



**Community Needs Response Plan
for Keene Memorial Library, Fremont, NE
2022-2026**

Reviewed and adopted by Library Board, August 15, 2022

This document is reviewed annually by the Library Board and Library staff.

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PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

Library Strategic Planning Committee:	
• Laura England-Biggs, Library Director	• Justine Ridder, Librarian I
• Linda McClain, Library Board Chair	• Dan Moenning, Library Technology Specialist
• LeAnn Rathke, Library Board	• Sonia Vanderworth, Library Assistant III
• Amanda Moenning, Library Board	• Ann Hoppe, Library Assistant III
• Becky Pence, Library Board	• Dorlissa Beyer, Library Assistant II
• Ryan Fiala, Library Board	• John Mullen, Library Assistant I
• Sally Ganem, City Council Liaison	• Rebecca Ruenholl, Library Aide
• Joey Spellerberg, Mayor	• Rebecca Zgoda, Library Aide
• Jody Sanders, City Administrator	• Keri Taylor, Library Aide
• Tracy Parr, Senior Office Associate	• Shaylin Daugherty, Library Aide
• Elisa Cruz, Librarian I	

Key Activities:

- Planning and Design: Library Director and consultants met to identify outcomes, stakeholder plan, and timeline.
- Stakeholder Engagement: Input from community members was solicited in Spring of 2022. Engagement methods included an online community-wide survey available in English and Spanish and a focus group of library users and community members.
- Setting Library Strategy: Library Planning Committee members came together in two half-day facilitated sessions to complete the planning process. The first session occurred at a Library Board meeting on April 18, 2022. The second session occurred at a staff retreat on June 12, 2022.
- Evaluation and Implementation: The plan will be carried out over the five years following the approval of the plan. The plan will be reviewed and adjusted as needed every year.

MISSION STATEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

- Mission: Keene Memorial Library connects people with access to life-long learning for discovery and growth.
- Vision: Inspire, strengthen, and enrich the quality of life for our community.
- Library Brand: Preserving Our Past, Informing Our Present, Inspiring Our Future.

Much has changed since the Keene Memorial Library began service some 50 years ago in 1971. The library is a community center, providing space for library programs for children and adults. Book discussion groups, lectures, story times, and the summer reading programs all contribute to the texture of a community. Library spaces are also used for interest group meetings, community organizations, and continuing education activities. The public library is a “third place” – not home or

work – but a place where residents feel welcome, where they find a comfortable atmosphere for reflection, and come together to learn, create information, and participate in enriching diversion.

2020-2021 Statistics:

- Circulation: 122,419 items checked out (41% Children/YA materials, 35% Adult Materials, 24% Downloads) – up 10% from the previous year
- Wi-fi Visits: 23,556 – up 15%
- Computer Use: 6,001 – down 20%, likely due to prevalence of personal devices
- Website Visits: 73,400 – up 84%
- Programming: 134 programs, 3,012 people attended (Due to Covid-19, programming was all online or involved take-home kits for the majority of the fiscal year. The library started in-person programming in September 2021.)
- Total Visitors: 45,716 – due to malfunctioning security gates and Covid-19, it is hard to compare with previous years
- Card Holders: 8,757 – up 7%

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Fremont is a city with a population of 27,141 located in Dodge County, Nebraska. Although it is the largest population center in the county and a shopping hub for the area, Fremont has grown slowly. The population has increased in diversity over the last decade, and now nearly 16% of the residents are Hispanic or Latino. Other ethnic groups represented in the population are Black or African American (0.2%), American Indian and Alaska Native (0.1%) and Asian (0.1%).

Fremont is located at the convergence of three major highways and is only 20 minutes away from the western edge of Omaha. The ready access to highways contributes to a large number of workers commuting to Douglas County for employment. However, Fremont attracts other area rural residents to the city by offering an array of retail businesses as well as a full-service hospital. The economy is rooted in agriculture and agribusiness with an expanding industrial sector including logistics, transportation, and food processing. The manufacturing industry provides the most jobs followed closely by jobs in the education, health care, and social assistance sectors.

67% of the population age 16 and over is in the labor force. The median household income is \$54,291. The unemployment rate is 3%. Approximately 12.3% of residents are identified as having incomes below the poverty line, and 51.57% of the school students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. This student poverty figure is significantly higher than the state rate of 44%. The poverty rate is higher among Hispanic residents.

The Fremont Public School district serves the city of Fremont as well as local rural residents. The ten school buildings all have libraries with professional staff and provide access to both books and information through technology. There are also a number of parochial schools serving the area. There is a Head Start program serving pre-school children who qualify based upon income. The community also has two post-secondary institutions – a community college and a liberal arts college.

The town has a number of recreational facilities including two municipal swimming pools, 22 parks, and a large community YMCA facility. The Chamber of Commerce is active in supporting the community and sponsors various events on an annual basis. There are a number of other civic groups including active Rotary, Kiwanis, Cosmopolitan, and Jaycee groups who largely support educational initiatives.

Communications are good with the Fremont community being served by a local daily newspaper and a radio station. Television coverage comes out of Omaha.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

In Spring of 2022, Keene Memorial Library sought to gather input from a broad group of community members to inform its 2022-2026 Community Needs Response Plan. Approximately 234 individuals were engaged through an online survey or focus group. The combined results were used to help Keene Memorial Library board and staff set the future direction for the library. Stakeholder engagement activities were administered by Mission Matters, independent facilitators who also facilitated the planning process. This summary provides a brief snapshot of some general themes that emerged.

Building on Strengths:

Fremont is seen by its residents as a great place to live. A majority of respondents feel positively about the quality of life available to them. One aspect people love about Fremont is its proximity to Omaha with a small-town feel. People also value the community's safety, parks and outdoor recreation, friendly people, and note that there are many opportunities to get involved.

Participants consider Keene Memorial Library a significant community asset. The library is described as a welcoming, highly accessible place, with few barriers noted to access services. Multiple generations report enjoying the library. Of note, the library is considered an especially valuable resource by low- to middle-income individuals and families. Community members commended the quality of the staff team.

Community Needs:

The following themes emerged as the community's top needs:

- **Housing:** Providing more available and affordable housing. Specific needs mentioned include workforce and middle-income housing, options for retirees to downsize, and senior living facilities.
- **Economic Development:** Developing and growing small, locally-owned businesses. Attracting and retaining workforce and skilled trades. Connecting people to higher-wage jobs. Offering more options in retail, shopping, entertainment, and restaurants.
- **Inclusion and Belonging:** Creating a welcoming culture for all persons, with a special emphasis on sectors that face greater barriers to belonging, such as the Hispanic community, older youth,

and newcomers. Countering a negative community reputation stemming from a 2014 housing ordinance.

- **Youth Engagement:** Offering more safe, welcoming places for older youth during non-school times.
- **Social Supports:** Making connections and raising awareness of the social support resources that are available to individuals and families in economic need.

LIBRARY ANALYSIS

LIBRARY STRENGTHS	EXTERNAL OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great staff with longevity and varied skills and knowledge • Outreach to community • Location – central to downtown • Lots of support such as bond issue and individual donors • Energy around upgrade – momentum • Support from the mayor and City Council • Increased usage – internet access • Amazing Board and Friends of Library • Bilingual staff • Quality collection – current, relevant, diverse • Willingness to grow and change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with diverse groups • After-school programming (current waitlist) • New building will offer more opportunities for modern technology • Bringing people together for support services • Community growth • The campaign puts the library in the spotlight – we need to maximize this time • New definition of a library’s relevance (“more than books”) • Mobile library • Support from the City • Downtown revitalization project and formation of a Creative District • More appreciation of the library’s free resources during a down economy
LIBRARY WEAKNESSES	EXTERNAL THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some bad public relations in the past under different leadership – previous lack of focus and planning • Age of facility • Not ADA compliant • Size of meeting room • Not fully staffed, resulting in limited hours and reactive (rather than proactive) mindset • Need more bilingual staff • Diversity of Board • Lack of quiet space – design flaw in functionality • Theft/loss of materials • Never enough funding • Lack of community awareness of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid-19 • Economy – instability, fear of recession, and inflation • Workforce – retaining great workers, turnover especially in part-time positions • Transition during construction – 1.5 years with limited circulation materials • Misunderstanding in community of who pays for library card and access to free services • Transportation issues • Some people feel the library is not needed • Theft/loss of materials • Never enough funding

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Complete a library expansion that provides enhanced accessibility, functionality, and world-class technology with dedicated spaces for adults, youth, and teens, community trainings, and meeting spaces.

What are we already doing in this area?

- Weekly design meetings, fundraising campaign, and using current spaces the best we can.

What difference could it make for Fremont five years from now if we really mobilized behind this goal?

- Keene Memorial Library is the first choice for community needs.
- Community members will have access to a variety of free meeting spaces, learning opportunities and cultural events.
- Children will have the freedom to explore and enjoy each other's company.
- Teens will have their own space to learn and grow into responsible members of the community.
- Adults will have a quiet space to browse the newspapers and carry on conversations without the interruptions of an open floor plan.

What significant actions will we take over the next five years to make tangible progress on this goal?

- **Objective 1a.** Execute final phase of library expansion project including fundraising, construction, furnishings, and staffing.
- **Objective 1b.** Educate staff fully on new technology capabilities as well as needs of the community to better assist patrons.
- **Objective 1c.** Expand capacity of the library to do more of what we do best with a fully staffed team, more bilingual staff, extended hours, more meeting rooms, Makerspace for creating, and a new computer lab with dedicated space for classes.

Goal 2: Connect library users to new and existing community-based resources through partnerships to support youth, families, individuals and businesses in economic need.

What are we already doing in this area?

- Out & About Storytime with Fremont Family Coalition, Staff attend meetings with Fremont Family Coalition organization

What difference could it make for Fremont five years from now if we really mobilized behind this goal?

- Healthier community – mental, physical, educational, and financial aspects
- Make better use of existing resources related to housing, social supports, etc.

What significant actions will we take over the next five years to make tangible progress on this goal?

- **Objective 2a.** Make the Fremont Family Coalition resource manual more accessible to library patrons.
- **Objective 2b.** Ongoing training for staff on how to locate community resources and connect patrons to them.
- **Objective 2c.** Collaborate with community-based organizations to host programs at the library to share information about local resources.
- **Objective 2d.** Partner with Chamber or other economic-development organizations to make resources available for local business-owners, entrepreneurs, and workers.

Goal 3: Through outreach, develop and strengthen relationships with diverse groups in Fremont to enhance feelings of inclusion and belonging in the community.

What are we already doing in this area?

- Working with the schools. Spanish language. Social media. Elderly / the Towers and homebound. Community events.

What difference could it make for Fremont five years from now if we really mobilized behind this goal?

- Increased awareness, increase in library card holders and library usage.
- Unrestricted access to materials and resources.
- Diverse library population and programming.
- More welcoming environment and community.
- Fremont residents become more civically engaged and those outside of the community have a more positive perception of Fremont.

What significant actions will we take over the next five years to make tangible progress on this goal?

- **Objective 3a.** Increase Keene Memorial Library's visibility in the community through pop-up libraries, off-site visits, Out and About Storytime, and other events.
- **Objective 3b.** Provide more programming in Spanish.
- **Objective 3c.** Add specialized staff positions to address current needs of the community.

EVALUATION

- Each goal is supported by a team of ~4 library staff who provide overall direction for the goal. Each team has a Goal Captain who is responsible for coordinating the team to help ensure the work gets done and also to be the primary point of contact for the Library Director.
- Goal teams will implement the plan in 90-day cycles by identifying action items for the upcoming quarter, who will complete them, and by when. At the end of each quarter, the team will provide a progress update and make adjustments for the next quarter.
- Every three months, supervisory staff will meet to reflect on and celebrate progress made.
- Every six months, the Library Director will provide a progress update to the Library Board.
- Every twelve months, the Library Board and staff will review the plan and make adjustments as needed.