



Community Forum Participants Enthusiastically Discuss the Future of the Lodi Public Library

On February 21, 2019, approximately 70 people from the Lodi Community gathered to discuss the current status and future direction of the Lodi Public Library. Participants shared their comments about library services, programs, and the facility, and made suggestions for the future direction of the library. In addition to the Forum discussion, an online survey link was posted to the library website as an additional mechanism for gathering community members' opinions and comments. Forum participants asked that a summary of the information be made available to those in attendance as well as to the community at large. The following is an abbreviated summary from both the Forum and the survey.

A special note – The Lodi Library Board is deeply grateful for the support of the Lodi community and was gratified by the number of attendees at the Forum, which clearly demonstrated that the Library is a highly valued asset to our community. Participants and survey respondents are very satisfied with current programs and services, and are genuinely concerned about the library's future. The Board would also like to express deep appreciation to Curt Hossman, who moderated the Forum, engaged participants, and guided an often lively and fruitful discussion on wide-ranging topics.

Three themes emerged from the Forum and survey responses: 1) engaging the community more fully in the life of the library; 2) enhancing library facilities to attract and support community programs, events, and activities; and 3) envisioning the future of the library.

Engaging the Community

Forum participants and survey respondents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with library services and programs. Among the services receiving high marks: access to computers and Internet, story time, the summer reading program, ability to place holds on materials, familiarity with library staff, and the annual Holiday Giving Tree.

When asked what they would like to see changed or added, the following themes emerged:

- ⇒ **Technology** – classes on new devices, digitization, and in general, more access to computers.
- ⇒ **More Programs for Lodi Youth** – programs designed to bring parents and children together, expand story time (in particular offer an evening or Saturday story time), more

activities for children before and after story time, special events (e.g. theater/ plays), and reading clubs.

- ⇒ **More Programs for Adults** –cooking classes, programs for those in assisted living facilities, board game nights, lecture series featuring local authors and artists, language and writing classes.
- ⇒ **Build Community Partnerships** – strengthen ties with local organizations and governmental bodies, especially the Lodi School District, in developing new programming for children and youth. Develop closer ties with groups whose mission focuses on senior citizens. Organizations mentioned included: LCAT (Lodi Community Action Team), IATA (Ice Age Trail Association), Rotary, Optimists, Lake Wisconsin Lodi Chamber of Commerce, ROL (ReachOut Lodi).
- ⇒ **Library Collections** – develop more collections around themes (i.e. black history, environment, etc.). Several respondents suggested that the library acquire more resources in the areas of adult fiction, audio books, e-books, music CDs, and consider additional newspaper resources such as The New York Times.

Enhancing library facilities

While there was not strong dissatisfaction expressed with the library facility, it was noted that the space could be made more welcoming and inviting. The most negative comments about the physical facility related to parking – the spots near the library are frequently full, and limits, access to the library particularly at certain times of the day and evening. It also makes it challenging for some patrons to access the library, especially older adults or those with limited mobility. There needs to be cooperation between city and local businesses to assess parking challenges and how to address them.

Regarding the internal environment, the following suggestions were made:

- ⇒ Library entrance – make it welcoming!
- ⇒ Better use of existing space, including the Board and program rooms
- ⇒ eCafé-style furniture would permit flexible seating arrangements
- ⇒ Create an inviting space for teens
- ⇒ Fresh coat of paint
- ⇒ Coffee area—a space for coffee and conversation (many libraries now have coffee bars and beverages are permitted in library policies.)
- ⇒ Create a family space where parents with small children can read and/or relax while their children engage in activities.
- ⇒ Establish a quiet area for adults
- ⇒ More space for technology
- ⇒ Revamp periodical/magazine area

Envisioning a New Future for the Lodi Public Library

Participants and survey respondents encouraged the library to keep on doing all the great things it has been doing. Many expressed their belief that the library belongs to all and that it can play a role in building a sense of community at a time when Lodi is growing. There was a strong sense that for the immediate future, the library should focus on fiscal resources, continue to assess current programs and services, and keep the community informed.

Additional suggestions

Better communications with the community. One respondent noted, *“I think you are doing a good first step by asking opinions of library users. However, please do not forget to follow up and share how you are implementing the peoples’ suggestions.”* By this report, we are beginning that process.

Hold another forum just on library finances and funding. Public library funding in Wisconsin is complicated. The funding formula is based in the Statutes and not easily explained. An effort to explain library funding would be helpful for the public to gain an overall appreciation of the financial challenges faced by the library. The Library Board is planning to hold another forum this summer, at which time it will share more statistical information about circulation, usage, program participation, etc.

Continue to be a safe haven for children. The Library has played this role in the past, and it should be a focus in future planning. One respondent stated it this way: *“As a parent and staff member at our local school, the kids programs are an essential part of our community. The story time is a place for young moms to connect and for kiddos to develop a love of reading. The summer reading program has been essential in encouraging kiddos to keep reading in the summer to prevent the summer slide. Our local library is essential to our community!”*

The forum elicited a great deal of information about how the Lodi community views its library, and a wealth of ideas were put forward. Truly, the Lodi Public Library is greatly valued and loved. The Library Board, along with the new library director Alex LeClair, will evaluate and incorporate the comments and suggestions in this report as it develops a new strategic plan.

The Lodi Library Board anticipates holding more forums to engage the community in planning for the future of the library. As noted above, a community forum on funding for the library will be held this summer. Watch for more information about this event.

A sincere thank you to all who participated in the forum and/or completed the survey.

The Lodi Public Library Board
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