



STONINGTON FREE LIBRARY

**Community Conversation
about the Future of the
Stonington Free Library:
*A Path to a Reimagined Library***



Community Conversation about the Future of the Stonington Free Library: *A Path to a Reimagined Library*

Recently, the Stonington Free Library completed a strategic planning effort that included extensive community engagement activities as well as a rigorous self assessment. This process included input from all of our constituents, and we have listened to your responses. We believe the resulting plan effectively articulates what is truly the community's plan for the library.

The feedback we received during the planning process underscored how much the Stonington Free Library (SFL) is loved and valued, and the strategic plan describes opportunities to build upon that foundation. We will seek to extend the Library's reach throughout Stonington by engaging the community through expanded program offerings, collaborative efforts with other organizations, and enhanced digital offerings.

As funding allows, the library has already begun to implement community outreach initiatives from the plan, establishing satellite operations at the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center and Masonicare at Mystic. We have reintroduced the Stonington Nonprofit Roundtable, offering an opportunity for local nonprofits to meet, exchange ideas and collaborate. Our collections are being continually refreshed, and we have begun to reutilize some of our space, providing a more welcoming, attractive way to access our newest acquisitions. In addition, we have launched a redesigned website which functions as a true "digital branch," enabling 24 hour access for our patrons. In response to community feedback, we have also reallocated our hours of operation, providing additional evening hours to accommodate the realities of busy working lives. Other initiatives arising from the strategic plan are under consideration and assessment, including steps to enhance access for patrons with physical disabilities.

As prudent stewards, we need to assess and provide for the sustainability of the library into the future, taking into account the cost of current services, proposed initiatives and our ongoing financial health. Critical to these efforts are the ability to attract and retain exceptional personnel. The library has made great strides in strengthening its staff development, including remedying longstanding pay inadequacies. Despite these increases, however, the library's spending on wages is still lower per capita than statewide averages and comparably-sized Connecticut towns.

The most pressing challenges faced by the library are our limited physical space and our financial constraints. While the library has already made great efforts to reallocate resources to implement initiatives from the plan, it is limited by its financial position. The library has been fortunate to receive consistent support from both the private and public sectors, but the current level of private and municipal funding is not sufficient to sustain current service levels, even before remedying handicap accessibility issues or implementing new initiatives. The resulting funding gap has been filled by increasing withdrawals from endowment funds; even after a recent substantial gift added to our endowment, the library still needs to draw a hefty 5.3% of the balance (over \$170,000) this year just to maintain current operations versus the 3-4% generally considered prudent.

The Library currently receives less than 1/3 of its operating budget from municipal sources, while the remainder is provided by our generous donors. We are committed to making every effort to raise the funds required to implement our strategic plan, and have already successfully raised over \$22,000 to support ADA compliance efforts, but we will also need the commitment of our municipal partners to provide additional support. We have analyzed municipal funding of libraries statewide and in comparable local communities, and found that Stonington's library spending falls woefully short in comparison.

The Town of Stonington's own Plan of Conservation and Development (adopted May 2015) identifies this issue. In its Section 11.2 titled Address Community Service Needs, it states "Capital improvement funds must be continually raised from private sources; the Board of Finance has increasingly cut funds to support library functions from the Town budget, creating a financial crisis to these key community resources." The Plan goes on to recommend in Section 11.2.7, Policies: "Continue to support the libraries in their efforts to provide library services at the village level."

Our strategic plan describes a library that engages the entire community as we seek to enrich lives and build community by bringing information, ideas and people together. To that end, we envision improving our handicap accessibility in compliance with current ADA standards, making the library and its programs available to all Stonington residents while optimizing the use of our limited physical space. We are convinced that the strategic plan represents a path to a reimagined 21st century library for Stonington, and we look forward to working with all of our constituents and stakeholders to make it a reality.

For additional background and information, this package provides the following:

- Strategic Plan Executive Summary
- Summary of Proposed Initiatives
- Financial Position Summary
- Municipal Funding Analysis
- Accessibility and ADA Compliance Issues

Respectfully submitted,

The Board of Trustees of the Stonington Free Library



Strategic Plan Summary



EXPAND OUR REACH • REFRESH • RENEW • REIMAGINE • ENSURE OUR SUSTAINABILITY

Introduction

Over the last two years, the Stonington Free Library has undertaken an exercise in self-assessment and community engagement, resulting in a plan to more effectively serve the people of the Town of Stonington.

This strategic plan represents how we intend to advance our mission. It sets forth broad goals and identifies objectives and initiatives designed for long term success. Our overarching goal in constructing the plan is to remain a vibrant library and a center for community learning and engagement.



Mission

Implementation, the ongoing refinement of the plan, and decisions on priorities will always be guided by the library's mission statement.

The Stonington Free Library seeks to enrich lives and build community by bringing information, ideas and people together.

Adopted June 2017 by the Board of Trustees



Strategic Goals

Three distinct goals emerged from the strategic planning process. These goals will guide the library's ongoing operations, programs and fundraising efforts over the near and long term and as the fiscal condition of the library allows.

Goal A: **Engage the Community** **and Extend the Reach of the** **Stonington Free Library**

The library has made significant efforts to engage and increase our reach into the community. We have expanded programmatic offerings; begun establishing collaborative relationships with other libraries and community organizations; augmented digital offerings, access and resources; and created a satellite location. This is just the beginning—the library will continue to extend its presence, provide more and better resources, collaborate effectively, and consistently communicate with the entire Stonington community.

Goal B: **Restore, Renew, and Reimagine** **the Spaces of the Library**

In an effort to improve the community's access to the library, we looked critically at our space. We concluded that improvements to the physical and digital infrastructure were necessary to meet our functional goals and improve accessibility. The library will pursue approaches to restore, renew and re-purpose library spaces.

We are examining and implementing methods to optimize the library's physical space. With the assistance of an architect, we are carefully considering approaches to meet accessibility standards. We are culling our collection and exploring more effective, space efficient approaches to presenting our offerings. We are committed to modernizing our digital space, including expanding digital services and resources and improving the speed and strength of our internet connection. Implementation of these and other initiatives will make the library a welcoming and effective place to read, work and gather.



Goal C: **Ensure the Sustainability of** **the Stonington Free Library** **for Future Generations**

The community, staff and volunteers are essential to the future of the library. To provide excellent programs and services, the SFL must attract and retain an exceptional staff. Also critical to our sustainability is engaging the wisdom, experience and financial support of our citizens. The library is committed to actively engaging the community, including identifying and cultivating future leaders and volunteers.



Our strategic plan will guide the library over the coming years as we continue to adapt and innovate our programs, services and physical structure to meet the needs and interests of the community we proudly serve. In everything we do, the Stonington Free Library is committed to the core belief that everyone should have free access to knowledge and information. Please find a full version of the strategic plan, including a description of the process, background and initiatives associated with each of the three strategic goals at www.stoningtonfreelibrary.org.

Goal A: Engage the community and extend the reach of the Stonington Free Library.

[The initiatives are numbered according to the objective(s) to which they are associated.]

Currently underway	Planned or to be pursued as funding allows
Increase programmatic offerings on a broad array of topics relevant to all ages, interests and needs ²	Extend the library hours physically and through a virtual front desk, particularly in the evening and during times of intensive school activities ^{2,3}
Pursue and foster outreach and collaborative initiatives with other libraries and community organizations, including the Stonington Nonprofit Round Table ^{3,4}	Increase digital resources that inform, entertain and inspire people of all ages, including technology training platforms and digital media services ³
Increase digital services including digital resources, access and instruction ³	Effectively communicate library offerings ^{1,5}
Increase card holders and circulation ^{1,3,5}	Establish an annual conversation with the community to solicit feedback ^{1,2}
Track reach through statistics related to library program participation and use of services ²	Support democracy and civic engagement (act as a site for voter registration, information) ³
Maintain a high functioning website which effectively communicates library resources and activities ^{1,3}	Create new advocacy roles for board members and supporters (town meetings) ³
Develop and maintain an effective social media presence ^{1,3}	Sponsor an annual community open house at the library themed around library offerings ^{1,5}
Increase youth involvement (through a teen advisory board, focused programmatic offerings) ^{2,3}	Increase participation in the One Book, One Region program in southeastern Connecticut (offer program based on the theme of the selected book) ^{2,4}
Expand volunteer programs (at Wadawanuck Square and satellite locations) ³	Offer topical pop-up events in response to a local or national event or issue ³
Increase email database to 3,500-4,000 (by 10-25%) ¹	

Goal B: Restore, renew, and reimagine the physical spaces of the Stonington Free Library.

[The initiatives are numbered according to the objective(s) to which they are associated.]

Currently underway	Planned or to be pursued as funding allows
Website redesign launched August 2017 ⁴	Refurbish the library's interior, including new furniture, shelving, carpeting, paint, and electrical infrastructure, with the help of an interior design/architectural firm ¹
Improve handicap accessibility to meet ADA standards and re-purpose existing space ^{1,2}	Improve use and flexibility of space (reduce space devoted to physical media storage, use of moveable furnishings, exploring creation of meeting space, reorganizing staff workspace) ^{1,2}
Refine the collection by eliminating antiquated material ³	Analyze network and electrical needs and reconfigure digital infrastructure accordingly ⁴
Increase digital services including digital offerings (Overdrive collection and features), resources and virtual engagements ^{3,4}	Install new collection and directional signage to enhance and simplify user experience ¹
Refresh the library's visual identity ²	Collaborate with the Stonington Village Improvement Association and the Stonington Borough (review landscaping on Wadawanuck Square) ¹
Improve high speed internet connection ⁴	
Organize electronic files and data (implement file structure and naming conventions, etc.) ⁵	

Goal C: Ensure the sustainability of the Stonington Free Library for future generations.

[The initiatives are numbered according to the objective(s) to which they are associated.]

Currently underway	Planned, to be pursued
Increase town funding support ¹	Increase the annual fund revenue by 2% annually ¹
Pursue state and local grant funding opportunities ²	Establish capital fund and budget ¹
Update policies and procedures, change, adapt and omit where necessary ^{4,5}	Offer staff professional development and continuing education opportunities ³
Characterize endowment funds (restricted, unrestricted) ¹	Identify ways to reduce recurring expenses and deploy assets efficiently ⁵
Establish guidelines and process for all new expenditures (e.g., develop procedures for pricing initiatives prior to commencement) ¹	Formally establish the existence and size of an SFL Endowment and create an agreed upon model for analyzing the anticipated size of the endowment based on projected investment growth, regular draws, and extraordinary draws ¹
Revise the endowment distribution guidelines to limit the annual draw to an agreed upon percentage ¹	Determine the extent to which additions to the SFL endowment are necessary to achieve sustainability and create a plan for raising needed funds ¹
Establish fundraising goals for the annual operating budget and endowment to achieve sustainability ¹	Cultivate new funding streams, including new donors and targeted program funding ²
Designate one or more youth positions on the board ⁴	Develop a succession plan for the board of trustees that identifies potential board members and prepares them for board service ⁴
Regularly conduct staff evaluations ³	Increase donor retention to 70% ¹
Ensure that library staff is adequately compensated and trained, appropriately sized and deployed ⁴	Increase revenue from fundraising events by 5% annually ¹

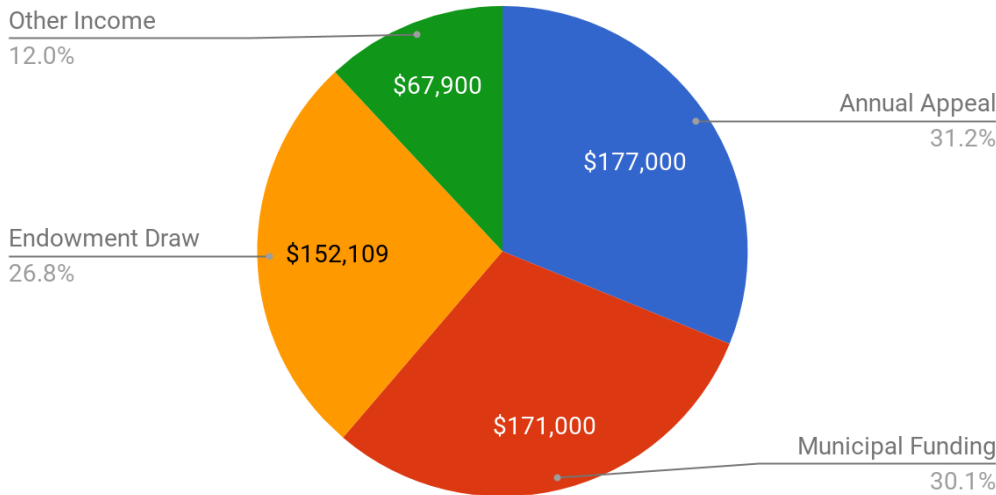
Financial Position Summary

Current Sources of Funding

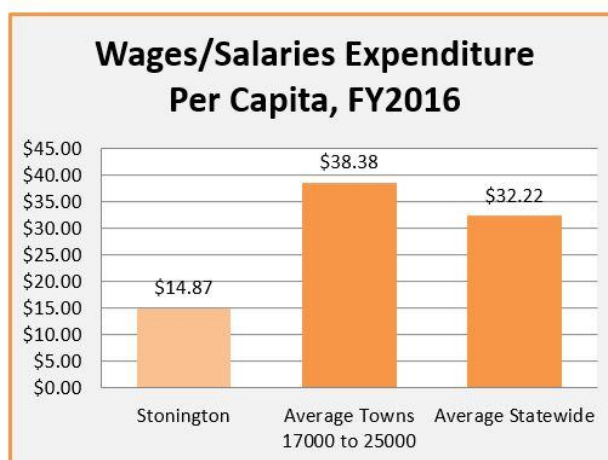
Municipal funding currently covers less than 1/3 of SFL's annual budget of \$568,009, while the remainder is provided through the generosity of its donors via the Annual Appeal and other donations as well as from the earnings on our donated endowment funds.

SFL Sources of Income

2017/18 Operating Budget = \$568,009



Personnel costs comprise over 60% of SFL's operating budget, consistent with the fact that our staff is our greatest asset. While these costs have grown over the past five years as a result of steps taken to remedy longstanding pay inadequacies and offer healthcare benefits to full time staff, essential to attracting and retaining qualified people, SFL's spending is still lower per capita than statewide averages and that of comparable towns.

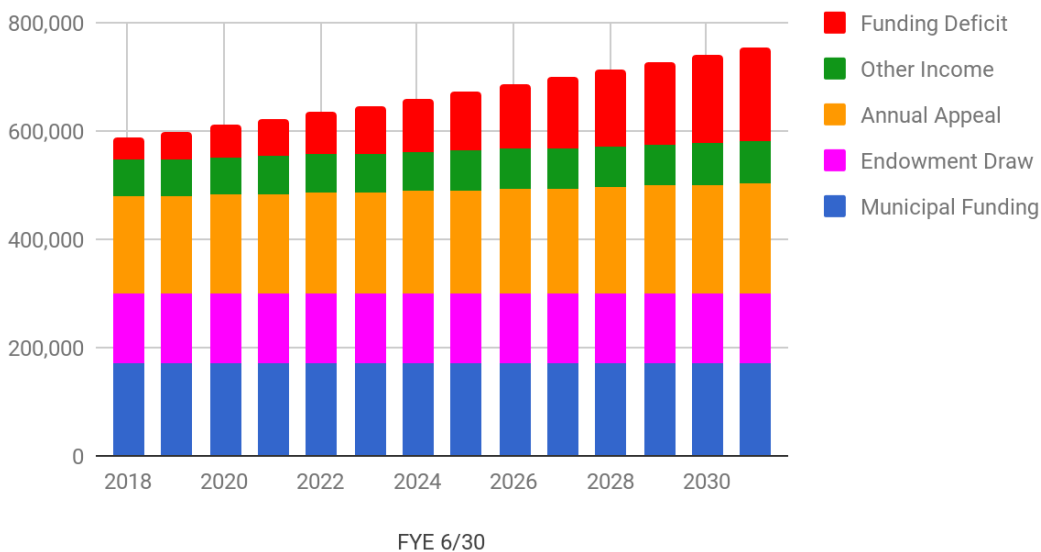


SFL is fortunate to have endowment funds of approximately \$3.2MM, including the recent Blanchet bequest which added \$1.25MM to the balance. Even with this substantial gift, however, a prudent draw of 4% will provide only \$130,000 in cash each year towards covering operating expenses without eroding principal. As illustrated above, the library anticipates drawing \$152,000 in 2017/18 just to cover operating costs, plus another \$20,000 for capital expenditures. Thus, SFL expects that the principal balance of its endowment funds will decline in 2017/18 by over \$40,000. Extrapolating forward, continuing to rely on endowment draws to fund operating deficits and capital needs will cause the entire endowment to be spent by 2035.

Projected Financial Outlook

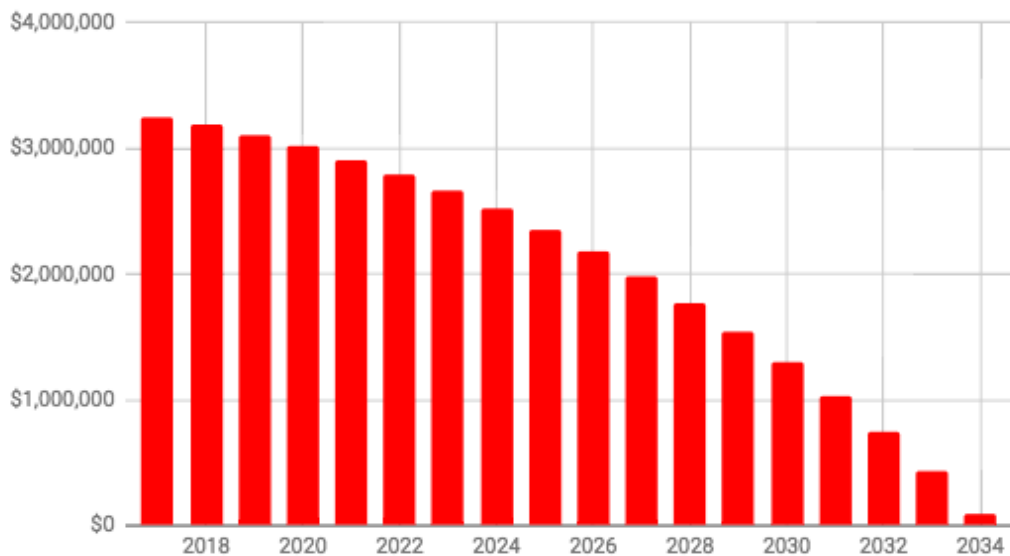
The Annual Appeal and other donations have demonstrated minimal growth, while municipal funding from the Town and Borough of Stonington have shown no growth. The SFL conservatively projects that its total operating budget will likely grow at an inflationary 2% per year from the current \$568,009, assuming no new services, staff or hours are added, and no capital projects above normal annual capital expenditures are implemented.

SFL Funding Deficit Analysis



Assuming the Annual Appeal and other donations grow at 1% per year and holding endowment draws and municipal funding flat, **SFL projects that its funding deficit will grow by approximately 5% per year, from \$42K in 2018 to \$141K by 2028. Without any new external funding, the library will have to rely on the endowment to cover the deficit. As stated above, under this scenario the entire endowment fund will be exhausted by early 2035.**

Projected Endowment Balance



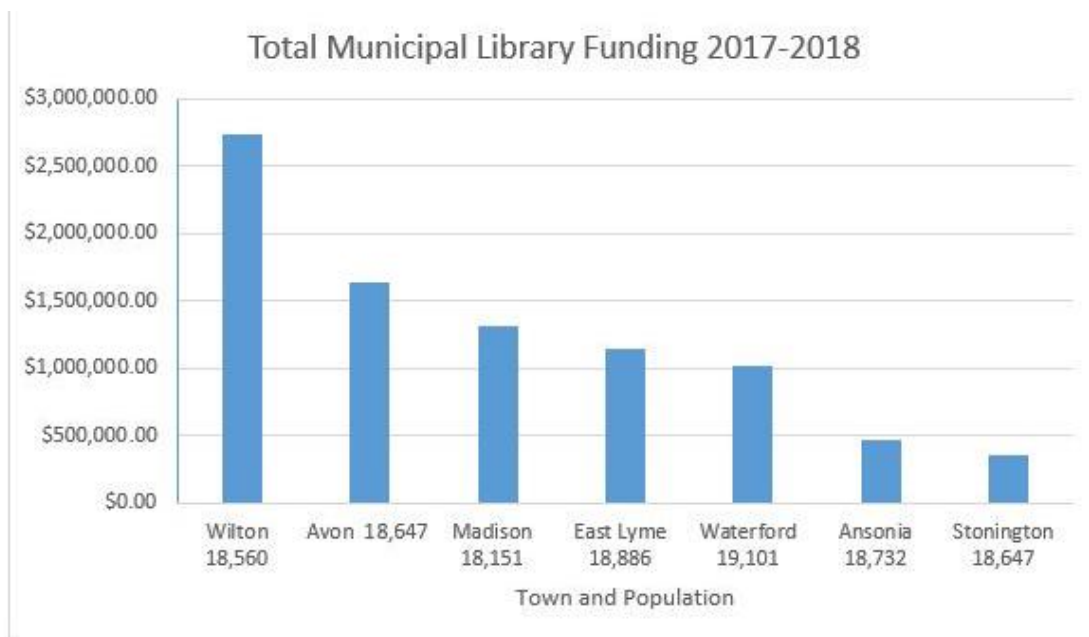
So where do we go from here? How do we address this persistent (and growing) funding deficit? How can we preserve the principal balance of our endowment funds for future sustainability while covering current operating and capital costs, not to mention implementing the new strategic initiatives identified by our community? How do we redesign the Stonington Free Library for the future, while at the same time ensuring that it *has* a future?

The choices seem clear: we either reduce the services we provide, cutting costs in order to manage within the funds available, or we find ways to increase the funds available to us. We are committed to rethinking the way we cultivate private funding—developing new strategies to extend our reach while obtaining donations, but the library also needs an increased funding commitment from the Town of Stonington and the Stonington Borough just to maintain let alone improve, all that the library can provide. We are not asking you to do it all, but we can't do it without you!

Municipal Funding Analysis

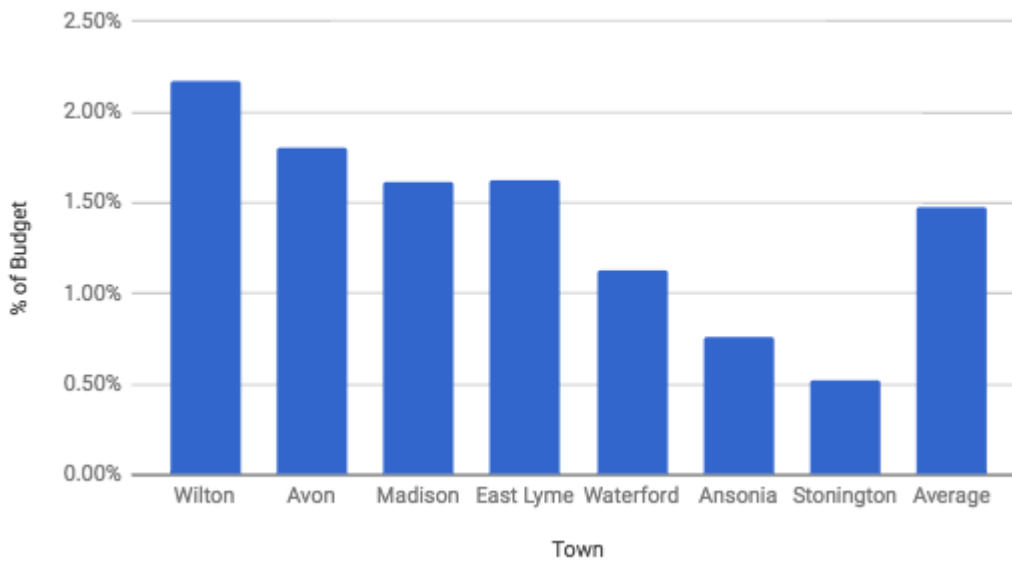
As part of our self assessment, we analyzed Stonington in comparison to similarly-sized Connecticut towns and found that our level of aggregate library municipal funding lags far behind that of its peer group both in aggregate library spending and as a percent of the Town's municipal budget.

As illustrated by the chart below, Stonington's total municipal funding for all libraries amounts to only \$354,500 (of which SFL receives \$171,000), the lowest among its peer group of seven Connecticut towns with populations closest to Stonington. Stonington's municipal library spending even trails that of Ansonia, despite having a grand list three times its size and per capita income of nearly double.



Looking at municipal library funding as a percent of total municipal budgets, we see from the chart below that Stonington lags on this measure as well, spending only 0.5% of its budget on libraries versus an average of 1.5% for comparably-sized Connecticut towns.

Library Spending as a % of Municipal Budget



The most recent Plan of Conservation and Development also identifies this issue. In Section 11.2: Address Community Service Needs it points out that “Capital improvement funds must be continually raised from private sources; the Board of Finance has increasingly cut funds to support the library functions from the Town budget, creating a financial crisis to these key community resources.” The Plan then goes on to recommend in Section 11.2.7 Policies: “Continue to support the libraries in their efforts to provide library services at the village level.”

Based on its current level of library services, SFL requires roughly \$42,000 to bridge its funding gap and reduce its reliance on endowment draws to a more prudent level, and this amount must grow by at least 2% per year to keep pace with inflation. Assuming a \$42,000 increase in the current level of municipal funding, Stonington’s total library spending would remain below \$400,000, still the lowest in its peer group both in aggregate spending and as a percent of the municipal budget.

In order to continue to implement the initiatives recommended by our strategic plan, additional annual funding would be needed.

The community’s top requests are:

1. Provide greater access to the library through expanded hours.
 - For example, adding six additional hours a week will cost \$14,820 annually.
2. Increase the number of interesting and compelling programs across all age groups that are accessible, topical and informative.
 - Additional quality programming will cost money, both to attract speakers and to accommodate additional patrons (i.e., reutilizing existing space or hiring outside venues like the La Grua Center)

3. Improve accessibility and better utilize the library's space.
 - The Accessibility and ADA Compliance section of this document outlines the \$420,000 accessibility and space reutilization project the library is eager to pursue.

Accessibility and ADA Compliance Issues

SFL's financial constraints not only affect the sustainability of ongoing and future library operations, they also limit our ability to invest in necessary capital improvements.

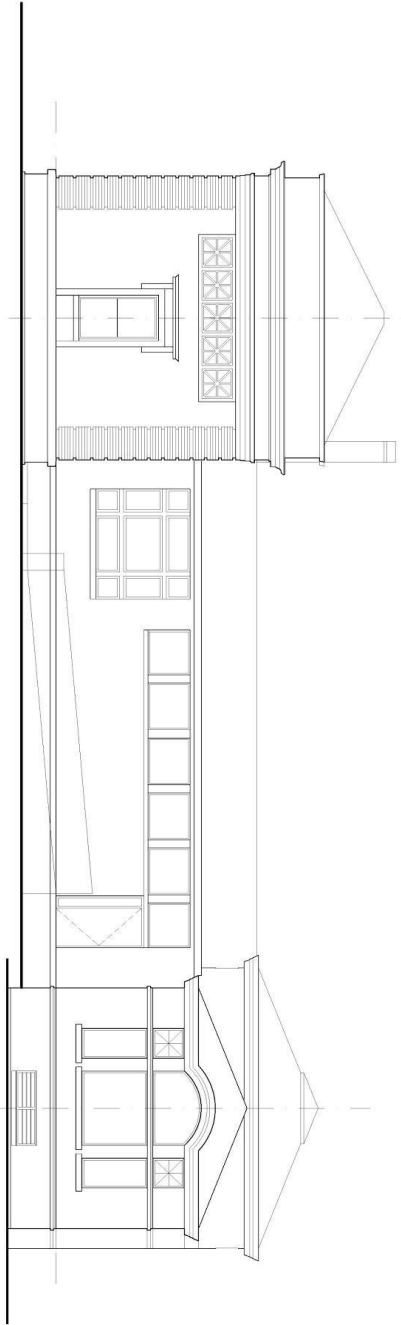
The most recent review of the library's compliance with ADA standards stemmed from a broken lift. The old lift was severely damaged by a flood in 2010, and despite numerous attempts at repair it has been deemed irreparable. Without a safe lift, children and their family members with physical disabilities cannot access the youth library or participate in the wide range of its popular programs. In addition, parents and caregivers with strollers find it very difficult to maneuver via the stairs.

At our core the Stonington Free Library is committed to providing access to every Stonington resident, so replacement lift/elevator options were extensively researched in June 2016. After consulting numerous professionals, we were advised that the current lift could not be repaired, nor could it be replaced in compliance with current ADA standards in its current location.

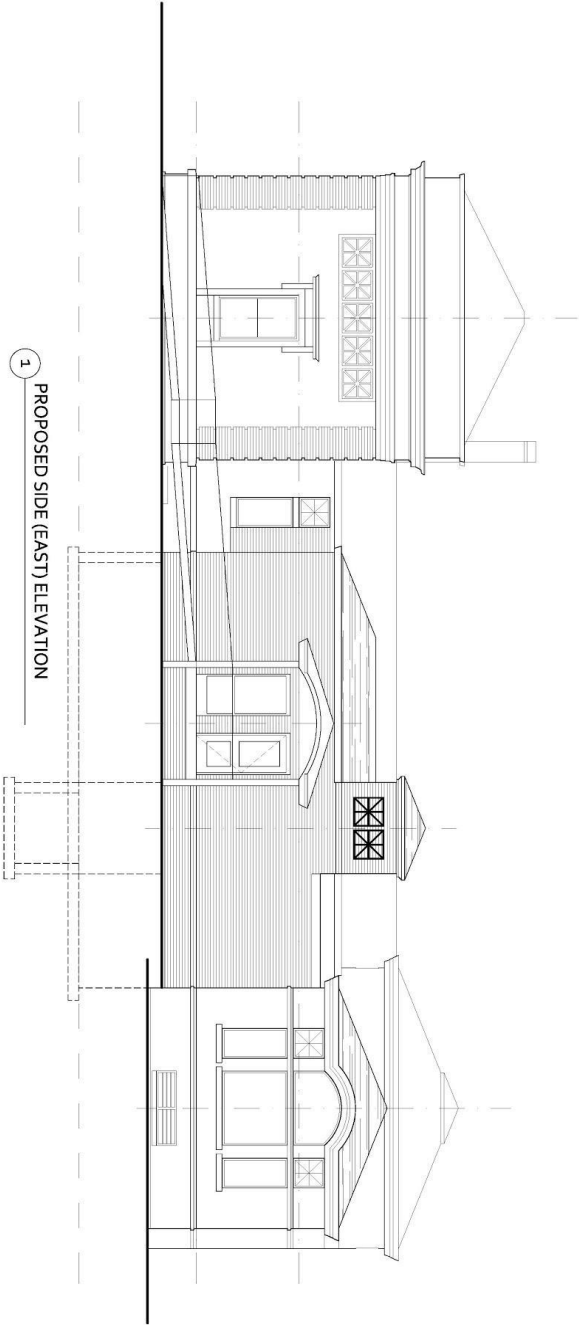
Given this information, the Board sought to obtain the services of a qualified architectural firm, knowledgeable about ADA requirements, to assist in the analysis of alternative solutions. After winning a competitive bidding process, Dewright Design, LLC was hired in February 2017 to propose several plans to solve our accessibility issues.

Current Status of the Accessibility Project

The conversations with Dewright Design about elevator options raised several additional accessibility issues, including ADA compliant bathrooms and doorway openings, as well as establishment of a "place of refuge" for patrons with disabilities in the event of fire. A series of options were developed by the architect and presented by the Building Committee to the Board of Trustees. Ultimately, the board unanimously agreed that the option attached was the most feasible and practical approach to resolving the library's collective handicap accessibility issues and has proceeded to commission plans and cost estimates. SFL successfully applied for and received a \$7,500 grant from the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation which will cover a portion of these architectural design fees. In addition to this grant, the Wimpfheimer Family Foundation has made a monetary pledge towards this project over the next five years. Dewright Design completed its drawings in July 2017 and estimated the project cost to be \$420,000. With your help, the board is eager to pursue this project to make SFL accessible to all.



1 EXISTING SIDE (EAST) ELEVATION



1 PROPOSED SIDE (EAST) ELEVATION

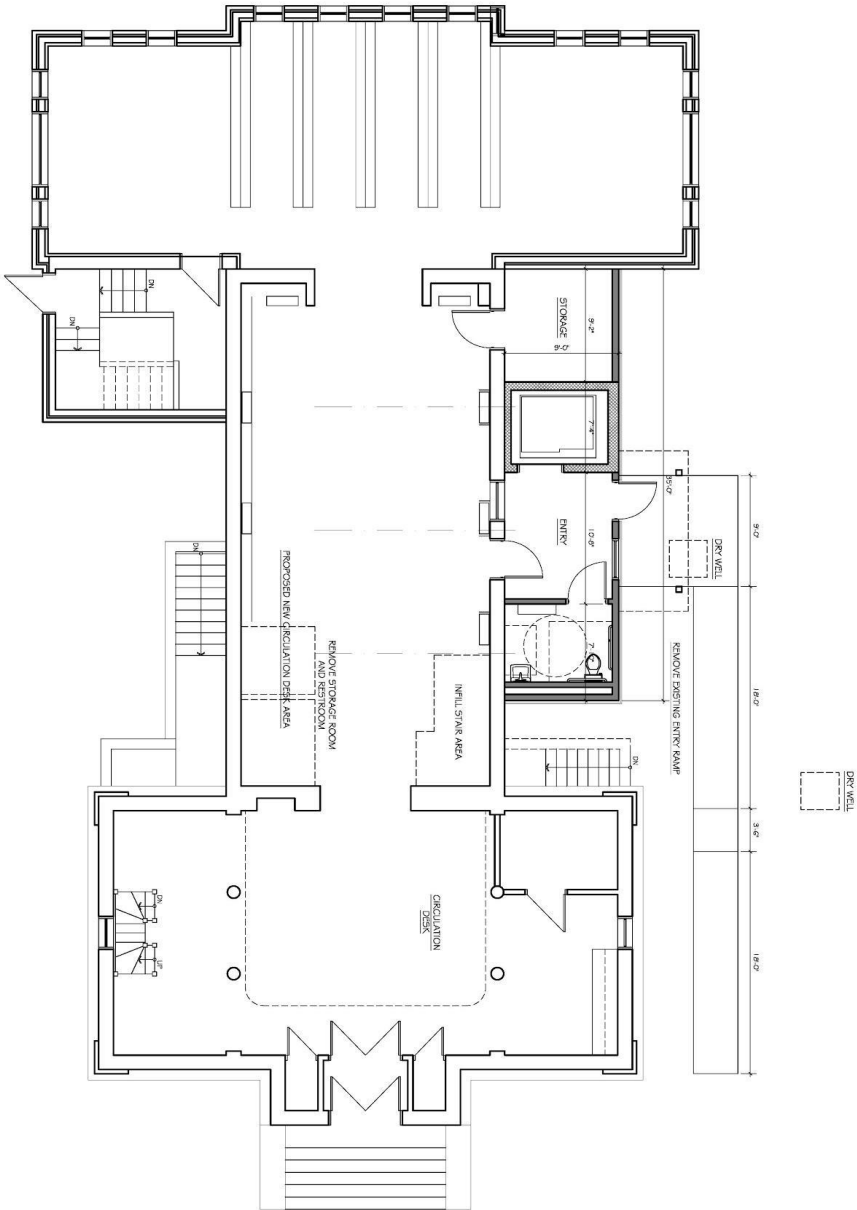
deuright design LLC
ARCHITECTURE | INTERIOR DESIGN
11 Dale Street
West Hartford, CT 06107
860.235.1910 | deurightdesign@comcast.net

Additions and Renovations for the:
Stonington Free Library
20 High Street
STONINGTON, CT

PROGRESS PRINT
NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

EXTERIOR
ELEVATIONS

DATE: 04 | 21 | 17
SCALE: 3/4" = 1'-0"
PROJECT No: 17-04
DRAWING
NUMBER:
A1-1



1 MAIN LEVEL FLOOR PLAN

deuright design LLC
ARCHITECTURE | INTERIOR DESIGN
11 Oak Street
West Hartford, CT 06107
860.416.9901 | deurightdesign@comcast.net

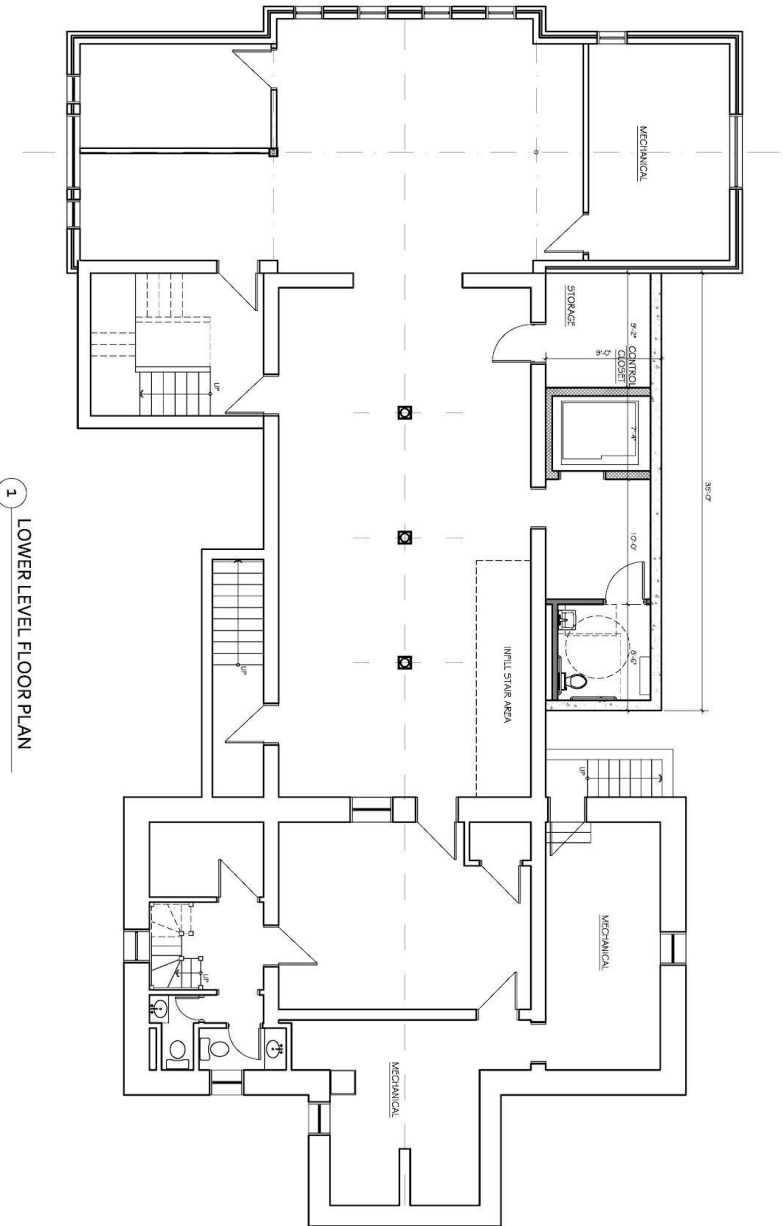
Additions and Renovations for the:
Stonington Free Library
20 High Street
STONINGTON, CT

PROGRESS PRINT
NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

EXISTING / DEMOLITION
LOWER LEVEL FLOOR PLANS
DATE: 04 | 21 | 17
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"
PROJECT No: 17-04
DRAWING
NUMBER:

A1-1

POSTING HERE



1 LOWER LEVEL FLOOR PLAN

dewright design LLC
ARCHITECTURE | INTERIOR DESIGN
33 Dink Street
West Hartford, CT 06107
860.245.3930 | dewrightdesign@comcast.net

Additions and Renovations for the:
Stonington Free Library
20 High Street
STONINGTON, CT

PROGRESS PRINT
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EXISTING / DEMOLITION LOWER LEVEL FLOOR PLANS	
DATE:	04 21 17
SCALE:	1/4" = 1'-0"
PROJECT No:	17-04
DRAWING NUMBER:	A1-2