

Thomas Memorial Library

Cape Elizabeth, Maine

Strategic Plan July 2025 – June 2030

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“Libraries are places where people come to know themselves and their communities... People may go to the library looking mainly for information, but they find each other there.”

–Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein,
Better Together : Restoring the American Community

I. Introduction

Public libraries in this country were founded based on democratic ideals, and they have always placed public benefit at the heart of their mission. The community public library became a prevalent and lasting American institution in the period between 1870 and 1930. Thomas Memorial Library was established right in the middle of this timeframe, with its formal dedication on April 22, 1919.

The original building—a one-room schoolhouse known as the Spurwink School building—was donated to the town by William Widgery Thomas, Jr. in order to become the community’s own free public library. In the 1919 report by the Maine Library Commission to the Maine State Legislature, the creation of the Thomas Memorial Library was described as follows:

“The Town of Cape Elizabeth, Maine, has recently been honored by the gift of a public library. This gift was made by the Honorable William Widgery Thomas, whose home was there and who has never forgotten the "little red school" of his boyhood days, which is the building completely equipped with furniture, supplies and books now presented for a

library... Such eager and appreciative use of the library facilities has been displayed since the opening that those interested in watching its progress feel that it will be only a brief time before the present room will prove inadequate and there will be need for other arrangements such as, possibly, the erecting of a community building which shall at the same time house the library and bring it nearer to the people than even a library building could.”

Indeed, the Thomas Memorial Library has gone through several transformations in the past century since its founding.

- 1958: The library was expanded by a 46 x 30 addition to house additional stack space, a children’s room and a reference area.
- 1967: By this time, more space was needed. An entryway was added and a new children’s room was developed in the basement.
- 1978: Again, it was determined that the library was in need of more space. Over the next 5 years, alternatives were carefully considered.
- 1983: The Town Council formed a committee to study the reuse of the Pond Cove School Annex as additional library space.
- 1984: A combination of public and private funds were used to construct the connector as well as provide new furnishings. The connector also accommodated the checkout desk and gallery space.
- 1985: As a result of the earnest efforts of town officials and active citizens, the former Annex was opened as the adult section, and the children’s library relocated in the original building and its addition by the end of the year.*
- 2007: A new committee was established to look at the long-term needs of the Thomas Memorial Library, and develop a plan to meet those needs.
- 2009: The Town Council voted to delay plans to rebuild the library.
- 2011: An architectural consultant was hired, and after a lengthy study and focus groups, they presented their first design for a new library building to the town for consideration.
- 2012: Voters rejected a referendum to borrow up to \$6 million for construction of a new Thomas Memorial Library.
- 2013: The Town Council established a five-member Library Building Committee to develop a building plan for renovating the Thomas Memorial Library.
- 2014: Voters approved the revised library renovation plan.

- 2015: The original Spurwink School building was detached from the existing library and became the site for library services during the renovation and construction of the new library building.
- 2016: The renovated Thomas Memorial Library opened in its current space.

*(Adapted from: “History of the Thomas Memorial Library Building”,
in the February 9, 1986 rededication booklet.)

Developing a Strategic Plan has been a goal for the Thomas Memorial Library and the Thomas Memorial Library Committee since the library reopened in 2016, but the process was repeatedly stalled. In 2020, under the leadership of Rachel Davis, who became our Library Director after having spent 27 years as our Children’s Librarian, the library and the TML Committee made plans to begin the strategic planning process. After a few stops and starts—and the interruption of the COVID-19 pandemic—the process finally got underway in earnest in the spring of 2024 with the hiring of consultant Will Plumley.

A Strategic Planning Working Group was formed consisting of members of the Thomas Memorial Library Committee, the Thomas Memorial Library Foundation, and Thomas Memorial Library staff. The work began in earnest in September of 2024 with community feedback about the library in the form of a survey and a community conversation. The Strategic Planning working group used that feedback as a starting point for embarking upon its work, meeting monthly until April of 2025.

II. The Library in 2025

"The libraries of America are and must ever remain the home of free and inquiring minds. To them, our citizens - of all ages and races, of all creeds and persuasions - must be able to turn with clear confidence that there they can freely seek the whole truth, unvarnished by fashion and uncompromised by expediency."

-- Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953

Public libraries have a long history of supporting civic health and upholding democratic principles. Libraries offer public spaces for community members to access trusted information and engage in discourse that bridges political divides. Public libraries in particular are essential to building social capital and encouraging civic engagement. Libraries also play a critical role in providing access to diverse perspectives and challenging prevailing orthodoxies, enabling citizens to make informed decisions about their lives and communities.

Work on this Strategic Plan began during an election year in which the “culture wars” had sharply divided the country, and the ideals upon which public libraries in this country

were founded were threatened both in rhetoric and in action. In 2024, ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked 821 attempts to censor library materials and services. In those cases, 2,452 unique titles were challenged; 72% of demands to censor books in school and public libraries were initiated by pressure groups and government entities that include elected officials, board members, and administrators.

While social and economic turmoil often threaten the viability of many public libraries around the country and in the state, Thomas Memorial Library is fortunate to maintain strong community usage and support. The library's strong financial support from the Thomas Memorial Library Foundation allows the library to offer enhancements to programs and services that otherwise would not be possible from the library's regular operating budget.

By the end of FY2025:

- The total number of TML cardholders stood at 4,830, or roughly 51% of the Town's population.
- The library had added over 3,400 physical items to its collection, with an annual circulation of over 85,000 items.
- An average of 317 unique users per month had borrowed an annual total of over 15,000 ebooks and digital audiobooks.
- The library had offered almost 600 public programs, with a total attendance of almost 10,000 people.
- An average of 1,500 people had visited the library each week.

Nevertheless, uncertainty about support for libraries at the state level as a result of federal funding loomed large, as Thomas Memorial Library and other Maine libraries benefit from resource sharing consortia at the state level, some of which are supported by federal grants.

It was against this backdrop that the Strategic Planning Working Group reaffirmed the foundational principles of public libraries in general, and Thomas Memorial Library in particular.

While in 2025 the library has continued to provide a robust suite of services and strong collections that make it a destination point for so many community members, we hope that this strategic plan will guide decision making, and help our staff to make deliberate choices about the services we offer in support of our well-considered objectives.

III. Mission

The Thomas Memorial Library fosters individual and civic well-being, growth, and vitality by connecting people with information, resources, and one another.

IV. Vision

Within the next five years, Thomas Memorial Library will be recognized as a cornerstone of democracy: a place where everyone in our community feels seen, accepted, supported and valued. Grounded in a commitment to the common good, we will expand access to resources and programs that strengthen our community by bringing people together around ideas, interests, and opportunities for discovery.

V. Values

- **Access** - We actively strive to remove barriers, create spaces, and offer resources that are accessible, welcoming, safe, and beneficial for all community members regardless of age, background, ability, socioeconomic status, language, culture, or identity.
- **Respect** - We honor the inherent dignity and diverse perspectives of all library users, staff, and community members.
- **Intellectual Freedom** - We resist censorship, protect privacy, and uphold the right of all individuals to seek, access, and express ideas within a safe and welcoming environment.
- **Creativity** - We embrace creative expression and innovative problem-solving in our programming as well as our daily operations. We foster creativity among both patrons and staff. We believe creativity is essential for self-actualization and collaboration, and that it gives humanity the best chance at envisioning and creating a better future.
- **Sustainability** - We make environmentally sound, economically viable, and equitable choices that preserve both physical and digital resources to ensure current and future service accessibility. Supporting climate resiliency allows the library to foster a thriving community, safeguard our shared well-being, and build a better future.
- **Human Relationships** - We recognize the importance of human connection to the health and wellbeing of individuals and societies. We promote a family-centered

approach to literacy and learning, expanding that philosophy to provide resources for community members throughout the lifespan.

- **Social Progress** - We advocate for an informed and civically engaged society by encouraging dialogue, partnering with organizations that serve the public good, and embracing advancements in knowledge, technology, and information access that advance the ideals of a healthy American democracy.

VI. Objectives & Strategies

The Strategic Planning Working Group developed the following five objectives to support the library's vision for 2030. Included here is an initial set of strategies that can be used to achieve each objective. It should be noted that these strategies are changeable throughout the five year time horizon in order to meet changing circumstances or as new and better ideas arise.

Objective 1: Connect with and welcome community members who may not currently use or feel comfortable in the library.

Possible strategies:

1. Promote and expand existing delivery program for homebound or low mobility patrons
2. Diversify offerings for various age groups
3. Design and advertise programs that can be enjoyed by a diversity of abilities and developmental levels
4. Augment the abilities of staff to overcome language and communication barriers with library users from a variety of backgrounds
5. Curate, offer, and advertise adaptive technologies and tools for library users
6. Offer options that allow community members to benefit from library programming virtually or through recordings

Objective 2: Develop programs and curate resources that foster critical literacy skills and empower community members to be well-informed.

Possible strategies:

1. Help older adults use new and existing technology tools
2. Train staff on available library and regional resources and build systems to retain that knowledge
3. Ensure that library programs and resources support the development of a variety of literacies: spoken and written word; cultural and historical, music and art, technological and analog communication systems, language acquisition, media and science

4. Help children build early literacy skills to ignite a love of learning

Objective 3: Provide opportunities for civic engagement in order to foster a sense of community and social responsibility.

Possible strategies:

1. Encourage understanding and participation in local government
2. Expand programs that seek to connect people with one another
3. Provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas and offer resources that encourage productive dialogue and appreciation for diverse perspectives

Objective 4: Foster creativity, playfulness, and delight through resources and programs that entertain and inspire.

Possible strategies:

1. Support creative exploration and expression
2. Provide opportunities for connection and expansion through games and imaginative play for all ages
3. Provide resources to encourage an appreciation of the power of art, invention, fantasy, and possibility

Objective 5: Promote well-being, health, and safety of the environment, individuals, and groups.

Possible strategies:

1. Seek out new partnerships and strengthen existing ones to promote resources that support health, safety and wellness
2. Create welcoming sustainable gardens on the library grounds
3. Seek sustainable solutions for library operations
4. Help the community share, reduce and reuse resources
5. Continue to support victims and survivors of domestic violence
6. Continue work as a Family Place Library to help families thrive
7. Support staff wellness

VII. Measures of Success

The Thomas Memorial Library uses established public library standards to track and measure our progress and commitment to the public. We use public library benchmarking and outcome-based measures to evaluate and compare our library to other Maine libraries, and to determine how effectively we are fulfilling our commitment to the community and positively impacting their lives. By setting targets and evaluating our success in relation to established measures, we can assess our achievements.

We will conduct evaluations annually, and at the conclusion of this five-year Strategic Plan. These evaluations will assess tangible results tied to each objective, including new or enhanced services, completed special projects, statistical data, and anecdotal and formal user feedback.

Some possible indicators may include measurements whether the library:

- Maintained or improved usage of the library by underserved populations, including children 6 - 11, teens 12 - 18, younger adults 20 - 40, seniors, and neurodiverse populations.
- Maintained or improved accessibility through the addition of adaptive technology and other resources.
- Prioritized regular staff training on safety, wellness, communication, and professional development.
- Reviewed and updated policies to ensure all community members have free and equitable access to library resources and services.
- Implemented sustainability measures for the library building and grounds.
- Maintained or improved a well-used and diverse collection of physical and digital resources.
- Maintained or improved strong relationships with Town government and other funding bodies to ensure the continued financial support that enables the library to achieve its community objectives.

The ultimate measures of this strategic plan's success will be documentation of the ways in which the library's core values are both reflected in and advanced by the resources and services it has delivered.

“I hope that this will prove a little lighthouse of knowledge. I hope it will lead you to a life more intellectual, more elevated and more spiritual... I have built a lighthouse and furnished the lamp, but it is for you, inhabitants of Cape Elizabeth, to keep the lamp burning so that it shall shine over this town forever.”

–William Widgery Thomas Jr.,
Thomas Memorial Library Dedication Address
April 22, 1919

VIII. The Strategic Planning Working Group

Will Plumley, Consultant

Thomas Memorial Library Committee

- Timothy Blackstone, Chair
- Reed Dyer
- Elizabeth Elliott
- Patience Maloney

Thomas Memorial Library Foundation Board

- Megan Bagdasarian

Thomas Memorial Library Staff

- Rachel Davis, Director
- Allyson Frick, Family Engagement Manager
- Sarah Gabrielson, Family Engagement Assistant
- Sasha Kohan, Community Engagement Librarian

This Strategic Plan was formally ratified for adoption by the Thomas Memorial Library Committee on July 10, 2025.

Thomas Memorial Library Committee

Tim Blackstone, Chair
Reed Dyer
Liz Elliott
Griff Gilbert
Tim Hebda
Patience Maloney
Scott Mazuzan
Rachel Davis, Secretary