

Catskill Public Library & Palenville Branch Library

Long Range Plan of Service

Adopted by the Board of Trustees November 15, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Mission

The Catskill Public Library and Palenville Branch Library are dedicated to providing free access to the world of ideas, learning and entertainment for enrichment of their respective communities. Our mission is to continually improve and expand our services, materials and programs to best serve the needs and desires of the residents of Catskill and Palenville, to whom the library belongs.

Catskill Public Library

The Catskill library was founded in 1893 and is currently housed in a 1901 neo-classical building funded through a grant from Andrew Carnegie. The local history collection includes the A. Fred Saunders Hudson River Steamboats Collection.

The library is located at the corner of Franklin and Bridge Streets in the Village of Catskill, the county seat of Greene County, NY. It is across Bridge Street from the Greene County Supreme Court Building.

CPL is chartered to the Catskill Public School District, population 12,473, and has a branch in rural Palenville, about 9 miles to the west.

Palenville Branch Library

Palenville Branch Library is located on Route 23A in the Hamlet of Palenville. The tradition of a library in the Hamlet of Palenville dates back to the 1920's. The small library joined with CPL in 1967. Although the location has changed over the years, the tradition of attentive, diligent service to the community has remained the same.

Palenville Branch Library has a reputation for vigorous programming and personal service.

Town and Village of Catskill Overview

Catskill is a small town of 11,397 residents located between the Catskill Mountains and Hudson River. The historic Village of Catskill, population 3,841, has waterfront on both the Hudson River and Catskill Creek. There is also a commercial section where many box stores can be found at the western edge of the Village, and a residential section called Jefferson Heights to the north. Palenville is a hamlet of under 900 residents, in the southwestern corner of the Town of Catskill. It is about 9 miles from the Village of Catskill and rural in nature.

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Demographic data can have significant margins of error. However, it remains one tool for thinking about and understanding our community so it is included here. Town information¹ is based on the 2020 US Census, while Village² and Palenville³ statistics are based on the American Community Survey.

The poverty rate in the Town is 12.9%. Due to how statistics are interpreted at different levels by the two surveys, it may not be comparable with the Village rate, though as the latter is reported at 18.8% it does seem likely that poverty is higher in the Village. It has been noted anecdotally that many patrons lack transportation and walk to the library. The reported Village poverty rate of 18.8% is almost double the rate of the county and 1.4 times that of the state.

In the Town, 87% are white, 5.6% Black, 4.4% Hispanic or Latino, and 1.2% Asian. In the Village there is more diversity with 75% white, 12% Black, 6% Hispanic or Latino, and 4% Asian. Also in the Village, 16% of children are from households that speak Spanish at home and 12% Indo-European languages.

Palenville has a population of 856. 16% live in poverty there. The hamlet is 98% white and 2% hispanic.

A similar percentage of Village of Catskill and Palenville residents drive to work - 73-74%. But unsurprisingly, Palenville residents travel 6 minutes further to work compared to their Village of Catskill peers. Houses in Palenville are worth about \$13,000 more than in the Village. Renting is more common in the Village at 36% compared to 25% in Palenville.

There is one elementary school in the Catskill School District⁴, along with one middle and one high school. All together the district serves about 1,550 students within the boundaries of the Catskill Central School District. CCSD qualifies for Community Eligibility Provision, a federal program allowing all students to receive free breakfast and lunch at school.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Catskill

The main library is in good repair, with relatively recent heating and cooling systems. Its trim was painted in 2023. The roof is due to be replaced in about 5 years. There is no sprinkler

¹ *U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: United States, Catskill Town, Greene County, New York*, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222. Accessed 8 Nov. 2023.

² "Census Profile: Catskill, NY." *Census Reporter*, censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US3613002-catskill-ny/. Accessed 8 Nov. 2023.

³ "Census Profile: Palenville, NY." *Census Reporter*, censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US3656132-palenville-ny/. Accessed 10 Nov. 2023.

⁴ "About Us." *Catskill Central School District*, catskillcsd.org/about/. Accessed 10 Nov. 2023.

system. ADA access is severely limited due to the geography and structure of the building. The only parking is along the street or in Village lots between two and 4 blocks away.

Palenville

Palenville is housed in a rented building near the main intersection in the Hamlet. It is ADA accessible. It has a limited number of parking spaces in a mostly gravel lot. It is in good repair but too small for the library's needs. Popular programming brings in numbers that would be more easily handled in a larger space.

Budget

The libraries share a combined 2024 budget of \$1,056,481 where \$771,954 is allocated to the main library and \$284,527 to the branch. Approximately 68% of expenses go to staffing; 17% to library services and materials such as collection, databases, ILL, programming, and patron printing and computing; 4% towards administration expenses; and 10% to care of the building and contents.

In addition the library holds a reserve balance of about \$384,000 in savings and reserve funds.

Staffing

There are a total of 15 staff members at CPL, including 2 full time librarians, and full time director, branch manager, bookkeeper, and senior library clerk. All other clerks are part time. Total FTEs are about 9.5. Staff receive vacation, holiday, and sick day benefits based on the number of hours worked and staff working at least 32 hours are eligible for health care. All employees are eligible to enroll in NYS Pension.

Technology

Both libraries are well equipped with technology for both staff and patrons. Apple computers are on a 5-7 year replacement schedule, with Windows computers used for staff and needing to be replaced slightly more often. All printing, including patron printing is via rented Canon copier/printer/scanners. Libdata is used to manage public computers and printing. Both libraries have public wifi with separate staff and admin networks.

Most staff are trained to perform routine tech help for patrons. Several are trained to take 45-minute tech help appointments to provide more involved assistance.

Holdings and Usage

CPL has holdings of about 48,000 items both digital and physical. It has an especially good collection of databases and online services. It also houses and coordinates several historical collections for the community.

Its visits and programming statistics have been improving since Covid. Together, Catskill and Palenville libraries provided almost 45,000 uses of physical items and digital resources in 2022 while answering over 4,500 reference questions. CPL Library patrons also have access to over 1.7 million unique titles in the Mid-Hudson Library System's shared catalog. In 2022, CPL

imported just under 7,000 items for its patrons while providing over 14,000 items for patrons of other System libraries.

Friends Group

As of 2023 there is a new Friends group developing under the guidance of a Steering Committee. They are eager to help the library fund programs, services, and materials and willing to serve as advocates for the library in the community.

COMMUNITY INPUT

In preparing this Plan patrons were surveyed about library services using paper and digital surveys. The survey was available in both libraries, online, and promoted in newsletters and by social media. Staff were also surveyed about their needs and what they observe and hear about the needs of patrons and the community at large. Lastly, several community members were engaged in one-to-one discussions regarding community assets, challenges, and changing needs. Results follow.

Community Survey

Library Visits

85% of respondents live in zip code 12414

67% use the library weekly, 18% monthly, 10% daily, and 6% never

Most patrons prefer to use the library in the afternoon (58%), some in the morning (44%) and the rest in the evening and on weekends. Seven respondents requested additional hours in the evenings or on weekends.

Many patrons complained of the lack of parking in Catskill.

Only one patron reported frequenting both libraries regularly for storytime. The remainder visit the library nearest to their home. Many reported walking to the Catskill building.

Library Use

87% of patrons report that their favored use of the library is to check out books. Other popular favorite uses include printing (32%), computer use (32%), and programs (25%). A significant number of people report they mostly use the wifi (17%). A combined 23% of people chose either digital resources or ebooks. 10% like the local history. Least popular were music, magazines, and scanning.

32 of 61 respondents said that the thing they value most about the library is staff. They mentioned their knowledge, friendliness, and willingness to help.

When questioned about how users hear about library news, it was very mixed. Some indicated they learn about upcoming events while in the library, some via the newsletter, and some via social media.

Some of the things that patrons indicated they would like from their library included hotspots, a more prominent location for non-fiction, how-to books, and computer literacy workshops for seniors. Many requested more programming and gave a wide variety of ideas about what they'd be interested in attending including things such as language learning, fiber art groups, crafts and chess in Catskill, local history in both branches, and foraging lectures in Palenville.

Community Aspirations

When asked about what they love about Catskill, many alluded to a picturesque, walkable, friendly village center with a diverse population that is interested in building community.

About Catskill's challenges one theme was very clear: gentrification. Many are concerned about rising housing and living costs. There are some divisive sentiments with a sense of old vs. new residents. There are concerns about accessibility and inclusion in the community. Others mentioned a lack of groceries "in town", lack of a place for kids to "hang out" or learn to be productive adults, no place to learn to swim, bullying, and climate change.

Staff Survey

Staff responding to the survey have worked at CPL for less than one year to more than 15. Half have worked at both the main library and branch.

When asked what the most important services the library provides are, staff talked about one-to-one interactions with patrons. Often, patrons request help handling important documents related to taxes, applying for SNAP or HEAP, job searching, citizenship, housing, and legal issues such as custody cases.

Especially important in Catskill are printing and faxing. Also, basic amenities such as seating, heat, A/C, drinking water, and bathroom facilities are very important there.

Staff also sees a need for more immediate tech help appointments, access to a social worker on site, lending hotspots, and life skills classes to assist patrons with things such as nutrition, applying for employment, how to be heard by authorities, and literacy.

Sometimes there is a disconnect between what is going on in the community and the library. It was suggested that the library prioritize working more closely with other organizations to synchronize efforts.

Staff is very concerned about housing costs in the community. They are also concerned about mental illness, homelessness, addiction, lack of access to technology, and lack of child care. Over the next 5 years, staff expects these problematic trends to continue and intensify.

When asked about their particular roles in the library, about half said they'd like more training in their particular area. Finding time in their workday for that training was listed as a challenge.

When asked what staff needs to remain at CPL, some mentioned better pay, especially in light of increasing living and driving expenses. They would also like to see clear consistent

leadership and expectations. Additionally, there are few full-time positions open for staff who need benefits.

Some staff are physically uncomfortable at the Franklin Street front desk. It is very difficult to sit at, too low for standing at, and shifts are long for standing.

Two staff members would like to see us explore purchasing options other than Amazon.

One-to-One Conversations

Arlene

Arlene is a small business owner raising children with her husband in the Village of Catskill. She is concerned about the effects of gentrification on local families and an increasing divide between income levels. She also thinks a lot about diversity and EDI awareness in the community and in the school. She is concerned about access to technology for some families and students. She is glad that CPL works with Hop-O-Nose and encourages more of that.

Arlene would like to see brief internships so students learn about the importance of the library. She would also like more author talks for young people. They go to the Hudson Children's Festival every year.

Ashley

Ashley is a Catskill Village resident and frequent library user. She observes that internet access, computing, printing and faxing are important services on Franklin Street. She wonders if the library offers ENL to kids and/or adults (it does, however at times it gets suspended when Questar III doesn't have a teacher available), and early literacy assistance for children.

Ashley also fears that not enough residents are informed about what is available at the library. Her ideas for communicating library services include advertising with DSS, the schools, and community organizations like churches where people go seeking help and services.

Matt

Matt is a town resident who teaches at the middle school and also serves in county government. He sees the library as a central part of the community.

As a teacher, Matt is happy to see teen activities at the library, like Game Club. However he is concerned with students' access to technology, especially for high school seniors. When asked about changes happening in the community, Matt cited use of social media and online content in general among students.

Matt suggests the library engage in more outreach so that students are aware of library resources and activities. He hopes that the schools would be receptive to sharing library events on social media and/or ParentSquare so parents would also be made aware.

Lastly Matt added that he just saw something on social media advertising after school activities for teens at the public library. He is hopeful that more youth and parents will learn of these programs and that students can take advantage of them, even between classes and sports.

Monica

Monica appreciates that the library provides education, socialization, entertainment, and a sense of community. She sees Catskill growing in the coming years. When asked about how the library could better serve the community she said that staying open later on one night would be convenient.

PLAN OF SERVICE

TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

Goal: The library will work to increase access to technology and technology learning via on-demand tech help sessions and getting technology into the hands of more residents.

Actions:

- Replace patron computers every 5-7 years.
- Maintain high speed internet in both buildings.
- Research the possibility of providing outdoor wifi at remote locations.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current tech help appointments and research the feasibility of providing shorter, on-demand sessions.
- Explore the development of a circulating tech collection including laptops and hotspots.
- Explore the possibility of self-help printing to free clerk time to provide more tech help and increase privacy.
- Offer tech learning programs for patrons.
- Send a staff member to become trained as a Digital Navigator through Digital Navigators of the Hudson Valley. Digital Navigators help patrons access affordable internet services, purchase devices, and get support learning how to use them.

Needs:

- Adequate staffing at both libraries to allow at least one clerk to spend blocks of time with single patrons on an as needed basis in addition to by appointment
- Regular tech training for staff that exceeds the minimum state requirements so that more staff members are comfortable assisting patrons with a variety of tech challenges
- Organizational structure to circulate technology as part of the libraries' Library of Things and funds to purchase and maintain items

Evaluation:

- Patrons express satisfaction with the immediacy of one-to-one tech assistance.
- Patrons are better able to apply for jobs online and fill out important life documents with less assistance from staff.
- Patrons attend and express positive impacts from technology oriented programs.

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PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Goal: Continue to offer a wide variety of programming and services while exploring new and more effective ways to serve the community.

Actions:

- Continually ask patrons and non-patrons what types of programming and services they desire and need.
- Continue to develop and foster relationships with local organizations such as DSS, Community Action, the public schools, local government, Hop-O-Nose, Questar, day hubs, and others.
- Experiment with new themes and activities to keep programming fresh.
- Continue to explore off-site programming locations for Catskill and Palenville as both are challenged for adequate space.
- Hold semi-annual meetings of admin staff responsible for designing programs and services in which current and changing patron needs and expressed interests are discussed, current offerings are evaluated, and new offerings are discussed and planned.
- Reach out to the developing Friends group for help with funding programs.

Needs:

- Palenville needs additional space, additional program supply funds, and extra staffing for special programs.
- Catskill needs off-site space for some programs, and staffing to help with programming, especially adult programming.
- Adequate staffing is needed at both sites so that the library can pursue new initiatives such as more community involvement, Digital Navigators, on-demand tech help, expanded Library of Things, reservations for museum passes, and a greater variety and numbers of programs.

Evaluation:

- Question patrons orally and by the use of paper evaluations regarding their experience with CPL programming.
- Compare program attendance numbers to past years.
- Gather, record, and compare anecdotal data to assess impact of programs.

STAFFING

Goal 1: There is a lot of competition, and turnover, for quality library clerks, librarians, managers, and directors. At the same time, staff is the most valued attribute of the library. The library is a pleasant place to work, provides good education, skills and experience, and all staff have some benefits. However, more competitive wages will help attract and retain motivated and dedicated personnel. This is especially true in our current economic climate where expenses have risen sharply, especially housing, food, and health care.

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Actions:

- The budget must grow to accommodate increased wages, cost of benefits, and rising cost of living.
- Consider the feasibility of new benefits such as spouse or family health care, tuition assistance, and relocation payments.

Needs:

- Regular, modest funding increases to keep up with increasing costs and increasing demand on library services.

Goal 2: Staff must understand what is expected, feel adequately prepared, and have frequent opportunities to receive feedback and be heard.

Actions:

- Include an introduction to the organizational chart with new employee training.
- The director will create a progress log in which to record employees' successes as well as challenges and check in with each staff member frequently.
- Ensure staff is aware of training opportunities and encouraged to participate.
- Initiate quarterly staff meetings where staff can get together, share ideas, and keep abreast of what is new in the library and library world.
- Educate staff about how to interact with our most vulnerable patrons such as those that are unsheltered or experiencing mental illness.
- Board will continue to perform an evaluation of the director at least yearly.

Needs:

- Time to organize and coordinate training and meetings

Evaluation for Goals 1 and 2:

- Staff express that they feel secure and valued in their roles.
- Staff turnover decreases.

BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES

Goal 1: The Franklin Street site was cited by many as a valuable building in the Village where people can come and relax, read, and access services such as computing and printing. CPL will continue to anticipate future repairs and needs, such as replacing the roof and purchasing a new boiler to keep the building in good condition.

Actions:

- A Facilities Plan will be developed for both buildings by the end of 2024 and kept up to date.
- A Disaster Plan for both buildings will be developed by the end of 2024 and kept up to date.
- Funding assistance such as the state construction grant will be sought for conditions studies and then any large projects deemed necessary

Needs:

- Staff time to devote to special projects.

Evaluation:

- Facilities and Disaster Plans will be completed by the end of 2024.

Goal 2: ADA access is an issue at the Franklin Street location.

Actions:

- Funding will be sought to pay an architect or engineer to explore options for increasing access at that building
- By the end of 2025, a plan will be in place to increase ADA access at the Franklin Street building
- Explore the possibility of an annex with ADA access

Needs:

- Funding to pay for professional advice regarding addition or retrofit options.
- A good relationship with the Village and Community so that any proposed changes will be welcomed.

Evaluation:

- By 2025 CPL will have secured and discussed several concrete options for ADA access improvement.

SUMMARY

Aware that rising cost of living is affecting the lives of area residents, including staff, Catskill Public Library and Palenville Branch Library will continue and improve its offerings in the areas of programs, services, technology, staff retention, and facilities. Budgetary increases will be sought judiciously with the intention of maintaining and improving the return on investment that members of our community can expect from their libraries. The Library will also seek funding through public and private grants when available while conscious that it is unwise to fund regular operational costs with unsustainable funds.

The Library will revisit this Plan of Service periodically and the Board will revise it as necessary but no less frequently than every 5 years. Community input into the Library's resources, programs, and services is welcome at any time, regardless of the existence of a current Plan of Service as the Library endeavors to be flexible in meeting the needs of local residents.