Park Ridge Public Library

Strategic Plan

January 2026-December 2030

Approved by the PRPL Board of Trustees August 19, 2025

Introduction and Background
Strategic planning is the systematic process of envisioning a desired future and translating that vision into broadly defined goals and a sequence of steps to achieve them.

The Park Ridge Public Library's last strategic plan was developed in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the core ways people use the Library—borrowing materials, attending programs, and accessing resources—have remained largely consistent, expectations around convenience and ease of access have shifted significantly.

The pandemic accelerated demand for more flexible, user-friendly services, from digital content access and streamlined interactions. Additionally, as work and learning environments have evolved, we've seen an increased need for both private spaces for focused use and collaborative spaces for group work and community engagement**.**

As we look ahead, our new strategic plan will help us respond to these evolving expectations while continuing to meet the needs of our patrons and community.

To that end, ReThinking Libraries, a professional strategic planning consulting firm, was hired to coordinate and facilitate the planning activities. The planning process was kicked off in January 2025 and the Library Board officially approved the final plan on August 19, 2025. This plan will be effective from January 2026 through December 2030.

Approach to planning
To ensure a thorough and positive planning experience, the Library engaged in a collaborative, in-depth data gathering process with the community, Library board, and staff. These activities included:

- Community-wide survey (including Library staff and Trustees): approximately 2,000 responses
- Strategic Retreat: 9 staff, 4 Trustees, and 10 community members
- Community Stakeholder Sessions: 13 sessions, 151 attendees including Library Staff, Trustees, Local Officials, Educators, Community Partners, and the Business Community
- Park Ridge demographic data and maps
- Library benchmark analysis
- Collection utilization analysis

What we heard
The Park Ridge Public Library's strategic plan is grounded in a clear understanding of its core purpose and role within the community. As a vital community and social connector, the Library serves as a "third place" for many residents—a welcoming space beyond home and work. It is a busy, highly utilized resource and remains the only free service available to everyone in the community. In a city that places a strong emphasis on education, the Library plays a critical role in supporting lifelong learning for all ages.

While the Library's central location is ideal, the building's size has long posed a challenge. The 2018–19 renovation significantly improved the interior layout, aesthetic, and organization of the collections. However, evolving patron behaviors and expectations continue to outpace the building's capacity. The current lobby design presents wayfinding challenges and fails to convey that one is entering a library. Patrons of all ages need more welcoming social spaces and quiet study areas. Teens, tweens, and older

elementary students require spaces that are more intentionally designed in both size and layout, while families with young children would benefit from reimagined areas that better support early learning and development.

Effectively communicating these priorities is essential to the Library's continued success. While the Library already maintains a well-established role in the community, it will collaborate with the Library Board, City leadership, elected officials, and local partners to reinforce its value and emphasize the importance of sustained investment and support. The Library also aims to cultivate community champions who can help amplify its message and broaden awareness of its impact. Through a strategic blend of digital and traditional communication channels, the Library will ensure its message is accessible to all. These efforts will highlight not only the Library's goals and needs, but also underscore the opportunities that can be realized and the challenges that may arise without continued support.

To strengthen and sustain the Library's future, additional support will be essential. This includes continued collaboration with the Library Board and City leadership to address the Library's most pressing needs. Equally important is the pursuit of alternative funding sources—such as establishing a foundation or endowment, expanding the Friends of the Library, and seeking grant opportunities to support capital improvements and programming. These strategies will be vital to ensuring the Library's continued growth, relevance, and long-term success.

Looking ahead, the Library envisions a lasting legacy as a central hub for meaningful community connection. It strives to reflect Park Ridge's deep commitment to education while providing resources and services that enrich the lives of all residents. The Library also aspires to be a vibrant center for innovation and creativity, fostering growth and inspiration throughout the community

Mission Statement: *Why do we exist?*
The Library's current mission statement was reviewed during input sessions, and a new statement was written based on feedback from our June 2025 retreat.

- *At the heart of a vibrant community, the Park Ridge Library connects people with information, ideas, and one another.*

Vision Statement: W*hat do we want to achieve?*
The Library's current vision statement was reviewed during input sessions, and a new statement was written based on feedback from our June 2025 retreat.

- *Inspire a future where knowledge, ideas, and connections empower every individual to grow, thrive, and succeed.*

Values: *How do we behave?*
The Library's current seven values were reviewed during our June 2025 retreat and, based on that feedback, were thoughtfully combined and refined into five updated values that reflect our shared priorities and workplace culture.

- *Access*
    - *We ensure open, equitable access to ideas and information, defending intellectual freedom and providing a space where all feel safe and empowered to learn.*

- *Education and Lifelong Learning*
    - *We support a culture of learning by providing reliable resources, dedicated spaces, and opportunities for human connection, and discovery at every stage of life.*
- *Collaboration*
    - *We work together—supporting our patrons and building lasting partnerships to strengthen our community.*
- *Community*
    - *We build trust through reliability, support, and understanding.*
- *Innovation*
    - *We tirelessly explore all opportunities for improving our collections, services, and the patron experience.*

Initiatives, Goals, Activities, and Outcomes: *What are our priorities and how are we going to address them?*

The strategic initiatives, goals, and activities are the results of the data-gathering process and comprise the core of the strategic plan.

Strategic Initiatives
The strategic initiatives guide our actions in allocating financial resources and staff time. They do not eliminate efforts in other areas, but they receive the most focused attention of all the activities we undertake for the next five years.

1. *Optimize spaces*
2. *Invest in resources and staff*
3. *Align programming, services, and outreach*
4. *Increase community awareness and support*

Goals
Goals are designed to focus on what the community receives as it continues to evolve and not on the resources the Library needs to deliver the service.

Activities
Activities are meant to illustrate possible actions the Library will complete in order to meet the goals of the plan. They are not intended to be absolute, but rather realistic suggestions that reflect the current environment. As the environment changes, and more information is discovered during the research phase of each activity, changes are possible. The aim of the activities is to meet the identified goals.

Outcomes
Outcomes are specific results—some of which are quantitative—that reflect the impact or benefit of the Library's actions, programs, or initiatives. Outcomes go beyond outputs (such as the number of programs offered) to demonstrate how those efforts make a meaningful difference, such as improved community engagement, increased access to resources, or enhanced learning opportunities. They help assess whether strategic goals are being effectively achieved.

Strategic Initiative 1: Optimize spaces

Goal: Pursue improvements to the Library facility.

Activities:

- Update the Library's interior spaces by working with staff and/or design professionals to develop options, plans, cost estimates.
- Explore opportunities for better utilization of the North lawn (Touhy/Prospect) in collaboration with the City of Park Ridge.
- Assess the viability of a future building expansion project and potential support within the community.

Outcome: Dynamic Library spaces that serve the community with excellence, both today and in the future.

- A further enhanced Library facility that better connects more users to resources, technology, and services, positively impacting their lives.
- Resident satisfaction with the Library's spaces improves and is a source of even greater community pride.
- Visits to the Library increase in frequency and duration, program attendance and service use increases
- The needs of neurodivergent patrons or those with physical limitations are better met by the Library's facility.
- Teen, Tween, and older elementary ages use of the Library is increased due to improved age focused areas.
- The Library offers more creative and collaborative opportunities and improved meeting and study spaces.
- Patrons attest to the Library building being a valuable component of the community's infrastructure.
- The total amount of Library space meets the needs and demands of the community.

Strategic Initiative 2: Invest in resources and staff

Goal: Identify opportunities to invest in materials, technology, staffing, and resources.

Activities:

- Improve digital access and ease of use of the Library and its resources.
- Evaluate digital materials spending to reduce wait times on popular materials.
- Utilize data and feedback to maximize the use physical materials.
- Empower Library staff through continuous learning to drive excellence and sustain a high-performing team.

Outcome: Seamlessly integrated resources and a high-performing staff poised to exceed community expectations and cultivate meaningful connections.

- Library services and resources are easier to access both physically and digitally.
- Users experience a broader array of resources and services that meet their needs.

- Visits to the Library increase in number and duration; more physical and digital resources are utilized.
- Service utilization and satisfaction across all categories increases and the user base expands to more residents.
- Library will continue to be seen as a friendly, welcoming place where Library users see their service needs met.
- A dedicated and highly effective staff remain well-positioned to provide the community with consistently excellent service.
- Staff will have the access to training, professional development, and resources they need to innovate and thrive.

Strategic Initiative 3: Align programming, services, and outreach

Goal: Advance and adapt the Library's services, programs, and outreach.

Activities:

- Develop engaging programs and services tailored to younger adults (20s and 30s).
- Expand multigenerational and intergenerational programming to foster community connection.
- Explore and pilot artificial intelligence (AI) programs and services.
- Evaluate new services that respond to community needs and enhance convenience.
- Pursue partnerships to broaden outreach and services for seniors and retirees.

Outcome: Engaging programs, responsive services, and targeted outreach that reflect community needs and deliver lasting impact.

- Visits to the Library increase in frequency and duration, program attendance and service use increases
- More residents are positively and consistently impacted by Library services.
- Community attends and rates Library programs as successful, impactful, and innovative.
- Resource utilization across all categories increases, and community satisfaction with resources is improved.
- Community has increased satisfaction (surveyed and anecdotal) and usage of Library services.
- Maintain and strengthen the high level of community members who believe the Library enhances the quality of life in Park Ridge.

Strategic Initiative 4: Increase community awareness and support

Goal: Increase community awareness and strengthen partnerships to grow appreciation, engagement, and support for Library services.

Activities:

- Establish a Library Foundation to boost charitable giving and while also supporting the growth of the Friends of the Library.
- Increase investment in community awareness and engagement.
- Leverage community engagement to grow volunteerism.
- Strengthen and expand partnerships with local organizations.

Outcome: A well-informed community that embraces the Library's impact and invests in its continued success.

- Overall awareness of Library resources and services for the entire community is increased.
- Partnerships are expanded and strengthened deepening the impact of the Library on the community, and the impact of those community partners.
- Increased community engagement with the Library.
- More residents are positively and consistently impacted by Library services.
- Library is successful in holding fundraising events that generate buzz about the Library and result in donations.
- Increase/maintain high number of community members attesting that the Library helps make Park Ridge an even better place to live.

Evaluation

This plan is a living document designed to be flexible and responsive to changes in the economic, demographic, or sociopolitical landscape. As demonstrated with the previous plan, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced certain initiatives, many of which were adapted to meet the needs of a post-pandemic environment. The strategic initiatives and goals outlined here are intentionally broad to allow for adjustments in the specific activities carried out.

Library management will work closely with the Board of Trustees before finalizing and implementing activities over the next five years. Quantitative measurements will be applied to outcomes as appropriate. A new metrics dashboard will be developed, and progress will be reported at each regular Library Board meeting.