

Amherst's libraries--The Jones, the Munson, the NAL--are **magic** places.

They are places where many children first encounter the wonders that books make possible. That **magic does not end**, however, when childhood ends, as adult readers can tell you when they discover an unexpected treasure while browsing the shelves of the adult collection.

Our libraries are places where **hospitality** comes alive as patrons encounter the friendliness of our extraordinary staff who, every day, go out of their way **to know, not just to serve**, those with whom they interact.

Amherst's libraries are **transformational** places where English language learners come to master the complexities of a second language. They are places where immigrants and residents study to become citizens.

They are **essential** places where vulnerable and disadvantaged people who need help with the challenges of daily life find the resources which

they would not otherwise get. In Amherst's libraries, homeless people find refuge and lonely people find companionship.

They are places where **book lovers find nurturance** in a world where some question the value of books.

Our libraries also offer the **hope** that comes alive in books and materials which record the moments when **what was once thought impossible is conquered by the human imagination.**

They **honor our varied pasts and point us toward the future.**

And, along with our public schools. Amherst's libraries are our town's most **democratic places** where the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the longtime resident and newcomer interact and are served as equals. They are places where **facts matter**, where civility reigns, and where the doors are open to everyone.

Amherst has **much to be proud of** in the work that is done every day in our libraries. I am **grateful to the Director, the staff, and the Trustees** for their contributions to that work.

2019 has been a year of great accomplishment for our three libraries, but there is **much that needs to be done** to sustain them and to make our libraries work for all of Amherst's residents.

Let me offer **a few facts** about what our libraries do for our community.

Every year, over **270,000 patrons visit our libraries**. The vast majority are not library card holders.

Still almost **450,000 items were loaned**;

almost 7,000 people attend youth programs;

over 26,000 reference questions are answered;

and over 2,500 people attend ESL tutoring sessions.

The services our libraries provide include

homebound delivery for those unable to leave their homes,
meeting room rentals for countless civic and other organizations,
computer access and wireless printing,
and **access to an in-house Social Worker**
(and, of course, interlibrary loan!). And, patrons checked out
guitars, banjo and ukuleles over 200 times

Library programs include bilingual story times; PC Doctor Hank; On
the Same Page community read events; and 5 different Summer Reading
Programs.

The Jones contributes in countless ways to the **cultural vibrancy of the
downtown**. It is a destination for young families, for the people who
take advantage of our rich programming, and for visitors to Amherst.
And **the Munson and North Amherst Libraries are indispensable to
their communities**.

We estimate that **the value of the services, books, and materials** which the libraries provided last year was **\$9.7 million**. In fiscal 2019, **the town appropriated \$1.9 million for our libraries**. Our town got \$4 in value for every dollar it invested.

Yet **the costs of running our libraries are rising faster than Town appropriations** and are outstripping our fundraising abilities. Hard choices are made every day about what we can do to serve the needs of the Town.

Amidst the daily work that our libraries do, we expended considerable energy looking out over the horizon. Thus we carried out a **comprehensive Long Range Planning process for the two Branch Libraries**. In this process we did public surveys, held public and staff fora, and analyzed data about the use and performance of the branch libraries.

The Trustees also established a **Sustainability Committee** to help us think in a broad way about the environmental impact of the work we do and began the process of creating an **Accessibility Committee** to help us think about ways we can better serve users with physical and other kinds of challenges.

We have entered onto a **new partnership with the Friends of the Jones Library System to combine our fundraising efforts and structure**. We hope this will eliminate confusion and produce stronger fundraising results.

Perhaps most important among our all our efforts to plan for the future is the work we have done to plan for the Jones Library. **In July of next year, we expect to receive a grant from the MBLC** to provide substantial funding for a long overdue renovation and expansion of the Jones library. The town will have 6 months from the date of the grant to fund its share of the project.

Right now our **building is inadequate and problematic in many ways.**

Let me list a few of the problems that the renovation and expansion will address:

The entire original 1928 portion of the Library is **not ADA compliant.**

There are real **safety issues** in the library because of its physical configuration.

The **atrium roof is poorly designed** and has leaked since it was installed. Many attempts throughout the years to make it water tight have failed, so we collect the rainwater in buckets.

The Jones is **in need of new HVAC equipment** and software because the system is at the end of its life-cycle, costly and inefficient.

The Adult Circulation Desk is confusing because there are three service points and it is hard to recognize as the service desk.

The only adult public restrooms are located on the lower level, which is closed 30 minutes before the Library closes each night (i.e., for security purposes).

The building is not wired properly for a 21st century library, thus it cannot handle the needs of the Library.

The Town Libraries Annual Report of 1910, unearthed by our wonderful Special Collections Librarian, Cyndi Harbeson, captures a sentiment that is as telling today as it was a century ago:

“Nothing can be more discouraging to a librarian wishing to make the library of real service to the community than the necessity of a constant struggle with absolutely unfit conditions.”

And, even if we were able to meet the challenges of the existing Jones building, we would still be faced with the fact that we **need more space than we have within the existing footprint.**

We need that space to **better serve the needs of children.**

Currently, the Children's Room is not large enough to house its collection (the collection is located on two different floors of the Library), nor technology (there is not enough room to house the number of computers necessary to meet the demand of the youth).

We need more space to **become fully ADA compliant** and accessible.

We need **more space to serve teens and young adults.** Right now there is no separate teen/young adult space.

We need more space to serve the **growing population of English language learners** who seek our help. Right now there is insufficient space for group and one-on-one ESL tutoring sessions.

We need more **space to enable us to preserve Amherst's history.**

Our Special Collections department lacks sufficient storage space for new manuscripts and other additions, and there is no place to process additions to the collection.

We need more space so that **book lovers have comfortable, inviting places to read in the library.**

We need **more space to meet the technology needs of Amherst's low income and homeless population.**

Change is never easy, especially when what we have is so loved by so many in the community.

The library of today is **more than a storehouse for books**. It is a **comprehensive social service facility**. Its vitality depends on doing that social service in one building.

The physical facility of the **Jones was renovated in 1967 and expanded in 1993**. Both times these changes were met with considerable resistance. But **both times the Town recognized that the**

changing needs of the town meant that the Jones would have to change.

Today, no one **wants** to expand the Jones just to expand. We **need** to expand the Jones to fulfill the vision of those who established this gem of a library, namely to be our community's cross road and a resource for all of Amherst's residents.

For Amherst's libraries this is a **time of challenge, of renewal and of possibility.**

If we prize the **magic** that happens, the **hospitality** that is offered, the **transformations** that are made possible, **the nurture and refuge** that is provided, and **the democratic possibility** that is realized every day in our libraries, we need to meet the challenge and grasp the possibilities that lie before us.

The famous astronomer **Carl Sagan** got it right when he said, “**The health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture, and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well we support our libraries.**”

For Amherst, the next year will go a long way to determining whether we will pass that test.

Thank you.