



HOBOKEN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Community Hub for All Hoboken Residents

ABSTRACT

A three-year strategic plan has been created to enable Hoboken Public Library to become a major contributor to the quality of life for all Hoboken residents.

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Introduction

In 2016, an outside consultant was hired to create a five-year strategic plan for the Hoboken Public Library (HPL). That process included a review of the library's mission statement and established five-year goals, objectives, and activities for the period from 2017 to 2022. That plan was titled "Reimagine, Restore, and Transform" and included the following goals:

- Goal 1: Develop service models that reimagine the role of the Hoboken Public Library.
- Goal 2: Restore parts of the Hoboken Library facility to preserve the past, celebrate the present, and create the future.
- Goal 3: Provide Library infrastructure to transform the Hoboken Public Library.

Full implementation of the strategic plan was interrupted by the retirement of the library director, Lina Podles and the pandemic. Library buildings were closed in accordance with state-wide emergency requirements and all library programs and services migrated to a virtual service, or online environment.

In June 2021, the Library Board of Trustees appointed Jennie Pu as the new director and in March 2022, requests for proposals to create a new strategic plan was released. In June 2022, MJ Gomez Associates was awarded the contract to develop an updated 3-year strategic plan for the library.

Project Overview

Our charge was to:

- Work with board members, library staff, and other community volunteers and agencies to review and affirm the mission and vision of HPL.
- Gather input regarding community needs/expectations/aspirations in terms of HPL.
- Review/assess HPL's strengths and weaknesses in order to create a plan that ensures it has the resources to successfully execute its next strategic plan.
- Develop a "plan of service" for HPL, including possible organizational structures and revenue models to support a possible capital campaign.
- Articulate actionable commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and ensure EDI is integrated at all levels, internally and externally.
- Meet with the board virtually and/or in-person for a retreat or board meeting as part of the strategic planning process.
- Produce a strategic plan in consultation with the director, staff, and strategic planning committee.

Approach and Major Project Activities

Our overall approach to the project was based on the “turning outward” process developed by the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. The turning outward process is a technique used to help organizations “better understand communities by making conversations more community-focused; being proactive to community issues; and putting community aspirations first.”¹

During the project, we worked in consultation with a strategic planning steering committee whose members were appointed by library director Jennie Pu². Over the next six months we conducted 24 stakeholder interviews³, seven focus groups, and with the help of library staff, distributed a community survey in Spanish and English. Over 800 responses to the survey were received. Separate focus groups included leadership from the library Friends and Foundation, small business community, teens, and library staff.

To learn more about the library’s operating environment, we reviewed documents related to the establishment of the library, New Jersey law pertaining to libraries, minutes from recent board meetings, and interviewed key stakeholders to gain an understanding of the issues impacting the community and to explore ways in which the library might respond to them.

The library currently operates a Main Library, (which is on the National Register of Historic Places), a full branch library on the second floor of the city’s Multi-Service Center at 124 Grand Street, and a “Learning Center” adjacent to the Hoboken Housing Authority (HHA). The Learning Center space is secured through a memorandum of understanding with the HHA. As part of the library’s vision for the future, the board hopes to increase the size of the main library at 500 Park Ave by constructing an extension into two adjacent townhomes that were purchased by the library in 2018.

In October 2022, we facilitated a workshop to present findings from our research. Representatives from the steering committee, board of directors, selected library leadership, and members of the Friends and Foundation were in attendance.

During the workshop we presented a summary of the responses to the community survey, and results from the stakeholder interviews and focus groups. The summary formed the basis of the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis that we developed. The analysis was organized into seven categories or themes: community engagement, governance, facilities, partnerships, services/programs, operations, and technology and are attached to this report.⁴

In November 2022, a follow-up workshop was held with members of the library leadership team to review and discuss preliminary goals, objectives, and recommended activities in support of the objectives. This report represents the results from the goal-setting workshop.

¹ <https://theharwoodinstitute.org>

² Appendix A Project Steering Committee members

³ Appendix B Stakeholder Interview participants

⁴ SWOT Analysis Charts – pages 23 - 29

Governance Structure

Under current New Jersey Library Law, Hoboken Public Library is recognized as a municipal library, as opposed to an association, county, or combined library system. The Hoboken Public Library is not a department of Hoboken city government and functions as an independent agency governed by a seven-member Board of Trustees. Under New Jersey library law, municipal libraries must have a minimum of 5, but no more than 7 trustees. Board members are appointed by the mayor and both the mayor and the superintendent of schools (or their respective, assigned alternate) are ex-officio, voting members of the Board. Trustees serve five-year staggered terms.

By state statute, municipal libraries are entitled to receive one third of a mill for each dollar of assessed local property value for library operations. In 2021, that amount totaled approximately \$5.8 MM. The city of Hoboken receives said sums collected by the state for the library and appropriates certified amounts to the library on an annual basis. Municipal libraries may seek additional funding from their local jurisdiction, but any permanent additional amounts must be approved by the voters. The library does not receive any additional funding from the City of Hoboken.

Hoboken Public Library in Context

The most recent published statistics from the New Jersey State Library are for 2021. Due to the pandemic, many libraries underwent reductions in service and furloughed many employees. Nonetheless, we used 2021 as the base year for comparative analysis. The municipal libraries we selected for comparison were selected based upon the following criteria: populations of similar size, operate a Main Library, as well as no more than two branches. The libraries included in our benchmarking were North Bergen, Union, Piscataway, New Brunswick, Wayne, Irvington, Parsippany-Troy Hills, and Perth Amboy.

In 2021, the HPL’s approved budget was \$5.815 million, \$2.8 MM of which was allocated for operations and \$3.2 million was allocated for personnel costs. In the same year, approximately \$85,480 was allocated for capital expenses.

According to 2021 statistics from the New Jersey State Library, average per capita revenues for libraries in

NJ Library	Population Served	Revenue per Capita	Pop Served Per Sqft	Pop Served per FTE
NORTH BERGEN	63,361	\$85.27	1,267	550
IRVINGTON	61,176	\$28.30	2,913	1,571
PISCATAWAY	60,804	\$78.88	1,169	1,269
HOBOKEN	60,419	\$97.12	1,233	893
UNION	59,728	\$52.21	2,133	2,357
PARSIPPANY-TROY HILLS	56,162	\$63.48	1,146	1,773
PERTH AMBOY	55,436	\$23.44	6,930	1,544
NEW BRUNSWICK	55,266	\$31.56	2,303	833
WAYNE	54,838	\$66.98	1,613	1,294
Peer Group Avg	58,577	\$58.58	1,674	1,268
New Jersey Avg	32,406	\$82.96	833	1,095

the peer group was \$58.58. Hoboken Public Library’s per capita revenue was \$97.12. In 2021, HPL reported a total of 35 full time equivalent (FTE) employees, or one employee for every 893 Hoboken residents. The average number of employees per capita in the peer group was one employee for every 1,268 residents.

Auxiliary Support

In 1986, the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with the purpose of raising money to support the library’s programming, services, and improvements that were beyond the scope of the library's budget. In 2009, the Hoboken Public Library Foundation, also a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, was established to support the growing needs of the library with a focus on capital improvements. Both organizations recently merged into one combined non-profit organization.

As part its operation, the library innovatively contracts with the Bergen County Cooperative Library System to provide Interlibrary Loan services, shared technology services, and to maintain the library's integrated library system, or ILS. The ILS includes a catalog of library's collection, database of its registered borrowers, and circulation records.

Findings – Stakeholder Interview: Summary of Issues Impacting Hoboken Residents

As part of our research about Hoboken, we asked community stakeholders to identify major issues impacting the lives of local residents. The issues expressed most frequently by stakeholders included (in no order):

- New residents – Over the past two decades, Hoboken has become a desirable location for residents from New York City to live due in part to housing affordability and easy public transportation to/from Manhattan. In 1990 the population of Hoboken stood at approximately 39,000 residents. In April 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau recorded Hoboken's population exceeding 60,000. The rapid growth has put pressure on local government for additional housing, and public amenities such as schools, parks, libraries, and additional community-oriented services.
- Housing – Migration to Hoboken is fueling the rising cost of housing. A limited supply of land to construct new housing within the one square mile that is the city of Hoboken is creating a rise in gentrification in low-income neighborhoods. According to the city's Office of Community Development, there are over 7,600 people on the waiting list for a extremely limited supply of affordable housing units.
- Education – The Hoboken Public School District operates 5 public schools serving slightly over 2,230 K – 12th grade students in the 2022/23 academic year. There are also 9 private schools and 3 charter schools in Hoboken. Parents who can afford it often choose to send their children to one of the 9 private schools. The 3 charter schools are a no cost alternative, but enrollment is by lottery and demand for admission significantly exceeds the number of available slots. This has resulted in major educational inequities. With the exception of the Stevens Institute of Technology, there is no Hoboken-based institution of higher education.
- Public transportation – Current options include light rail, buses operated by NJ Transit, and HobokenHop Shuttle buses but accessibility for residents living in low-income sections of Hoboken is limited and does not provide easy access to the library.
- Family-oriented services – Rapid migration to Hoboken has generated a rise in the number of new residents seeking to make Hoboken the place they want to raise a family in but are not always able to find an adequate number of family-oriented activities.
- Public space – Several stakeholders remarked that there is a dearth of public meeting space in the city. Nonprofit organizations and civic groups would like to see the library provide this service.
- Environmental issues – Hoboken is prone to flooding. The community has had its share of flooding problems which have been exacerbated by climate change. With financial help from state and federal agencies, city leaders are taking measures to mitigate future disasters caused by

flooding. Additional city-sponsored environmental projects are focused on the creation and/or improvement of parks, recycling, and civic beautification.

- Economic divide – there is a growing concern that Hoboken is quickly devolving into a community of “haves and have nots.” This is impacting educational opportunities for many residents as well as access to affordable housing.

The issues cited above are not the responsibility of the library per se. They do, however, provide insight into issues that impact the quality of life in Hoboken. As an important community asset, we believe that the library’s value to the community is amplified when it works with other agencies, organizations, and community groups to address concerns that align with and further its mission. For this report, we have identified these issues as a basis for the many of our recommendations for the library to pursue as part of its three-year strategic plan.

Findings – Focus Groups

Seven focus groups were hosted as part of the project. We conducted four staff focus groups, one with small business owners, one with leaders from the library Friends and Foundation, and a focus group consisting of teen library users. With some modification to the format of the conversation with each group, we asked attendees to provide feedback on items that stakeholders identified as issues impacting the quality of life for Hoboken residents; how well the library was doing to accomplish its mission; and to name one thing they thought the library was doing well. This last item was asked in the form of the following question: “what is the one thing that they thought the library should win an award for?”

Teens – Our focus group with teens was very informal. The teens were engaged and had strong opinions and a sense of ownership about the Teen Zone. Teens thought the library was doing well. The Teen Zone was identified as a place where they felt safe and comfortable to hang out with their friends. They liked the library’s arts & craft programs and enjoyed the graphic novels. They thought the library would be better if it had a book club for teens and offered online and in-person tutoring.

Small Businesses – This group thought that the city could do a better job of nurturing small businesses and saw the library as a natural venue to help. They provided a wealth of ideas about how the library can help them grow their businesses and were very vocal about potential creative marketing opportunities. The small business community sees themselves as a unique user group because they are not necessarily tied to a 9 to 5 operation. That gave them more freedom to appreciate how the library can help them thrive. High on their list was a vision for the library to provide space for networking opportunities. And the library could provide free access to resources such as business books, databases, and possibly, a “business center” where certain amenities such as printing might be available. Many expressed a willingness to pay for such a service, in part because of the possibility that the revenue generated could help offset the expense.

Some attendees expressed interest in exploring creative marketing ideas with the library. One small business owner for example, envisioned sponsoring a program with an author who writes about topics that are of interest to small businesses owners.

Friends and Foundation - At the time of our focus group discussion, the merger between the Friends of the Library and the Library Foundation had not been finalized. Representatives from each group were extremely proud to be affiliated with the library. Most attendees self-identified as long time Hoboken residents. Some represent families with historic ties to the community and active engagement in civic life. Over the years, they have witnessed a growing economic divide that is negatively affecting the community. This issue is impacting housing, education, and development. For some, they saw the library as a great “equalizer” that can address these inequities.

Attendees pointed out that one of the challenges the library faces is that many people are unaware of the services it offers. It was the opinion of the group that Hoboken residents without children may not have a connection to the library. The Friends pointed out that over the years, they have seen it as their mission to increase awareness about the library. They did so by sponsoring programs like the summer reading program and representing the library at street festivals.

When asked what they thought the one thing the library should win an award for there was a strong consensus that the library should win an award for sustaining library service during the pandemic.

Staff - Four staff focus groups were conducted over two days. With the exception of staff who were on vacation, not scheduled to work, or were out ill, nearly all staff participated in one of the focus group sessions. Not surprising, most of their concerns were focused internally on operations, organizational structure and relationships between departments, units, and newly hired employees. Operational concerns revolved around internal communications, equity, diversity, and inclusion, and disparate salaries, and job descriptions. Since the pandemic, additional positions have been created and new hires have brought attention to the need for clarification regarding the integration of these positions within the organization. Some employees were struggling with work-life balance issues. There were consistent comments on the need for more training on topics such as safety/security, equity, diversity, and inclusion, program management, and the ability of the library to sustain current programming and service levels. Going forward, management will need to keep addressing these fundamental internal issues in order to build an effective team to deliver excellent library service.

Findings – Community Survey

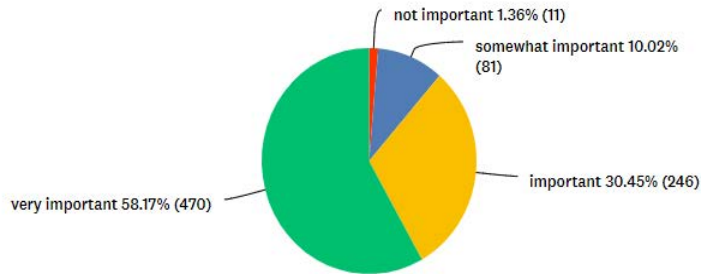
Over 800 individuals responded to a 20-question public facing survey that was deployed during the month of October. The survey, in English and Spanish, was distributed primarily by the library’s marketing department using social media channels managed by the library. We received less than ten responses in Spanish.

The survey asked respondents to provide opinions about library facilities, hours of service, staff experience, collections, programs, and overall library satisfaction. Survey respondents stated that they strongly viewed the library as a valuable community resource, regardless of whether they use the library regularly or not (Q4). Over 700 respondents said that was important or very important.

Q4

For me, the Hoboken Public Library is...

Answered: 808 Skipped: 3



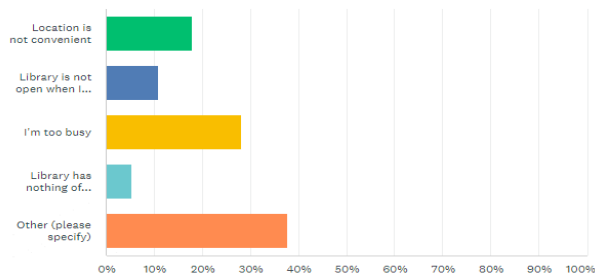
NOT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1.36%	10.02%	30.45%	58.17%	808	3.45
11	81	246	470		

We also wanted to know how long they have been library users and if they don't use the library, to tell us why. Nearly 40% of the respondents have been using the library for 10 years or more. Less than two percent said they have never used the library. The chart below (Q8) indicates some of the reasons why they don't use the library.

Q8

I don't use the library because...(check all that apply)

Answered: 267 Skipped: 544



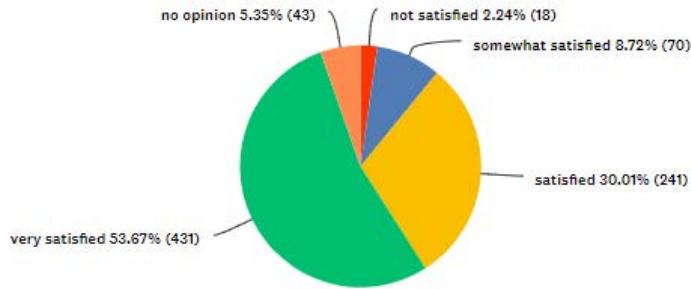
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Location is not convenient	17.98% 48
Library is not open when I need it	10.86% 29
I'm too busy	28.09% 75
Library has nothing of interest to me	5.24% 14
Other (please specify)	Responses 37.83% 101
TOTAL	267

Respondents had a very positive overall level of satisfaction about the library (Q13).

Q13

Overall, I rate my satisfaction with the service I receive at the Hoboken Public Library as follows:

Answered: 803 Skipped: 8

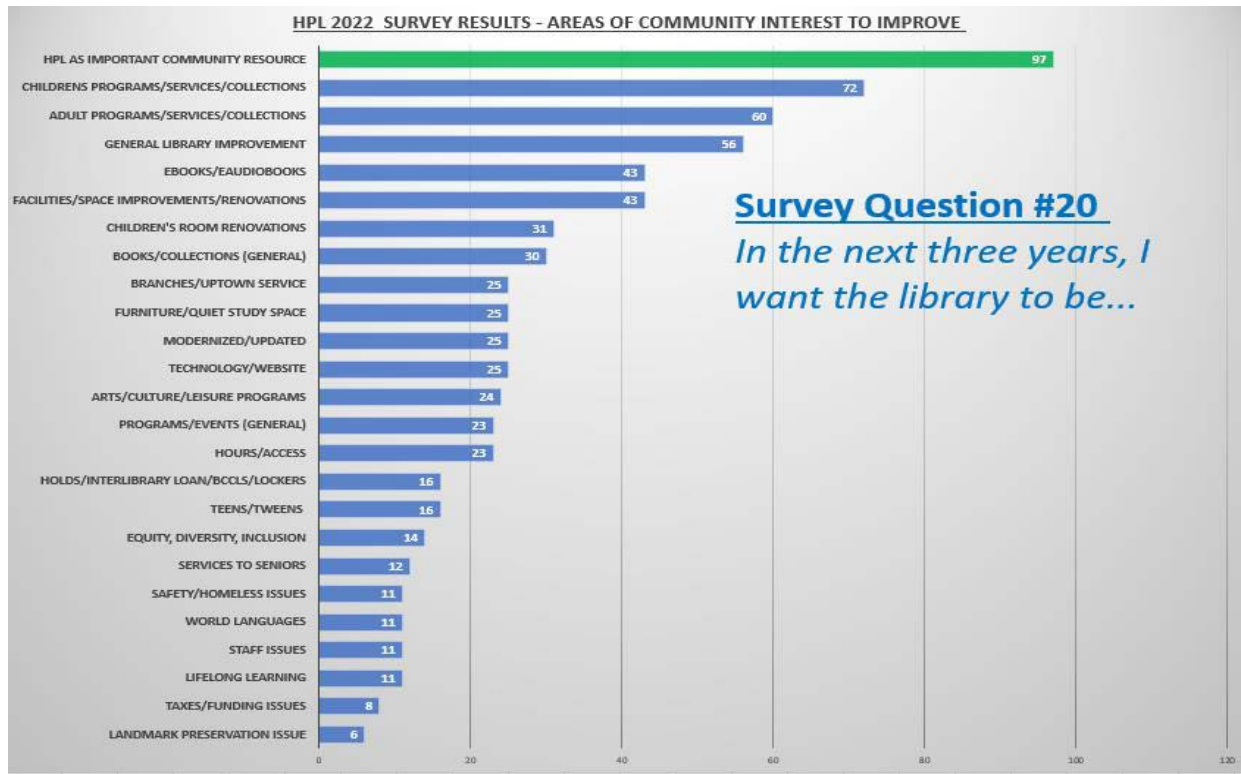


NOT SATISFIED	SOMEWHAT SATISFIED	SATISFIED	VERY SATISFIED	NO OPINION	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
2.24%	8.72%	30.01%	53.67%	5.35%	803	2.62
18	70	241	431	43		

We also asked them to tell us to rate the library’s collections. Eight hundred (800) answered this question. Nearly two-thirds (65.57%) of the respondents rated that the book collection as good or excellent. A little over 40% rated the e-Book collection as good/excellent.

	POOR-	FAIR-	GOOD-	EXCELLENT-	NO OPINION-	TOTAL-	WEIGHTED AVERAGE-
- Book collection	3.92% 31	15.06% 119	39.37% 311	26.20% 207	15.44% 122	790	3.34
- e-Books	2.32% 18	9.16% 71	23.48% 182	17.03% 132	48.00% 372	775	3.99
- Magazines & newspapers	1.30% 10	3.50% 27	12.97% 100	8.04% 62	74.19% 572	771	4.50
- DVD's and audio recordings	1.43% 11	4.81% 37	17.66% 136	9.35% 72	66.75% 514	770	4.35
- Website	2.83% 22	14.29% 111	34.88% 271	12.74% 99	35.26% 274	777	3.63
- Databases	1.17% 9	4.28% 33	15.30% 118	8.30% 64	70.95% 547	771	4.44

Respondents were asked to give us their vision for what they would like the library to be in the next three years. Respondents wanted to see the library as an important community resource and the majority wanted to see improvements to library facilities. The chart below summarizes several areas of concern including program priorities.



Recommended Goals

Based on the research we conducted, and analysis of the data and feedback received, we are recommending that the library adopt and implement five goals over the next three years. Each goal has been organized by an area of focus, followed by a recommended goal, target objectives, and a set of recommended activities.⁵ It is our recommendation that when the goals have been adopted, the library director should appoint and direct a senior manager to assemble an internal team to review, modify (as needed), prioritize, and implement the recommended activities. The net result of this exercise will be the creation of a three-year work plan for the library. The organizational work plan will form the basis for annual work plans of each departmental senior manager. The library director will use that information to deliver quarterly progress reports to the board.

Area of Focus: Partnerships and Community Relationships

1. **Goal: *Enhance partnerships to position HPL as the community hub for all Hoboken residents.***

Target Objectives:

1. Schools
2. Hoboken Housing Authority
3. Friends & Foundation
4. Business Community
5. Local Non-Profits

Target Objective 1: Schools - Strengthen policy and programmatic relationships with Hoboken public and private schools and other education-based organizations. (Equity, Inclusion)

Justification: The institutional preK – 12 education landscape in Hoboken is extremely diverse and compartmentalized. Five public schools are administered directly by the Hoboken Public School District (HPSD). Three public schools have been granted charters by the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Education and operate independent of the HPSD. There are nine private, independently-funded schools in Hoboken, most of which serve students preK – 8th grade. The Hudson School serves students 5th grade through high school.

With the exception of the HPSD, we could not identify any school that that offers what is typically considered to be library services to its student body. Typical school library services include collections that support the curriculum and library instruction that includes digital literacy competencies. HPSD provides one school media specialist⁶ in the district. Based on our research, none of the schools, public or

⁵ Within this section, the terms Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion have been placed next to some of the recommended goals, target objectives, and activities to indicate how these recommendations advance library progress toward achieving greater equity, diversity, and inclusion.

⁶ Though the New Jersey Education Association has forcefully asserted that every school should have School Library Media Specialist <https://www.niea.org/every-school-needs-a-certified-school-library-media-specialist/>, no NJ state mandate exists.

private has devoted adequate resources to provide meaningful library or research instruction to its students.

The library has an opportunity to position itself as a major partner in helping promote and support reading improvement and library and digital literacy instruction to students living in Hoboken.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that HPL implement the following activities:

- A. Convene a high-level meeting with the HPSD Superintendent, private and charter school principals and directors to explore collaborative initiatives with the library such as:
 - 1. Public library provided resources to supplement school resources in support of the school curriculum.
 - 2. A calendar for librarians in the classroom and teachers in the library.
 - 3. An annual library card-drive for all Hoboken students.⁷
 - 4. Meet with school representatives to measure interest for a proposed new “bookmobile” for regular school visits.
- B. Hire a certified NJ School Library Media Specialist and/or a certified NJ Associate Library Media Specialist that would be jointly funded by HPSD and adding it as part of the library’s youth services team to develop, coordinate, and deliver targeted service and classroom supports for schools and educators.
- C. Offer a library-sponsored professional development program for teachers.

Target Objective 2: Hoboken Housing Authority - Improve overall library services and programs to residents living in HHA with particular emphasis on service to youth. (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion)

Justification: The Hoboken Housing Authority (HHA) is an independent government agency chartered by the State of New Jersey. According to their website, the HHA manages 1,353 units of public housing in 28 properties at six locations across the city. The main campus of HHA encompasses 17 acres and contains 806 public housing units and is home to 598 families.

Through a memorandum of understanding with HHA, the library operates “The Learning Center” located at 401 Harrison Street. The Center is on HHA property. The Center operates in a very small space measuring approximately 500 square feet and houses a small non-circulating library collection. The Center is open 8 hours per week (Wednesday & Friday from 1 to 5 pm) and is staffed by a part-time social worker and library assistant.

Throughout the strategic planning project several attempts were made to learn more about library service for HHA residents and to solicit input regarding the strategic plan. Unfortunately, we were not

⁷ <https://www.ala.org/conferenceevents/celebrationweeks/card>

successful in getting an appointment with key leadership at HHA. Simultaneously, during this period the library has been exploring library service models for public housing residents in other cities.

Based on our analysis, knowledge of best library practices, and understanding of the current operations, the Learning Center does not function as a library branch nor as a “reading” room or library study space. Library service offered at the current location is inadequate and should be re-evaluated by the library in conjunction with HHA leadership.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that HPL implement the following activities:

- A. Working with the HHA, conduct a targeted needs assessment survey of all HHA residents.
- B. Convene a high-level meeting with appropriate library and HHA leadership to review the results from the survey to establish a better understanding about the service needs and expectations that can be developed over a three-year period.
- C. Expand access to HPL technology-based hardware and online library content such as:
 - 1. enhanced software (Zoom or similar platform) and equipment (cameras and monitors),
 - 2. improved Internet connectivity,
 - 3. computer and Internet skill training for HHA residents.
- D. Explore the possibility of a joint project between HUSD, HHA, the City of Hoboken, and HPL for a new mixed-use facility.
- E. Regularly contribute information on HPL and services via HHA Residents Newsletters.
- F. Add the Book Bike to the service suite offerings at HHA.

Target Objective 3: Friends & Foundation – Support capacity-building and effectiveness efforts of the HPL Friends & Foundation for fundraising, advocacy, and library promotion. (Diversity, Inclusion)

Justification: The recent merger of the Friends of the Library with the Library Foundation (F&F) offers a tremendous opportunity to re-position the relationship of the merged organization with HPL. Library affiliated organizations such as this focus their efforts in three key areas: fundraising, advocacy, and volunteer efforts on behalf of the library. The focus group with leadership from both organizations revealed a high degree of enthusiasm for the future of HPL. They were inspired by the prospect of expanding youth access to the library and the potential for an expanded main library. Members of the F&F that we spoke with represent a community of long-time residents of Hoboken who are committed to seeing the library grow and prosper as an important family-oriented institution.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that HPL implement the following activities:

- A. Develop a joint strategy, including special events, to help increase and diversify F&F membership.
- B. Promote an annual fundraising strategy that aligns with the library’s short, and long-term needs.

- C. Increase F&F capacity through joint efforts designed to recruit volunteers and diversify membership.
- D. Create a legislative advocacy agenda with appropriate government agencies, elected/appointed officials at all levels of government.
- E. Introduce the HPL trustees and F&F leadership to the informational, educational, and advocacy opportunities offered the NJLA (New Jersey Library Association) Library Trustee Academy and the American Library Association's United for Libraries' extensive suite of resources.⁸
- F. Pay for institutional membership in the American Library Association and NJLA.

Target Objective 4: Business Community – Strengthen library outreach to the Hoboken-based business community to explore the creation of activities/partnerships to support the information needs of Hoboken-based businesses. (Inclusion)

Justification: Small, locally owned businesses were invited to provide their perspective and opinions regarding the library. Small business owners in attendance stated they lack the resources to subscribe to or purchase important publications or online databases that could benefit their business. Although the Hoboken Business Alliance provides some services to small business owners, many stated that they lack the space to host or participate in business networking events. They believe that the library could help them with some of the resources they need in the two areas mentioned above. Attendees also expressed interest in sponsoring some aspects of library programming to enhance visibility of their business.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that HPL implement the following activities:

- A. Invite representatives from various Hoboken business support organizations such as the Hoboken Business Alliance and the City of Hoboken's Economic Development Department to explore interest in developing joint initiatives in support of information needs of small businesses.
- B. Consider establishing a Library Small Business Advisory Council (SBAC).
- C. Work with small businesses to create and sponsor programs such as a speaker series, or possible business plan competition, etc.

Target Objective 5: Local Nonprofits - Recruit key local Hoboken nonprofits to help HPL achieve its strategic objectives. (I)

Justification: As in many communities, Hoboken is home to several nonprofit organizations that provide charitable services to segments of the local population by raising money or supplying volunteers for worthy causes. The library has informal partnerships with faith-based organizations and nonprofits in Hoboken as well as formal partnerships with groups such as the Friends and Foundation of the Library. We believe that the library (and the greater Hoboken community) could benefit if it established additional

⁸ <https://njlitrustees.org/content/trustee-academy>

formal partnerships with existing nonprofits with missions or projects that align with the strategic objectives of the library. For example, the library might consider establishing a formal partnership with TRUE Mentors, a volunteer nonprofit group that provides a free youth mentoring service. The library could provide library collections or an online portal to library resources or a youth-oriented book or poetry club at the Jubilee Center, the home of TRUE Mentors.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that HPL implement the following activities:

- A. Research and identify local nonprofits that could help the library achieve its strategic objectives such as literacy-service providers, programs for seniors, Maker Space, and after-school tutoring.
- B. Formalize relationships with selected strategic partners with a formal memorandum of understanding process. (I)
- C. Expand the working relationship with the Hoboken Historical Museum to create additional joint programming, collections, and exhibits that promote local history and heritage to the community. Grant funding through the Institute of Museum and Library Services may be a strong possibility for funding. (I)

Area of Focus: Library Service for the Hoboken Community

2. ***Goal: Improve efficiencies in the delivery of library services and establish sustainable and impactful programs, services, and collections tailored to meet community needs.***

Target Objectives:

6. Programs
7. Collections: Processing New Material for the Collection and Enhancing Accessibility
8. Collections: Formats and Subjects
9. Services

Target Objective 6: Programs – Develop and implement an internal formal process for coordinating the creation, implementation, and evaluation of all in-person and virtual library programs. (Inclusion)

Justification: According to the New Jersey State Library, HPL sponsored over 900 programs in 2021. However, according to our analysis, there is limited coordination between various units in the library for deciding and evaluating what programs to produce and sponsor. This has resulted in duplication of efforts, scheduling conflicts and confusion, and impacts the quality of library programming.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that HPL implement the following activities:

- A. Align, assess, and strengthen internal program planning and evaluation skills before developing and delivering programs for the community.

- B. Strengthen the library's brand as a community hub for all Hoboken's residents (in-person and via virtual platforms) by providing programs for the following constituencies and content areas:
- Arts and leisure
 - Digital literacy
 - Seniors
 - School aged children
 - Teens/tweens
 - Health & wellness literacy
 - Financial literacy
 - Jobs & careers
 - Preschool aged children, families, and caregivers.

Target Objective 7: Collections, Processing and Accessibility (Equity) - Speed access to library materials by streamlining the materials selection, acquisition, and access service processes offered by key vendors.

Justification: The availability of newer acquisitions to the library's collections, could be improved by updating current practices and procedures by removing unnecessary steps that staff currently does. Vendors can perform some of these tasks more efficiently.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that HPL implement the following activities:

- A. Establish and follow time-oriented metrics for getting materials on the shelves.
- B. Maximize the use of vendor pre-processing services.
- C. Improve browsability and retail marketing of print collections by exploring, testing, and expanding the use of genre labels, genre bookmarks, themed/subject displays, inhouse and on the library's website. (Inclusion)
- D. Expand existing 24/7 Locker pick-up service and investigate potential for more locations. (Inclusion)

Target Objective 8: Collections: Formats and Subjects - Expand promotion of and access to eBooks, audiobooks, online magazines, databases, borrowable hardware, and other patron-facing technology. (I)

Justification: The collection needs of the library could be better aligned with growing demand by more closely monitoring national publishing trends and local circulation.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that the library implement the following activities:

- A. Develop a plan to regularly analyze collection use.
- B. Use a data-driven approach to better align collection development activities.
- C. Conduct a thorough review of the holdings and accessibility of HPL local history collections and seek-out potential grants to support this area. (Diversity)

- D. Align and develop world language collection holdings with local census demographics and use patterns. (Diversity, Inclusion)
- E. Annually review the library's materials selection policy and challenges review process. (Equity)

Target Objective 9: Services – Re-imagine how the library serves Hoboken residents.

Justification: Many successful public libraries around the country look for ways to offer value to their communities that aspire beyond traditional collections and programs. Hoboken Public Library currently delivers several services that cannot be classified as either programs or print/electronic collections. Examples include the museum pass program and the Book Bike service unit. Hoboken's unique demographics and geography present opportunities for these and possibly new types of service delivery options. Libraries are adopting new service delivery models that have evolved (or expanded) during the pandemic. The library should consider exploring these models more aggressively.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that the library implement the following activities:

- A. Initiate a robust mobile library service operation such as a mini bookmobile to deliver programs and materials to local schools, community centers, HHA, senior centers, and Hoboken residents with limited access to library resources. (Equity, Inclusion)
- B. Expand and promote the development and marketing of more online service through platforms such as YouTube, and the museum pass program, and nonprofit local radio (WFMU).
- C. Create new guidelines, policies, and procedures to enable bookable meeting space for the public.

Area of Focus: Capital Improvements/Facilities

- 3. Goal: ***Create safe, accessible, and inviting library spaces for all.***

Target Objective 10: Improve Building Use & Advance Capital Improvements

Justification: Due to a variety of circumstances, library service and programming has been hampered by facility limitations. According to ALA standards, a library serving a diverse population the size of Hoboken's 60,000 residents should have a facility of 44,000 square feet. The current library is 13,000 square feet—less than a third of the recommended size. Over the past few years, in an effort to expand its footprint, the library has opened three satellite operations: the Teen Zone, located next to the main library, the Grand Street Branch, which operates on the second floor at 124 Grand Street, and the Learning Center, which operates to primarily serve the residents of the HHA.

The main library is undergoing a major renovation which is expected to be completed in early 2023. The renovation will not impact the entire building, but once completed, it will create new and exciting public space in the main reading room and on the upper floor. The first floor of the library is also in need of major renovation and the desire to expand the main library into two library-owned buildings adjacent to the main library remains a wish, but no funding is available to complete either project.

The Library Foundation was established to focus on capital improvements. The recent merger between the Friends of the Library and the Foundation provides a “once in a generation” opportunity to raise awareness about the project and new funding opportunities to complete renovation of the main library.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that the library implement the following activities:

- A. Ask the Friends and Foundation to hire an outside consultant to conduct a fundraising feasibility study for a capital campaign.
- B. Work with the Friends & Foundation to develop an annual fundraising and advocacy strategy in support of planned and future capital improvements. **(Inclusion)**
- C. Investigate HPL’s participation in American Library Association’s sustainable libraries project.⁹ **(Inclusion)**
- D. Implement new strategies, methodologies, and policies to improve safety and security for patrons and staff at all facilities.
- E. Update the 2019 HPL Capital Master Plan to consider current and projected population growth and demographic shifts. **(Equity)**

Area of Focus: Organizational Capacity

- 4. ***Goal: Build a highly effective, mission-driven organizational culture that works together to transform HPL into a successful, effective, and user-centered urban library.***

Target Objective 11: Create a culture of assessment, service improvement, and operational decision-making. **(Inclusion)**

Justification: Under new leadership, along with overwhelmingly positive community support as expressed by respondents to the community survey, the library is poised to make a greater impact on the lives of Hoboken residents. To make such an impact, the library will need to develop a strong, focused, and dedicated library management team that can motivate and encourage staff creativity and risk taking and build an organization that is acutely community focused.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that the library implement the following activities:

⁹ <https://www.sustainablelibrariesinitiative.org>

- A. Adopt (or create) industry-wide assessment tools and teach library managers how to identify and use data to evaluate library effectiveness. (Equity)
- B. With assistance from an HR consultant, review and update all existing job descriptions and develop official job descriptions where none currently exist. Create or improve staff performance evaluation tools and an annual staff review process. (Equity)
- C. Upon adoption of the final three-year strategic plan, require all management staff to develop annual work plans that define their individual and departmental contributions toward accomplishing the plan. (Equity, Inclusion)
- D. Identify skills, competencies, and knowledge gaps in staff and provide financial support and training opportunities for employees to address those gaps. (Equity)
- E. Fund, develop, and implement a technology plan.
- F. Explore the feasibility of a full organizational-wide compensation study. (Equity)
- G. Build library board and F&F awareness of best practices and trends in 21st century public library services and strengthen their role in building organizational capacity through advocacy and creating a culture of innovation and success. (Inclusion)

Area of Focus: Local Government Relations

5. Goal: *Strengthen the library's connections to the strategic priorities of the City of Hoboken*

Target Objective 12: Promote the library's value as a partner on issues impacting city residents by gaining a "seat at the municipal table" on policies, initiatives, and projects that improve the quality of life for Hoboken residents.

Justification: As an agency that operates independent of city or county government, the library functions outside of the major legislative, policy-making environment of issues that impact Hoboken residents. This requires the library to work even harder to demonstrate its value in the community. In order for the library to enhance its value and have a greater impact on the quality of life in Hoboken, it must assert itself more strongly in issues that matter to civic and community leaders.

To achieve this objective, we recommend that the library implement the following activities:

- A. Demonstrate the library's value as a partner on issues impacting city residents by strengthening communications about how library activities are making contribution to issues that are important to community leaders. (Inclusion)
- B. Host a "Hoboken Reads" program (aka, One City One Book, and/or Literacy Day with the mayor's office as sponsor). (Diversity, Inclusion)
- C. Invite a city council representative to serve on an ad hoc committee to advise the board on special projects. (Equity, Inclusion)
- D. Present an annual report to the city council, highlighting areas that intersect with the city priorities. (Inclusion)

- E. Appoint a library staff liaison to serve the needs of local government by providing office-level information service such as journal subscriptions related to public policy and municipal government, library research service, special collections, and access to library archives for elected and appointed officials. (Inclusion)
- F. Identify and secure a lobbyist to advocate for library issues in Trenton and Washington DC. (Equity)
- G. Partner with city hall to co-sponsor events such as Arts & Culture Festival, art exhibitions, community forums, and a Hoboken History Day (with the Hoboken Historical Museum). (Equity, Inclusion)
- H. Promote “pop-up” libraries at city-sponsored events, such as farmer’s markets, Hoboken Green Fair, etc. (Inclusion)
- I. Demonstrate active leadership on library policy matters on local, state, federal levels. (I)

Epilogue

Many recommendations in this strategic plan are externally focused and have been designed to help the library gain greater visibility in the community. In previous years, due to a variety of circumstances, HPL has not been highly visible in the community. Over the next three years the library should engage in activities that enhance its visibility and strengthen relations with major institutions and organizations in Hoboken and at the state, and federal levels.

In our experience, public libraries that function as departments of city government have greater opportunities to foster ties and relationships with civic leaders – a key element for gaining greater support. Hoboken Public Library is an independent government entity, not a city department. We are not recommending that the library merge with the city, but that it instead, seeks out more opportunities to “gain as seat at the table” in matters impacting the quality of life in Hoboken.

Relationship building is an essential step to secure the level of financial support the library needs to complete the renovation and future expansion of the Main library. Those same relationships are essential for the library is to gain greater recognition as a contributing partner to the quality of life in the community.

Over the short term, the library can achieve greater visibility by investing in a mobile unit to provide a greater library presence at schools, community events, and the HHA. Over the long term, the library should focus on cultivating greater community support to provide the funding that it needs to complete its capital improvement projects.¹⁰

Library Director Jennie Pu provides the board of trustees and the Friends and Foundation the kind of leadership that the library needs to gain broader community support. Both organizations are essential elements to achieve the goals outlined in this plan. This requires the board and Friends and Foundation to strengthen their capacity as advocates and fundraisers. Director Pu will need to build a team that can implement the strategies outlined in this plan.

¹⁰ In 2019, according to a study by Clark, Canton, Hintz, funding for capital improvements needed to renovate and expand the Main library was estimated to be a little over \$29,000,000. https://hobokenlibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/20191120_HPL_MasterPlanUpdate-Nov-2019-.pdf

**Hoboken Public Library
Strategic Planning Steering Committee**

Jerome Abernathy, Hoboken Public Library Board of Trustees

Jason Freeman, City of Hoboken

Nora Martinez DeBenedetto, Coordinator of Constituent Services, City of Hoboken

James Runkle, Hoboken Business Alliance

Robert Foster, Hoboken Historical Museum

Carolyn Hartwick, Hoboken Public Library

Jennie Pu, Hoboken Public Library

Ana Sanchez, Ana Sanchez Architects, LLC

Hoboken Public Library – Stakeholder Interview Participants

Community Members

- Jerome Abernathy, President Board of Trustees
- Bob Foster, Director, Hoboken Historical Museum
- Nora Martinez DeBenedetto, Office of Constituent Services, City of Hoboken
- Amanda Blaney, Hoboken Public Library Board of Trustees and Director, Friends and Foundation
- Dr. Christine Johnson, Superintendent, Hoboken Public School District
- James Sproule, Community Impact Director, Hoboken Grace
- Jennifer Evans (former) Hoboken Public School District Representative to Library Board of Trustees
- Jason Freeman, Business Administrator, City of Hoboken, Mayor’s Representative to the Library Board of Trustees
- Susan Murcko, Hoboken Public Library Board of Trustees
- Jack Silbert, Hoboken Public Library Board of Trustees
- Ana Sanchez, Former Member, Hoboken Public Library Board of Trustees,
- JoAnn Serrano, Hoboken Public Library Board of Trustees and Treasurer-Elect, Friends and Foundation

Library Staff

- Jennie Pu, Library Director
- Rosary Van Ingen, Assistant Director
- Carolyn Hartwick, Chief Financial Officer
- Vanessa Soto, Youth Services Manager
- Nicole Marconi, Access Services Manager
- Aimee Harris, Information and Digital Services Manager
- Phil Mendez, Information Technology Manager
- Mark Curiale, Marketing and Communications
- Andrew Luck, Community Engagement Manager
- Ally Blumenfeld, Outreach Librarian

COLLECTIONS, SERVICE & PROGRAMS	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bergen County Cooperative Library System (BCCLS) • Children’s programming • Hoboken archives & local history collection • eBook and audio book use • Collections • Pre-school programming/Storytime (park) • Staff expertise • Fine Free library policy • Outreach & community engagement • Robust reference collection for independent investors • New Special Collections manager • Book clubs • Mobile Printing • Technology device lending • Printing, scanning, copying • Notary services • Museum pass program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space for teens/tweens • Program planning & evaluation strategy • Programs for adults and seniors • Alignment with city-wide initiatives • Shared program planning calendar • Cross-departmental planning • Combined circulation/collections department • Collection acquisition & development • Cultural/Arts programming • Teens/tweens service • Programs for young professionals • World languages collection strategy • Timely acquisition of popular/new materials • eContent in Spanish • Integration of EDI
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital literacy instruction (esp. for students) • Reboot of reference services for all ages • Strengthen access to the local history collection • Partnerships with locally based publishing world & literary arts organizations • Consolidate access services • Streamline collection development processing • Formal partnerships with local nonprofits • Tutoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus • Staff capacity to maintain current expectations • Changing demographics • Workable staffing models • Conflicting service models • Balancing new service initiatives vs. existing services

GOVERNANCE	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NJ State library laws <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Representation from the Mayor & Superintendent’s office ○ Guaranteed percentage of local tax revenue • Relationship with the Mayor’s office • Engaged board leadership • Support for the library • Grant funding support for Main library renovation • Support for library director • Community confidence in city government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative agenda • Programmatic involvement with the school district • Advocacy • Partnerships with state & federal officials and agencies
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgeting independence • Multi-level government relations strategy • New representative from school board • Possible new branch operation as part of the proposed mixed-use • General community agreement on the issues affecting residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for political divisiveness • Financial instability due to changing economy • Loss of political and community support for the proposed new branch operation in the mixed-use project • Community unwilling to support new taxes

PARTNERSHIPS	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends of the Library • Library Foundation • New part time fundraising staff member • Relations with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hoboken City Hall ○ Hoboken Historical Museum ○ Hoboken Grace ○ Hoboken Housing Authority (HHA) ○ Hoboken Business Alliance ○ Hoboken Grace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship with local education providers • Engagement with Friends and Foundation • Partnership strategy • Fundraising • Stevens Institute • Service to HHA residents space limitations • Limited partnerships with agencies serving low-income residents (Hoboken Shelter)
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for community-based campaigns • Pending Friends/Foundation merger • Hoboken Family Alliance • Sponsorships with the business community and nonprofits serving young professionals • Literacy initiatives with agencies serving children, adults, and limited English-speakers • Library service outreach to public, charter, and independent schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collections ○ Digital literacy ○ Card campaign ○ Teacher “in-house” instruction • Literary arts organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited number of volunteers participating in the Friends and Library Foundation • Fundraising competition from other organizations • Time & effort

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly created community engagement department • Population growth • Internet presence • Library staff • Promotion • Virtual programming • Relations with City Hall • Public perception as an egalitarian service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness about library programs • Outreach strategy & focus • Alignment with community needs • Strategy for engaging with underserved segments of the community (low income, unhoused, technology challenged) • Facilities • Minimal access to library experience • Cross-departmental planning of community planning efforts
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal partnerships with local nonprofits & city department (Cultural Affairs, Parks & Recreation) • Families with young children • Public meeting space when library renovation is completed • Collaboration with small businesses • Educational partnerships • Seniors • Teens • Social media strategy • Catalyst for community networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to over-promise, under deliver • Staffing • Breakdown in government relations • Not keeping abreast of changing demographics • Insufficient funding to align resources with priorities

LIBRARY OPERATIONS & ADMINISTRATION	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New director • Board support • New hires <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HR ○ Community Engagement Development ○ Special Collections • BCCLS support • Staff expertise • Consistent funding source • Dedicated & engaged staff • Progress on renovation at Main 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job descriptions • Policies & procedures • Internal communications • Integrated systemwide planning & evaluation protocols • NJ civil service hiring guidelines • Evolving organizational structure • Evidence-based management • Work plans & related performance metrics • New employee on-boarding & orientation • Team-based approach to decision-making and problem solving • Standards • Volunteer management
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated strategic plan (pending) • Long-term financial strategy • Use of data for decision-making • Compensation study • Perennial community input mechanisms • Multi-departmental evidence-based management protocols • Service point coverage/staff deployment strategy • Fundraising (development) strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited income source • Fluctuating funding levels (economy-based) • Staff turnover • Competition for a limited talent pool • Staff training • Staff cohesion • Communication gaps

TECHNOLOGY	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book lockers • BCCLS technology support collaboration • Dedicated and knowledgeable IT staff • Excellent WiFi connectivity • 3D maker space • Fine Free Library • Technology devices for loan • eContent for loan • Robust suite of eContent via NJSL and BCCLS • Video programming (YouTube) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website upgrades • Technology replacement strategy • Technology staff training • Use of data to monitor/manage library use • Security cameras • Alignment of roles, responsibilities, assignments for technology-based services
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vendor collection processing • Community podcasting • Expanded Wi-Fi at the Foxhills Gardens Senior Center • Affordable Internet Connectivity Act • Increased demand for digital content vs. print • Aging software and hardware infrastructure (software/hardware) • Increasing costs/ supply chain • Increased use of applications via Polaris • Website redesign • Expanded locker access (Uptown) • Public technology training • Enhanced partnership with Hoboken Housing Authority to support tech access for public housing residents • Tech savvy new hires • Digitization projects (Hoboken history and archival collections) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to keep up with emerging trends • Affordability and ownership of digital content vs. print • Technology infrastructure (software/hardware) • Increasing costs/supply chain • Licensing • Increasing migration of content to digital formats

FACILITIES	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main library under renovation • Lockers • Nostalgic historic building • Staff expertise • Flood mitigation solution at Main Library • Additional locations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teen Zone Annex 1 ○ Learning Center - HHA ○ Grand Street branch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemporary service delivery within a historic building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seating ○ Children’s space ○ Meeting rooms ○ Quiet study space ○ Furniture ○ Managing safety ○ Traffic flow and organization of services and collections • Signage at Main and other locales • Grand Street branch • Service/space limitations at HHA • Space for the size of the population served • Master facility plan • HHA Learning Center • Teen Zone – Annex 1
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a master facilities plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Future use of annex building uses ○ Potential Uptown presence/branch • Mobile service alternatives • Re-think service strategy for the newly renovated Main library • Partnership with HHA for a new branch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-going maintenance costs • Renovation project delays • Source of funds for capital improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Integration of annex buildings ○ Learning Center • Staff expertise for managing capital improvements • Residential flooding issues