

Melrose Public Library

Strategic Plan FY2021 – FY2026

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WHY DO A STRATEGIC PLAN?

Strategic planning is required by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC). Libraries who wish to be considered for grants from the MBLC under the federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) or the Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program need to have an approved multi-year strategic plan on file with the MBLC. Melrose has been the recipient of several LSTA grants over the years, and we are currently on the waiting list for a major construction/renovation grant. It is important to us to remain in compliance with this requirement.

Additionally, strategic plans are simply good organizational practice. In the past, many organizations worked on long range plans then put them on a shelf and didn't really use them. Today, we appreciate the opportunity to reach out to the community for feedback on what we're doing well and where we can improve. We work as a staff to ensure that our goals are in line with what the community wants.

There are many, many services we would like to provide as a public library. Strategic planning helps us to prioritize as we budget, and as we plan services and activities in the near and more distant future.

Ultimately, strategic planning is a tool that we use to connect with ourselves and our community to ensure that we continue providing the best library service possible.

MISSION & VISION STATEMENTS

Mission

Melrose Public Library's staff, building and collections provide a portal for all to explore, imagine and engage. The library is where literacy, local history and community connect!

Vision

Melrose Public Library-- where people of all ages, experiences, abilities and beliefs can belong. As a 21st century community institution with roots in the late 19th century, the library is grounded in the present and has its sights set on the future. Carefully curated resources provide wide access to books, media, and technology. Skilled and welcoming staff design innovative programming to foster individual growth and enhance community engagement. The Melrose Public Library offers places to meet, study, read, engage in civic discourse and share all our stories.

USER NEEDS ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY & LIBRARY DESCRIPTION

History of Melrose

Indigenous peoples inhabited present-day Melrose as far back as 10,000 years ago. They developed trails in the area and likely used Ell Pond for ice fishing and other activities. Some of Melrose's major roads, such as Main Street, Lebanon Street, Lynde Street and other parts of the city, likely date back to routes that were traveled prior to European settlement in the 1600s.

After the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1633, the area including Melrose was part of Charlestown, and then in 1649 the areas known today as Malden, Everett, and Melrose became Malden. The population of present-day Melrose grew slowly in the 1600s through early 1800s until the Boston & Maine Railroad was built in 1845, with stations at Wyoming Hill and Melrose Highlands. After the arrival of rail, and subsequently in the arrival of west-east streetcars near the turn of the century, Melrose's population grew exponentially. In 1845, it was around 400 residents, and by 1870 it was 3,414. Melrose was incorporated as an independent town in 1850 and, after residents voted to change its form of government, became a city in 1900. The advent of the railroad in the early 19th century made Melrose an attractive place to live for those who worked in the capital city of Boston. The city continued to grow and by 1915 its population was 16,880.

As automobiles became a more dominant mode of transportation, streetcars were discontinued, and roadways such as the Metropolitan District Commission's East Fellsway, built. The city reached a population of 25,333 in 1940. Suburbanization led to further growth in the 1950s and 1960s, and the city's population peaked at 33,180 in the 1970 Census.

In 1977, the MBTA Orange Line was extended to Oak Grove Station, bringing rapid transit to Melrose, making it even more feasible for commuters to live in Melrose and work in Boston. Despite this greater accessibility, the city's population declined in each decade from 1970 to 2010, when the population was 26,983.

In the era when shopping malls were becoming more popular, community members worked to establish Downtown Melrose as a Historic District. These historic preservation efforts in the 1970s and 1980s helped to solidify the city's path of development that defines Melrose today. Many of the city's residences date from the Victorian era and its downtown Main Street business district maintains the aspect of its Victorian turn-of-the-century origin. Further, since many of Melrose's streets were constructed before the advent of automobiles and the street grid is relatively compact, the city is notably walker-friendly.

Population - growth

Since 2010, the city's population has been growing again. The 2018 US Census Population Estimate is 28,193, a population increase of roughly 5% since 2010. Over the past decade, the population of children ages 0-9 in Melrose has grown, resulting in an increased elementary school grade population. Using American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year estimates for 2006-2010 and 2013-2017 for comparisons, some growth is evident in nearly every age cohort between 2010 and 2017.

Melrose has one pre-K school, five elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. There are two private schools in Melrose (Melrose Montessori School and St. Mary's School). The youth population has been, and is expected to continue, growing, according to the New England School Development Council (www.nesdec.org). The library serves this growing population with materials, services and programming designed to enrich, entertain and educate.

Population - demographics

The city has become more racially and ethnically diverse; it was about 85.3% White Non-Hispanic in 2017 and 88.6% White Non-Hispanic in 2010, according to ACS 5-Year Estimates for 2013-2017 and 2006-2010. Within broad categories of race and ethnicity, nearly every group has increased in numbers, and every group except White Non-Hispanic has increased in proportion of the population: about 3.3% are Hispanic or Latino, 3.5% are Black or African American Non-Hispanic, 6.1% are Asian Non-Hispanic, and 1.8% are two or more races and Non-Hispanic.

About 15% of Melrose's population age 5 and older speaks a language other than English at home. Beyond these other-than-English-at-home speakers, more than a third, perhaps even 40%, speak English less than very well. Some of the languages spoken at home in addition to English are "French, Haitian, or Cajun", Spanish, "Chinese (incl. Mandarin, Cantonese)", Vietnamese, Arabic, "Russian, Polish, or other Slavic languages", and German, according to ACS 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017.

About 14% of the city's population is foreign born. While exact figures for ACS estimates are unreliable for such small sample sizes, the top twenty countries of origin for foreign born Melrosians are Haiti, Vietnam, Brazil, Canada, Ireland, China (excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan), Greece, India, Italy, Nepal, Morocco, Mexico, Colombia, Japan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, United Kingdom (inc. Crown Dependencies), France, Jordan, El Salvador, Hong Kong, and Czechoslovakia (includes Czech Republic and Slovakia).

Of the 11,481 estimated households in Melrose, about 63% are family households, 31% are single-person households, and the remaining are non-family households with two or more individuals. More than a third of the single-person households are occupied by a resident age 65 or older. The average family household size for Melrose is 3.12 (and the average household size for all households is 2.42).

About six in ten Melrose households live in single-family homes, and about two-thirds of these homes are occupied by family households. About four in ten Melrose households live in buildings with two or more homes, and two-thirds of the residents in these homes are non-family households. A third of Melrose residents are renters; just under half of the renter households are family households.

The city's labor force participation rate for the population age 16 years and over is about 72.6% and the unemployment rate is about 3.7%. About 35% of 16 to 19 year-olds participate in the labor force. About 39% of 65 to 74 year olds are still in the labor force and about 4% of Melrose residents age 75 and over are still in the labor force.

Among husband-wife married couple families in Melrose, both spouses are in the labor force for more than six in ten households, and for those families with children, about three-quarters have both parents in the labor force at least part time. Nearly all Melrose families with children under 18 years old, including other family types, participate in the labor force. Data for same-sex married couples and for genders other than male and female are unfortunately not available in the Census.

The mean travel time to work for those in the labor force is about 32.7 minutes. About 22% of Melrose households use public transportation to commute, and about 3% work at home. Two-thirds of commuters drive alone to work.

About 95% of the city's population is a high school graduate or higher.

About 55% of the city's population has a bachelor's degree or higher education level.

About 5% of the city's population are veterans.

About 5% of the city's population under 65 years old has a disability.

About 8% of households do not have a computer.

About 11% of households do not have a broadband Internet subscription.

About 4% of the population is in poverty.

About 1 in 5 homeowners are cost-burdened, meaning they spend 30% or more of their household income on housing expenses.

About half of renters are cost-burdened, with over a quarter of renter households spending between 30-50% of their household income on housing expenses and about 17% spending more than half their income on housing expenses.

Median family income in 2017 was \$93,434 as compared with \$92,878 for Middlesex County and families, \$74,167 for Massachusetts.

[<https://censusreporter.org/profiles/97000US2507620-melrose-school-district-ma/>]

When looking at highest level of education achieved among persons 25 years and older, 31% have bachelor's degrees, 24% have graduate or professional degrees, 16% are high school graduates, 15% have some college, 8% have associate degrees, 4% have some high school and 2% have less than 9th grade education. [<https://censusreporter.org/profiles/97000US2507620-melrose-school-district-ma/>]

The Melrose population is slightly older than the state average, with a median age of 40.5, where the Middlesex County median age is 38.5 and Massachusetts is 39.4 according to the 2017 American Community Survey. In Melrose, 16.2% of the population is 65 and over, (15.5% for the state) and 20.5% is under 19 (20.4% for the state).

[<https://censusreporter.org/profiles/97000US2507620-melrose-school-district-ma/>]

City Government

A community of homes since its inception, Melrose remains primarily residential, with a small percentage of commercial and industrial acreage. Melrose has a comparatively small commercial tax base, with roughly 70% of its FY2019 revenue coming from residential taxes. This makes the rules and limitations of Proposition 2 ½ very important to the fiscal health of the community; an override of Proposition 2 ½ was successfully passed in Spring 2019 for the first time in over two decades. The city has a comprehensive growth management plan, subdivision control laws and requires site plan approval. The median sale price for residences in the first 6 months of 2019 was \$585,500 [*Banker & Tradesman*]. The Melrose Housing Authority (MHA) provides affordable housing to Melrose residents. The MHA currently assists over 550 households through our Public Housing, and Rental Assistance Programs. The MHA owns and manages 322 units of State-Aided Family & Elderly Conventional Housing, and is currently authorized to assist 240 households on the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. [www.melroseha.com]

Today, Melrose has a city government with a Mayor and 11 City Councilors. The city is in the 5th Congressional District, the 3rd Middlesex Senatorial District, and the 35th Middlesex Representative District. There are 20,041 registered voters: 11,113 unenrolled, 6,826 Democrats, 1,905 Republicans, 56 Libertarians and 12 Green-Rainbow.

[https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/elepdf/enrollment_count_20190201.pdf]

Melrose - General Facts

Melrose is located on 4.7 square miles, about seven miles north of Boston, with a population density of 6,057 persons per square mile. Today Melrose has a population of 28,193, of whom 20,162 were active library users on June 30, 2019. The City is part of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and is considered to be within the Boston Metropolitan Statistical Area. Transportation is available via commuter rail from North Station, or via the MBTA Orange Line from Oak Grove subway station. Three bus service lines run from Oak Grove subway station. The MBTA also offers a paratransit service for the elderly and disabled. Route 1 to the east of the city and Interstate Route 93 to the west offer north-south highway access.

Melrose has its own cultural, recreational and entertainment organizations with a community symphony orchestra, choral society, theater groups, sports leagues, restaurants and a cable television network. A modern baseball field, two golf courses and the bordering Middlesex Fells Reservation provide many and varied opportunities for recreation.

The undisputed reputation of Melrose as a fine community in which to live is strengthened by its public library. The City recognizes the importance of a vigorous public library and is dedicated to making the Melrose Public Library the very best it can be. The Melrose Public Library is a dynamic institution that offers a vast array of resources, programs, and services designed to meet the community's educational, informational, and recreational requirements. The community's markedly high regard for the library is due in large part to the library staff's unfailing professionalism and the guidance and support of the library trustees and city administrators.

MPL History

The Melrose Public Library was established after a Town Meeting vote on March 27, 1871. Initially, the library included a modest collection of books and was housed at one end of the Selectmen's Room in the Waverly Block on Essex Street, where Waverly Apartments is located today. The library moved to a room in the newly constructed Town Hall in 1874, and after outgrowing that space, it moved to the new YMCA building across the street. Around the turn of the century, Mayor John Larrabee and other community members petitioned Andrew Carnegie for a grant to build a new library. The present-day Melrose Public Library on West Emerson Street was built in 1904 with those grant funds.

In 1963, a growing collection of materials and increasing usage by the community necessitated the construction of an addition to the Melrose Public Library building.

Throughout this time, the Melrose Public Library has been a central community facility. In 1990, the library was awarded a Massachusetts Library Construction Grant that enabled major targeted improvements to be made to the library's interior and exterior. Public computers with database access were added in the 1990s, and the Melrose Public Library, like other libraries, was increasingly viewed as a place to get internet access. This service grew throughout the 2000s. A significant individual donation, with a community matching challenge, allowed the library to introduce wireless internet service to Melrose patrons in 2006. Over time, new materials formats such as CDs, DVDs and downloadable materials have been added to reflect the changing ways that patrons use their library.

The library has struggled to find a truly separate space for its young adult population, but with the help of the Friends of Melrose Public Library, an interior space designer was hired in 2014 and a small but comfortable space was created for tweens and teens.

In January 2017, Melrose successfully applied for a construction/renovation grant; we are now #3 on the waiting list for funding. The proposed project would include a modest expansion with major upgrades to the physical plant and floorplans resulting in significantly better utilization of the existing space.

MPL Now

In FY2019, the library owned 92,715 physical items, and provided access to 21,907 e-books. Physical items were circulated 280,541 times, and e-books and e-audio books through Overdrive were circulated 28,818 times. Adult and Young Adult physical circulations accounted for 46.37% of total circulation, with Children's materials accounting for 53.63%.

Library usage has been seeing a steady increase over the past several years. Just over 70% of the Melrose population (cradle to grave) have active library cards. Our current challenge is how to keep pace with the needs of our eager community!

Library Usage Statistics	2015-2018					
	% Change	FY2019	FY2018	FY2017	FY2016	FY2015
Total Programs Held	50.16%	464	449	441	346	309
Program Attendance	40.32%	15,026	13,222	12,702	12,284	10,708

Meeting Room Use (total)	73.47%	935	773	773	633	539
Material Circulated (physical items & e-books)	7.55%	311,551	305,934	299,669	293,285	289,669
FTE Staff (Mon – Sat)	0.28%	14.13	14.13	14.13	14.09	14.09

MPL Needs

The library’s staffing levels have not increased meaningfully with the increased use of our services. While all library areas are feeling the pressure, children’s services are particularly strained. The population increases so frequently discussed in relation to the schools have been keenly felt in the public library. The library has not added a full-time staff member in at least 50 years. The current levels are not adequate, and the current rate of growth in services is not sustainable without addressing this issue.

The Department of Public Works maintains the current facility, with the exception of the decorative plantings on the grounds, which are funded by the Trustees. The proposed construction/renovation building project will enable us to significantly improve efficiency and service, ensure that our historic building is up to code, and provide the flexibility to move forward with modern library services as they evolve. Each passing year shows more clearly the need for this renovation and expansion. The library is very excited about the possibility of improving access outside and inside the library, restoring/preserving our historic building, and enhancing services to the community through a renovation/expansion.

INTERVIEW, SURVEY & GROUP WORK SUMMARY

Interviews were conducted with a variety of stakeholders in the community. Following is a summary of those conversations, with full text included as Appendix A:

Despite their differing areas of expertise, stakeholders were uniform in many of their observations. The talented, skilled and welcoming staff were universally noted and appreciated. Areas for improvement included the need for access to the library and library programming during non-traditional hours to address families with multiple earners; and the need to be inclusive in the broadest sense -- from improving handicapped access to the building to targeting services to specific populations (e.g., ESL, elderly). In expressing the interests of their specific populations, stakeholders shared overwhelmingly positive feelings about the library's mission and its delivery of that mission. The commerce sector ably discussed the library as a key to bringing new residents to Melrose; the human rights commission saw the library as sharing core elements of its humanistic mission; the mayor and alderperson celebrate the library as a civic center for community engagement, education, and discourse.

A **survey** was widely distributed in the community, via email blasts, physical copies in several City locations, and a link on the library’s website. The library’s Friends group passed out copies at events such as the local Farmer’s Market. 784 surveys were completed. A summary of results is below, with expanded results included as Appendix B.

The survey results indicated that the public feels strongly about the four areas that have been incorporated as goals. The vast majority of respondents are regular users, with an overall positive feel for what the library does offer. Many survey respondents made a significant effort to comment with

respect and appreciation for the library staff and their work in creating a welcoming, community-oriented environment to foster literacy. The importance of a well-qualified staff as part of the value of the library was clear.

When asked how we can improve, for the most part the desire was expressed for an expansion of the services we already offer. Throughout the comments, a strong theme was improved hours, with specific feedback about the disconnect some patrons, particularly families, feel between our existing hours and the lifestyles of modern families. While the library is well-used during the existing hours, those hours do not seem to reflect the changing demographics (families with two working parents; individuals who work remotely, etc.). Similarly, it seems that more programming on evenings and weekends for families, and during the daytime for seniors, would be welcome.

While the library collections were well rated overall, there were several comments regarding the depth and breadth of the collections, and increasing the diversity of offerings. The number of references to ebooks, e-audiobooks and online access to materials in general has increased significantly. This is also reflected in our regular circulation statistics for online offerings.

Melrose's historic Carnegie library is beloved in the community. Historically, few complaints are made about this building, although there were several comments in this survey about need for "an upgrade," or comparisons to other towns' libraries viewed more favorably. Many respondents seemed aware of the pending grant opportunity, and viewed it as a positive upcoming improvement. Although no areas of inquiry had the facilities as a top response focus, the ratings of "fair" and "good" far outweighed "excellent" for facilities, which is a shift from the past. Additionally, as we have seen before, some community desires are not possible to meet in the current facility due to its limitations.

Intensive **group work** was done with both the strategic planning committee and library staff at critical junctures in the process. The core strategic planning team met as a whole four times from October 2018 - March 2019 to share their ideas about Melrose and the library's central place in the city, and to prioritize completing a mission and vision statement that not only described the MPL but also envisioned the past, present, and future of the library and the city. Work on a strategic plan based on new mission and vision statements requires the input of a widespread group. The core strategic planning team reviewed survey/focus group/interview data, responded to it, and prioritized a list of goals (achievable, aspirational, and wish list). Further, the core strategic planning committee conducted much of its work through smaller task groups (document, stakeholder, survey, community description). The team identified ways to reach out to the community at large (in library and online surveys) and target groups with particular interests and/or which might be left out of the survey population (focus groups and interviews). They worked individually and collaboratively, in person, via email, and via shared drives.

Throughout the process, it became evident that the MPL staff was not only a key stakeholder in the plan and the primary executors of any actions described therein, but also they were a group of professionals that the core team and the community as a whole trusted and found

invaluable. Thus, at two points, the trustee serving as Chair of the strategic planning process met with the staff during staff meetings. In the initial meeting (April 2019), she guided the staff in brainstorming goals, reacting to goals others had developed, and identifying the viability of these goals (achievable, aspirational, wish list). In the second meeting (August 2019), she conducted a round-robin activity to outline key components of the Fiscal Year 2021 action plan, the first action plan to come out of this strategic plan. The round robin moved from individual ideas about actions that tied to established goals, then asked for teams to build on the individual actions ideas, then concluded with wider collaboration; thus, the process moved from individual to collective. The first process was invaluable to the ultimate development of plan goals. The second process resulted in numerous achievable and ambitious actions that the Library Director will cull from for a one-year plan.

GOALS

After soliciting discussion and feedback from the community at large, community stakeholders, the strategic planning committee, and staff, the Library Director and Committee Chair determined four goals representing the overriding themes for planning, with an additional four priorities which will weave through each goal. The priorities, or areas of special emphasis, are (a) historical resources, (b) technical services, (c) intentional diversity/inclusion, and (b) new initiatives and ongoing assessment.

The **goals** are:

Goal 1: Comprehensive Collections - Melrose Public Library has collections that reflect depth and breadth of topics, a wide range of formats, and current material as well as standard works.

Goal 2: Diverse Services – Melrose Public Library offers programming, hours and technology resources that reflect the current lifestyles of residents and publicity that actively reaches out to, and engages with, the community.

Goal 3: User-Centric Facilities – Melrose Public Library will strive to provide well-maintained facilities that are clean, welcoming and accessible, containing appropriate spaces for staff and public, with a focus on user-centric design for libraries.

Goal 4: Superb Staffing – Melrose Public Library staff will engage in training opportunities that encourage excellent, professional library service. Staffing levels will be maintained and enhanced to allow time for direct patron interaction, program and service planning, and outstanding implementation of library services.

ACTION PLAN, FY2021

Each year the Library Director will work with the library staff to develop an action plan for the upcoming fiscal year. The action plan represents the practical steps that will be taken to achieve the goals listed above. Each step will address the following: What do we want to accomplish, how will we get there, and what will be the outcome?

SAMPLE ACTION:

Goal 1: Comprehensive Collections - Melrose Public Library has collections that reflect depth and breadth of topics, a wide range of formats, and current material as well as standard works.

Objective: Ensure access to health information for all patrons.

- Activity: Assess existing health collection; weed outdated materials
- Activity: Perform diversity audit on health collection; are there materials in an adequate variety of formats and topics
- Activity: Address areas of weakness; advocate for funding as necessary
- Activity: Promote existing materials through displays and social media
- Outcome: All residents will have access to a well-rounded collection of information that contributes to the health and well-being of the community.

PLANNING METHODOLOGY

The staff of the Melrose Public Library and the Strategic Planning Committee developed the library's new strategic plan under the leadership of Committee Chair Cathryn Mercier and Library Director Linda Gardener. The Committee Chair and Library Director met regularly to develop a core strategic planning team that would include wide representation from the community and community interests. In the bustling environs of Melrose, where new buildings and renovated Victorians continue to increase the city's population in varied ways, the Committee Chair and Library Director wanted to give as many individuals and aspects of the city as possible a chance to participate and be heard.

The committee was formed in September 2018, consisting of representatives from the staff, members of the community, the public school system, the Board of Aldermen, the library Board of Trustees, and the Friends of Melrose Public Library, Inc. They worked both as a whole and in subcommittees through the end of Summer 2019.

Key to the development of this plan was the decision to revise the existing mission statement, and create a vision statement for the first time. The new statements are the result of extensive discussion by both staff and committee members. Other important components of the work were the development and distribution of a survey, several targeted interviews, and intensive group work with the staff and within the committee itself.

The discussions that took place in both the staff sessions and the Strategic Planning Committee meetings, combined with review of the surveys and interviews, drove the end result. They enabled the Library Director and Committee Chair to establish goals that are in line with the current trajectory of both the City and the library's future. These goals are in line with the new Mission and Vision. Along with the goals, strong themes emerged that will be interwoven throughout each year's action plan. The library staff, working with the newly formulated goals and themes, worked to prioritize activities for the Fiscal 2021 Action Plan. The Library Board of Trustees received updates throughout the process, and reviewed the strategic plan at their meeting in September 2019.

GOVERNING BOARD APPROVAL

Approved by the Library Board of Trustees on .

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS

MAYOR OF MELROSE, Gail Infurna:

The library is one of the jewels in Melrose because of its services, knowledge, and the qualified, friendly staff. It is the place that every newcomer to the city should go – for a welcome, for a sense of community, and to become familiar with the wide-ranging resources. I've recently become a more frequent user of the book loans, including the library's collection and other collections to which we have access. MPL conducts excellent programming across ages; I'm particularly impressed by the "every 2nd grader" program that collaborates with the schools. We have benefited from talented staff at the library and from the continuity of staff across changes in library administration. The library runs so smoothly, it's almost a "no news is good news" situation. I wonder if we have enough technology and computer stations available to serve the demand? The handicapped entrance is unwelcoming and poses a "dignity" issue. Also, that door off the back ramp is not that easy to open. The library needs to restore some of the hours it has lost over time; it needs funding for construction and funding for maintenance and repair work to keep an old building going – and to keep accreditation to keep us in line for a new building that would better meet the city's growing needs.

BOARD OF ALDERMEN CHAIR, Jennifer Lemmerman:

The library is a central gathering space in the city. It offers accessibility to internet and other technologies and resources. It offers programming across a wide spectrum of interests. Staff strive to welcome individuals from across the city, whether one is seeking a children's program, a book to read, reference help in using the many resources, or a warm place to shelter. The access to NOBLE for ILL and for use of ebooks are valuable assets to our citizens. The library's play spaces for children and children's programming are especially popular. First need for improvement is relocation of the handicapped access ramp and door to make them welcoming. The library areas for improvement largely require additional resources: more public/community meeting spaces for small group use; a larger gathering space for events, such as "author's corner" or a sponsored lecture; extended hours; and children's programming offered outside the working day (e.g., after 5). The library's "Melrose archives" could become even more of a feature of the library and more central to the life of the city. Over the next five years, how might the library explore ways to interact with the Aldermen?

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT-CURRICULUM, MELROSE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, Margaret Adams:
Marianne Stanton and the rest of the children's room staff are simply phenomenal. Their outreach to the schools, Marianne's knowledge of education and educational processes, and their overall understanding of curriculum have made the MPL children's collection an invaluable one to the MPS. In addition, Marianne has done good training programs on book selection for our PTOs, has collaborated with us to bring all second graders to the library to get a library card, and has conducted meaningful and very popular summer reading programs. [are MPL's summer reading programs better attended than those at other libraries?] Are there connections to the school not being used: perhaps there's a senior intern who could work in the archives? Or some connection between the archives and the third-grade curriculum project on the history of Melrose. The library as a whole has been an essential partner in the family ESL grant/program. Not only does that program meet in the library (being open in the evenings when the schools

are not helps solve a logistics challenge with such programs), but also that meeting space enables the participants in the ESL program to become a larger part of the Melrose community and have access to its resources, its general knowledge about Melrose. At MA's home library (in Dedham), they have a collection of resources that go far beyond books: people can check out ipads, toys and games, robots, knitting sets, pressure cookers, breadmakers, scooters; has MPL ever thought about those kind of "loans"? Dedham stores these items on the bookshelves and, even though MA wonders about giving up book space and funds for these items, they intrigue her. They tap multiple literacies, mobilize a different kind of access, and represent a different kind of generational use of the library. Similarly, she wondered about 3-D printers; she also noted that Dedham does not charge for copies made in the library. MA challenges the library to improve its social media presence. Building a stronger, regular social media presence (perhaps on the City page) enables the library to be known widely and for others to sing regularly the praises of the library; over time – and a relatively short one – that presence builds support for the library in many venues. By extension, she wondered if the library could reach out to other constituencies in the City, for example, the human rights commission or the commission on women? Parks and recreation? How might these conversations create affiliations with these different political players across the City? She sees the fundamental platform of any strategic plan: how to survive in these changing times?

COUNCIL ON AGING DIRECTOR, Dawn Folopoulos:

A brief and practical conversation was held. The Director does not live in Melrose, but is committed to the senior residents of the City. The preferences of seniors are shifting, as the population ages. The elder members of the population still prefer physical books, and feel it is important to maintain these collections. The baby boomers and seniors who were or perhaps still are commuting find value in the audio book collections. In any format, books are important to them. The library excels in the area of staffing, having staff who are friendly, and willing to help the senior population navigate both the physical library and the online catalog and other resources. It would be wonderful if the library could be a trusted resource in providing programs for seniors that involve "protecting your assets" information, and general financial education for seniors. Programs that investigate topics such as "good and bad" reverse mortgages could help the senior population make educated choices for themselves. The library is also an ideal location for teaching seniors how to use ebooks devices and the Overdrive library. Outreach could be done with "remember when storytimes" at local senior housing. The ramp in its current location is a barrier to access and should be improved. The elevator location does not provide convenient access, especially from the back door where the ramp is located. It is important to have a mix of chair styles – arms and no arms, comfortable and not too low, to allow for easy sitting and rising.

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION:

This conversation practically attended to the questions and turned to aspirational possibilities for the MPL. The MPL and the HRC share some essential missions around citizenship, community engagement, and the cultivation of practices, policies, tools and a way of life committed to literacy/literacies, cultural competencies, and inclusion. The MPL is a central location in the city for discussions about citizenship and is the place that holds the resources – books, staff, patrons, technologies – to access those tools. How could the MPL and the HRC

work together on additional shared programming? The MPL is crucial space for HRC discussions because it is a neutral and unbiased space as well as being opened at a variety of hours to accommodate programming at different times to reach different audiences. The HRC English conversation group serves as one example of groups benefiting from the library as that safe meeting space. In addition, by bringing in the English conversation group, members of that group become exposed to the MPL resources, they see and identify others who might be valuable to them (or to whom they might be valuable) in negotiating the municipality, and they begin to develop their own sense of membership and identity within the City. The MPL needs to provide content and generate content; they need to be innovative in programming, access and space usage to amplify the civic discourse in which all members of the community should participate. The MPL can develop dynamic relationships with other government entities in Melrose; why limit important citywide discussions to the Aldermanic Chambers? How might the MPL develop partnerships with other commissions (HRC, Commission on Women, and the newly-approved-but-not-yet-formed Commission on Disabilities) to further collectively share their individual and shared missions? The design of the MPL as physical space remains crucial in its movement of people in and out, in its multigenerational and intergenerational outreaches, and in its capacity to advance a city-wide culture of engagement. The MPL is known for excellent children's programming and HRC enjoyed the "cleaning day" and MLK partnerships. In addition, might the MPL consider things like new resident's training, pop-up libraries, specific "libguides" to topics of interest across the city (e.g., curated booklists?). The MPL needs to develop a stronger social media presence, in part to strengthen and share the individual and wide-spread voices of support for the MPL, its work, and its strengths.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE:

The Chair of the Chamber offered a largely personal perspective. Currently, the Chamber doesn't have any shared events with the MPL. It does point people in the direction of MPL for resources and information, but there is not a formal partnership between the two entities. Perhaps there should be? The Chamber's "Welcome to Melrose" program greets new residents with a reusable shopping bag filled with contributions from around town (e.g., a dessert card from Turner's, a mug from Edward Jones). Perhaps there could be some kind of welcome/introduction in the packet from the MPL or the Friends? As an individual library user, Lauren and her husband had the MPL as one of their first stopping points when they moved to the city about six years ago. She sees the library as a place to become knowledgeable about and connected with the community. It's also a gathering space for community. "The library was a first point of contact for our family and, as we continue to grow our family, we have grown with the MPL." They take particular advantage of children's programming and the multiple resources (and talented staff) in the children's room. The family uses ILL, the pass programs, and book borrowing privileges. While she feels that her family is well-served, Lauren wonders about those who don't know how to access the library, either for borrowing or for browsing. Are there areas, or populations, that need outreach. The school-library connection is so strong, as are literacy programs. What about working parents? How do they enjoy the library with their children? And could the hours expand?

APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESULTS

Melrose Public Library conducted a community survey through the month of February 2019, developed by a working group within the Strategic Planning Committee using JotForm. The

library distributed the survey in print and online. Ultimately, the library collected a total of 784 responses. In the narrative sections, we saw several motifs, and categorized responses through these motifs to see emerging patterns. The motifs used were: Atmosphere/Community; Children's Room; Collections; Facilities; Hours; Programs; Services; and Staffing.

This survey, combined with the interviews and the facilitated work of the planning committee and library staff, was instrumental in assessing the community's library needs.

Question 1: Do you have a library card?

With 780 responses, all but 16 had library cards. Some of the "no" answers later indicated that they were new to town, and had not yet visited the library. With an estimated population of 28,193, and 20,162 active library cards as of June 30, 2019, this is not a surprising answer, but did validate our sense of Melrose as a very library-oriented community.

Question 2: On average, how often do you visit the library?

771 answers were logged. With 407 replying monthly, and 312 replying weekly, it is clear that the majority of respondents were mostly regular users. There were 43 "never" responses, and 9 responded with daily visits. Some of the "never" respondents specified in the comments section that they are really "occasional" users.

Question 3: If you don't regularly use the library, why not? Are there obstacles to accessing the library? Are there resources you need that the library doesn't provide?

Of 202 answers, the majority of people who didn't come regularly indicated that they prefer to use the library online. This showed that some online users don't include themselves as "regular" library users, which was interesting. Of the remainder, 35 indicated no obstacles, simply lifestyle and 61 cited personal habit. The most significant obstacle within the library's environment was hours, with 32 comments. The most common requests involved weekend hours in the summer, and earlier hours in the mornings.

Question 4: How would you rate each of the following library services? (Quality)

Customer Service: Excellent: 665, Good: 88, Don't Know/NA: 12, Fair: 7, Poor: 0

Collection (books, DVDs, music, newspapers, etc.): Excellent: 286, Good: 364, Don't Know/NA: 37, Fair: 76, Poor: 6

Online Services: Excellent: 296, Good: 283, Don't Know/NA: 142, Fair: 43, Poor: 3

Museum Passes: Excellent: 308, Good: 237, Don't Know/NA: 199, Fair: 24, Poor: 2

Interlibrary Loan: Excellent: 476, Good: 153, Don't Know/NA: 128, Fair: 10, Poor: 1

Computers & Printers: Excellent: 150, Good: 142, Don't Know/NA: 412, Fair: 52, Poor: 10

Internet Access: Excellent: 188, Good: 148, Don't Know/NA: 397, Fair: 29, Poor: 3

Facilities: Excellent: 245, Good: 347, Don't Know/NA: 41, Fair: 121, Poor: 12

Hours of Operation: Excellent: 211, Good: 361, Don't Know/NA: 18, Fair: 153, Poor: 24

Overall Service: Excellent: 415, Good: 319, Don't Know/NA: 8, Fair: 26, Poor: 1

In the comments section, there were 309 responses. Over 100 were about the staff, and overwhelmingly complimentary regarding staff helpfulness, knowledgeable service, and friendliness. Virtually all of the 79 comments about hours reflected a desire for improved weekend hours – longer hours on Sundays, and weekend hours in the summer. Many of the

comments reflected an understanding that the building, while appreciated, needed to be updated.

Question 5: How would you rate each of the following library services? (Importance)

Borrowing Materials: Very Important: 638, Important: 84, Somewhat Important: 18, Don't Know/NA: 8, Not Important: 10

Reference: Very Important: 237, Important: 256, Somewhat Important: 150, Don't Know/NA: 54, Not Important: 54

Programs: Very Important: 365, Important: 232, Somewhat Important: 110, Don't Know/NA: 33, Not Important: 18

Computers, Printers, Copier, Fax: Very Important: 176, Important: 219, Somewhat Important: 178, Don't Know/NA: 91, Not Important: 91

Reading Areas: Very Important: 222, Important: 290, Somewhat Important: 148, Don't Know/NA: 50, Not Important: 43

Community Meeting Rooms: Very Important: 213, Important: 285, Somewhat Important: 136, Don't Know/NA: 74, Not Important: 48

Internet Access: Very Important: 356, Important: 200, Somewhat Important: 88, Don't Know/NA: 68, Not Important: 44

Inter-library Loan: Very Important: 437, Important: 229, Somewhat Important: 68, Don't Know/NA: 14, Not Important: 12

Study Rooms: Very Important: 135, Important: 244, Somewhat Important: 177, Don't Know/NA: 110, Not Important: 90

Online Services: Very Important: 436, Important: 225, Somewhat Important: 37, Don't Know/NA: 45, Not Important: 8

Newspapers & Magazines: Very Important: 143, Important: 253, Somewhat Important: 203, Don't Know/NA: 63, Not Important: 91

Museum Passes: Very Important: 323, Important: 251, Somewhat Important: 107, Don't Know/NA: 52, Not Important: 23

Seed Library: Very Important: 104, Important: 153, Somewhat Important: 166, Don't Know/NA: 229, Not Important: 82

Overall Importance of Library: Very Important: 559, Important: 164, Somewhat Important: 30, Don't Know/NA: 2, Not Important: 4

Question 6: How do you find out about library programs and offerings?

The responses varied, as follows:

In-house Flyers/Website: 363

Social Media: 310

Local Newspapers: 303

Online Events Calendars or Blogs: 264

Word of Mouth: 229

Library Staff: 204

Friends: 2

Wish I got email newsletters: 1

Other: 30

[Note: Although only one person indicated the desire for email newsletters, we have received feedback from several patrons directly requesting this service.]

Question 7: What do you value the MOST about the library?

Total Responses: 627

Atmosphere/Community: 134

Children's Room: 88

Collections: 263

Facilities: 30

Hours: 6

Programs: 69

Services: 120

Staffing: 149

We again saw that the library staff is held in very high regard in the community. The direct comments about staff and the atmosphere/community comments sometimes overlapped, as the staff are often responsible for the "feel" of the library that patrons appreciate. Additionally, many of the comments regarding the Children's Room referenced the help and friendly atmosphere provided by staff. Appreciation was very high for the availability of a variety of collections, from the books to the museum passes. Many comments referenced the ebook collection. While it is seen in other sections that there is a strong desire for improved hours, the hours that we do have are appreciated.

Question 8: How could the library better serve your needs?

Total Responses: 446

Atmosphere/Community: 0

Children's Room: 0

Collections: 94

Facilities: 70

Hours: 127

Programs: 53

Services: 60

Staffing: 7

Misc or None: 96

As seen in other comment areas, the desire for expanded hours is strong. Specifically, weekend hours in the summer and 9am openings in the mornings are the most common desires. In addition to simply adding more programming (for all ages), desire for programming at different times and days was also represented. The library collections received feedback for more depth and breadth across formats.

Question 9: Are there additional programs or resources you would like the library to provide?

Total Responses: 272

Atmosphere/Community: 0

Children's Room: 0

Collections: 39

Facilities: 19

Hours: 4
Programs: 122
Services: 12
Staffing: 0
Misc/None: 79

The desire for additional programming far outstripped any other category. Once again, programming is desired for all age groups, and with a variety of times and topics. It is notable that almost a third of the answers indicated that their needs from the library are already being met.

Question 10: How does the library benefit you or the community?

Total Responses: 477
Atmosphere/Community: 218
Children's Room: 3
Collections: 210
Facilities: 25
Hours: 1
Programs: 94
Services: 118
Staffing: 40
Misc/None: 81

The answers to this question reveal the esteem in which the Melrose Public Library is held locally. Many comments pointed out not only the library's role in fostering literacy, but how the library helped them create their sense of community. This feeling came from both newcomers to Melrose and individuals who referred to growing up with this library. Another strong theme was appreciation for the collections, and the library's role in making literacy affordable. It is important to pay attention to these answers, and ensure that as we strive to always make improvements, we do not overlook or lose that which we already do well.