

# Radnor Memorial Library

---

## WE HEAR YOU

---

Community Conversations

With Radnor residents

About the Radnor Memorial Library

Prepared by:

Alan and Leslie Burger

Library Development Solutions

March 2019

Table of Contents

**Contents**

Introduction ..... 1

Gathering information ..... 1

Survey Participants ..... 2

Review of Initial Findings ..... 2

Discussion of Survey and Focus Group Findings ..... 8

Conclusion..... 11

## Introduction

During February 2019, a number of informal focus groups and a community conversation, or town hall meeting, were held at the Radnor Memorial Library (RML). Participants were asked open-ended questions designed to stimulate conversation about the Radnor community and the library, its capacity to anticipate emerging needs and its evolving role in the community. The discussions with staff and residents provided thoughtful comments useful for the future direction of the RML as well as specific suggestions for its strategic direction.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the conversations, over 860 participants completed an online and print survey. Information from the survey about library use will be helpful to planners as they create a new roadmap for the library.

## Gathering information

The facilitators discussed various topics with the participants including awareness about library resources and participants' thoughts about the newly renovated facility.

### The following are among the topics that were discussed:

- What is special about Radnor?
- What changes have taken place recently in Radnor and elsewhere in the past few years that may affect library services?
- What do you think about the renovated building?
- What ideas do you have for an amazing Radnor Memorial Library?
- What about the new Radnor Memorial Library do you like and works well? What still needs improvement?

### The groups included:

• Community Leaders	12
• Parents of Young Children	10
• Middle and High School students	22
• Library staff	9
• Town hall meeting	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>

Each conversation lasted approximately 1.5 hours. Comments from each session were recorded and transcribed to create a record of the meetings. Participants appreciated the opportunity to engage in a dialogue about the library and its role in Radnor. They offered many helpful suggestions and ideas.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Radnor Memorial Library Board of Trustees hired Library Development Solutions to conduct a series of conversations and a survey with community residents to elicit suggestions and ideas for the library's new strategic plan. The purposes of the conversations were to listen to community comments about the library and to provide participants with an opportunity to offer their ideas about the community's library needs. The library board believes that information from the conversations and the survey will assist in the director and board's ability to make important decisions about library resources.

## Survey Participants

Over 860 Radnor Township residents described their uses of the library, offered suggestions for improvements, and commented about the library's image, its role in the community and other subjects related to library use and support. They offered comments about the renovated building, programming and the growing demand for additional programs and meeting space as well as the need for more technology instruction. The survey included questions about library use and the image of the RML as well as providing opportunities for open-ended comments.<sup>2</sup>

## Review of Initial Findings

Areas of concern from both groups of participants include:

- Residents feel that the library is a critically important community asset that should be utilized by more people
- The need for even more technology devices and technology training as the world becomes more reliant on digital resources and access to them
- The request for additional adult and children's programs at times of day that many families can participate on weekends and weekday evenings
- A more routine marketing, branding and communication campaign by the library about activities and programs
- Improved access to best sellers and newer books
- More space for individual and group meetings, both for the library and for community groups
- The ability of the RML to fund an ever-popular schedule of hours, programs, materials and space for community needs

Survey respondents indicated their top reasons for using the library are:

- To borrow books – 78%
- To browse – 39%
- To borrow bestsellers – 32%
- To ask for staff assistance – 28%
- To borrow DVDs – 27%
- To attend a children's program – 25%

The top words that people used to describe the new Radnor Memorial Library and a word cloud to illustrate them are:

- Beautiful
- Spacious
- Nice

---

<sup>2</sup> This response compares to 195 responses during the last community - wide survey in 2009. That survey produced 60 open-ended comments and the most recent survey produced over 2,000 open-ended comments.

- Great
- Open
- Welcoming

Bright airy books designed better old library wonderful fabulous  
 clean work feel Fantastic welcoming time great well lit  
 nice fresh space one beautiful user friendly  
 spacious kids love Yes open find library community  
 modern Open welcoming bright parking light looks great inviting  
 bright welcoming looks building new quiet Amazing go comfortable

Many focus group participants indicated that they use other area libraries, especially when the RML closed and moved to a temporary location with limited resources and hours:

- Ludington Library
- Tredyffrin Public Library
- Upper Merion Township Library
- Easttown Library

The reasons for those visits include:

- Open when our library was closed
- More seating
- Children’s programs
- Helpful and friendly staff

Participants would like to get information from the library primarily through the email newsletter and the discussions in the focus groups revealed that some people are unaware of the newsletter. A suggestion was made that the email newsletter be issued weekly, which the consultants would encourage.

Preferences	Survey Response
The email newsletter	67%
The library’s website	55%
In the library	42%
Facebook	28%
Text Message	17%

In response to the question of “How Important the Radnor Memorial Library is to you and your family and to the Radnor community” the following results from 834 respondents to this question are an indication of community support for the role of the library:

- Extremely important or very important to Radnor – 93%
- Extremely important or very important to you and your family – 81%

Participants recognize the important role that the library plays in Radnor. However, the wide gap between the two measurements points to an opportunity for the RML to play an even more active role in people’s lives and in the life of the community.

## **Initial Conclusions and Recommendations**

The following conclusions and recommendations are a result of the comments expressed by participants during the focus groups, the town hall meeting and in the survey, as well as observations made by the consultants during these sessions and from their visits.

### **1. It's All About the Programs**

Create new, iconic, annual library programs to attract more people to the library. Provocative, informative, topical and fun programming is needed for adults, older adults, children and teens and sometimes in collaboration with local organizations and institutions, where possible. Subjects such as technology, visual arts, performing arts, history, science and literature, cooking are good examples of programs that participants would like to see. STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art & Design and Math) related programs are especially popular with middle school and high school students. Author talks and book signings, lectures and discussions are additional examples to include in a routine schedule of interesting, dynamic and fun programs. Use the instructors and experts from local colleges and universities. Publicly visible programs such as an annual Radnor Reads program (which can reach into all the wards of the township and focus on an issue that has relevance to Radnor residents, as distinguished from the DCLS Community Reads), or 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten, a Student Film Festival (student produced and presented), an Environmental Film Festival, a children's Book Festival, or hosting the Farmer's Market are among many ideas to attract additional audiences to the library.

Use compelling, and provocative programs to make the Radnor Memorial Library the most desirable venue in town.

### **2. Reduce and refresh collections**

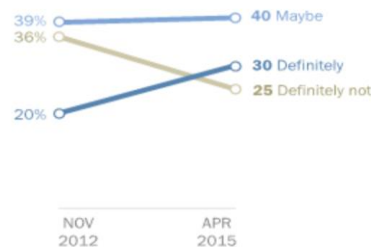
The library should continue to evaluate its current collection and manage the changing balance between print/AV and digital/streaming resources. Residents want collections that are topical, fresh, and available. The library needs to remove and replace outdated and static reference materials with digital resources, replace worn and damaged books and remove non-circulating materials. This will lead to fewer non-circulating books in the dense stacks on the floor (and the opportunity to remove some of the stacks) and will quickly result in increased circulation, especially since people told us that they love to browse in the library. Removing old and damaged material from the children's oversized collection (41,250 items in 2018) and refreshing it with new, desirable books will be an easy win for the library to show that they are listening to patron suggestions and making it easier for people to browse. In other words, there will be more books in people's hands and more people coming into the library.

The library needs to develop a collection size, in all formats and for all ages, that is targeted to interests, turnover and efficient space utilization. The current size of the collection is not sustainable for effective management and promotion. The RML is a popular community library, not an academic, research or storage facility and the collection should reflect that mission.

### Growing Public Support for Libraries Moving Some Books and Stacks to Create Space for Community and Tech Spaces

*% of those ages 16+ who answer this question in the following ways*

Should libraries move some print books and stacks out of public locations to free up more space for things such as tech centers, reading rooms, meeting rooms, and cultural events?



Source: Pew Research Center survey March 17-April 12, 2015.  
N=1,003 Americans ages 16 and older

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

### 3. Use the new floorplan with flexibility in mind

The need for additional quiet and group study spaces was heard at every opportunity from patrons. As mentioned, some of the book stacks can be removed to create new spaces that are in demand, such as a new digital download bar, small study rooms and other new seating formats. The site lines on the main floor can be greatly enhanced with fewer dense stacks and additional seating.

Small to medium study, tutor and group study space can be arranged with a few low-cost changes to the layout. Additionally, use of the Winsor and Conference Rooms can be made to accommodate groups who may linger after the

library is closed with a change to lock-up procedures and a small fee for cleanup or security related closing when they are finished.

### 4. Invest in staff and staffing to meet changing needs

The library should commit to a program of staff development to ensure that all staff has the skills needed to meet the needs of residents of all ages. This includes technology related skills as well as customer service skills. According to experts, jobs that require emphasis on technology related skills are growing three times faster than other jobs.

The daily challenge faced by all libraries is how to teach staff and the public to use digital devices to support searching and digital downloading of content. Promoting and offering instruction in the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook, Internet searching, computer applications and other skills involving the use of new hardware or software is expected by residents. Residents want the library to stay ahead of popular trends and uses of new digital formats and devices, and have them available for use. Participants expect the RML to be the leader in Radnor, in digital content and training in use of that content and devices. This is a significant change in how the library is viewed – as the digital help desk of Radnor. Using Linked In Learning or other subscription services can help to meet this need.



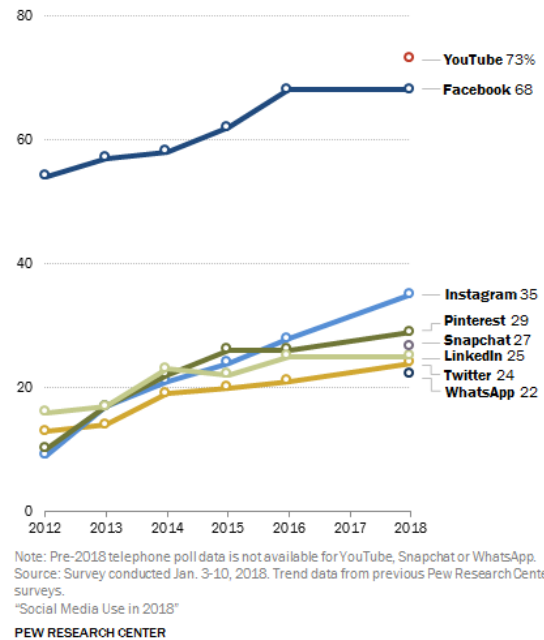
## 5. Align the library's message with community interests and needs

The library is a popular destination for students after school, for new residents who search for assistance with digital resources, story times for toddlers and for seniors looking for an active place to learn and socialize. The library can view these recommendations as paths to engagement with all populations, as it considers changes to policies, programming and collections that will attract more use.

The library will review its vision & mission, and its engagement with the community as it thinks about the future. This should include expanding the reach of the email newsletter with a briefer weekly mailing about the next week's activities, daily use of Facebook and social media, and a rebranding of all things RML. The library can serve an expanded role as a small business and technology incubator, a new expanded career and job center and Radnor's cool Front Porch for relaxing and learning.

### Majority of Americans now use Facebook, YouTube

% of U.S. adults who say they use the following social media sites online or on their cellphone



## 6. Sustainable funding and governance

Considering the rapidly evolving nature of learning and knowledge today, it is important for community leaders to work toward a greater and increasingly wider role for the library in the life of all residents and toward a new sustainable funding future for the library, through a variety of methods. One of the many challenges facing the library will be how to pay for all that the community wants with a combination of public and private funds. The RML and the library board will need to improve its fundraising/development apparatus and at the same time refine its approach to public funds. One suggestion, endorsed by the Town Manager, has been to determine an annual millage for the library which would provide a routine base of funds and supplement that with increased private funding. Also, a development/fundraising person should be added to staff and report to the director.

## Discussion of Survey and Focus Group Findings

*We all walked away from the library when it closed and went elsewhere. Many of my friends have not come back.*

When participants were asked what they consider special and unique characteristics about Radnor, they mentioned that it is a family-oriented community that has a lot going on for all ages. People who grew up here are drawn back to the area to raise their families. Other comments included the following:

- Nice parks and recreational areas
- Close to major universities and colleges
- Many students live in Radnor
- Very good public schools
- An active place for children, families and seniors
- A walking and biking community for many people
- Growing diversity
- Non-profits and for profits collaborate
- Active nightlife and restaurants in Wayne
- Friendly, professional and very educated community
- It is an active and engaged community
- Convenient to Philadelphia

The increasing use of digital media and mobile devices by residents is evident in the survey responses and focus group comments. Comments about community changes that will inform the way the RML provides services includes:

- Increase in Asian language speakers/readers over the last few years
- More people are newly self-employed, home based or telecommute to work
- Rapidly changing technology-difficult for everyone to keep up
- More dual income families
- Seniors are leading active lifestyles in Radnor though many are falling through the safety net and missing community services
- Continued popularity of private schools
- New Penn medical development
- Traffic everywhere

### What works well at the Radnor Memorial Library?

*Among the 687 responses to this question in the survey are:*

*The people working behind the desk are always friendly and helpful*

*I love the museum pass program - hope to see more programming events and hope to take advantage*

*The activities for kids, from small children all the way up to the teens, are excellent! We love the toy area and the teen space. The staff are always kind and accessible and willing to try and help with whatever issues I have.*

*The children's story times are amazing and the use of social media for communication is an awesome way for me to keep up with the library*

*So not like a library of old - so vibrant, Sometimes too much!*

*I love the snack area in the back of the library. My kid can enjoy her snack while doing homework.*

events children s customer service organization Kids programs way work  
employees helpful friendly amazing really knowledgeable children programs  
many kids everyone welcoming super friendly staff lighting help fantastic  
service professional community find nice time friendly keep  
love beautiful books efficient helpful resources library  
available great Friendly helpful staff staff open  
Everything much programs interesting good  
rooms space come always seem well pleasant librarians  
awesome clean especially helpful staff think children book selection

Participants were quick to praise the library, staff and its resources: Comments included:

- Open and friendly
- Big happy smiles at the desk
- Much more space than before
- Door to the children's room
- Study rooms for quiet study
- Peter Rabbit Room
- Quiet space and study rooms
- Vending machine – has Tasty Cakes
- Little study rooms

**Some of the responses from survey respondents and focus group participants about improvements to the facilities, services or policies include:**

*The drive through book slot is inconvenient. The entire book slot needs to be moved closer so books can be dispensed from the driver's side of a car or an elongated slot should be installed.*

*I think the new books need to be better displayed and organized. Hard to find one the way it's organized now; need more of the bestsellers. There are books system shows u have, but not in stacks*

*It would be good to work on acoustics, and to add some seating near the children's books that isn't in the toy area (we liked the big tables that were previously in the children's section). The rows of bookshelves in the children's section are too long so it is awkward to get around in the space. It would be helpful to have desks/tables/carrels closer to the NF section. My children would like more book club meetings!*

*I think anyone above 14 should be able to check out a Chromebook as long as they have a library card.*

*Seems as though popular books are never in - can we get more copies?*

*1) Small group rooms are not sufficiently sound proofed to be used as quiet areas. Extra insulation between rooms or even white noise machines would help. 2) It would be good to have more programming aimed at middle-aged (30s-50s) adults. This could include a wider array of lecture topics and talks as well as adult books groups taking place in the evenings after work and/or on the weekends.*

Comments included suggestions about children's and teen programs offered in the evening, and many about computer use and technology training for residents and staff. Participants commented about the need for increased communication about programs and additional programming for teens and children. People commented about wanting to attend interesting performing arts, visual arts, topical issues and cultural performances more often.

many people signs one noise make teen know seating think welcoming  
 see chairs children family area love see Nothing close  
 programs activities space thing library say  
 books place kids keep better Nothing think use  
 computers need looking time children s parking add Maybe  
 school adult nice room come much story time think anything meeting N

Comments covered:

- Stay open late for study groups during midterms and finals
- Need more meeting space
- Computer use after 2:30 is peak time –clash of teens and older adults after school each day with computer use in the teen/computer areas – need better separation of people and use of laptops and tablets
- Turn on the large screen in the teen room – what is for anyway – I've never seen it being used
- More outlets
- Middle School students can't bring their Chromebooks home so we need many more computers, Chromebooks in the library after school

- Better marketing and communication to the public
- Author talks and discussions
- Opportunities for people to volunteer. There used to be volunteers and now none

### **An Amazing Radnor Memorial Library**

Participants were asked to describe their idea of what an amazing Radnor Memorial Library would look like in the near future. How would it respond to community interests and needs? What would they see and what would be happening in the library? Here are some of their comments:

- Back of the building becoming as useful and attractive as the front as a new campus is developed along with new senior center
- Intergenerational activities
- Connect Radnor Trail to library with great signage – maybe on the ground green footprints
- Self-help resources – “how to” – landscaping, CAD, Design, planning, tool libraries, cake molds, metal detectors
- More digital books on Kindle – look for RML licenses aside from DCLS
- Large LIBRARY street signs on Lancaster for the library
- Great partnership between library and school
- Café like space like the Gryphon
- Series of classes with local professors – RML University
- Space for robotics, coding activities
- Books by Mail - deliver to everyone in town who wants it, or wherever they are on their summer vacation
- Final and midterm cram nights (late and with tutors and food) at the library for Middle and High school students
- No fees for DVDs

### **Conclusion**

Information from the focus groups and the survey will be reviewed and discussed by the library board, staff, and administration. They will address the needs of residents for continuing to repurpose space, make improvements in the digital and print collections and accessibility to devices, for even more new programs and routine technology instruction. The next step in the planning process will be the development of a strategic plan that the library will use as a roadmap to address the issues that are discussed here.