

# Chapter 9: Rutland Region Public Libraries

## INTRODUCTION

Public libraries have been defining elements of American communities since Colonial times.

Today what libraries in the Rutland Region and across the Country do is changing as quickly as our society: electronic materials, downloadable audio books, and DVDs all are now as much a part of library collections as books; people visit the library from home or office over the Internet as well as by walking through the doors. But while these forms change, the substance of library service remains constant from one century to another.

This chapter of the *Regional Plan* is focused on how those roles interact with the needs of the communities and residents they serve.



RRPC Staff

Libraries throughout the Region are critical educational resources for residents of all ages.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

Twenty of the twenty-one public libraries in Rutland Region reported data to the Vermont Department of Libraries for fiscal year 2005-06. Those libraries provided no-fee service in 23 of the 28 cities and towns in Rutland County, representing 98.5% of its total population.

Each is a wholly independent institution, with its own facilities, hiring and firing, procurement, fund-raising, fiscal and program management. Services typically include Internet access, book collections, recorded books and music, movies, reference assistance, interlibrary loans, free meeting room space, homebound delivery and programs for adults, teens and children. A number of libraries also serve as a base for child and family literacy.

Some libraries serve several towns and a number serve as a touchstone for the tourist economy, proving information to visitors and Internet access to temporary residents. The general level of service and available access is primarily determined by local support which varies widely. Some of the Region's libraries receive a level of tax support from their communities while others are dependent entirely on small trust funds and volunteer workers. Nearly every library has turned to fund raising to augment stretched budgets. There is no direct state or federal aid.

## UNMET NEEDS

Eight of the Region's public libraries do not meet State standards for operations; two of these, furthermore, do not meet the Federal definition of a public library. This is not to say, of course, that the efforts of those running these libraries are below par. As demonstrated by the Fast Fact on the following page, the standards reflect operational capacity.

All are faced with the challenge of rapidly changing (and expensive) technology needs in their communities. Nearly every library has a free Internet connection, but there is a growing demand for more computers, more computer programs and Internet access from those who either have no working equipment or who do not have Internet service. This group encompasses traditional students, adults returning to school and a number of residents seeking local minimum wage jobs that require online applications and e-mail addresses. Additionally, many library staff do not make a living wage, and many more also do not receive benefits.

Resource sharing, a common practice in the library world, is facilitated by the State Department of Libraries, but beyond interlibrary loan, there is little coordination of services, planning, or administration. Cooperation among the libraries is informal; there is no regional or county



## FAST FACT

The Vermont Department of Libraries collects, organizes and disseminates information and library materials in a variety of formats to the three branches of State government, to public, school and college libraries statewide, to the general public, and Vermonters with special needs. Their mission is to support and strengthen local libraries, to foster new means for statewide cooperation and resource sharing and to increase public awareness of libraries and their services, and to act as an advocate on their behalf.

library system or consortium. Because a tiny town cannot possibly provide the resources that a larger place can, considerable inequities exist in library service across the Region.

### *Inequities Across the Region*

The people of Rutland Region do not all receive the same level of public library service. Indicators of this include:

- Operating expenditures per capita range from a low of 89 cents to a high of over \$155.
- Staff available to serve the public range from 2.3 per 1,000 people to 0.12 per 1,000.
- Levels of public support range from nothing all the way to \$160 per person per year.
- Use rates reflect this same disparity. Some libraries receive more than 23 visits per capita per year; some less than one.



Browsing the Internet at the Rutland Library

- \$23.43 per capita, compared with a national average of \$30.49.
- While the number of items in collections are more than twice national averages, circulation is 15% below national averages. This suggests outdated or unattractive collections, and/or fewer hours open due to low funding.



### *Performance in Comparison with National Norms*

The people of the Rutland Region do not receive library service that is up to national averages. Indicators of this include:

- Libraries in the Rutland Region receive, on average, \$18.91 per capita from local tax sources, less than two thirds the national average of \$26.25.
- Operating expenditures on average were

### *Lack of Support for Planning, Coordination and Resource Sharing*

The Rutland Region's public libraries have few places to turn to for support in sharing of resources and knowledge. The Vermont Department of Libraries provides solid continuing education programs, statewide data collection, and resource sharing. However, Vermont is one of a handful of states with no state funding for public libraries, and little funding for public library systems or cooperative efforts.

In states with more robust public funding at regional or state levels, one finds services such as statewide library cards (in almost half the states), books by mail and courier service, shared technology, regional continuing education programs, roving program consultants and specialists, public awareness campaigns, and the like.

Location of Libraries in the Rutland Region

Funds are not available to support regional library cooperatives or consortia, or even to conduct experimental or pilot programs in such equalizing services as a courier, region-wide library card, a regional children's program specialist, a technology troubleshooter, regional marketing and public awareness campaign, or a region-wide shared library technology.

## FUTURE TRENDS

Books and libraries have provided a gateway to the promise of a better life. The rapid rise of the Internet led many to predict that the era of libraries was over. Counter to these predictions, however, library use across the nation has increased dramatically, with more visitors, more books circulated, more programs attended and, not surprising, more people connected to the Internet.

Community libraries have become community living rooms; in even the smallest of libraries staff and volunteer workers are assisting hopeful job seekers

with Internet applications and resume writing and connecting individuals to helpful websites and to local services.

These libraries offer Internet access where local connections are non-existent or out of financial reach for many. They work with children and youth, single parents, adults returning to school while juggling jobs and family obligations. Home schooling families, incubator businesses and a growing population of elders are all supported by their local libraries through a wide variety of services and collection formats. And not the least important, libraries open their doors to serve as a community gathering space for local and regional meetings.

Libraries will continue to offer traditional services but in new ways as collaborative networks through state and regional libraries emerge. Downloadable books, rotating collections of films and recorded books, shared personnel, delivery services, books mailed to homes and websites with blogging capabilities will connect readers to each other AND to the larger world. Growing interest in local history and family genealogy will continue require access to



### FAST FACT

The Vermont Department of Libraries, sets minimum standards that public libraries must meet annually in order to qualify for certain services such as cataloging and federal pass-through grants. The standards are based upon a series of eight principles of good community service and include requirements such as regular and open board meetings, expenditure percentages spent on materials, work with the local school system, a willingness to share resources and a minimum number of hours the library must be open to name a few.

## LIBRARY CAPACITIES AND DATA, RUTLAND COUNTY AND VERMONT

RESOURCES USED	Rutland County Public	Rutland County, per capita	State Public Library Totals	State To- tals, per cap-
Square Footage of All Facilities	76,935	1.20	693,946	1.11
Operating Expenditures	\$1,807,579.18	\$28.26	\$18,774,056.90	\$30.03
Revenue From All Sources	\$1,820,695.06	\$28.46	\$18,548,606.69	\$29.67
Full-Time Equivalent Staff	28	- N/A	322	- N/A
Weekly Volunteer Hours	315	- N/A	2,994	- N/A
Total Items in Collection	306,277	4.79	3,019,490	4.83
Registered Borrowers*	41,706	0.65	280,110	0.45
Gate Count	334,435	5.23	3,687,368	5.90
Questions Answered	41,318	0.65	398,348	0.64
Items Lent	393,458	6.15	4,328,856	6.92
Program Attendance	24,896	0.39	322,656	0.52
Computer Uses	76,336	1.19	721,084	1.15
State Library Service Population *			625,186	
Rutland County Service Population *		63,966		
*Library Service Populations may be larger than actual population, since there is overlap of areas served. Patrons may be counted by more than one library.				

(Source: Vermont Department of Libraries, Public Library Statistics, 2006-2007, available at [http://dol.state.vt.us/GOPHER\\_ROOT5/LIBRARIES/stats/STATS.HTML](http://dol.state.vt.us/GOPHER_ROOT5/LIBRARIES/stats/STATS.HTML)).



## FAST FACT

FEDERAL DEFINITION OF A PUBLIC LIBRARY: An entity that is established under state enabling laws or regulations to serve a community, district, or region, and that provides at least the following:

- Organized collection of printed or other library materials, or a combination thereof;
- Paid staff;
- An established schedule in which services of the staff are available to the public;
- The facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule; and
- Is supported in whole or in part with public funds.

local collections of rich resources.

Libraries perform a wide variety of functions that are quietly important to the community and the region at large. But to keep hardware current, to pay for network costs of shared resources and to attract and keep qualified staff essential to the effective management of increasingly sophisticated institutions, libraries will need the combined support of local and state government and a recognition of their importance to the economic vitality of a community.

Without such an understanding libraries will likely enter a downward spiral that is difficult to reverse. Cuts in budgets or flat-funding result in reduced staff, fewer open hours and fewer materials purchased which, in turn, affect families, students, businesses, and a community's sense of well-being and pride.

Libraries are not only the underpinning of a democratic society, they are a part of a community's infrastructure, like roads and schools, and as often, their existence and their stability are taken for granted.

Most of the libraries in Rutland County regardless of size are struggling to remain

afloat. The disconnect between actual use by the community and governmental units focused primarily on keeping taxes flat is a serious problem with long-term consequences.

## **MEETING CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS**

Several structural factors have influenced the current situation, each of which can be addressed at the regional or state level.

### *Formal Library Cooperation*

More than 40% of Vermont's public libraries are governed by a private nonprofit corporation. Nationally, only 14% of public libraries are governed by private corporations. Governmental bodies are often held to national or statewide standards in a way that nonprofit institutions can not be.

One way of addressing the issue of libraries with independent boards and varied governance is by forming regional library systems, wherein each library



## **A LOT OF FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

### ROLES OF THE LOCAL LIBRARY...

Public libraries in the Rutland Region and elsewhere play timeless roles, having to do with fundamental goals of education, individual growth, and community health.

Libraries are:

- **A community commons**, a public living room, a place to gather. A visitor center for tourists and newcomers. A place to build community spirit and to increase civic participation.
- **A lifelong learning**

**center**, a source for people of all ages and walks of life to pursue individual interests, common or esoteric, professional or amateur.

- **An early childhood learning center**, a place for very young children, helping them get ready for school and receive a happy introduction to the pleasures of reading, thinking, and learning.
- **A gateway to the information world**, a place to participate fully in

today's information age, for people of all means and abilities. A place to get help navigating the complexities of the Web, to learn to read, to gain discernment.

- **A source of delight**, of ready access to classic and popular current literature, music, and information, in formats for everyone – books of course, and DVDs and CDs and downloadable electronic materials, and whatever the next year brings us.

Public libraries provide all this for a very small amount of money – in Vermont, an average of \$26 per person per year.

A study conducted by the Vermont Department of Libraries in 2006 determined that the average return on investment for public libraries is \$6.96. This means that for every \$1 invested by state or local government in public libraries, the local economy receives a boost of nearly \$7.

maintains its total identity and autonomy, but shares such resources as online catalogs, courier service, and reciprocal borrowing. New York State and Massachusetts provide nearby examples.

### *Coordinated Planning For the Future*

For public libraries to be the most vital and effective agencies they can be, thoughtful planning is absolutely necessary. Some libraries in Rutland Region have had the time and resources to invest in systematic long-range planning, but those efforts have been done alone. Libraries should plan together – not only with each other but also with allied agencies in their communities and regions. Effective program and capital planning requires a broader view.

- When updating town plans, work with the Vermont Library Association to increase knowledge and understanding of public policy issues related to library matters .
- Convene towns in Rutland Region that have public libraries to begin to study the possibility of formalizing some library cooperation to work on joint plans and programs.



Libraries are important to the economic activity in the Region. See the Economic Activity chapter for more information.

Libraries are also a part of the Region’s cultural resources. See the Historic and Cultural Resources chapter.

## **RRPC ROLE AND ACTIONS**

- Educate and inform constituents of public policy issues surrounding public libraries – funding, governance, program design, and capital needs – at the Region, state, and national levels.
- Work with individual towns to assess current library services and plan for the future; facilitate coordinated planning between and among towns.
- Work with the Vermont Department of Libraries in exploring constructive ways to develop experimental or pilot small-scale region-wide programs as demonstration projects for possible statewide coordination.



Reading Time at the Rutland Free Library

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## *ADDITIONAL RESOURCES*

- Vermont Department of Libraries, Public Library Statistics, 2006-2007
- OCLC/Return on Investment, [www.oclc.org/roi](http://www.oclc.org/roi)
- Public Library Association, [www.pla.org](http://www.pla.org)
- Libraries for the Future, [www.lff.org](http://www.lff.org)
- Community Analysis, [www.rutlandfree.org/docs/rflcommunityanalysis.doc](http://www.rutlandfree.org/docs/rflcommunityanalysis.doc)
- National Study on Computers in Libraries, [www.ii.fsu.edu/projectFiles/plinternet/2007/2007](http://www.ii.fsu.edu/projectFiles/plinternet/2007/2007)
- Vermont Dept of Libraries, <http://dol.state.vt.us>

## CASE STUDY: THE MACLURE LIBRARY



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The Maclure Library in Pittsford [population 3,200] is a vital resource in the community. It partners with town, school, civic, private and State government organizations to offer programs to diverse groups and fill a crucial niche.

The Pittsford Recreation Department and the library collaborate on numerous children's programs, giving parents an opportunity to interact with their children in a fun, low-cost atmosphere with an educational component.

After reading the Southwestern Vermont Council on the Aging survey results on Pittsford, the Maclure staff and library board decided that the senior population was not served in any meaningful way. Again with the Town's Recreation Department, the library initiated the Pittsford Senior Group which meets twice a month at the library for discussions, and once a month for lunch at the Pittsford Police Academy. Attendance at the first luncheon numbered 61 and a waiting list was added for the following month's luncheon.

The Vermont Association for the Blind and five local community groups use the library twice a month for meetings and programs.

Partnering with Stafford Technical Center's Human Services Department made it possible to

offer a Parent's Group, providing parents an opportunity to discuss child-related issues. Every year the library holds a book discussion at the Lothrop Elementary School, through the Vermont Humanities Council. The most recent involved both the elementary school and high school and focused on bullying in the school. Over 100 students and 75 parents read the book and 85 people attended the discussion.

The newly formed Pittsford Business Association uses the library for meeting space and held its first mixer here. State partners include the Department of Employment and Training, Adult Basic Education and the Student Diversion Program.

In addition, services offered at the library take to the road. The Maclure created a "Traveling Library" which visits five Pittsford daycare centers twice a month, reading to children who are unable to visit the library, and haunts the local swimming area during the summer giving children and adults easy access to books all summer.

Library personnel have worked hard to become a meaningful part of the community and it appears they have succeeded. Approximately 1,033 out of 1,390 households are cardholders. In the last year the library has seen increases of 41% in general circulation, 35% in computer use (160% since 2004), 40% in young adult circulation, and 38% in large print books. Their six computers are used an average of 400 times each month with over 50 wireless customers accessing our service from anywhere within 500 feet of the library. Students and adults use our computers for everything from instant messaging, to PowerPoint presentations, to filling out online job applications and college courses.

As the times have changed, so has the library. But despite their success, demands outstrip the library's limited resources, forcing difficult decisions and labor-intensive fundraising efforts.