

# PLAISTOW PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN



2018 - 2020

Adopted by the Plaistow Public Library  
Strategic Planning Committee

December 12, 2017

Approved by the Plaistow Public Library  
Board of Trustees

December 12, 2017



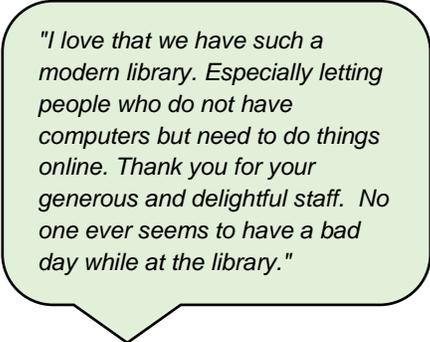
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Plaistow Public Library understands that libraries, along with a wide range of other service and retail organizations, are facing tougher and more numerous challenges than ever before. Our competition is changing and growing. Rapid changes in society and technology are transforming the ways we interact with each other, spend our free time, learn, and improve our lives. How should the Library respond to these challenges? Do we need to simply improve the way we offer existing services? Or does the very concept of the Library's role and place in the community need to evolve as well?

In the fall of 2016 the Library's Board of Trustees began the task of creating a strategic plan to answer these questions. Over the past year we assessed our spaces and services as well as our program and staffing needs. We studied emerging library trends outside of our community. We also reached out to the community and listened hard to what people had to say.

We've learned that the Library is many things to many people, and we are fortunate to have a library that is not only modern and well-equipped, but also attractive and large enough to meet our present needs. Our staff receives almost universal praise and our patrons are vocal in their praise of the services we currently offer. We will continue doing those things we do well. But we also identified **four critical strategic issues** – issues which if not addressed will continue to weaken our ability to meet Plaistow's needs.



*"I love that we have such a modern library. Especially letting people who do not have computers but need to do things online. Thank you for your generous and delightful staff. No one ever seems to have a bad day while at the library."*

- 1. We need to increase the community's awareness of many of the Library's services.**
- 2. We need to reach under-served populations – tweens/ teens, younger adults, and males, in particular.**
- 3. We need to improve our "technology game" with infrastructure, classes, and improved staff competencies.**
- 4. We need to find creative ways to offer a full range of programs for all ages, at a variety of times, in spite of our limited staff.**

To that end, we are sharing with you twenty specific objectives that will serve as the foundation for creating Plaistow's "Library of the Future". Our objectives for 2018-20 focus on seven main areas: Programs, Marketing and Outreach, Technology, Collections and Discovery, Community Hub, Staff and Leadership, and Facilities.

Of course, much of what we will do over the next three years is not covered in this document and will occur organically. As a strategic plan it includes only those activities we feel will have the greatest impact in helping us address the four critical issues identified above. In addition, we will continue, as we always have, to respond to Plaistow's evolving needs, to utilize new best practices for libraries, and to capitalize on opportunities as they arise.

So, what will the Library look like in 2020? In truth, it will look a lot like it does today. We are not planning any major construction projects. Books and programs will remain a core part of our business. Staff size will be about the same, although job descriptions may evolve. Nonetheless, by 2020 we will have made real changes to improve the patron experience, to strengthen existing services, and to better integrate the Library with the rest of the community.

**Some of these changes include:**

- Reorganizing our spaces and collections for ease of use. High-value "real estate" will highlight high-interest or under-utilized materials, and signage will be enhanced to provide better wayfinding and discovery.
- Integrating new technologies (including possibly some that we can't quite envision yet) into our operations and our offerings, just as we always have done.
- Experimenting with streaming digital media services that allow you to borrow music, movies, and/ or TV shows on your computer, tablet, or phone – and even your TV.
- Offering one of the fastest internet connections in town, with a more robust network that will benefit both the Library's mission-critical systems and our patrons.
- Establishing an ongoing feedback loop with the community, through surveys and focus groups, to help us stay abreast of the town's evolving needs.

A lot has changed since the Library's early days over 100 years ago in a small corner of the Town Office. We have supplemented traditional media such as books and magazines with records and videocassettes, DVDs and CDs, and now digital collections available online 24/7.

Throughout its history the Library has evolved with the changing times and Plaistow's needs, all the while remaining true to its core mission and values: Welcoming and supporting all people in their enjoyment of reading and pursuit of lifelong learning, and providing equal access to information, ideas and knowledge through books, programs, and other resources.

This plan provides our roadmap as we continue to respond to the needs of patrons as they seek to learn, thrive, and grow in the 21st century.

**LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

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Catherine Willis, Chair  
James Peck, Vice-Chair  
Jane Query, Treasurer  
Jennifer Kiarsis, Secretary  
Rosemarie Bayek, Board Member

**STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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Scott Campbell, Consultant  
Jennifer Dawley, Head of Youth Services  
Megan Lee, Resident  
Kristin Lewis, Resident  
James Peck, Board Member  
John Sherman, Resident  
Melissa Theberge, Recording Secretary  
Catherine Willis, Board Member  
Cab Vinton, Director

	OBJECTIVE	SUCCESS METRICS	
<b>PROGRAMS</b>	1	Implement a new demand-driven programming model, with a particular focus on technology classes to start.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan &amp; implement at least one demand-driven program per month.</li> <li>• Re-evaluate &amp; establish new goals.</li> </ul>
	2	Implement community-led classes, including programs co-sponsored with local businesses, town departments, and town & regional organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan &amp; implement at least one community-led program per month.</li> <li>• Re-evaluate &amp; establish new goals.</li> </ul>
	3	Become a Family Places Library (familyplacelibraries.org).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin application process &amp; establish a target completion date.</li> </ul>
	4	Expand the time window during which we typically offer programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate reasonable goals for children's/ teen programs with the Head of Youth Services.</li> <li>• Plan &amp; implement at least one adult weekend program per month; re-evaluate.</li> </ul>
<b>MARKETING &amp; OUTREACH</b>	5	Increase library use by non-users, teens, 20-30-somethings, and men in particular.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review statistics from peer libraries to establish benchmarks.</li> <li>• Begin tracking gender &amp; age baseline figures for Plaistow programs &amp; circulation.</li> <li>• Conduct at least two focus group meetings with each under-served population.</li> <li>• Establish goals and benchmarks for the remainder of the strategic planning period.</li> </ul>
	6	Move forward installation of a digital sign on Main St.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain proposals and estimates, including realistic mockups.</li> <li>• Begin communication with appropriate Town authorities.</li> </ul>
	7	Increase awareness of services and use by under-served populations, particularly through visual media (Instagram, Pinterest, branding, video recordings, community TV, etc.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a Marketing Plan, with a particular focus on under-served populations.</li> <li>• Coordinate protocol for broadcasting programs with Dean Zanello.</li> <li>• Determine best practices &amp; benchmarks for use of Facebook, Instagram, &amp; Pinterest.</li> </ul>
	8	Solicit community feedback on a regular basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct one-question surveys bimonthly.</li> <li>• Re-survey community one year after initial Strategic Plan survey (Aug 2018), reusing key questions and compare results.</li> <li>• Investigate splash screen surveys for public access computers &amp; wifi connections.</li> </ul>
<b>COMMUNITY LIVING ROOM</b>	9	Initiate a Welcome Wagon, with quarterly open houses for new residents & new library users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify &amp; meet with potential partner organizations &amp; town departments.</li> <li>• Plan &amp; implement first New Resident Orientation Meet-n-Greet.</li> </ul>
	10	Create a centralized calendar of community events (both library and non-library).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate technical options for an online community calendar.</li> <li>• Discuss our plans with key Town officials.</li> <li>• Launch new calendar.</li> </ul>

**OBJECTIVE**

**SUCCESS METRICS**

<b>TECHNOLOGY</b>	11	Upgrade network, wifi, & public access computers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement higher speed broadband.</li> </ul>
	12	Develop a Technology Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create plan for approval by the Board of Trustees.</li> </ul>
	13	Continue to add devices to Loanable Technology service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate circulation of hotspot.</li> <li>• Develop a list of potential acquisitions &amp; budget requirements.</li> <li>• Purchase first additional equipment.</li> </ul>

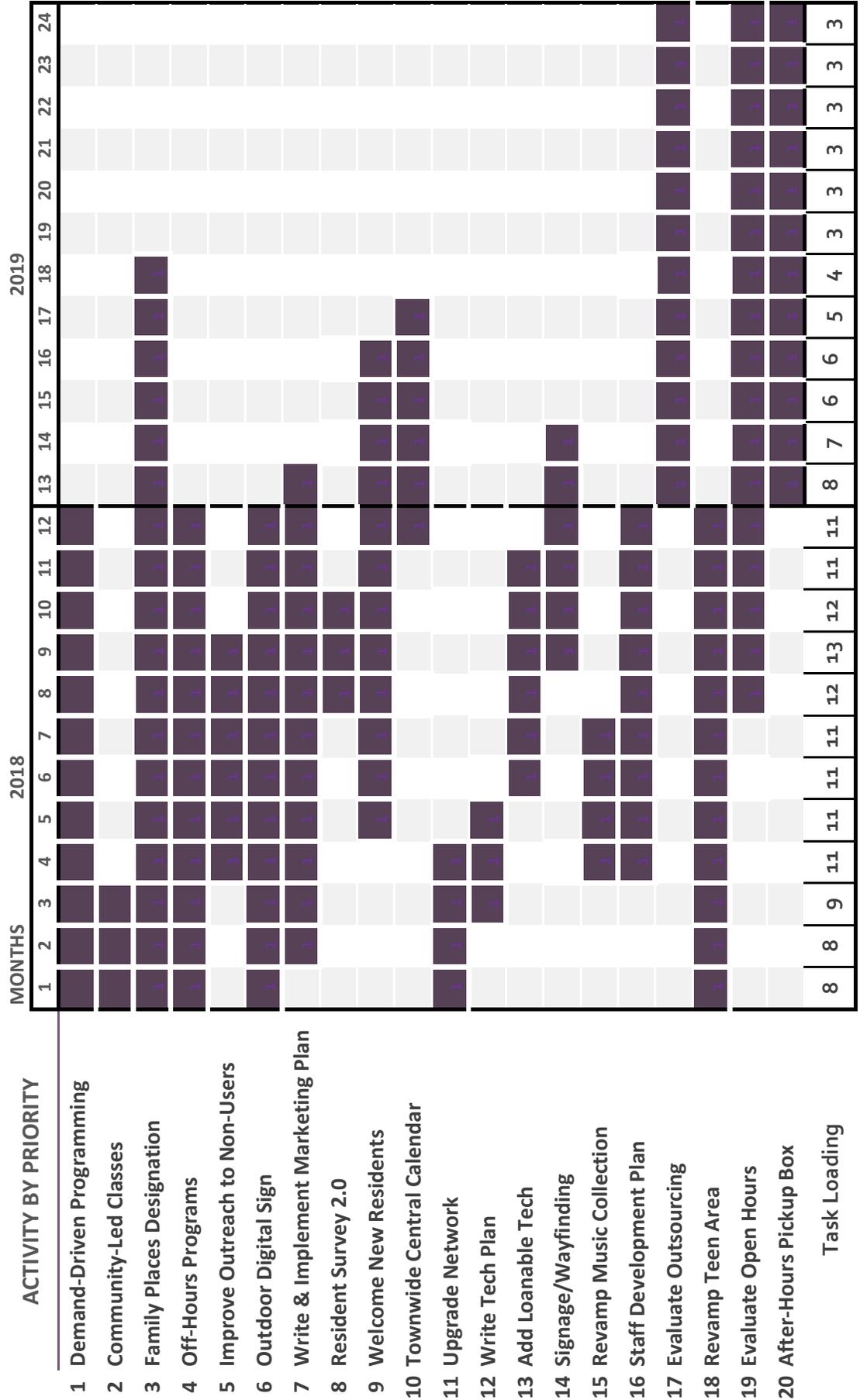
<b>COLLECTIONS &amp; DISCOVERY</b>	14	Improve signage, wayfinding, & general usability of the building & its collections.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a space needs analysis (evaluation of areas by function vs. needs &amp; space allocated).</li> <li>• Complete a signage/ wayfinding audit &amp; evaluation, including site visits to other libraries &amp; bookstores.</li> <li>• Share recommendations with Trustees &amp; implement plan.</li> <li>• Explore potential for partnership with the Plaistow Historical Society.</li> </ul>
	15	Weed music collection & implement a trial with a streaming service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement free trial of streaming music service.</li> <li>• Evaluate circulation of music collection.</li> <li>• Weed collection as needed &amp; re-purpose freed up space.</li> </ul>

<b>STAFF &amp; LEADERSHIP</b>	16	Create a more formal plan for staff development, particularly in the areas of technology, marketing, customer service, & collection development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a document template for individualized professional development plans.</li> <li>• Meet with staff &amp; develop individualized plans for each employee.</li> </ul>
	17	Explore options for using independent contractors or companies for certain functions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research one option for outsourcing per quarter.</li> <li>• Provide a summary report to the Board of Trustees with a recommendation to proceed/ not proceed.</li> </ul>

<b>FACILITIES</b>	18	Provide leadership & guidance to a Teen Advisory Board in redesigning the Teen area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Teen Advisory Board, meeting at least once per month, with at least 5 members.</li> <li>• Establish reasonable goals for the establishment &amp; mission of a Teen Advisory Board with the Head of Youth Services.</li> </ul>
	19	Complete a more thorough study of optimal library hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate door counter data.</li> <li>• Conduct mini-survey.</li> <li>• Make decision &amp; implement any changes to operating hours.</li> </ul>
	20	Institute after-hours pickup service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect estimates from 3 vendors &amp; present recommendation to the Board of Trustees.</li> </ul>

# Plaistow Library Strategic Plan Gantt Chart

2020 left blank intentionally. Many projects will be evaluated after the initial phase is complete. As a result, we expect that many activities will in turn have secondary phases.



## SURVEY OVERVIEW

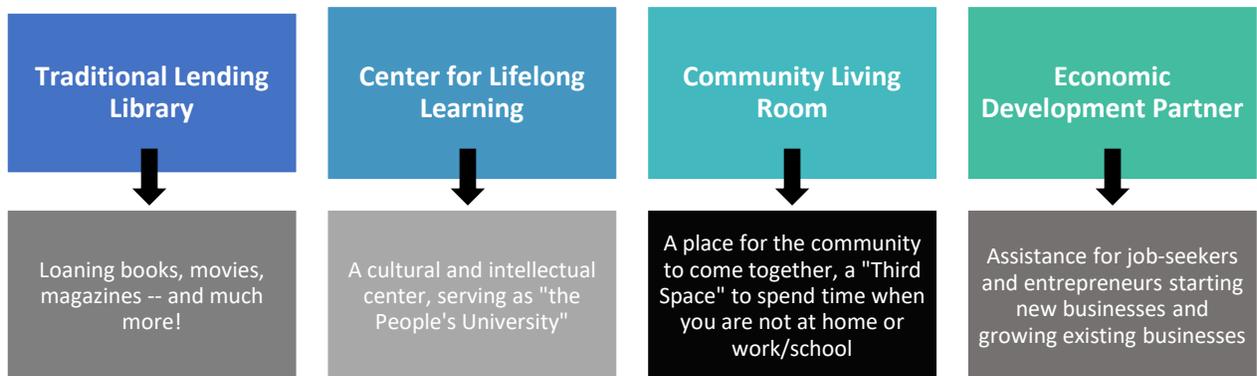
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A core part of our strategic planning was to conduct a town-wide survey of residents. We mailed the survey in August 2017 to all Plaistow residential addresses to give both library patrons and non-patrons an opportunity to share their ideas with us. We also posted and widely promoted an online version of the survey.

Our goals with this survey were multifaceted:

- To determine current levels of patron satisfaction with our existing services
- To establish a baseline for future surveys
- To introduce potential new services to the community
- To gauge interest in these new services

We developed the survey with the explicit goal of pushing the envelope of how Plaistow residents think about public library services (“Traditional Lending Library” and “Center for Lifelong Learning”). Along with expanding the definition of these models, we introduced two new models: “Community Living Room” and “Economic Development Partner”.



In October we also invited residents to an Open Forum where we shared an overview of our planning efforts to date along with highlights from our 426 survey responses. A wide-ranging discussion largely reinforced our survey findings and confirmed that our preliminary ideas were indeed on the right track.

## SURVEY RESULTS\*: What was NOT surprising

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Our patrons love the Library, both as a provider of valuable services and as the beautiful building it is. Over 90% said the Library is either “essential” or “very important” to the community. Our users deeply appreciate our staff. And above all, they want us to continue doing what we do.

*“I think our local library is awesome. It is a community gathering place, I find out local news, see neighbors and always feel welcome. I love my library.”*

\* Complete survey results are provided in the detailed Appendices included with our Strategic Plan.

*"I wasn't aware of the Inter-Library Loan network, the opportunities to learn about local and NH history, the online catalog, or the option to borrow e-readers and hot spots."*

We also expected that many services would be unfamiliar to many people, and indeed this turned out to be the case.

Similarly, the survey confirmed our everyday experience that patrons from the Baby Boomer and older generations are over-represented relative to Plaistow's population, and that library users are far more likely to be females than males (65% of our cardholders and 80% of our survey respondents vs. 52% of the population).

Finally, surveys by public libraries almost invariably indicate a demand for increased hours of operation – and our survey was no exception. While our hours are for the most part meeting Plaistow's needs, the community certainly expressed interest in expanded hours over Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

## SURVEY RESULTS: What surprised us

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After mass mailing the survey and offering several attractive incentives, we had hoped for a higher response from residents who do not use the Library. In the end, 10% of respondents met our definition of a non-user (a resident with no library use in the past year). Even so, 75% of these individuals agreed that the Library is "essential" or "very important".

We expected that there would be strong support for the more traditional models of library service (loaning materials, children's programs, et al.) But we also expected a more enthusiastic response to the more innovative and "outside the box" ideas we presented. Our survey asked respondents to indicate their degree of support for twenty-eight service ideas across all four basic library models. The top eight are all services that we currently offer. Along the same lines, the bottom ten are all services that we currently do **not** offer.

That said, there was still strong support for newer ideas. Our rating scale indicated support on a scale from 1 to 5 ("Definitely **do not/ do** offer this service"). While the twelve existing services received an average score of 4.4, the other sixteen, newer ideas were not far behind with an average score of 3.9. We believe local support for these new services will only increase as residents become more familiar with them and as they become a more prevalent throughout the library landscape.

## THE PATH FORWARD

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A small-town library has no choice but to allocate its resources extremely carefully. In short, it must be **strategic** in selecting which initiatives to pursue – hence this Strategic Plan! The community has told us very clearly, both directly and indirectly, not only that it values our core offerings most highly, but also that we have not yet met the highest standards we set for ourselves in delivering these services.

Accordingly, the Strategic Plan for the 2018-2020 period focuses on strengthening our foundation. In taking on the four critical strategic issues identified on Page 1, we will significantly enhance our capacity to serve Plaistow as both its Traditional Lending Library and its Center for Lifelong Learning. Success on these fronts will prepare us to take on new challenges, in particular to more easily integrate new service models that the community has shown interest in, “Community Hub” and “Economic Development Partner”.

## EVALUATION & ACCOUNTABILITY

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Strategic Plans, like Mission Statements and Vision Statements, can be useful. But all too often they are words in documents that, once written, are shelved and forgotten. Here, we will do two things to avoid this fate.

1. Include a Strategic Plan update as a specific Agenda item in every Board of Trustees Meeting going forward.
2. Internally track the progress of each objective by including specific measurable success metrics and assigning target start and completion dates. (See Gantt chart on Page 5.)

## CONCLUSION

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Library operations and even the concept of the role of libraries in the community are changing across the country. Many of these changes are being driven by the rapid proliferation of new technologies and communication media. The community will always need a cultural center and a place to learn both during and after our formal school years.

More than ever, however, what we lack is a place where we can connect with each other, learn from each other, share our ideas with the larger community, and build energy around projects that affect us all. This Strategic Plan for 2018-2020 builds on those aspects of our mission that have always been the Library’s strengths.

But it is also a direct challenge to complacency. The Library must not be just a quiet space for reflection and self-discovery, but also a collaborative space where Plaistow comes together to form and strengthen connections. Ironically, we cannot fulfill our mission as a “community anchor” if we remain static.



*“I am very proud of the Plaistow Library. It provides good services to the community, and is clearly moving to improve and constantly grow.”*

Our future starts and ends with you. Thank you for sharing your ideas with us. We are depending on you to continue helping us be the library you need us to be.