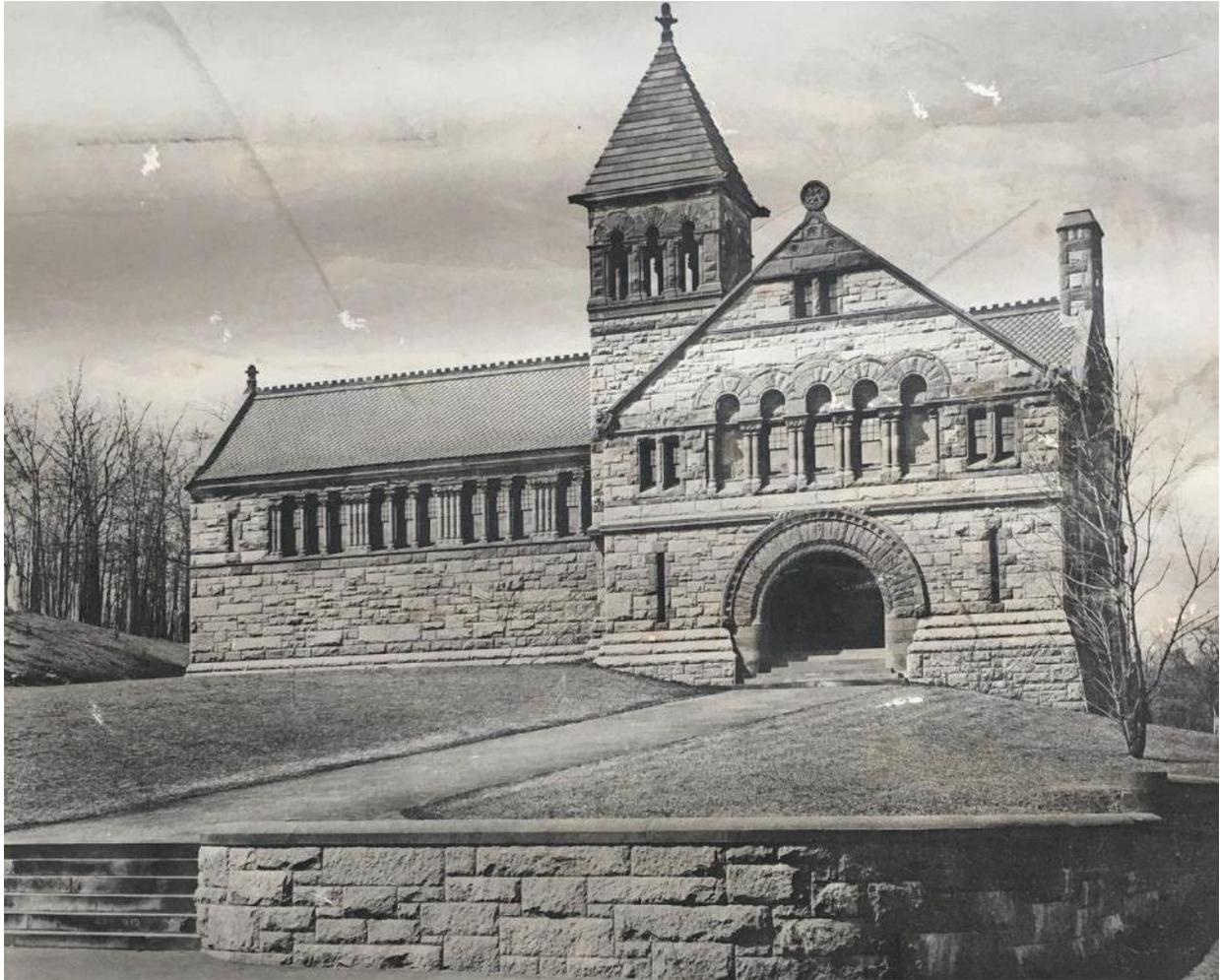


The Ames Free Library
Where the Community Connects
53 Main Street
Easton, MA 02356



Strategic Plan 2025-2030

The plan is dedicated to the 25,058 residents of the Easton community.

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Introduction

The Ames Free Library Strategic Plan 2025–2030 took a year of community-wide visioning, assessment and response before major goals and specific objectives for the next five fiscal years were developed.

The goal of this plan is both simple and profound. It aims to provide direction to the frenetic scope of expanding services and programs at the library even as it addresses changing community needs. In this Plan can be found a mission statement, goals, and objectives that will help the library stay on track and be true to its mission, amid the conflicting demands and pressures of the future.

Mission Statement

The Ames Free Library/Easton’s Public Library provides materials and services to help the residents of Easton obtain information to meet their personal, educational, professional, and recreational needs. Emphasis is placed upon supporting students of all ages, particularly stimulating younger children’s interest and appreciation for reading and learning. The library serves as a learning and educational center for all residents of the community.

Methodology

The Executive Director, with input from staff, formed a planning committee of 14. The members represented a cross-section of staff, Board of Directors, Friends of the Ames Free Library, town officials, volunteers, community and social organizations. Age, race, gender and socioeconomic levels were also considered.

On June 16, 2023 Executive Director Ian Dunbar facilitated a SOAR exercise with the Planning Committee. The thoughtful discussion by the committee members highlighted the library’s perceived strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results.

Kristi Chadwick, Massachusetts Library System Consultant, facilitated a community visioning session on July 11, 2023 in which the Planning Committee focused the SOAR results into visioning ideas through a series of questions related to the town of Easton, and then organized their responses along a strength and impact matrix, resulting in the following themes being seen as both High Impact & High Strength for the library to implement:

- Town history/maintaining history
- Library green space
- Town pride (through both programs and their participants)
- Community impact
- Town information
- Child friendly
- Volunteers
- Town [as a] destination

The visioning ideas were then used to populate a series of 31 survey questions. The survey was available both online on the library website as well as in hard copy at the main circulation desk. It ran for two months in the summer of 2023. It resulted in 160 completed responses to the formal questions and some heartwarming narrative remarks on staff and library.

The results of the survey and the various meetings with the Planning Committee, Board of Directors, and staff were combined to finalize the goals and objectives of the library for the next five years. The plan was submitted to the Board of Directors and approved at a meeting on September 17, 2024.

Ames Free Library, a History

The Ames Free Library first opened its doors in 1883. Under the terms of the will of Oliver Ames II, \$50,000, in trust, was left for the construction and support of a library for the benefit of the inhabitants of Easton, MA. Fifteen thousand dollars of this amount was designated for a permanent fund, the income of which shall be devoted to increasing the library and keeping the building, its appurtenances, and contents in repair. This fund was added to by his descendants through the years and constituted the library's sole support until 1972 when town support was given in order to qualify the library for state aid.

The main building was designed by Henry Hobson Richardson in 1877 and opened in 1883. One of the outstanding men in the history of American architecture, Richardson was the teacher of Louis Sullivan, the father of the modern skyscraper, whose pupil, Frank Lloyd Wright, remains one of the foremost architects of the 20th century. The Ames Free Library is one of four public libraries in Massachusetts designed by Richardson. The others are located in Malden, Quincy, and Woburn. The library is built of Milford granite with the same Longmeadow trim used on Trinity Church in Boston. The very low cavernous arch over the doorway was used here by Richardson for the first time and became one of the most prominent and widely imitated characteristics of his style.

The picturesque carvings and corner gargoyles on the outside of the building are the design of Stanford White as is much of the interior wood detail, including the unusual barrel-vaulted ceiling in the book stack wing. The ceiling is butternut wood. White also designed the ornately carved mantelpiece of Portland stone in the reading room which bears the handsome bronze relief of Oliver Ames II, by Augustus St. Gaudens.

Renewed interest in Richardson's work has resulted in students from all over the country and abroad coming to study and examine this finely preserved example of his work.

The children's wing, built in 1931, was the gift of Mrs. William H. Ames (Fanny Holt Ames), a member of the Board of Trustees for 40 years, in memory of her husband William Hadwen Ames. The addition was designed by Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge of Boston, the architectural firm formed by three members of H.H. Richardson's office upon his death in 1886. In February of 1998, the library received a large gift from the estate of Fanny Holt Ames in order to increase the endowment funds of the library to benefit the school children of Easton.

Through the years, several small architectural changes have taken place within the library. When the library was established, the top floors were used as the apartment for the librarian. Indeed, the space had been used until the early 1990s as an apartment. The book stack wing has also seen significant changes. Originally, it was separated by a beautifully carved wooden screen and a desk for the librarian that created a barrier for the public. In those days, it was accepted practice to keep the collection closed to the public and to have the staff retrieve the desired material.

A building of great architectural interest, the Ames Free Library continues to be a vital educational influence in the community it serves. Six generations of townspeople have received learning, inspiration, and pleasure from the original bequest due to the perseverance and dedication of successive trustees to the high ideals of the founder.

In 2014 the Ames Free Library opened the Learning Commons @Queset House, the 19th Century home of Broadway producer Winthrop Ames. Queset House hosts library events and community meetings. The building is equipped with a digital media lab, podcasting studio, and makerspace, all accessible for free to the public. Prior to purchasing Queset House in 2002, the Ames Free Library Board of Directors sought to expand the library building in order to accommodate a growing collection and more services. This expansion didn't occur which led to the Learning Commons. Having a building devoted to library programming and exploring technology allows the Richardson library building to focus on its original purpose as a reading library while maintaining its historic footprint.

Ames Free Library was named Best Small Library in America Finalist in 2011 & 2016, a national award sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Library Journal. This annual award was created "to encourage and showcase the exemplary work of libraries serving populations under 25,000." The Ames Free Library was chosen as a finalist in recognition to its dedication to community partnerships, patron engagement, and the Learning Commons @Queset House. The Ames Free Library was the first library in Massachusetts to receive this award, and the second library in the country to be awarded twice.

Governance

The governance of the library is unusual in that it has incrementally evolved from a privately funded institution to one getting about 42% of its support from the town. In March of 1883 the Massachusetts Legislature enacted special legislation to make the Ames Free Library one of the few incorporated libraries in the Commonwealth. The Board of Directors was five members appointed by the Unitarian Society of North Easton in accordance with Mr. Ames' will. The library was supported entirely by private funds until 1972, when the town voted its first annual appropriation of \$1,000 in order to qualify for state aid to libraries. In 1977, the trustees were designated as directors.

In 1990, the library by-laws were revised to provide for greater participation by the town. The current Board of Directors consists of nine members, with the Easton Select Board appointing members with representation determined by the town's annual support of the library operating budget. Remaining seats are appointed by the corporation. Directors serve three-year terms.

The Town of Easton

The Town of Easton, a suburb about thirty minutes from Boston, is twenty-nine square miles with a population of 25,058. Easton is governed by Open Town Meeting with a five-member Select Board serving three-year terms. The Board hires a full-time Town Administrator to supervise the daily operations of government. The town's history is uniquely connected with the establishment of the Ames Shovel Company in 1803 and the Ames family through many generations. In the late nineteenth century, the Ames family donated several landmark buildings,

including Oakes Ames Hall, the Ames Free Library, and the Old Colony Railroad Station, all three of which were designed by the noted architect Henry Hobson Richardson, and “Wayside,” an estate which currently serves as Town Hall. The Ames Family also donated the land which provides Easton’s fine open spaces, the Natural Resource Trust’s “Sheep Pasture,” the Trustees of the Reservations’ Governor Oliver Ames Estate, and Borderland State Park.

Statistical Profile

Collection Use

- Circulation was 8th highest in the 72-member SAILS system with 108,539 circulations in FY24.
- The physical footprint of the library allowed for a relatively modest collection of 52,911 items, giving weight to the importance of the SAILS consortial partnership.
- There were 10,358 registered borrowers of which 8,835 were Easton residents.
- 85,967 people visited the Richardson library building & Queset House in FY24.

Services

- 1,281 programs were offered in FY24, including age-appropriate story times, school visits, book clubs, lectures, music performances, hands-on workshops, ESOL, and more with attendance of 13,290.
- Computers providing internet access and word processing were used 4,452 times. Wireless internet was accessed 11,696 times in both buildings and from the library campus grounds.
- Professional librarians were available to answer 5,986 reference queries in addition to innumerable quotidian requests such as help with printing or locating a book on the shelf.
- Online databases were accessed 15,120 times.
- 23 museum passes were used 1,091 times by families throughout the year.
- The library’s website was utilized 102,285 times.
- The meeting rooms at Queset House were regularly used 170 times by local business, organizations, town departments and schools.
- An expanding ‘Library of Things’ included hotspots, a telescope, sewing machines, a karaoke machine, a power washer, a drum kit, lawn games, and more.

Budget and Fundraising

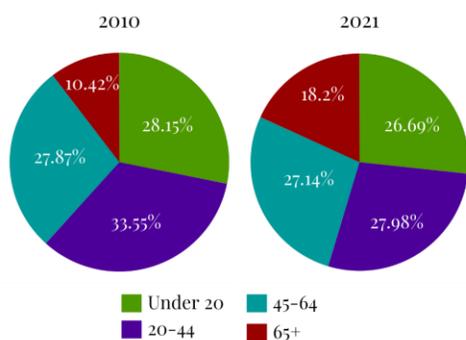
- The town continued to contribute 42% of the library’s operating budget. In effect, Easton residents who paid \$22.69 in FY22 paid far less than the \$47.84 per capita paid by residents of towns serving the same demographic cohort.
- However, funding from endowments and fundraising allowed for higher than average per capita expenditure with \$58.67.
- Generous financial grants to the library were awarded by town agencies such as the Easton Lions, the Community Preservation Act Committee, the Local Cultural Council, the Easton Grange, local banks, and individuals.
- The Friends of the Library worked consistently to raise money with a dedicated book sale room in Queset House and two annual book sale events.

Facilities – The Library Campus

- The Ames Free Library campus consists of the main Richardson library building, the learning common at Queset House, and a connecting Italianate garden, all freely accessible to the public.
- The main Richardson building houses the traditional library services: the circulating collection of books, movies, video games, magazines, *things*, and more; six public use computers, three OPACs, and circulating Chromebooks; a public use printer, photocopier, fax-machine, and book scanner; public service desks for circulation, reference, and the Children’s room; technical services space and administrative offices.
- Queset House hosts library events, workshops, and presentations. It contains a Digital Media Lab, Podcasting Studio, and Maker Space, all for public use. The House is also reserved for private meetings and events.
- Queset Garden is used by the community to explore nature, picnic, play on a bocce court, and as a photographic backdrop. The library holds free community concerts and children’s events in the Garden every summer.

What Easton Looks Like Today - A Community Snapshot

Population: 25,058



An Older Community

The 65+ demographic increased nearly 8% in the last decade. The median age of town residents has increased from 37.4 years to 42.3 years.



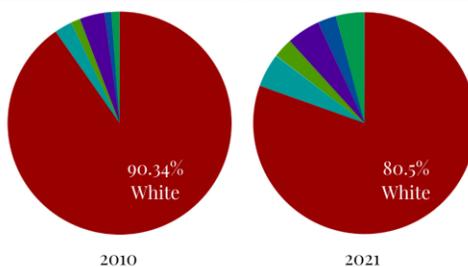
Median Income



A Diversifying Community

Nearly 20% of residents identified their race or ethnicity as non-white in 2021, a 10% increase from 2010.

- African American/Black
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Other
- Multiracial
- American Indian/Alaska Native



Goals & Objectives

The Library as Community Space and Destination

Provide a good state-of-the-art, functional, accessible library facility that compliments and enhances Easton's historic cultural district.

- The Richardson main library building and Queset House will be maintained and enhanced to ensure safety and accessibility for users, and highlight the H.H. Richardson Historic District, a National Historic Landmark District, that includes the library.
- Queset Garden will be maintained and expanded to better accommodate daily recreational use and to engage visitors as a venue to learn about nature.
- Increase staff development in order to best serve the changing needs of the community.
- Support the Easton Shovel Town Cultural District's mission.
- Preserve and highlight Easton's unique history through programming and collaborating with the Easton Historical Society, the Easton Tricentennial Committee, and other local organizations.
- Develop and maintain engaging services, programming, outreach, events, and technology access and instruction to further the library's mission of supporting the community's personal, educational, professional, and recreational needs.

The Library as Community Connector

Fulfill the library's commitment to being "Where the Community Connects" by fostering an environment of life-long learning to patrons of all ages and backgrounds, and promoting collaboration between the library, town entities, and local organizations.

- Enhance the meeting spaces in Queset House to best serve the changing needs of the community.
- Promote the use of Queset House's meeting space to Easton departments, organizations, and business.
- Support education/early education in Easton through collaboration with schools, childcare centers, and other entities.
- Promote the activities of the library's English for All ESOL program to highlight the community's diverse population.
- Provide opportunities for talented and knowledgeable library users to share their passions with the community through workshops, one-on-one sessions, and community groups.
- Extend key services to all of Easton by expanding outreach activities beyond the local Cultural District.

Acknowledgements

The Ames Free Library Strategic Plan, 2025-2030 is the culmination of efforts made by a number of individuals who generously gave of their time, skills, energy, and ideas to judiciously craft a working template. We thank the many users who completed the survey and offer special thanks to the following:

Planning Committee:

- Barbara Beech Chair, Friends of the Ames Free Library
- Jessica Block Assistant Director, Ames Free Library
- Krissy Cannizzo Director of Education & Outreach, Children's Museum in Easton
- Lisa deVos Program Director, Easton Chamber of Commerce
- Ian Dunbar Executive Director, Ames Free Library
- Gary Erickson Teacher, Easton Public Schools
- Patrick Hellen Chair, Easton Finance Committee
- Jackie Hixon Resident, Library User, Preschool Parent
- Abby Liu Teen Advisory Board Member, Ames Free Library
- Jennifer Macaulay Director, MacPhaidin Library, Stonehill College
- Ginny Murry Resident, Library User
- Elizabeth Reichman Ames Free Library Board of Directors
- John Rodrigue Prof. of History, Stonehill College
- Mary Silva Head of Circulation, Ames Free Library

Massachusetts Library System:

- Kristi Chadwick, Consultant

