

John G. McCullough Free Library

2023 Report to Village of North Bennington

December 7th, 2023

Library Contact Information:

John G. McCullough Free Library

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Contact Information:

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Community Appropriations Requested:

Town of Bennington: \$48,000.00 Received in 2023: \$42,500.00

Village of North Bennington: \$30,500.00 Received in 2023: \$27,500.00

Town of Shaftsbury: \$25,200.00 Received in 2023: \$25,200.00

How will these funds be used to support the North Bennington community? Funds will be used to meet the library's operating expenses. All North Bennington residents are encouraged to activate their McCullough Library memberships to take advantage of the library's wide array of resources, services and free events for all ages. Subscribing to the library's monthly e-newsletter is a great way to keep up-to-date with news, opportunities, and events. Examples of how the library has delivered on its mission of service to Bennington residents can be found below.

Mission:

The John G. McCullough Library is an essential community center: a comfortable and welcoming place where people of all ages can satisfy their curiosity, stimulate their imaginations, become better informed, and connect to the online world. Our library cultivates a stable, vital, and dynamic community by facilitating lifelong learning and literacy at all levels.

2023 Successes:

General Service Updates: The McCullough Library's building reopened to visitors on December 1st, 2022, after the completion of critical repairs, accessibility upgrades and air quality improvements. Since reopening, area residents eagerly returned to the library in record numbers. New and renewed memberships, door traffic, use of the collection, and event attendance have reached an all-time high. Use of the library's digital collections (Libby for ebooks and digital audiobooks and Kanopy for video streaming) remained high, even after the building reopened. Use of the new Laura Nowak Memorial Meeting Room on the library's second floor has grown steadily in its first year.

Increased Hours of Operation: An exceptionally generous donation made it possible for the library to respond to the public's longstanding request for an increase in hours when it reopened in December 2022. The library is open Tuesdays 10:00 AM- 8:00 PM, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays 10:00 AM- 6:00 PM and Saturdays 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. More information about this funding opportunity and related fundraising challenge can be found in the "Plans and Expectations" section of this report.

Youth Services: At a time when so many are concerned about the recent pandemic's lingering effects on the reading and social skills of young people, they may take heart in the rousing success of the McCullough Library's Youth Services department in the past year. The library's Summer Reading Program is a great example of these efforts and their impact on young people in our community. Organized and led by Youth Services Librarian Gizelle Guyette, 126 young people registered for Summer Reading. Together, they tracked 111,550 minutes of reading over the summer, and more than 800 people attended Summer Reading events hosted by the library. Author visits to area schools, SuperbOwl Sunday (live owls!), and a host of other opportunities for young people and families rounded out a robust schedule of events.

Partnership with Village School of North Bennington: The library piloted a unique partnership with the Village School of North Bennington in January. The library's Assistant Director, Cassidy Kokasko, is now also employed at the Village School as their school librarian. The Village School pays for Cassidy's work at the school, and the two organizations split the cost of benefits. This contract with the Village School has enabled both organizations to efficiently employ and retain a talented librarian on a full-time basis.

2023- 2026 Strategic Plan: The library completed its three-year Strategic Plan in June. This plan is available on the library's website.

Friends of the Library Auction Fundraiser: The Friends of the Library held a combination virtual/ live auction event in September, which was tremendously successful. With relatively few overhead expenses, the Friends of the Library surpassed their goal and raised over \$14,000 for library events, museum passes, craft supplies, and special projects. While the Friends remain on the lookout for an indoor space for book storage, sorting, and sale(s), auctions remain a viable fundraising option for this group.

Building improvements: A fresh coat of paint was applied walls of the lobby, staircase, and second floor landing. New carpeting on the first floor and the staircase will likely be installed by the end of 2023 or the beginning of 2024.

Setbacks:

Website Improvements: The library was unable to put in place accessibility and improved event promotions on its website without additional software and software subscriptions. Software costs for these improvements are included in this year's funding request.

Construction Delays: Supply chain and local skilled labor shortages delayed the completion of some parts of the recent building renovation and preservation project. Final components should be completed in early 2024.

Gift Card Fundraiser: A gift card fundraiser held in April 2023 to replace a gala dinner event at a local restaurant, was not successful. This effort raised only a few hundred dollars. The library's Trustees plan to return to gala dinners in 2024.

Plans and Expectations for 2024:

Bonnie Dundas Youth Room Project: Thanks to a generous donation from the family of former Children's Librarian Bonnie Dundas and gifts from other donors, much-needed repairs and updates to the youth services room will be made in 2024. Grant funding is being sought to supplement these donations. Guided by feedback from young people and caregivers, updates will include sanding and re-sealing the floors, new shades for the windows, a fresh coat of paint, uniform shelving on casters, and improved seating options for visitors of all ages.

Fundraising for Library Equity and Sustainability Fund: The increase in library hours described above is directly related to an extraordinary funding and fundraising opportunity. The McCullough Library's Equity and Sustainability Fund, established with the Vermont Community Foundation in early 2023, will create supplemental income for the library to guarantee benefits and competitive wages for staff, and provides the public with more opportunity to take advantage all the library offers. Bridge funding was given to put these changes in place immediately. A fundraising effort to supplement this large gift and make these improvements permanent launched

its preliminary, “quiet” phase in early 2023. These first phases have been successful; as of this report, nearly \$200K has been raised. The second, more public phase of this campaign will commence in 2024.

Zinio: Building on the continued popularity of Libby, the library’s ebook and digital audiobook lending app, we’re planning to purchase a subscription to Zinio, a collection of more than 3,000 popular magazines, available on an unlimited basis to McCullough Library members.

Sustainable Libraries Initiative: The McCullough Library is the first library in the county and one of a handful in Vermont to join the Sustainable Libraries Initiative, a relatively new certification program through the American Library Association. The certification process enables the library to develop and advance environmentally sound, socially equitable, and economically feasible practices to intentionally address climate change and co-create thriving communities.

Accessibility and Energy Efficiency Upgrades: Building on the success of the recent renovation project, the library is actively preparing for the second phase of accessibility improvements: the construction of an addition to the West Street portion of the building. Plans include a new ramp and rear entry to the building, and an elevator to the second floor. Library staff are working to secure funding to guide this proposed project through the review and document approval phases to put it in the best possible position when it applies for state and federal capital improvement grant funding through the Vermont Department of Libraries. In the meantime, smaller accessibility projects, including some new furnishings and a reconfiguration of the library’s first floor, are pending grant funding. The library is also pursuing funding to assist with the cost of repairs to and better insulation for the building’s many windows, which will help with energy costs and consumption.

Respectfully submitted,

-Jennie Rozycki, Library Director

12/7/2023