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A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE MARK SKINNER LIBRARY

Introduction: Mark Skinner Library was founded in 1897, and acts as the sole public library serving the Manchester community. For most of its history, the Library was governed and operated as a private library. However, in 2003, the Library followed the path of most of its Vermont brethren by converting to a public library, one receiving some form of public (municipal) funding.

In March of 2005, in an effort to partially address some very formidable financial challenges, the Library won unanimous approval from the voters at Town Meeting to roughly double Manchester's annual municipal library contribution. Thus, for FY 2006, the Library will receive public funding of \$120,000. Although this additional funding is a very helpful step in the right direction, the Library's financial situation, both from an operational and a capital needs perspective, remains precarious. As a condition of the Town's additional level of assistance, the Library pledged that it would not invade its endowment principal in FY 2006, it would accept additional town representation on its Board of Trustees and it would answer some fundamental questions about its future.

Background: The Library embarked on a strategic planning process in early June 2005, when the Board of Trustees agreed to construct a thoughtful, coherent, long-term plan. The plan was to be one that produces a vision for the "library of the future" and charts a sound course for the Library over the next five years. The strategic plan that would evolve from the process must answer the following fundamental questions:

A. Primary question:

1. What does the Manchester community want in its future public library?

- a. What services should the Library offer?
- b. What "constituency" should the Library primarily serve?

B. Subsidiary questions:

1. Given the future service mission of the Library (to be determined in A.1.), what facility-oriented changes should be implemented?

- a. Should the Library remain at its present location?
- b. If the Library remains at its present location, what changes to the current structure should be effected to properly address future service demands?

2. How should the Library be governed?

- a. As a private library with a private Board of Trustees?
- b. As a public library without town representation?
- c. As a public library with town representation?
 - How much representation?
 - Should town representatives be elected or appointed?
- d. As a municipal library with elected, autonomous Trustees?
- e. Or as a municipal library with appointed Trustees?

3. How should the Library be financed?

- a. All privately?
- b. All publicly?
- c. A mix of public and private funding?
- d. Should the operational funding source differ from the capital funding source?

The Planning Process: The Library staff and Board of Trustees agreed that the planning effort should be conducted in an objective, unbiased manner, and that those shepherding the process would make every effort to enter the planning arena devoid of preconceived notions. Every idea and question that would come to the fore would be entertained and considered.

It was also agreed that public participation would be an imperative. The Library decided to enter into an extensive public dialogue with the Manchester community in the development of its strategic plan. The greater Manchester community would be invited to offer input through a series of public forums.

To implement the planning process, the Library Board appointed a four-member subcommittee comprised of Bob Allen, Christine Miles, Pauline Architas Moore and Jeff Wilson to work with Library Director Ellen Boyer to facilitate public input and guide the plan development process. The subcommittee asked Wayne and Deborah Granquist of Granquist Associates, a consulting firm in Weston, Vermont, to assist in the effort.

In early September 2005, the Library announced it would be holding a series of three public forums to involve the greater Manchester community in planning the future of the Library. Invitations were mailed to several dozen community leaders and representatives, and articles about the forthcoming sessions were featured in local newspapers. All of the meetings would be held at the Manchester Town Hall, and arrangements were made to have the events televised on the Northshire public access TV channel.

The first forum was held from 5:30 to 7 PM on September 26, 2005. More than 50 people attended. After a presentation of the history of the Mark Skinner Library and information about its utilization and finances, the audience was asked "What do you like about the Mark Skinner Library?" The responses were listed on white paper sheets.

After some discussion, the attendees were then asked to come up with suggested changes that would make the Library even better. After the list of suggestions was compiled, the members of the audience were each given three red dots and asked to "vote" for their top choices.

At the second forum, on October 17, 2005, the results of the first session were reviewed. The top choices for making the Library even better broke down into two areas: service enhancements and facility improvements.

The suggestions for enhanced services were:

- more outreach – a bookmobile, home delivery, a monthly newsletter
- longer hours – especially Mondays and evenings 5-8 pm
- more computers – with computer training and a wireless hub
- more programs for teens – including recent DVDs and videos

There were five alternatives expressed regarding improving the facility:

1. remain in the current facility – make repairs, address code issues and handicapped accessibility deficiencies (estimated cost \$1.2 million)
2. remain in the current facility – address deficiencies (as in #1) and make functional and efficiency improvements (estimated cost \$1.6 million)
3. relocate to a new site with new stand-alone library (estimated cost \$3.3 million)
4. partner with MEMS and relocate to the MEMS campus (estimated cost \$3.1 million)
5. relocate to a multi-purpose "community center" at the Town's recreation area (estimated cost for the entire project of \$13.7 million with an indoor pool, \$10.1 million without)

The approximately 50 people in attendance at the October 17th meeting were then asked to break into groups of 8, discuss the suggestions, and come up with answers to 2 questions:

- *What would your group recommend about (a) service levels and (b) the facility?*
- *How would your group pay for your recommendations?*

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After a half hour of discussions within the groups, each group presented its conclusions to the full audience.

There was remarkable uniformity in the conclusions of the groups.

With regard to improving services and programs:

- bookmobile – no, too expensive
- home delivery – yes, but use volunteers
- longer hours – yes, but less than the full 19 extra hours suggested
- technology – more computers, training and a wireless hub
- programs – more, especially for young people
- newsletter – maybe, but use existing media wherever possible

The groups then considered the five options for dealing with the facility issue. The alternative of moving to a new stand-alone library facility received the greatest support.

The second choice was to remain in the existing building, but make repairs and major renovations to improve the facility. There was little support for partnering with MEMS at the school's campus, and little support for merging the Library with a new community center.

The recommendations from the public meetings were taken into account in drafting this plan, and on November 21, 2005, a third public forum was held to allow the Manchester community a chance to review and comment on the plan prior to its presentation to the Library's Board of Trustees and the Manchester Selectboard on December 6, 2005.

At the November 21st meeting Bob Allen presented an outline of the proposed plan and moderated the spirited discussion that followed. There were many comments and questions, but they boiled down to these:

- What are the facts on users, fixed costs and variable costs?
- What services does the Library want to provide? What services do the Library's customers want? In the future, will libraries still be mainly repositories of print materials? What about computers? Might libraries just be information centers?
- Has the Library compared itself to libraries in other communities? What are other libraries doing to attract new customers? Perhaps the Library needs to be more of a community center with meeting rooms, programs, more computers, videos etc.

The questions raised at the public session are excellent ones. Some of them have ready answers. Others will be addressed in the planning process. But here is a quick summary of some of the available facts:

- The Library is currently serving more people than it ever has before, with less money for materials than ever before. During the past 7 years program attendance has nearly tripled and membership has more than doubled, while the book budget has been cut almost in half, and the magazine and newspaper budget has been reduced to \$0.
- The total budget figure has increased over the 7-year span due mostly to uncontrollable costs like fuel, electricity, telecommunications and health insurance.
- The size of the Library's collection has also decreased. Over the past few years library staff have systematically sold or discarded books in order to make the collection more relevant, accurate and attractive.

Circulation of adult materials accounted for 76% of the total (30,260 items).

fiction	34%
audio formats	14%
non fiction	10%
video formats	10%
magazines	6%
large print	2%

Circulation of juvenile materials accounted for 24% of the total (9,653 items).

preschool books	11%
non fiction	4%
easy readers (grades K-2)	2%
fiction (grades 3-8)	2%
young adult (grades 9-12)	2%
video	2%
audio	1%

Clearly, the young adult population is underserved at Mark Skinner, and is therefore one of the target populations in this plan.

A review of municipal financial support afforded libraries in comparable Vermont towns reveals that public funding for Mark Skinner is currently below the norm.

Town	Population	FY 06 Library Funding Request	FY 06 Library Funding Per Capita
Ludlow	2,449	\$33,700	\$13.76
Middlebury	8,183	\$502,369	\$48.44
Shelburne	6,944	\$171,006	\$24.63
Stowe	4,339	\$374,844	\$86.39
Williston	7,650	\$363,720	\$47.55
Wilmington	2,225	\$93,566	\$42.05
Woodstock	4,212	\$74,336	\$17.65
Average	4,000	\$179,282	\$31.16
Manchester- FY06		\$120,000	\$28.71

It must be noted that much of this plan is aimed at getting answers to the question, "What should the Mark Skinner Library of the future look like?" For example, the plan spells out a timetable for assessing the impact of information technology on the future usage of the Library. And there is a process to involve young people, their teachers, parents and advocates in determining how best to serve their interests.

But it should be clear in reading the plan that the Trustees and leadership of the Mark Skinner Library believe that meeting the future needs of the Manchester community will require an *up-to-date physical facility* – not simply a "virtual", or on-line presence. The Trustees and staff are mindful of the need to exploit all the advantages of technology but are also convinced that Manchester must have a *place* where people of all ages come and gather to read, converse, explore, be educated and entertained – in short, a library!

The Plan: The Mark Skinner Library's Strategic Plan has been developed to move the Library toward its vision of the future, to further the historic mission of this century-old library, and to meet the goals that have emerged from this planning process.

Vision – Over the next several years, the Mark Skinner Library will grow to be an even more vibrant community center for education, enjoyment and communication that serves all members of the greater Manchester community with warmth and efficiency, enjoys a sound financial base, and is housed in an up-to-date, welcoming facility.

Mission – The Mark Skinner Library is committed to serving the life-long journey of learning by providing information and opportunities for personal enrichment and enjoyment to people of all ages in our community.

The goals to be accomplished over the next five years reflect not only the thoughts and recommendations expressed by the public, but also the best considered thought of the Library's staff and Trustees. The goals are intended to answer the basic questions posed at the beginning of the process, as described above, and as follow:

1. What does the Manchester community want in its future public library?

The community desires a first-rate library.

2. What facility-oriented changes should be implemented?

The first choice, based upon public input, is to build a new, free-standing library in Manchester. The second choice would be to repair, rehabilitate and expand the existing building. The decision between these two will depend in large part on the amount of financial support that can be garnered from private donors and town taxpayers.

3. How should the Library be governed?

By a Board of Trustees on which the Selectboard has representation.

4. How should the Library be financed?

By a combination of private donations, distributions from the endowment, and support from the town of Manchester. Over time, the Library will seek a level of town support equal to 70% of the Library's annual operating revenue (the current average for municipalities in Vermont).⁴

Strategic Goals:

Goal 1: Collections, programs and services that meet the needs of the greater Manchester community.

Goal 2: Up-to-date and user-friendly technology that enhances the knowledge and education of our patrons.

Goal 3: A sound and sustainable financial program that will support a first rate public library in Manchester.

Goal 4: A trained and welcoming staff working together with a dedicated Board of Trustees in a manner that clearly defines the role of management and the role of governance.

⁴ 70% public funding average gleaned from the Vermont State Department of Libraries, February 2005.

Goal 5: *Facilities that are efficient, accessible and comfortable, and which provide suitable environments for the widely varying needs of our patrons.*

Meeting our Goals: Through this plan, the Library has tried to define goals clearly and link them to a set of measurable objectives, a series of action steps, a timetable directed at goal and objective implementation and a person or persons responsible for bringing them to fruition. Moreover, the Library is committed to continuing to monitor progress towards the attainment of these goals and objectives, and to amend the objectives or take corrective action when progress falls behind.

Goal 1: *Collections, programs and services that meet the needs of the greater Manchester community.*

Objectives:

1.1 Expand the number of hours that the Library is open to the public.

Action steps:	Completion date:	Tasked to:
1.1a. Evaluate alternatives for expanded hours.	January 1, 2006	Trustees
1.1b. Determine first step towards longer hours and such "first step" costs.	January 1, 2006	Trustees
1.1c. Include "first step" longer hours costs in FY 07 budget.	January 1, 2006	Trustees
1.1d. Implement expanded hours that require additional FY 07 funding.	August 1, 2006	Trustees
1.1e. Survey customers on this topic and modify hours accordingly.	Aug – Sept, 2006	Staff
1.1f. Budget for survey-based expanded hours in FY 08.	November 1, 2006	Trustees
1.1g. Implement survey-based expanded hours.	August 1, 2007	Trustees

1.2 Increase the outreach of the Library to the community.

Action steps:	Completion date:	Tasked to:
1.2a. Assess demand and need for delivery services through focus groups and interviews with prospective users.	November 1, 2007	Staff
1.2b. If sufficient demand exists, evaluate possibility of using volunteers, define program, assign responsibility, create budget, and include costs in FY 2008 budget.	November 15, 2007	Trustees

1.3 Enhance services for young people.

Action steps:	Completion date:	Tasked to:
1.3a. Convene focus groups of teens,	September 1,	Special Youth

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teachers, interested citizens and parents, and explore ways to meet the needs and desires of community youth.	2006	Services Committee
1.3b. Develop a Plan of Youth Services and coordinate with local schools.	October 1, 2006	Special Youth Services Committee
1.3c. Once plan is completed include any additional costs of enhanced youth services in FY 2008 budget.	November 1, 2006	Trustees

Goal 2: *Up-to-date and user-friendly technology that enhances the knowledge and education of our patrons.*

Objectives:

2.1 Improve the availability and usefulness of the Library's information technology resources through more computers, computer training and a wireless hub.

Action steps:	Completion date:	Tasked to:
2.1a. Install a wireless hub as soon as financially feasible.	No later than August 1, 2006	Staff

2.2 Develop and implement a long-range technology plan to improve access and productivity.

Action steps:	Completion date:	Tasked to:
2.2a. Obtain the help of one or more volunteers from the community who are knowledgeable and experienced in information technology, and undertake an analysis of opportunities, needs and resource requirements.	April 1, 2006	Trustees
2.2b. Using the volunteers, explore ways that technology can improve both productivity in the Library and service to the public.	July 1, 2006	Special Tech Committee
2.2c. Develop an Information Technology Plan with dates, financial requirements and milestones.	August 1, 2006	Special Tech Committee
2.2d. Determine sources of possible grants and make applications.	Ongoing	Special Tech Committee
2.2e. Include any costs not covered by grants or other funding in the FY 2008 budget.	November 1, 2006	Trustees

Goal 3: A sound and sustainable financial program that will support a first rate public library in Manchester.

Objectives:

3.1 Increase the Library's ability to raise funds from the community, foundations and other non-taxpayer sources.

Action steps:	Completion date:	Tasked to:
3.1a. Review the mission of the Development Committee and clarify its roles and responsibilities.	April 1, 2006	Development Committee
3.1b. Discuss the position of Development Director as it relates to the current and future needs of the Library, prepare job description.	May 1, 2006	Development Committee
3.1c. If the decision is made to hire a Development Director, use private funds to do so.	August 1, 2006	Trustees

3.2 Ensure that the Library's annual budgets and operating plans meet current needs, accomplish service and technology improvements, and are based on reliable revenue estimates.

Action steps:	Completion date:	Tasked to:
3.2a. Beginning with FY2008, undertake a "zero-based" budget exercise, looking for efficiencies and productivity enhancements while also attempting to accomplish service and technology improvements.	Annually develop the MSL budget proposal by November 1st	Finance Committee
3.2b. Test the budget proposal as follows: If the town of Manchester contributes at the state-wide average for library support of 70% of operating revenues, and the Library endowment contributes no more than 5% of its principal funds, can the Library raise the balance of the budget from its annual fund-raising activities?	Every year, as part of the budget process	Trustees
3.2c. If the answer to "b" is "yes", then the budget is appropriate for approval and submission to the Town. If the answer is "no", then either the budget must be reduced, or steps must be taken to increase the Library's fund-raising capability.	In each year, by November 15th	Trustees

Goal 4: A trained and welcoming staff working together with a dedicated Board of Trustees in a manner that clearly defines the role of management and the role of governance.

Objectives:

4.1 *Maintain and develop a library staff that has the knowledge and skills to meet the goals of this plan.*

Action steps:	Completion date:	Tasked to:
4.1a. Make every effort to compensate (pay & benefits) staff in a manner commensurate with other professional librarians.	Ongoing	Trustees
4.1b. Provide for each staff member a clear job description and annual work objectives.	January 1, 2006	Executive Committee
4.1c. Convene the staff for one hour per week for a staff development program aimed at team building, familiarity with information technology, improving patron service and charting progress on the Strategic Plan.	Ongoing	Library Director
4.1d. Explore outside training and management development resources – recommend attendance for appropriate staff members.	Ongoing	Library Director
4.1e. Hold a dinner and retreat at least annually for staff and Board of Trustees.	May 1, 2006	Executive Committee

4.2 *Ensure that the Board of Trustees is composed of individuals who represent the Manchester community and possess the experience, skills and judgment to attain the Library's goals and objectives.*

Action steps:	Completion Date:	Tasked to:
4.2a. Create a matrix of the qualities needed on the Board of Trustees.	July 1, 2006	Nominating Committee
4.2b. Assess the current Board members as to skills, experience, community relationships and fund-raising ability. Give consideration to the role of the Selectboard in the governance of the Library, and ensure that at least 4 trustees are nominated by the Selectboard.	July 1, 2006	Nominating Committee
4.2c. Review the Library bylaws to determine the appropriate number of Trustees, given the matrix.	July 1, 2006	Nominating Committee
4.2d. Create a list of potential Trustees, identify ways to reach them and undertake a program of recruitment.	July 1, 2006	Nominating Committee

4.3 Clearly define the roles of the Trustees and management.

Action steps:	Completion Date:	Tasked to:
4.3a. Create job descriptions for Trustees, which include their role in fund-raising and safeguarding the financial strength of the institution.	April 1, 2006	Nominating Committee
4.3b. Conduct a training session for continuing and new Trustees that familiarizes them with the history of the Library, the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan and makes clear their role in governance of the Library in contrast to the role of management and staff.	Annually	Trustees

Goal 5: *Facilities that are efficient, accessible and comfortable, and which provide suitable environments for the widely varying needs of our patrons.*

Objectives:

5.1 Decide whether to renovate the existing library building or move to a new location.

Action steps:	Completion Date:	Tasked to:
5.1a. Establish a Facilities Planning Committee (FPC) to assess the feasibility of relocating the Library as opposed to remaining at the current site and enhancing the existing structure.	April 1, 2006	Trustees
5.1b. Issue Facilities Plan with its recommendations and associated cost estimates to the Trustees.	April 1, 2007	Special Facilities Planning Committee
5.1c. Act on the FPC recommendations.	June 1, 2007	Trustees

5.2 Develop a financial plan and establish the economic capacity to carry out the Facilities Plan.

Action steps:	Completion Date:	Tasked to:
5.2a. Recruit and establish a steering committee for a capital campaign.	July 1, 2007	Development Committee
5.2b. Consider and decide whether to engage a capital campaign fund-raising consultant.	September 1, 2007	Trustees
5.2c. If one is to be engaged, search for and contract with such a consultant to perform an assessment of the capacity of the Library to undertake a capital campaign, and provide an estimate of the amount of funds that can be raised.	November 1, 2007	Development Committee
5.2d. Complete fund-raising survey and establish feasible campaign goal.	January 1, 2008	Development Committee
5.2e. Share the results of the fund-raising consultant's survey with the Manchester Selectboard and determine what portion of this capital project should be funded publicly and what amount will come through private donations.	February 1, 2008	Trustees

5.3 Design, finance and construct renovated or new library facility.

Action steps:	Completion Date:	Tasked to:
5.3a. Appoint a Building Committee to engage architects and engineers to establish final cost estimates.	March 1, 2008	Trustees
5.3b. Begin "quiet phase" of the capital campaign.	March 1, 2008	Development Committee
5.3c. Place the bond issue question before the voters of Manchester.	June 1, 2008	Trustees
5.3d. If the bond issue is approved, select architect, engineers and/or construction company or manager.	July 1, 2008	Building Committee

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5.3e. Complete capital campaign.	December 1, 2008	Development Committee
5.3f. Complete pre-construction design and permit work.	February 1, 2009	Building Committee
5.3g. Break ground on the new building or expanded library.	Spring, 2009	Building Committee
5.3h. Complete the construction of a new facility or rehabilitation of the existing library building.	Spring-Summer, 2010	Building Committee

Monitoring and Reporting: The Trustees shall annually review and discuss progress in achieving the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan. In addition, a progress report in this regard shall be included in the Library's annual report to the Selectboard.

Approved January 3, 2006, by the following members of the Mark Skinner Library Board of Trustees:

Bob Allen
 Meg Kenny
 Christine Miles
 Pauline Architas Moore
 Barbara Morrow
 Steve Nichols
 Lauren Seem
 Chuck Thompson
 Jeff Wilson