2020 - 2022 Strategic Plan

Public Feedback: Interview Results

{**S**brand}

Clearview
Library District

2020-2022 Strategic Plan

The Clearview Library District has embarked on a three-year strategic planning process to evaluate its current efforts and establish a roadmap for future library services and resources. Community feedback is an essential component of the Clearview Library District's efforts to create a community-driven 2020-2022 strategic plan.

This report focuses only on the personal interview results. It is one of seven community engagement components, which included:
- Online and print survey
- White board question prompts placed throughout the district
- Sticky note feedback prompts at the library
- Engagement posts on Facebook and Instagram
- One-on-one interviews with influential community leaders
- Community meeting
- Advisory Group meetings

Personal Interview Overview

For every strategic plan, it's helpful to get feedback from partners, community members, clients and patrons of all ages, people who have never used the library, and others in the community. That broad range of thoughts and feedback can inform the final strategic plan. This report was created and written by Sheryl Trent of SBrand Consulting, and all questions or comments can be directed to her at sheryl@sheryltrent.com.

This is a summary of the personal interviews that were conducted with twenty-four community members selected because of their unique relationship with the library. Through emails and phone calls forty-seven individuals were contacted, and twenty-four agreed to be interviewed (due to time constraints or communication gaps, some individuals were not able to be interviewed although they did volunteer). Those interviewed included representatives from Severance, Windsor, the school district, the library board, the library foundation, developers in the district, business owners in the district, and partners of the library.

The interviews were conducted in person, by phone and in one case via email only starting on June 5, 2019. There were a standard set of questions:

1. What is working well with the Clearview Library District right now?
2. What is not working well right now?
3. What Library services are most important to you?
4. Looking ahead for the next three years:
   a. What programs or services should we add?
   b. What programs or services should we reduce?

c. What role should the library play in our community?
d. How should we grow with the growing community?
e. What new or innovative ideas have you seen in other libraries that we should consider here?
5. What else would you like to tell me?

Because the interviews are by nature conversations, each answer led to more in depth conversations and questions. When information was offered, follow up questions to gain more detail, suggestions and thoughts were asked.

This report focuses ONLY on the results from those interviews, which does mean that this is a very small segment of the overall information. However, it is also the most detailed and informative, since the interviews took place in person, on the phone and via email allowing for more in depth conversations and follow up questions.

All the conversations were completely confidential, so the information in this report has been compiled into the most common themes, and often the language was adapted to have context and make more sense in the written form. These are NOT recommendations, nor are they suggestions. This is information that will lead to a better strategic plan and a more successful library and was offered in that context. It is important to note that some of this information will be strenuously defended by some of the interviewees, and some of this information will be strenuously denied by some of the interviewees. Because the report focuses on THEMES, not individual comments, it needs to be understood that many opinions were expressed, and **only the most commonly recurring themes are noted below**.

Key Themes
There are six overarching themes from the interviews. Underneath those themes, and in addition to the very positive and appreciative feedback mentioned in the first theme, there is a lack of understanding of what the library does offer and what the role of the library is in the community. A secondary perception is that the Clearview Library District has not listened in order to understand when feedback has been offered (either in a specific sense by that interviewee or a general sense from the community). One very significant outcome of that perception is a stated lack of trust that the District is a wise steward of funds and has open and honest communication of information or needs. Again, this does not reflect what EVERY interview stated, but the most common themes among those interviewed. This information should be balanced with the information generated by the community survey, the white board, the sticky notes, and the postcards.

Theme One: Appreciation for Programs and Services

The general feedback from all interviews was that the library is an important part of the community, and that they personally, or their friends and family have and do use the library services and programming. General support for a library was evidenced in every conversation.

Additionally, there was general agreement that in the past several years the library has offered new and diverse programming and services that were needed in the community, and that the resources provided by the library have dramatically improved in recent years.

The day to day programming and operational relationship with staff is viewed as professional, welcoming, helpful and very customer service oriented. The core library staff is perceived as being very professional and knowledgeable. Feedback on collaboration was mixed with some specific positive comments around programming at the staff level on day to day opportunities, and the school district collaboration in particular was listed as a positive.

A counter to that is the perception that key partnerships, especially with the two towns, may not been maintained or enhanced for many years, and significant segments of the community that the Library serves do not feel as if they have been heard in their request for services and collaborative opportunities. There is a strong perception about lack of equity in service delivery and location consideration, most significantly in Severance.

Theme Two: Strengthening Trust

The most common issue discussed during the interviews was that the library has lost the trust of the community, and the result of that could be reflected in the vote on the ballot issue. That loss of trust was based in the feeling that, while the library does ask for feedback, the library does not listen to feedback and the reaction of the library is perceived as defensive, arrogant and dismissive. Several clear examples were repeated around the purchase of land, the two ballot measures, Drag Queen Story Hour, and prospective offers of land and locations for a new library facility.

Communication styles and differences have contributed greatly to this theme of trust: the feedback was that listening to learn and understand should be a focus, instead of listening to respond. The words "defensive" and "arrogant" were used as examples when library leadership were questioned or challenged about a decision. People in the community feel dismissed or made to feel as if they don't understand/are stupid when they bring up issues or concerns. This perceived "lack of humility" contributes to some of the other themes

There was a concern expressed as a part of this theme and it was presented as feedback that could be helpful to the strategic plan. That concern is that if these trust issues as explained here are not addressed and eventually solved, it is likely that core segments of the current tax base will either leave to join another District, or there might be consideration of a resident-based ballot initiative to limit the revenue available to the library.

Theme Three: Communication for Transparency and Openness

This lack of trust as conveyed here might be compounded by the way the library presents and shares data and documents. Without a clear understanding of what data means, a persistent reaction will be to not believe that data. The interviewees indicated that the library should be

completely open and transparent in all communications and responses to requests for information.

Some interviewees felt that there needed to be a statistically significant survey of the community needs and wants as related to library services, as well as an organizational assessment of the structure of the library Board and staff. This survey and assessment conducted by a neutral third party (selected by a community group) would result in data and information that could be believed by the community.

Theme Four: Financing and Funding

Lack of trust and clarity about data, along with communication gaps has led to questioning on the part of some interviewees about the use of resources. For example:

Why did the Library Board buy the land?
Why does the Library need to expand?
Why hasn't the Library evaluated smaller satellite facilities instead of one new large facility?
What about partnerships with other entities (the two towns, fire district, school district, etc) to co-locate, partner in building a facility, purchase land next to other facilities, and so on
On what data is the library basing the need for a new facility?

Until the library can strengthen partnerships, focus on relationships, and demonstrate open and transparent communication of data, there will continue to be questioning regarding the use of resources.

Theme Five: Mission/Role of the library

The community, and even close community partners, seem unsure as to the Mission of the library and their role in the community. The library often offers not just the same types of classes, but the same exact classes as other taxpayer funded entities, which is perceived as competition instead of collaboration. Certainly, the role of any library has evolved and expanded over the years, and some members of the community may not understand what the library can offer.

The library has an adopted Mission Statement:
Cultivate Curiosity | Enlighten the Mind | Strengthen the Community

Theme Six: Governance and Culture

Library law is complicated and not as easy to understand as some other taxpayer funded entities. As a result, there are some expectations expressed by the interviewees that are based on incorrect assumptions or lack of full understanding. Additionally, the bylaws seem to be changed regularly, leading to distrust and uncertainty about guidance and structure.

There is some confusion about the selection of Board members and how that selection process might affect accountability to the public. There is also a belief that the Board may not be acting in the traditional role of a Board in relationship to decision making, involvement with finances, and other key governance areas.

Summary

Again, it should be noted that **this is one part of seven types of feedback and opinion**, and that interviews do offer far more in depth opportunities to communicate than some other options. The information was offered confidentially to help the library improve strategically over the coming years. This information can and should be balanced against the other comments from the online survey and community engagement strategies in place, which will be due at the end of July and reported out in late August.

For questions or comments, please contact Sheryl Trent of SBrand Consulting at sheryl@sheryltrent.com or 970-208-6633.