

## Reimagining Starr 2021

# Community Survey 2020 Results



### Background: Starr Library Then and Now

Incorporated in 1862 as the Starr Institute, today’s Starr Library is an Association Library under the laws of New York State and is a 501(c)(3) organization under federal tax laws. Principal funding is through a “Chapter 414” referendum approved by Rhinebeck voters, supplemented by grants, annual donations, and interest on gifts held in an endowment fund, as required by Starr bylaws.



From 1862 until 1975, the Starr Institute was housed in the heart of the Village in a building on Montgomery Street of the same name. In 1975 the library was moved to its present location on a hill at the western edge of the Village, where a new two-story library building was erected on a parcel now owned by the library. In 2005, the library was enlarged with a one-story east-facing addition that serves as the main entrance. The two buildings combined cover approximately 11,000 square feet and abut what is now the entrance to the Thompson-Mazzarella Park.

In the past 15 years, the role of Starr Library—as with many public libraries—has changed in many ways, serving increasingly as a community center. As shown in the table to the right, the number of programs held at Starr has more than doubled since 2005, and total attendance has increased nearly fivefold. The number of annual library visits has also increased steadily to just under 100,000.

Nearly 20,000 e-books circulated last year, while in 2005 there were none. Surprisingly, book circulation has increased since 2005, despite the growing popularity of electronic resources.

Starr Library has been a busy place: About 25 community groups use Starr Library for meetings, among them Friends of Starr Library, who hold very successful book sales here six times a year, the Rhinebeck Historical Society, and the AARP, who use our space to provide free tax help. Although use has expanded greatly, the building has not.

Data Item	2005	2019	% Change
Library Visits	62,128	98,868	59%
Programs	165	515	212%
Total Program Attendance	1,518	8,660	470%
DVD/Audio	1,287	4,740	268%
e-Books	-0-	19,057	NA
Book Circulation	48,966	55,311	13%
Rhinebeck Town Population	8,166	7,788	-5%

### Planning for the Future

In 2019, the Starr Library Board of Trustees determined that a new comprehensive long-range plan was needed for all aspects of the library (e.g., operations, programs, finances, and partnerships), including the facility. A long-range plan subcommittee, composed of Board and staff, was formed in September 2019 to coordinate the planning process. In 2020, with generous financial assistance from the Friends of Starr Library, the Board hired architect Paul Mays, a partner in the firm Butler Rowland Mays Architects, LLP and a specialist in library design, to complete a building assessment report. The report showed that, although the facility is in good condition, there are important environmental, HVAC, and accessibility issues that need to be corrected throughout the space. The Board worked with Mays to determine the need for a building renovation or expansion and to engage the community in the process of that determination.

When completed, Starr Library’s long-range plan will also meet new 2021 minimum state standards for New York’s public libraries that require a community-based, board-approved, written long-range plan of service.

## Identifying Starr's Needs and Priorities

Starr Library's goal is to serve the entire community with facilities, services, and programs responsive to local needs and patrons of all ages. To assess needs and priorities, Starr Trustees and staff committed to collecting information from many sources to guide planning and have completed the following:

- **Comparisons**

We compared Starr operations (e.g., circulation, program attendance) with data available for the 65 libraries in the Mid-Hudson Library System. Board members also reviewed program offerings at other libraries.

- **Area Library Tours**

Board members toured recently renovated area libraries to collect ideas and observe renovations, many completed by architect Mays. Libraries included those in Kingston, Stanfordville, Kinderhook, Claverack, and others.

- **Consultations with Key Officials and User Groups**

Trustees and staff met in fall 2019 with the Friends of Starr Library, the Rhinebeck Historic Society, government officials, and other user groups.

- **In-House Survey**

An electronic survey was administered to 30 staff members, Trustees and Friends in December 2019 and January 2020 on library use, patron experience, and space assets and limitations.

- **Stakeholder Interviews**

In late February and early March 2020, architect Paul Mays conducted individual face-to-face interviews with 28 community stakeholders and a follow-up Zoom session in July 2020.

- **Community Survey 2020**

In August 2020, an electronic survey was created to gather information from the community on future needs and priorities. The survey was launched in October 2020. (See Appendix for a copy.)

- **Virtual Community Forums with Architect Paul Mays**

Four virtual forums took place in late January and early February 2021 to inform the community about the survey results and to show how Mr. Mays has used community-generated ideas like those provided in the survey as a basis for expanding or renovating other libraries.

## Community Survey 2020 Results

The Starr Community Survey 2020 was distributed by Starr Library in late October to an email list comprising just under 3,000 individuals who had used a library card in the past two years or who were on the Starr newsletter list—that is, chiefly Starr users. The survey was also made available throughout November on Starr's website and was promoted and distributed to the wider community through the Rhinebeck Central School District and community groups.

- **About 1 in 3 Rhinebeck households (963) saw the survey and about 1 in 5 started or completed the survey (603).**

**Survey Respondents.** Not surprisingly, survey respondents were chiefly Starr users—both frequent and infrequent users. All but a handful of respondents (99%) reported having a library card; and 4% of survey respondents reported never having visited the library. Similarly, almost all participants in a local ESL program reported having a library card.

Survey respondent demographics were comparable to the Rhinebeck community for younger and older residents but differed in other categories.\* Respondents tended to have more younger children than Rhinebeck residents as whole, and residents over 65 were somewhat overrepresented in the survey (37.7% vs. 31.9%). Respondents had more advanced degrees (56%) than the community overall (25.3%). The majority of respondents were female, and 7% of respondents reported barriers to accessing or using Starr Library.

\* We compared survey respondent demographics to Rhinebeck census data (American Community Survey 2018-2019 or 2020) where feasible. We also examined trends by age category from 2010 to 2019.

## What Brings Patrons to the Library

**Pre-COVID, Starr Library was a remarkably busy place, and it will be again soon.**

- In 2019, Starr offered 534 programs attended by nearly 8,660 participants.
- Survey respondents paid hundreds of visits to the library every month, while hundreds of patrons use Starr’s online services every week.
- Nearly half (46%) of 549 respondents come to Starr library two or more times per month, while 28% visit weekly or more often. And half (51%) stay 30 minutes or more when they visit.
- Residents come to Starr to browse and borrow material but also to attend adult and children’s programs and Friends’ book sales.
- Starr is also the home to the Rhinebeck Historic Society and houses their archives, and in 2019 many other community groups reserved Starr space for their meetings.

## Reasons Patrons Use Starr’s Website

Reasons Patrons Use Starr Website	Percentage (%)	Count(n)
Search the catalog and request an item	32%	352
Check my account online (books checked out, fines, reading history)	25%	278
View the calendar of events	28%	312
Access or subscribe to e-magazines or newspapers	7%	80
Learn a language using Mango	2%	20
Learn arts and crafts using Creativebug	2%	22
Other	4%	43
Total	100%	1,107

Most respondents (352) use Starr’s online services to search the catalog and order materials online, view the Starr calendar, or check their account. Far fewer respondents have accessed online magazine subscriptions, Mango, or a wealth of other online programs and services.

During COVID, Starr increased promotion of online resources via a bi-weekly newsletter and recently added Hoopla, a free digital media service available to all Rhinebeck cardholders.

Although most patrons can easily access and check out books online, some patrons need help, especially with e-magazine and newspaper subscriptions.

## What Services Respondents Want for Their Household

Respondents selected four of 10 library services as especially important to their households:

- Sixty-five percent of over 421 respondents rated **adult lifelong learning resources** as *very important*.
- Even stronger ratings (81%) came from a subset of respondents (n=293), likely parents or grandparents, on the vital importance of **resources for young and school-aged children**.
- Two other ratings to note are the importance placed by many on **accommodating special needs patrons** and providing a **comfortable place to read or study**.

### Rate Importance of 10 Library Services:

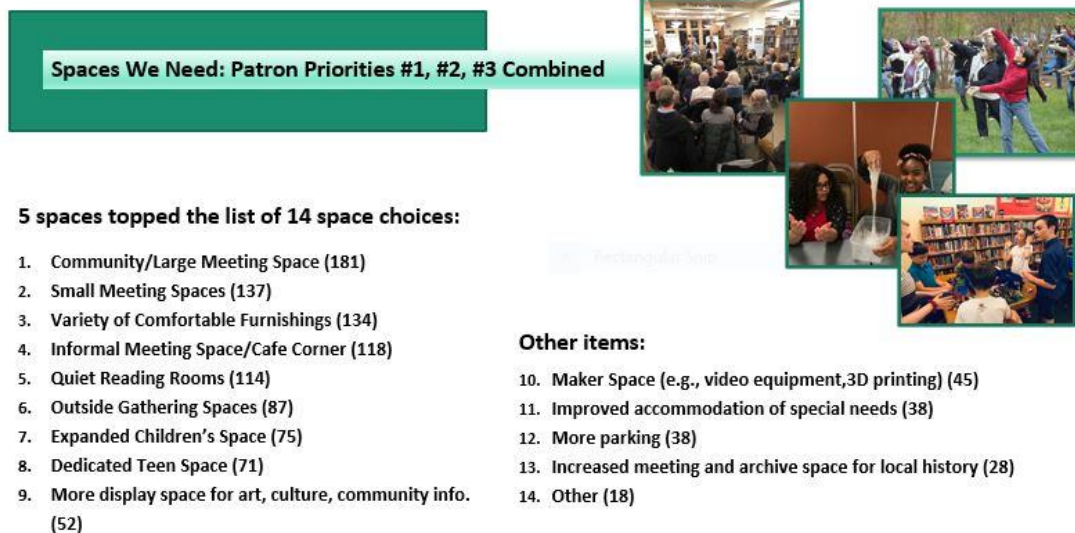
- Starr as a Hub of the community
- Providing adults with lifelong learning resources and programming
- Providing school age children and teens with learning resources and programming
- Providing young children with learning resources and programming
- Accommodating special needs patrons
- Providing comfortable place to read or work
- Providing technology that can be borrowed
- Providing reference support
- Providing video streaming services
- Providing history/genealogy services or research

## Starr as a Hub of Our Community

- **Respondents overwhelmingly rated the library as a *very important* hub for the whole community** — 82% of 418 who answered the question. Two-thirds (67%) also consider the library a very important hub for their own household.

## The Physical Spaces We Need

Respondents were asked to prioritize Starr space needs, selecting their 1st, 2nd, and 3rd priorities from among a list of 14 options. Results, combining the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices are shown below. Space priorities selected by most respondents align with priorities identified by the Board, staff and 28 stakeholders interviewed in March 2020. At the same time, the Board and staff have knowledge of space needs that may not be apparent to the public, especially space and storage needs of the Friends and Historical Society, housed at Starr. Responses to other survey questions indicate broad support for addressing special needs.



(n) = number of respondents who rated item a 1st, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> priority

## Responses to Open-Ended Questions\*

**Q. How the library can better accommodate patron special needs (e.g., quiet, low stimulation areas, assistive-adaptive technology, flexible spaces)?**

**Thank you to the more than 150 people who wrote comments in response to this question.** Some shared observations and specific suggestions, while others felt the library is perfect as is. Some had kind words for the library staff, but some felt more specialized children's staff and volunteers were needed. Frequently mentioned improvements were more quiet areas, more comfortable seating (both soft and hard backed), flexible spaces, low-stimulation areas and special library hours, rooms for small groups, partitions or rooms with doors, more room overall, better lighting, more tech help for seniors, aids for patrons with limited vision, covered outdoor spaces, less comingling of adults and children, wider aisles to accommodate wheelchairs, and better placement of electric outlets.

**Q. Relative to library physical spaces, tell us about any initiatives or innovations you may have seen, heard, or read about elsewhere that have impressed you.**

**More than 100 individuals responded to this question, submitting rich and diverse suggestions for library improvements.** Fifteen individuals cited features that impressed them from 16 different libraries around the country. Among them were the Brooklyn Public Library (solar panels, room reservations, sound-proofed glass-enclosed small meeting spaces), the Boulder (CO) and Boston public libraries (café spaces), the Bozeman (MT) library (green technology), the Spanish River Library in Boca Raton, FL (wedding venue), and libraries in Ossining, NY (one-person spaces, café, art gallery), Montrose, NY (café corner, outdoor space, small performance/meeting space), Farmington and Greenwich, CT (Maker Spaces), Mahopac (meeting spaces for groups, comfortable seating), Chappaqua, NY (teen space) and Guilderland/Albany system overall. Local area libraries were also cited: Staatsburg and Port Ewen (outdoor space), Morton (performance space, reading room), and Red Hook for children's programs and space organization.

Half of the suggestions focused on physical spaces and furnishings: 17 comments called for improved smaller spaces for quiet reading, work, or tutorials, while more comfortable furniture and larger multipurpose spaces were also mentioned frequently, with specific examples. The need to improve the look and comfort of Starr's basement attracted some attention. Children's spaces and programs were the subject of 14 comments, while 10 individuals were enthusiastic about café corners and seven (7) proposed lending libraries of things—mostly tools. One respondent explained how a café corner would extend the time she and her children could spend in the library, and with friends, instead of leaving to grab coffee in the Village center.

We also received “asks” for individual desks, a rocking chair, rotating art display area, whiteboards, hi-tech equipment for meetings, a technical help room for seniors, and some plants. A few patrons cherish the old wooden tables and chairs and don't want to see them go away. One respondent suggested coding workshops and up-and-coming technology.

**Q. How can Starr Library better serve our community in the coming years? Please share any suggestions you may have.**

**Over 200 comments were submitted on how Starr Library might improve its facility or operations for the future.** Comments addressed indoor spaces, outdoor spaces, book collections for adults, adults' or children's programs and activities, scheduling, hours (especially for working adults), and technology (tech equipment and help). Patrons asked for both social and quiet spaces, adult and children's space, and spaces for community groups, with some separation among them.

Many cited the **importance of Starr's role as a gathering space** currently and point to the need for Starr in the future to “bring people together,” to help people “connect,” and to serve as source of community information or a “center for community dialogue.”

Suggestions were equally divided among expanding adult programs and increasing children's programs and activities, often in conjunction with improved spaces for both. Several comments came from working adults who would like to see a return to weekend hours of operations and/or would like some programs scheduled at times to accommodate them. As elsewhere in this survey, respondents mention most frequently **community/large meeting space, small meeting/quiet space, and hangout (“cafe corner”) space.**

Suggestions were often specific, as illustrated here:

- “more opportunities for those of us with skills/expertise to share and learn from one another”
- “community theater readings in a space that would engage the imagination—a small platform can transform the world”
- “community events outside—movies, puppet shows, dance events based on books”
- “a welcome program for families new to the area”
- “waive overdue fines”

Detailed data tables are available in the form a QuestionPro Survey Excel Report. To obtain a copy, please email Stephen Cook, Starr Director at [stardirector@icloud.com](mailto:stardirector@icloud.com)