



# GROTON PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2026–2030

**Submitted by:**



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# Groton Public Library

## Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2026–2030

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing world, public libraries are uniquely positioned to connect, inspire, and empower people of all ages. The best public libraries are innovative, responsive, and quick to adapt to their community's evolving needs. As Groton Public Library workers, we are proud of our ability to pivot quickly and support our residents in every way possible, most notably during the recent pandemic.



Every five years, we review our organization from a higher-level perspective and create a new strategic plan. We listen to our community's feedback and diverse perspectives, evaluate what's working well and what needs improvement, and assess the evolving needs of those we serve. Each town is unique, and its public library must adapt to meet local interests and needs while preserving core library services.

We began our strategic planning process in the fall of 2019, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to pause. To ensure optimal conditions, we waited until normal operations resumed, full staffing and budget were restored, a top-to-bottom technological overhaul was completed, and we welcomed the organization's first-ever Assistant Library Director. We resumed our planning efforts in the fall of 2023.

Strategic plans are essential for guiding decision-making and ensuring long-term success. By assessing priorities, reviewing our direction, setting clear goals, and outlining actionable steps, we create a roadmap to the future to ensure we plan effectively to achieve our goals.

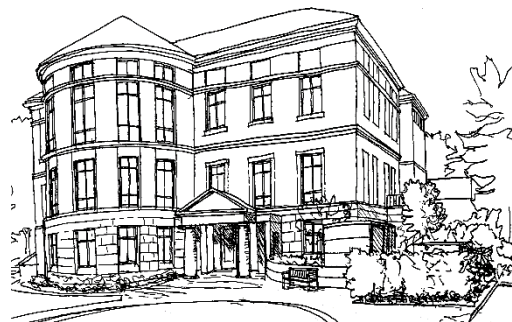
This document outlines our vision for the next five years through fiscal year 2030, which ends June 30, 2030. We look forward to working with and alongside our community to create the best possible public library for the citizens of Groton.

As always, we welcome your comments or feedback.

Vanessa Abraham  
Library Director

"As I mentioned...the town LOVES its library, and it's not because of the building and books, though they are both great. We recognize how outstanding, friendly and caring the staff is, which makes entering, asking for help and using resources such a wonderful experience."

*-Carole Greenfield, in a 2/16/24 email*



## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Groton, Massachusetts, is a small town known for its quintessential New England beauty and charm, excellent public schools, well-run government, strong community participation and philanthropy, exceptional quality of life, and generous conservation of open spaces.



The Groton Public Library (GPL) has been an essential part of the Groton community for 170 years. Founded in 1854, it is one of the oldest libraries in the Commonwealth. The Library was primarily housed in a room in Town Hall until 1894, when the current building opened. Over 100 years later, in 1999, the 4,000 sq. ft. two-level building quadrupled to the 17,417 sq. ft. three-level beautifully transformed and renovated building we enjoy today.

Opposite the Town Common, the GPL has long served as Groton’s center of learning, literacy, creativity, and connection. It has experienced many periods of change—whether the Spanish Flu, Great Depression, post-World War II boom, late 20<sup>th</sup>-century population growth, internet explosion, technological advancement, information revolution, digital universe, or the COVID pandemic—through it all, GPL has successfully adapted and continued to serve its users.

Responding to the community’s needs identified in the FY2016-2020 strategic plan included a multi-year interior space redesign that created a fantastic new teen area by reducing staff space and shelving. We made new computer areas and opened up lines of sight to provide a more inviting open floor plan with additional seating and work options. We extended Sunday hours (the #1 survey request) to be open nine months (instead of four) each year since 2018 (excepting COVID-related budget cuts and hiring freezes). We added drive-up book returns, returned adult non-fiction from “neighborhoods” to Dewey Decimal Classification numeric order, expanded digital collections, improved customer service, and increased programming for all ages.

In developing this new Strategic Plan, the GPL has completed a comprehensive study of the community’s evolving needs to design the best way forward. This document describes the planning process, summarizes the findings, and shares the final plan for fiscal years 2026-2030.



“The GPL was one of the major reasons we moved to town 19 years ago and we still love everything about it! Keep up the great work.”


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“Just want to say how much that I appreciate the GPL staff for everything they do... GPL is one of the best parts of living in Groton, and I don't say that lightly.”


*-2024 survey comments*

# GROTON, MA COMMUNITY PROFILE


The Town of Groton was founded in 1655 and is situated in Middlesex County, approximately 35 miles northwest of Boston. It is centrally located within the state and provides easy access to major roadways. Groton encompasses 32.5 square miles, making it the largest town by area in Middlesex County. Groton is home to two prestigious private preparatory schools, Groton School and Lawrence Academy, the world's largest Shirdi Sai Temple outside of India, and the world-class Groton Hill Music Center.

 **11,315**  
**Population**

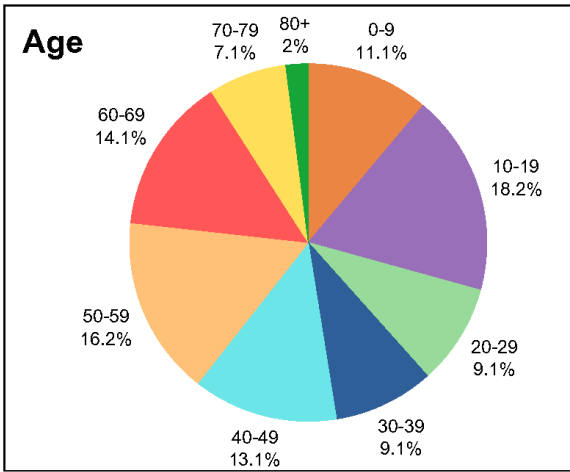
**Sex**  
Male **51%**  
Female **49%**



**Households**  
**3,710**




**3** people per household on average



 **Median Home Value \$628,500**

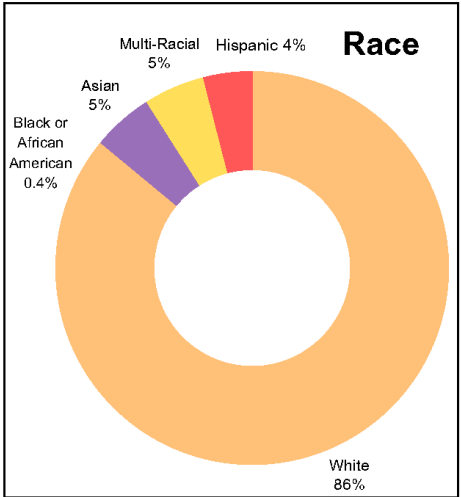
**Median Household Income**  
**\$186,333**



twice the MA average of \$94,488

**Education**

- High School Graduates: **96%**
- Bachelors Degree: **34%**
- Masters degree or higher: **29%**




**Foreign Born Population**  
**9.5%**

**Languages Spoken at Home**

- 8.8%** speak a language other than English at home (MA: 25%)
- 1.6%** speak Spanish

**Employment**  
In the Labor Workforce (ages 16+): **6,216**



Unemployment: **2.4%**  
(MA: 2.9% US: 3.9%)

**Persons Living in Poverty**  
**4.5%**

3% of children & 11% of seniors ages 65+  
MA: 10.4% of people live in poverty

**Sources:** census.gov, mass.gov

# GROTON PUBLIC LIBRARY PROFILE

Founded in 1854, the Groton Public Library (GPL) in Groton, MA is the 8th oldest public library in the state. GPL is certified every year by the MA Board of Library Commissioners and is a member of the Merrimack Valley Library Consortium. GPL is open 48 hours a week year-round (52 hours per week Sept-May) serving a town of 11,315 residents. It has a staff of 28 (11.625 FTE). The library building underwent an extensive renovation and expansion in 1999 and currently consists of 17,417 square feet with 3 floors. It has one study room and three meeting rooms.

<p><b>GPL Cardholders</b></p> <p><b>7,668</b></p> <p>70% of Groton residents have a library card</p>	<p><b>2023 Visitors to the Library</b></p> <p><b>82,747*</b></p> <p><small>*estimated</small></p>	<p><b>Physical Collection</b></p> <p><b>72,494</b> items total</p> <p>Adult <b>44,448</b> (61.3%)          Teen <b>4,702</b> (6.5%)          Children <b>23,344</b> (32.2%)</p>															
<p><b>Circulation</b></p> <p>2023 Physical Circulation: <b>160,683</b>          2023 Digital Circulation: <b>35,524</b>  <b>TOTAL: 196,207</b></p>	<p><b>Summer Reading</b></p> <p><b>687</b> participants of all ages</p>	<p><b>New Items</b></p> <p><b>5,538</b> items added to the collection</p> <p>5,250 items were withdrawn from the collection</p>															
<p><b>Reference Questions Answered</b></p> <p><b>3,401</b></p>	<p><b>Databases</b></p> <p><b>21,870</b> searches completed</p>	<p><b>Programming</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>General Category</th> <th># Programs</th> <th># Attendees</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Adults</td> <td>529</td> <td>7,020</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Teens</td> <td>229</td> <td>2,790</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Children</td> <td>294</td> <td>8,500</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>TOTAL</b></td> <td><b>1,052</b></td> <td><b>18,310</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><small>*not including 1,117 views of recorded programs</small></p>	General Category	# Programs	# Attendees	Adults	529	7,020	Teens	229	2,790	Children	294	8,500	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,052</b>	<b>18,310</b>
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<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,052</b>	<b>18,310</b>															
<p><b>Technology</b></p> <p><b>20</b> public computers were used <b>3,412</b> times</p> <p>Also available for public use: tablets, laptops, printers, copier, scanner, fax, 3-D printer</p>	<p><b>Meeting Room Use</b></p> <p><b>1,369</b> bookings* by outside groups</p> <p><small>*does not include informal drop-in use</small></p>																
<p><b>Free 24/7 Wi-Fi</b></p> <p>throughout the building and grounds was accessed <b>9,608</b> times</p>																	

2023 Groton Public Library statistics

## OUR PLANNING PROCESS

In the fall of 2019 and again in the fall of 2023, we hired Barbara Alevras of Sage Consulting Services to guide us through the planning process, facilitate meetings and focus groups, and help conduct community surveys.

After establishing the information we wanted to gather, Library Staff and Trustees brainstormed questions and challenges, identified stakeholders to engage, and created a detailed process (see *Appendix A—GPL Strategic Planning Project Flowchart 2023-24*). We also compiled important background information about the Library and the Groton community.

In October 2023, a 14-member Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) was formed with Library Staff and nine community members representing various constituencies.

GPL Director Vanessa Abraham served as SPAC Chair with the following library and community members:

- **Helena Altman**, Library Trustee
- **Kate Bettencourt**, Library Trustee Chair
- **Sarah Breen**, Assistant Library Director
- **Peter Cunningham**, Select Board Member
- **Deborah Dowson**, GPL Teen Librarian
- **Patricia Dufresne**, Town Accountant
- **Meg Genoter**, Groton Dunstable Middle School Librarian
- **Gary Green**, Finance Committee Member
- **Nicole Irvin**, GPL Circulation Librarian
- **Carole Prest**, Community Member and Retired Strategic Planner
- **Lauren Sanchez**, GPL Children’s Librarian
- **Holly Shreve**, Florence Roche Elementary School Reading Specialist
- **Mike Woods**, GPL Endowment Chair



During its eight-month tenure, the SPAC met twice to:

- Learn about the strategic planning process, review current library trends, and brainstorm community engagement ideas
- Develop community vision statements describing the ideal Groton
- Identify and prioritize the community vision statements GPL could best support

SPAC members also served as stakeholders and continued to receive updates on our progress and summaries of the information collected.

During the winter of 2023-2024, we solicited community feedback using a variety of methods:

- A town-wide survey yielded **913** responses
- A youth survey yielded **248** responses
- A focus group with **9** teenagers
- A focus group with **8** parents and caregivers
- Two adult focus groups with **17** community members
- A SOAR\* exercise with **17** Library Staff Members, followed by a survey of all Staff
- A SOAR\* exercise with **8** Library and Endowment Trustees, followed by a survey of all Trustees

\* *Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results*

Summary reports highlighting trends and ideas derived from each feedback activity are available for review as appendices.

As part of our planning process, we updated our mission statement. We added vision and values statements to better encapsulate who we are as an organization and serve as a guidepost in the future. After several staff members winnowed down a large sampling of statements from other libraries, a poll was sent to the entire staff to narrow the list down to the top five in each. The Trustees were then polled and, at their May meeting, voted to approve



GPL's new mission, vision, and values statements included in this document.

The final stage of the process involved two special sessions—one with Staff and one with Trustees—to review all the data collected and decide upon GPL's broad strategic goals and objectives for the next five years, fine-tuned by our senior librarians, and voted on by the Board of Trustees.



Focus Group of Community Members Answer  
*What Are the First 3 Words You Think of When  
You Think of the Groton Library?*



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A thorough review of all the data provided many insights into community perceptions of GPL and ideas for improvements. We received numerous suggestions and creative ideas for how the GPL can better meet its community's wants and needs going forward.



The data shows that while our users are overwhelmingly satisfied with GPL's staff, services, programs, and facility, there are also some areas for improvement. Here are some areas GPL should focus on as we plan for the future:

- **COLLECTIONS:** There is a high demand for increasing digital collections and shortening wait times. Our users also want more physical copies of bestselling "hot" titles, reduced wait times, more large print, and updates to adult non-fiction collections. Parents asked for decodable books for kids as it is local schools' current reading instruction method.
- **FACILITY:** The building and grounds are described as clean and beautiful. There is definite interest in additional study and meeting rooms and a place for people to take a call or participate in a virtual meeting away from open areas. Noise is an issue for many, especially during after-school hours, even in the designated Quiet Area, which shares an open floor plan with the Teen Area. A dedicated space specifically for older, school-aged kids was a popular request for the Children's Room.
- **ACCESS:** Road access was a major concern, particularly during flooding events that close Broadmeadow Road, GPL's sole access point. Respondents also inquired if it was okay to exit through a private section of Playground Road owned by Lawrence Academy. Also, several people wanted more parking and a more spacious lot for greater ease of use.
- **MARKETING:** There is a need for much improved communication. Many are unaware of all the GPL offers, including the higher profile services such as museum passes, digital collections, and the Library of Things. Community members identified direct mailings and social media as the most effective ways to communicate library information to townspeople.

"I did not know you had all this awesome stuff!"  
-2024 survey comment



- **PARTNERSHIPS & OUTREACH:** Many want a more vigorous community outreach program and greater coordination and partnerships with schools, town departments, community groups, local businesses and non-profits, and the local community center.
- **OPERATIONS:** Sunday hours remain the best time for many to visit the Library, as expressed in our 2015 survey. If GPL could expand service hours, summer Sundays would be the top choice. While opening 9-10 am was the least popular option at 10%, there were several impassioned pleas from parents and remote workers to open earlier.

- **PROGRAMS:** There were many programming suggestions and numerous requests to schedule more children’s and family programs on evenings and weekends for working parents. Several respondents asked for more events and gatherings for homeschoolers.
- **SERVICES:** Many respondents want a robust and relatively comprehensive Library of Things to borrow. We also need to make our current offerings much more visible.
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Our Wi-Fi needs substantive improvement in speed, capacity, strength, and ease of use. Several respondents said they don’t find our redesigned website easy to navigate. As essential library services, both must work optimally and intuitively.

In all feedback collected, GPL Staff were highly valued and praised for their friendliness and helpfulness. GPL Staff listed management, the Board of Trustees, and the Town as key GPL strengths. While all GPL departments and Staff earned top ratings, many write-in comments expressed heartfelt appreciation and love for GPL’s Children’s Room and its Staff in particular.



## **OUR PLAN**

### **Community Vision Statement**

The Library’s fourteen-person Strategic Planning Advisory Committee brainstormed a series of vision statements reflecting the ideal Groton. Following is the community vision statement the group believes the Library can best support and positively impact:

**Groton supports and promotes free academic, vocational, recreational, accessible, and cultural lifelong learning opportunities for people of all ages.**

*Appendix E—GPL Community Vision Statement Results Report 2024* presents the full community visioning exercise results.



### Our Mission

Groton Public Library fosters literacy, enriches lives, and strengthens the community. We bring people, information, and ideas together.

### Our Vision

Groton Public Library is a vibrant and welcoming place where all come to learn, discover, create, and connect.

### Our Values

- Literacy, Lifelong Learning, and Education
- Free, Open, and Equitable Access
- Intellectual Freedom, Confidentiality, and Privacy
- Joy, Discovery, and Creativity
- Kind, Quality Service
- Community Connections and Partnerships

*The Library Board of Trustees approved our mission, vision, and values statements on May 14, 2024.*

### Our Tagline

**Groton Public Library, Open to All**

### Our Guiding Philosophy

**From the American Library Association:**

- The Library Bill of Rights
- Professional Code of Ethics
- The Freedom to Read
- Libraries: An American Value

“The people are what make our library truly special. The staff is so much more than just staff. Keep up the fantastic work! I always say our library is like a home away from home.”

*-2024 survey comment*



## Strategic Goals and Supporting Objectives

### GOAL 1: Maintain and Expand Core Services and Financial Resources

- 1.1 Maintain and Expand Hours
- 1.2 Maximize Use of Revenue Sources
- 1.3 Strengthen Bonds with Town Government, Community Stakeholders, and Library Supporters
- 1.4 Expand Advocacy to Increase Public Awareness of the Library's Value to the Community



### GOAL 2: Optimize Our Facility for Community Needs



- 2.1 Redesign and Renovate the Children's Room
- 2.2 Upgrade Functionality and the Acoustics of Library Spaces
- 2.3 Enhance Our Outdoor Spaces as Community Gathering Places
- 2.4 Deliver High-Quality, Innovative, and User-Friendly Technology Services
- 2.5 Improve Accessibility, Visibility, and the User Experience to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all.

### GOAL 3: Be the Center for Literacy, Education, and Lifelong Learning for the Community

- 3.1 Provide Educational Support for Students of All Ages, Academic Levels, and Learning Needs
- 3.2 Nurture and Foster Early Literacy and Family Engagement
- 3.3 Empower Learners of All Ages with the Tools and the Support Needed to Develop Strong Reading and Writing Skills
- 3.4 Add to Digital, Civic, and Cultural Literacy Through Engaging Programs and Resources



## GOAL 4: Build Connections that Strengthen Our Community

- 4.1 Develop Meaningful Marketing and Outreach
- 4.2 Increase Opportunities for Community Engagement
- 4.3 Cultivate and Expand Community Partnerships



## GOAL 5: Foster Excellence in Library Services to the Community

- 5.1 Promote Continuing Customer Service Excellence
- 5.2 Offer Engaging Programs, Activities, and Enrichment Opportunities for All
- 5.3 Provide Responsive and Relevant Collections that Meet Community Needs
- 5.4 Be an Essential Starting Place for Local Interest and Groton Historical Resources
- 5.5 Invest in Library Staff Development, Opportunities, and Growth



### Annual Action Plans

The Library creates an Action Plan detailing specific activities and strategies to advance our strategic goals in the upcoming year. The Action Plan captures new initiatives and tasks designed to support specific objectives and address changing needs. It is updated annually and submitted to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC).

### Measuring and Communicating Our Progress

Our goals and objectives will be included in the monthly report for GPL Department Heads to capture progress throughout the year. The Director will periodically update Library Staff and the Board of Trustees on developments and share successes with the community. Goals and objectives will be reviewed as part of the Library Trustees and Staff establishing annual action plans for the upcoming fiscal year. Notable achievements will be posted online and shared with the Town Manager, Select Board, and Townspeople.

## PLAN APPROVAL

On September 10, 2024, the Library's six-member Board of Trustees unanimously approved this *Strategic Plan*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank everyone who contributed to this Strategic Plan, especially the Library Staff, Board of Trustees, Endowment Board Trustees, and individual community members. We particularly appreciate all who responded to the surveys, served on the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee, and joined a focus group. We are grateful to all the Library Staff and Trustees who participated in a SOAR exercise, helped create our new mission, vision, and values statements, and attended the final planning sessions. We are deeply indebted to our Strategic Planning Consultant, Barbara Alevras, who steered us throughout the process, ensured the highest quality of work, and served as an excellent guide and resource at every turn.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

We are excited to launch our new Strategic Plan, which will help guide this organization to continued success over the next five years. We are committed to making the Groton Public Library the best possible resource for our community. We are grateful for the support of town residents and will continue to innovate, be responsive, and proactively identify and meet the needs of those we serve.

### GPL Board of Trustees

Helena Altsman, Chair  
Mark Gerath, Vice-Chair  
Jennifer Petersen, Secretary  
Kate Bettencourt, Member  
Kristen von Campe, Member  
Dave Zeiler, Member



## **APPENDICES**

Following is a list of Strategic Plan document appendices. They are available for download and review at the following link: <https://gpl.org/about/reports-planning>

**Appendix A—GPL Strategic Planning Project Flowchart 2023-24:** This flowchart presents the strategic planning project methodology and general timeline.

**Appendix B—GPL Boards Survey Results Report 2023:** The Groton Public Library Board of Trustees and GPL Endowment Trustees survey was conducted in December 2023.

**Appendix C—GPL Community Member Focus Groups Summary Report 2024:** This report summarizes the ideas and feedback received during two focus groups conducted with community members in January 2024.

**Appendix D—GPL Community Survey 2024 Results Summary:** The community survey was conducted from mid-January to mid-February 2024. The report presents respondents' feedback and a summary of responses to each question.

**Appendix E—GPL Community Vision Statement Results Report 2024:** The Library's Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) brainstormed a series of vision statements reflecting the ideal Groton and prioritized the vision statements the Library can best support and positively impact. This report presents a prioritized list of the final community vision statements.

**Appendix F—GPL Grades 5-12 2023 Survey Results Report:** The youth survey was conducted from mid-November to mid-December 2023. The report presents respondents' feedback and a summary of responses to each question.

**Appendix G—GPL Parents and Caregivers Focus Group Summary Report 2024:** This report summarizes the ideas and feedback received during a focus group conducted with parents and caregivers in January 2024.

**Appendix H—GPL SOAR Exercise Summary Results Report 2023:** This report documents the results of an environmental assessment of the Library's Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR). One exercise was conducted with Library Staff, and a second was conducted with the Library's Board of Trustees and the GPL Endowment Board of Trustees.

**Appendix I—GPL SPAC Survey Results Report 2024:** The Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) survey was conducted from mid-January to early February 2024.

**Appendix J—GPL Staff Survey Results Report 2023:** The Staff survey was conducted in December 2023.

**Appendix K—GPL Teens Focus Group Summary Report 2024:** This report summarizes the ideas and feedback from a focus group conducted with teens in January 2024.

"The Groton Public Library is an absolute gem. The best "new book" collection I could imagine. And the interlibrary loan is incredibly responsive. The children's area is fantastic. Thank you for all that you do. It is so appreciated. I feel so fortunate to live in a town with such a strong and thriving public library."

*-2024 survey comment*

**Appendix L—GPL Community Survey 2024 Full Results:** The community survey was conducted from mid-January to mid-February 2024. The report presents all the data collected.