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# *TABLE of CONTENTS*

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<b><i>From the Library Director and Board President</i></b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>East Greenbush Community Library Strategic Plan 2023-2028</b> .....	<b>3</b>
“You Belong Here” .....	3
<b>Strategic Plan Goals</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Build Community Connections .....	4
Engage with Your Community.....	4
Satisfy Curiosity & Stimulate Imagination .....	5
Promote Literacies .....	5
Advance Local Economic Vitality .....	6
<b>Looking Forward</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>The Planning Process</b> .....	<b>7</b>
The Community.....	8
East Greenbush Community Library .....	12
Next Steps .....	13
<b>Strategic Planning Team Members</b> .....	<b>15</b>

## ***From* THE LIBRARY DIRECTOR and BOARD PRESIDENT**

We're thrilled to share a new chapter for the East Greenbush Community Library. As President of the Library Board and the Library Director, we're proud to introduce our new Library Strategic Plan.

Our library has always been a vital community hub, fostering learning, connection, and inspiration. This newest strategic plan guides us forward while staying true to our values. We envision the library as the central hub where all people will feel welcome, supported in learning, and connected to their community and one another.

Through discussions with the community, patrons, staff, Board, Friends and partners, we've identified key areas of focus that will drive our library's growth. We're excited about the possibilities! Your continued involvement is critical as we bring this plan to life. We will focus on the following organizational goals:

1. Build Community Connections
2. Engage with Your Community
3. Satisfy Curiosity & Stimulate Imagination
4. Promote Literacies
5. Advance Local Economic Vitality

Thank you for being a part of the East Greenbush Community Library family. Together, we're shaping our future for learning, connecting, and promoting our sense of community.

With excitement and gratitude,

*Lynne Oudekerk*

Lynne Oudekerk  
President, Library Board of Trustees

*Jill Dugas Hughes*

Jill Dugas Hughes  
Library Director

# East Greenbush Community Library Strategic Plan 2023-2028

## *“You Belong Here”*

Throughout the community assessment process, a key role that the East Greenbush Community Library can play came into focus - as a place for belonging. A common observation was that public libraries are one of the last remaining places in a community where people can just be, without expectation of a transaction taking place. At the same time, it was noted that public libraries have staff who are trained to provide access to trusted sources of information that help people navigate their daily lives and spark curiosity and growth.

The phrase “You Belong Here” became a central idea to the strategic planning process and was critical to the process of prioritizing which services the East Greenbush Community Library would offer to the community. This idea inspired a new vision statement:



### VISION

*To serve as the central hub where people feel welcome, supported in learning, and connected to community and one another.*

Because a library’s potential role is so vast, the first task of the Work Group was to use the community and library assessments to select from a list of “service priorities” created by the Public Library Association (and modified and adapted by MB&A). The service priorities were selected and turned into goals, which are meant to reflect what will change for the community when the East Greenbush Community Library successfully takes steps to offer services and programs in line with the service priorities. Those goals, and associated objectives, are presented below. The objectives listed give a sense of how the library will assess its own progress toward meeting its goals. A new library mission was crafted, in line with what the library will offer:

### MISSION

*We inspire learning, imagination, collaboration, and compassion by providing our community with equitable access to resources in a welcoming environment.*



## Strategic Plan Goals

### *Build Community Connections*

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Community members will feel welcomed by the library and library staff and will feel more connected with one another by having access to programs and resources that are responsive to their needs, reflective of the diversity of community voices, and give them the opportunity to work together with the library to create meaningful experiences.

To do this, we will:

- Increase opportunities and methods for community members to offer feedback
- Increase program opportunities for community members to engage meaningfully with one another across lines of difference
- Identify current underserved communities and craft initiatives to increase usage by identified groups.

*Why is this important to us?*

This goal will help the library intentionally and meaningfully address increasing linguistic and ethnic diversity, ensuring that staff offer programs and opportunities for all current and future library users to feel a sense of welcome and belonging when they interact with the library.

### *Engage with Your Community*

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New and longtime community members will see the East Greenbush Community Library as a central hub for resources to engage them with local government, volunteer opportunities, and programs, services, and activities in partnership with community agencies and organizations.

To do this, we will:

- Increase bi-directional communication with local government and community agencies
- Increase usage of or collaboration with the library by local government and community groups for meetings and events
- Increase usage of library resources to connect community members to community events

### *Why is this important to us?*

Survey respondents and others clearly indicated that one way to create the changes they hoped to see in the community was to increase communication between town government, other town groups, and residents. The library can use its existing resources and relationships, as well as data from the survey on where respondents feel the greatest sense of connection in the community, to facilitate connections. A special focus will be on residents who are new to East Greenbush and the United States, who may not have past experience with public libraries or are unaware of the opportunities to participate in civic life.

## ***Satisfy Curiosity & Stimulate Imagination*** ---

Community members will know that when they interact with East Greenbush Community Library, they will have access to resources and experiences that enrich their lives and engage them with new ideas in spaces that allow for both quiet and active uses.

To do this, we will:

- Assess the use of physical (both indoor and outdoor) and virtual spaces to meet the needs of the community, including barriers to accessibility
- Increase the overall awareness that community members have of the library's programs, collections, and services.
- Increase circulation of diverse resources and materials

### *Why is this important to us?*

When people think of “libraries”, this is the first service that comes to mind - and it continues to be central to the library's role in the community. East Greenbush Community Library is where people can connect with old friends and favorite reading materials, and encounter new topics or ideas that will broaden their horizons. EGCL staff will focus on making these resources and experiences both relevant and accessible.

## ***Promote Literacies*** ---

Community members will see the value in literacies of all types, from early literacy to digital literacy. Community members of all ages will find services at the library that help them develop or practice a variety of literacy skills, develop their ability to understand and express ideas and opinions, and to succeed in pursuits of interest.

To do this, we will:

- Increase opportunities for hands-on and intergenerational learning
- Increase on-site and on-line access to resources that promote literacy skills
- Increase community partnerships with educational institutions

*Why is this important to us?*

Working toward this goal will allow us to deepen our relationship with the East Greenbush Central School District to offer programming and services that complement their curriculum-based learning with intergenerational and flexible offerings.

Recognizing the fast-paced shifts in what people need to learn and how they learn, this goal positions the library as a partner for beta testing and innovation, as well as providing core early literacy services and programming for children and their caregivers.

### *Advance Local Economic Vitality*

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Local businesses, entrepreneurs, and community leaders will view the library as part of their support system for growth and success in our community.

To do this, we will:

- Increase library staff capacity to assist businesses and entrepreneurs in physical and digital spaces.
- Increase usage of existing library resources that support local businesses and entrepreneurs
- Increase opportunities for local businesses and entrepreneurs to network and build skills

*Why is this important to us?*

Libraries are natural partners for those who are seeking to start or expand a small business. East Greenbush has a challenging small business environment and supporting local businesses can both create new connections between town residents and increase the town's economic vitality. The library, with its available technology, spaces, and ability to connect people with resources (including mentors or other people who can provide guidance), will explore how it can best support the local business environment.

## **Looking Forward**

The East Greenbush Community Library is ready for action. Armed with new community partners, a fresh look at how systems can operate, and examples from community organizations around the world combined with internal leadership and a desire for a community hub, the library is positioned to take the lead and move forward.

## The Planning Process

In February 2023, East Greenbush Community Library engaged Maxine Bleiweis & Associates (MB&A) to facilitate the strategic planning process.

The strategic planning process was designed intentionally to start by gathering information from the community. This began in March, with MB&A conducting ten key informant interviews with selected individuals, including local and county elected officials, business owners, education leaders, and key community members. During this time background research was conducted, including a review of the most recent Census data and demographic trends, town board and commission meeting minutes, planning documents, and local news stories.

A community survey was available from March 7 to April 14, both online and on paper, and professionally translated into Spanish, Mandarin, and Urdu. A total of 772 individuals responded to the survey; a total of 71% were from the library's chartered and contracted service area (57% from East Greenbush, 14% from Schodack). One survey was returned in Mandarin. A youth survey (ages four to 18) was also distributed at the library and received 103 responses.

In April 2023, the consultants came to East Greenbush for a three-day site visit. While in East Greenbush they facilitated both a staff meeting and a meeting of the Board of Trustees and Friends of the Library to familiarize each group with the strategic planning process, present new ideas, and conduct a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) assessment. They conducted five staff interviews. To gain additional community input they held a community forum and four focus groups. Groups were composed of members of the business community, teens, nonprofit and faith-based leaders, and parents and caregivers. Finally, a Community Advisory Council was convened (see pg.14 for membership) to hear a presentation on public library trends and to also participate in a SOAR assessment.

Following the site visit, a Work Group made up of four staff members, two Board members, and one member of the Friends of the Library (see pg.14 for membership) met over Zoom with the consultants. Over the course of five meetings held between May 10 and June 14, 2023, the Work Group reviewed the results of the community needs that had been identified through the process, developed proposed mission and vision statements, selected service priorities, drafted goals and objectives, and reviewed activities and foundational strategies. In addition, the Work Group facilitated a staff meeting focused on the development of action steps to be used for accomplishing goals.

*The Community*

**Current community snapshot**

East Greenbush Community Library is chartered to serve the Town of East Greenbush and is contracted to serve the Town of Schodack. Over the past decade, East Greenbush has become a more diverse community, as reflected in the census data below. Of particular note is the percentage of residents who identify as two or more races, Asian residents, percentage of foreign-born residents, and the number of foreign-born residents who are not US citizens - all of which are higher than the percentages in Rensselaer County as a whole. East Greenbush also has a high percentage of residents who are government employees due to its proximity to Albany. Schodack has less linguistic and ethnic diversity than East Greenbush, as also shown in the table below.<sup>1</sup>

	East Greenbush	Schodack	Rensselaer County
Population size	16,521	12,899	159,853
White, alone	86.3%	92.7%	81.1%
Hispanic/Latino	5.2%	3.6%	5.7%
Two or more races	4.8%	2.5%	2.8%
Asian	4%	1.3%	3.1%
African American	2.6%	0.1%	8.8%
Language other than English at home	8.6%	6%	7.8%
Foreign-born	7.7%	2.8%	5.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher	46.3%	36.1%	34.3%
Median household income	\$99,009	\$86,310	\$76,731

East Greenbush Central School District serves 4,018 students, kindergarten to 12th grade, including a small portion of Schodack.<sup>2</sup> Of those students, 77% identify as white, 7% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% as Hispanic/Latino, 5% as multi-racial, and 4% as

<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2021 5-year estimates.

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?instid=800000039628>

Black/African American. While only 1% (or 57 students) are identified as English Language Learners (ELL,) this population is concentrated in lower elementary school (19% in kindergarten in 2021-22) and has higher levels of need than the average student. Compared to 15% of all students with identified disabilities, 35% of ELL students are identified as having a disability; compared to 22% of all students who are economically disadvantaged, 53% of ELL students are economically disadvantaged. 60% of ELL students are Asian/Pacific Islander, 23% are Hispanic/Latino, and 16% are white. The top five languages in the district for ELL are Spanish, Urdu, Persian, Mandarin, and Arabic.

## **Community trends**

The community assessment process is designed to ask questions to identify issues that East Greenbush and Schodack are currently facing, creating a framework for the East Greenbush Community Library to identify where the library can play a role in addressing the issues. The questions used in the focus groups, interviews, and surveys were primarily open-ended to help identify themes, which are presented below.

### **Increasing linguistic and ethnic diversity**

East Greenbush has experienced and continues to experience a shift in its population that includes increasing linguistic and ethnic diversity.

In 2011, 6.1% of residents reported speaking a language other than English at home; 5.6% were foreign born, and of those foreign born, only 35.2% were not US citizens. As noted in the community snapshot, those percentages have increased in the past ten years.

The places where foreign-born residents come from have shifted. In 2011, 39.1% of foreign-born residents were born in Europe, 30.7% in Asia, and 27.3% in Latin America. In 2021, it is now 57.2% from Asia, 17.3% from Latin America, and 14.2% from Europe. Community members had varying perceptions of these shifts, depending on their age and level of involvement in the community. People connected to the school district feel the change acutely, as it impacts services and methods of communication with parents and caregivers of students. Others viewed it from the lens of the impact that Regeneron, a biotechnology company that has been expanding its presence in East Greenbush, is driving immigration from Asian countries.

## **Sense of isolation and desire for reconnection**

The first data collection tool for the community assessment was the community survey. In open-ended responses, it was clear that the number one concern was a sense of isolation and a desire for reconnection. A total of 268 respondents who said they lived in East Greenbush or Schodack took the time to answer the following questions:

What are three words or phrases to describe the kind of community you'd LIKE to live in  
Why is that important to you?

How is that different from how you see things now?

What are some of the things that need to happen to create that kind of change?

Below is a sampling of responses that were entered:

*"People seem very isolated" (age 30-44)*

*"Not much community in my neighborhood" (age 30-44)*

*"I feel isolated right now, especially as someone who does not have kids and can't interact with the community through them." (age 30-44)*

*"We need for people to feel safe and secure, so they will get out and live, and help others feel safe to live." (age 45-59)*

These responses were used to help plan for the community forum, where participants were asked:

What do you do when you want to feel connected/in community with others?

Why do you seek out community/what motivates you?

The discussion and feedback, including the responses provided on sticky notes to the right, echoed the need for spaces and opportunities to address social isolation and encourage connections.

## **Lack of a town center**

While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is clearly a factor in people's sense of isolation, another factor that is unique to East Greenbush is the physical layout of the town and the lack of a natural town center, or a space that is officially designated as a Community Center.

Many open-ended survey responses identified this as a challenge and a community need. One survey response that illustrates this:

What are three words or phrases to describe the kind of community you'd LIKE to live in: *"Close knit community"*

Why is that important to you? *“I’d like to live in a community where everybody knows my name”*

How is that different from how you see things now? *“There’s no Town Center”*

On a practical level, there is a desire for walkability and to decrease the need to drive, especially for local shopping.

*“I prefer access to local shops and such. I feel I am driving everywhere to accomplish this.” (age 45-59)*

*“There is no community center of town or walkable town center” (age 45-59)*

### **Community Aspirations**

Beyond identifying issues and challenges, the community assessment process is focused on uncovering the vision the community has for itself. From key informant interviews, it was clear that many people see East Greenbush as standing at an inflection point. While it was described as “the hottest town in Rensselaer County” with both the relocation of the County Office Building and Regeneron’s growth, there was also acknowledgement that its “bones [infrastructure] seem to be aging,” and there is a need to responsibly manage its growth.

Working with the Community Advisory Council and the Board of Trustees and Friends of the Library, several community aspirations, or vision statements, were developed that reflect where these key community leaders hope to see East Greenbush and Schodack in the future:

1. To be a welcoming environment for an increasingly diverse population
2. To provide gathering places that are free and accessible
3. To foster and broaden our sense of community
4. To attract good leadership, new families, and businesses

## *East Greenbush Community Library*

### **Library strengths, opportunities, and aspirations**

With all of this information gathered about East Greenbush and Schodack, the focus shifted to identifying the East Greenbush Community Library's role in working with all key town stakeholders to advance the community's vision. Using the SOAR assessment, a strengths-based analysis tool, the following strengths, opportunities, and aspirations were identified.

Key **strengths** included: the quality of EGCL's staff and the services they provide to all library users, such as programming for all ages; the library's location adjacent to the YMCA and senior living facility; its reputation as a library that people travel from all over the Capital region to use; strong community relationships; and the existing building, including the unique feature of the drive-up window.

**Opportunities** were centered on space, welcoming, and communications. The land that is available adjacent to the library provides an opportunity to provide outdoor programming and activities, as well as possibilities for expansion. In addition, the indoor space could be reconfigured to more successfully meet the needs of the various groups who use the library throughout the day. Staff, Board, and Friends also identified a potential role for the library as a place to welcome new arrivals to the community, as well as a gap in current marketing and communications, including expanding partnerships to help reach new audiences.

Finally, the groups were asked to answer the question "In five years, East Greenbush Community Library will be known as..." Responses reflected the community's needs, the library's strengths, and the library's areas for growth:

#### **In five years, the East Greenbush Community Library will be known as...**

- The first stop for people who are new to the community
- THE community hub
- A center for experiential learning that supports personal and economic growth
- An open place where everyone can feel welcome, safe, and connected
- A place for people to gather and eat
- Reflective of community voices
- A center for digital resources and interaction
- A place for community organizations to come and discuss common issues

## *Next Steps*

In order for the East Greenbush Community Library to be successful in implementing its strategic plan, it is recommended that certain key changes and shifts be made or begun in year one of the plan.

### **Staffing structure and support**

The organizational chart and job descriptions must support the goals of the plan. For example, the goals of community engagement and advancing economic vitality will require more staff time. Asking where those hours will come from, while at the same time, identifying areas to decrease staff time, may hold the answer. Streamlining routine tasks, particularly in the management of materials, could free up staff to accomplish more public-facing activities. Ultimately, new positions may need to be created to support the plan.

To support staff, the need for new training, cross-training, and continuing education budgets and time allotment should be addressed to fill in any gaps in knowledge and skills. Performance evaluation for each staff member should be based on how the individual's work and contributions bring the plan closer to reality. Job descriptions should be updated to enable staff to carry out the plan. Job descriptions should be as broad as possible, based on outcomes rather than tasks.

### **Space planning**

A look at the physical environment, both inside and outside, to remove barriers to success for the plan is also essential. In order for potential users to feel "I belong here," they have to see themselves as welcome and part of the organization.

In the 20+ years since the library was opened to the public, the delivery of library service has shifted from the emphasis on materials with some programs to the desire to welcome people onto the grounds and into the space for a variety of activities that may or may not include library materials. Rethinking the space based on the plan first and materials second is a challenge that should be undertaken. As the space is currently configured, there is a constant tug between the need for group gathering, quiet time, and the time taken with the inventory.

To establish the library as the community hub, the outside should be reconciled with that vision. For people who do not consider themselves library patrons, the potential changes to the outside activities and messaging can begin a new era in services for the community.

## **Marketing/Communications**

The need to change the messaging of a public library is paramount, as there can remain a widely-held perception among non-library users that the Internet has made the library obsolete.

Asking all of the following are essential starts to the process:

How are people in our community communicating with one another?

Does that align with how the library is communicating with them?

Who are the current library ambassadors and who needs to become one?

What message is the library sending about itself with the way it currently communicates?

The library should plan regularly scheduled focus groups and gatherings and keep in touch with the thinking and reactions of a variety of constituents with a special effort to include younger voices and new and potential users.

The Community Advisory Council that was established to help shape the plan is a uniquely qualified asset to partner with marketing and communications. Each member has their own community constituency. Creating a marketing and communications plan as part of the goal of the Council will assist in facilitation.

## **Sustainability/Funding structure**

East Greenbush Community Library is currently chartered to serve the Town of East Greenbush and contracts with the Town of Schodack to provide services. This structure does not take into account that approximately 35% of library users do not live in either East Greenbush or Schodack, yet consider the East Greenbush Community Library to be their library of choice. The leadership of the East Greenbush Community Library could convene a small working group to examine how it can bring in funding to provide the wide range of services that it is known for, including opportunities for private fundraising and community-based support and changes at the state level to see if the government funding mechanism can better match the service area.

## **Strategic Planning Team Members**

### **Work Group**

Jill Dugas Hughes, Library Director  
Mari Harris, Vice President, Library Board  
Lynne Oudekerk, President, Library Board  
Marion Pierson, Head of Circulation  
Julie Ann Price, President, Friends of Library  
Catherine Snow, Head of Adult & Information Services  
Jenna Zaborowski, Youth & Family Services/Teen Librarian

### **Community Advisory Council**

Kelly Aldinger, Teacher, East Greenbush Central School District  
Jake Ashby, Senator, NYS, 43<sup>rd</sup> District  
Jim Church, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Questar III BOCES  
Mary Pat Donnelly, District Attorney, Rensselaer County  
Tom Grant, County Legislator, Rensselaer County  
Shay Harrison, Co-President, Literacy Volunteers of Rensselaer County  
Chris Horne, President/CEO, Junior Achievement of Northeastern New York  
Nichole Krisanda, Parent, East Greenbush  
Ed Nestler, Town Board Member, Town of East Greenbush  
Charles Peter, Town Supervisor, Town of Schodack  
Elaine Rudzinski, Chief of Police, East Greenbush Police Department  
Jeff Simons, Superintendent of Schools, East Greenbush Central School District

### **Library Board of Trustees**

Lynne Oudekerk, President  
Mari Harris, Vice President  
Amanda Miller, Secretary  
Katie Sheehan, Treasurer  
Michael Poost  
Camille Engel  
Charlie Pensabene

### **Consultants- Maxine Bleiweis & Associates**

Maxine Bleiweis, Principal  
Erica Byrne, Senior Associate