books for my homebound customers.”

“I grade my students’ papers here every week.”

“I use the library for Ancestry.com.”

“...to attend children’s programs when my grandchildren visit.”

“The staff has helped me to update myself and become more computer savvy.”

Over 2,000 people expressed what they would like to see in their local branch regarding services, collections, and facilities. The most frequent comments across most branches are:
• More room
• Need a larger library
• More parking
• Need Sunday hours—all year round
• More hours
• More Spanish newspapers
• There are very long waits for popular items like bestsellers—get more please
• Many more computers
• More computer instruction
• More DVDs—greater variety

As an added bonus, 2,700 people provided their email addresses so they can receive the library’s e-newsletter detailing programs, services, and more.
Focus Groups

Ocean County residents were invited to participate in one of several focus groups. The consultants and library staff used these meetings to explore participants’ current level of satisfaction with library services and programs, to seek their ideas about the future of the Ocean County Library, and to provide a forum for voices in various communities.

More than 141 people attended focus group sessions to voice their concerns and participate in the library’s planning process. Qualitative information gathered during the sessions provided library planners with much to incorporate into the planning process. County residents who participated were eager to discuss their needs, as well as praise and critique the library. Many felt that the library played an essential role after Sandy in providing needed resources to many shore communities.

Individuals were recruited for 13 focus groups including: Seniors & Providers, Residents Affected by Superstorm Sandy, Economically Disadvantaged Residents & Providers, Community-Based Organizations, School Administrators & Partners, Religious Leaders, Differently Abled People & Providers, Early Learning & Early Literacy, and Hispanic Leaders & Spanish Speakers. Participants represented every geographical area of the county and all ages.

All facilitators attended a training session with the consultants to review the focus group process, including note-taking and conducting a productive meeting.

Focus group leaders held discussions in which residents expressed thanks for the library, as well as their hopes for future services. Residents primarily requested:

- Increased access to library resources, including computers, collections, and facilities
- Marketing and communication to residents about the library’s resources and programs
- Use and instruction in digital resources
- New or additional resources for job seeking, parenting, English language skills, citizenship, and enjoyment
- Outlets for civic engagement for all in the communities
- A place for all residents to connect with others

Specific comments included:

- Expanded or enhanced hours of operation, including Sunday hours
- More e-mail communication
- Consider new community programs to benefit residents
- Promote the library through traditional and new media, including social media
- Create an Ocean County Library mobile presence
- Improve the library’s website and make it informative and easy to use
- Use social media sites and keep the information current and relevant
- Stay ahead of technology changes in order to provide resources to residents. Don’t follow—lead!
- Continue to offer computer and other digital device training often, both in classes and by appointment
- Keep all branch facilities up to date with technology and services
- Offer quicker turnaround time on holds of popular books
- Provide an interesting and useful array of services and resources for all residents
Similar in many ways to the survey comments, many of the participants in the focus groups shared their opinions about the branches they use, and suggested the following areas of improvement:

- Expand branches that are crowded with people due to population changes
- Expand parking in those locations that are heavily used
- Consider additions or replacements for branches that are in high demand, or consider small feeder branches to help meet demand
- Anticipate the demand for increased library services by the young families moving into Lakewood, Jackson, and other areas
- Consider a larger southern hub branch to meet demand in that area as it grows

**Population Growth in Ocean County**

According to the Ocean County Planning Board’s *Comprehensive Master Plan* (2011), the population of Ocean County had reached 576,567 in 2010. According to the US Census Bureau, Ocean County was the fastest-growing county in the state. The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) projected the Ocean County population will grow to 776,300 by 2035, or 34.6 percent. Ocean County is home to more veterans and seniors than any other county in the state. The implications for the Ocean County Library’s facilities’ plan and services include:

- Almost all of Ocean County’s population growth since the early 1900s was due to immigration, rather than the natural increase of population.
- Population is concentrated in the northeastern and central municipalities, along the barrier island beaches and along the Route 9 corridor.
- Lakewood Township has the highest population, followed by the Townships of Toms River, Brick, Jackson, Manchester and Berkeley.
- Many of the southern and western areas of Ocean County are located in the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Area, and are primarily rural.
- The latest age statistics for Ocean County show the movement and aging of Baby Boomers from 2000 to 2010 and the general increase of population across most of the age groups.
- Over the past 50 years, Ocean County has attracted a large number of young families in search of starter homes.
- Ocean County also maintains a large population of seniors, many of whom choose to reside in adult communities. The 65+ demographic represents just over 23% of Ocean County’s 2010 population.
- The current senior population is concentrated throughout many areas of Ocean County, including Berkeley, Barnegat, Manchester, Lakewood, and Ocean Townships. Those towns are also where most of the adult communities are located.
- The largest minority concentrations are in Lakewood Township and South Toms River Borough. The minority population of Lakewood Township totals 29,226, or 31 percent. In South Toms River, the minority population totals 1,737, or 47 percent. Other higher minority concentrations are in Toms River, Jackson, Brick, Berkeley and Manchester.
- Ocean County’s largest age group, 25-44 year-olds, is expected to be the fastest-growing group in the foreseeable future. This productive age group will increase the demand for high-salary jobs. The second- and third-largest age groups are 45-64 year-olds and those older than 65, respectively.
• Employment within health care services has increased significantly over the last two decades and is projected to remain at the forefront of Ocean County job growth. This sector includes ambulatory health care, nursing, and residential care and social assistance. Since Ocean County has a large population of senior citizens, and an increasing population of 45-64 year-olds ("Baby Boomers") advancing toward retirement, demand for these services will continue to increase.

• Retail and trade services have historically employed a large segment of the workforce and this is projected to continue. Many of these jobs are in the seasonal tourism industry, which remains very popular in Ocean County. The tourism industry generated $3.35 billion to the local economy in 2010. Ocean County was third in the state behind Atlantic and Cape May Counties.

• The construction industry has been seriously impacted by the housing recession of the last several years. New construction in the residential and commercial markets experienced a loss of 2,029 jobs in Ocean County from 2004 to 2009.

• The library anticipates that the downturn in the construction industry should reverse as Ocean County rebuilds communities and infrastructure following Hurricane Sandy.