In 2019, after successfully addressing the goals detailed in the previous Strategic Plan 2013–2018, the library Board of Trustees approved the Fanwood Memorial Library Strategic Plan 2019–2021. It outlines the library’s goals and service objectives moving forward, which will help guide us through the next three years and enable us to effectively serve the needs of the Fanwood community.
I. Strategic Plan Accomplishments

A. Fanwood Library Redesign Project

The building committee continued to work with John Veisz (of FVHD Architects and Planners), to develop the final design that now has the approval of Borough Council, the Board of Trustees, the Friends of the Library, and all of the stakeholders. The window for application to the NJ Library Bond Construction Act for one-to-one matching funds will be open from March 9, 2020 to April 6, 2020 and we will submit our request for funding as early as possible within that timeframe. We hope to secure half of the project’s funding from the state, which the Borough will match with local funds. The project will provide all Fanwood residents with an ADA-compliant, energy efficient facility that will satisfy the current and future service needs of Fanwood, and offer increased and flexible community space.

Preparations for the project continued by the Board and Friends with the formation of a Fundraising Committee to undertake a capital campaign that will seek to raise $250,000, which will be added to the private-side support of the project. Kathleen Smythe, who was appointed to the library’s Board of Trustees in January of 2018, and who has a professional background in development and fundraising, will help to guide us in this fundraising effort. In addition to applying for matching funds from the state’s Library Bond Construction Act we will seek grants and support from other sources.

B. Materials Purchased

We provided books and DVDs, audio books on CD, iPads and Kindles for public use, access to online databases, encyclopedias, digital magazines, increased access to e-books and audiobooks, test prep databases and a variety of video streaming services, despite the fact that market prices continue to challenge and outpace our tight budget. Through strong, careful budget management, we added 3,364 items to the collection in 2019. We continued our participation in the Kanopy film streaming service, and provided additional streaming options to our online offerings: Acorn TV, IndieFlix, Quello Concerts and Pongalo. We are now providing access to selected online book titles for Fanwood residents only (to minimize wait time) with our participation in RBdigital's OneClick service. This is in addition to the Friend’s-supported eBook access via eLibraryNJ. In 2019, we provided full online access to the New York Times for Fanwood cardholders, and continued with the popular Tutor.com and RBdigital's downloadable online magazine collection.

C. Technology

In 2019 we undertook, and finished, a major capital improvement project to implement RFID tagging in all of our materials. As we move forward, this will improve and streamline our operations in circulation, security and collection management. We also provided two self-checkout workstations for patrons. With the technology goals outlined in the previous Strategic Plan completed (as described in the State of the Library January 2016, available on the library website), we continued to work to upgrade our public
computing infrastructure. The website is revised and refined on an ongoing basis to best serve our users, and Google Analytics helps us accurately evaluate use of our site. In addition, we retained the services of Matt Mrowicki’s Impression Technology to provide IT services and help maintain our network.

D. Staff
2019 brought staffing changes that included the retirement of long-time, much-loved employee Sheldon Roskin, after 19 years of service. We also lost three other more recently hired part-timers, Mary Ann Bonacum, Rosie Everson and Leighton Heisey. We were able to maintain our high level of service by reworking schedules, increasing hours for Katherine Minski, and adding two part-timers, Elizabeth Cooke Valcich and Suzanne Romero. Individual staff responsibilities and training continue to be addressed, and efforts are ongoing to streamline operations. Despite our relatively small staff (or because of it), we continue to embrace the challenge of having all employees cross-trained in basic library responsibilities so that we can meet the needs of the community, regardless of who is working at any given time.

Regular staff meetings continued with an emphasis on providing first-rate customer service and coordinated integration between the Children’s and Adult Departments. Staff training and development opportunities, both on-site and regionally, continue to be a priority.

The library’s dedicated full-time and part-time staff members continued to serve the public with a high standard of customer service. They developed engaging, well-attended programming events for all age groups, selected and processed materials, maintained our patron and materials databases, checked out over 44,736 items, and helped hundreds of patrons with technical issues, reference questions, computer sessions and faxing, all of which contributed daily to the success of library operations. Children’s Librarian Susan Staub delivered a compelling calendar of events for families and kids, and engaged in a number of professional development opportunities.

Meredith Scheiner continues to prove herself to be an invaluable addition to the full-time staff. Her responsibilities include administrative work, staff supervision and scheduling, the monthly e-newsletter, social media postings, and programming for teens and adults.

As Director, I maintained my own commitment to customer service, community involvement, and strong leadership throughout 2019. I focused on bringing the new library project to fruition, and with oversight, creativity, and attention to details, both large and small, I continued to ensure excellent day-to-day library operations, technology and website oversight, budget and facility management, staffing, services, and programming. Additionally, I continued my work with the award-winning Libraries and Autism: We’re Connected project, which has had a broad national impact over the past 12 years and highlights the need for universal, welcoming, and inclusive library service and access for all users.

II. Promotional Campaigns and Community Awareness
Our efforts to celebrate and promote the library’s assets and goals are ongoing. The addition of local resident Kara Asciutto to the Board of Trustees in 2019 has provided us with a firm hand to help guide our advocacy efforts. Kara’s background in marketing will help us focus on increasing engagement
between the public and the library by providing services, soliciting information, and spreading our message by fostering cooperation among the community, trustees, staff, patrons, community organizations, and businesses.

A. Internet Presence Expanded and Improved

The Internet presence improvement and expansion goals outlined in the previous Strategic Plan have been completed (as described in the State of the Library January 2016, available on the library website). In 2019, the bandwidth of our Fios internet connection increased to 75/75 Mbps for both upload and download speeds, allowing us to better serve our patrons on both our in-house computers and with our free Wi-Fi service. We continue to utilize and evaluate the variety of social media and other web-based technologies to best serve our community of users.

B. Community Engagement Extended

Crucial to the library’s success is our ability to be responsive to the Fanwood community’s current needs and expectations, while remaining flexible enough to anticipate future needs and trends. Throughout 2019, we continued to explore ways to reach out to all of our users and the community so as to serve them most effectively.

- We staffed a table at Fannywood Day where we previewed the preliminary design of the new library facility, spoke to many people about the project, and gave away many books to children, teens, and adults.
- The library reached out to the local schools to promote Summer Reading Programs, as a means for children to continue learning all summer, reinforcing and growing their literacy rather than suffering a loss in their skills.
- The two Take-a-Book–Leave-a-Book Little Free Libraries in Fanwood’s La Grande and Forest Road Parks continue to be well used and popular.
- We worked with the Fanwood Recreation Department’s Camp to provide two Storytimes a week over the summer in La Grande Park, and the ability for kids to check out books at the park.
- Our unique BookBike LibraCycle made a number of appearances around town, including at the Rockin’ for Autism event and Fannywood Day. When not out and about, the bike makes an eye-catching display in the library.
- The MuseumPass Program, jointly underwritten by the Friends groups of both the Fanwood and the Scotch Plains libraries, remains very successful and popular. Use of this program by cardholders in both communities rose significantly again in 2019, with 563 circulations of museum membership passes (a 19% increase over 2018). Along with the sale of 1,140 day-passes (a 15% increase over 2018), and the very conservative estimate that each museum pass is being used by an average of three people, it makes for an estimated 2,829 total uses of this program for the year (a 17% increase on overall usage). Although we are losing access to the Grounds for Sculpture, which is no longer offering library passes, the three new venues that were added in late 2018, NY Transit Museum, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), have proven very popular with patrons.
- We maintained our focus on effective use, presence and postings on social media (Facebook and Instagram).
- We reached out to downtown businesses and local home-based business owners, as well as all of the newly hired teachers in the school district.
III. Outside Funding Initiatives

In 2019, the library sought alternative, supplemental funding and secured the following grants:

- $5,000 Union County Freeholders (Oculus Quest VR, gaming, programming, materials)
- $1,750 SP-Fanwood Service League (online materials and subscriptions)
- $4,330 Friends of the Library (eLibraryNJ)
- $11,080 This additional funding is equal to approximately 10% of the library’s total 2019 operating budget.

In addition to the eLibraryNJ support noted above, the Friends of the Library also provide significant ongoing financial support for our robust programming offerings, as well as other necessities not provided for in the municipal budget.

IV. Shared Services

We maintained our successful shared-services relationship with the Scotch Plains Public Library. This long-standing co-operation provides technical and cataloging support, a shared online catalog and library management software, popular programs like MuseumPass and Tutor.com, and allows residents of both communities to benefit from access to the two libraries.

V. Statistics – In 2019 the Fanwood Memorial Library:

- Maintained our active level of loaning materials (books, books-on-CD, DVDs, periodicals, etc.) with a total circulation of 44,736 items. [up 5% over 2018]
- Reached over 2,893 active registered cardholders. [up 43% over 2018]
- Showed another dramatic increase in eBook and audiobook circulation, through our participation in eLibraryNJ, which is underwritten by the Friends of the Library, with 5,459 checked-out items [up 56% over 2018] by over 1,336 unique Fanwood cardholder users.
- Expanded, eBook and Audiobook access via RBdigital’s OneClick platform, which provides popular titles for Fanwood residents only, decreasing wait times and broadening the available collection. In 2019, over 426 titles were downloaded [up 85% over 2018]. The same platform also provides access to Marvel Comics titles, ACT/SAT online test prep, streaming video, and access to 60 popular magazine titles.
- Continued accepting credit cards to collect fines and fees using Square, which was implemented on March 16, 2017. In 2019, we took in a total of $910.56 and netted $883.83 (total fees equaled $26.73). These are funds that would very likely not have been collected otherwise.
- Maintained the Kanopy streaming service for Fanwood residents. This provides access to over 30,000 feature films, documentaries, foreign language films, and training videos. It also includes instructional films and lessons, the Great Courses series, and more. In 2019, users visited the site 4,317 times and watched 858 films. [up 167% over 2018]
- Served up fast, secure access to the Internet with our Fios broadband capability, and provided more than 10,386 individuals with free Wi-Fi connections.
Enabled Fanwood cardholders to download **950 online digital magazines** with our access to the RBdigital platform. [up 79% over 2018]

Provided, in partnership with the Scotch Plains Library, 142 live tutoring sessions to students from both communities who made use of our free online tutoring service, Tutor.com.

Maintained our **increased hours** by opening to the public on Tuesdays at 9:30 a.m. and including Sunday hours.

Continued our busy and active **on-site attendance in 2019 with 45,985 library users through our doors**.

Had more than **206,000 unique visits to our website**. [up 47% over 2018]

Reached **over 1,900 active subscribers with our monthly e-newsletter**.

**VI. Programming**

2019 was another very busy and successful year of programming with a broad spectrum of well-attended, free events for all ages. There were rich offerings for children from 18 months and up that included storytimes and crafts, and regular weekly opportunities for adults, such as our Scrabble Club, and Hook & Needle, our knitting and crochet group. The Thursday afternoon Rubick’s Cube Club is quite popular with teens, and we continued loaning our telescope, which families can borrow for a week. Grupó ñ, an immersion, enrichment program for advanced Spanish speakers ages 8+, which focused on literacy and culture met regularly.

Other programming highlights included:

- The 2019 annual **Teen Photography Contest**, whose theme was “Baby It’s Cold Outside.”
- Music – concert performances are always popular at FML and 2019 brought these musicians to the library: Mimi and the Podd Brothers (jazz); Stratford Creek: Celtic Voyage; Francine Evans & Joel Zelnik, who took us on a memorable musical journey called, “Forever Judy & the Wizard of Oz,” highlighting America’s number one female vocalist, Judy Garland. The Florian Schantz Jazz Combo played a Holiday/Winter Concert.
- Drama – Peyton Dixon portrayed Theodore Roosevelt; Professor Robin Wexler, a docent at Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, “Spilled the ‘T’ about Teddy Roosevelt”; Dr. Daisy Nelson Century brought Harriet Tubman to life. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare covered all of his plays in less than two hours.
- A celebration of the 100th birthday of Children’s Book Week in April provided a variety of programs including: an author visit with Laura Sassi; a visit from artist/illustrator/author Leeza Hernandez (who designed all of the artwork for the 2019 national Collaborative Summer Library Reading Program, “A Universe of Stories”); Michelle Oram, who has been teaching theatre and voice for over 35 years and believes in the healing powers of nature and the voice to make us whole, spoke about her book Songs of the Woods.
- NJ Maker’s Day STEM/STEAM activities for the family – Robotics, Coding Unplugged; Code Combat; Circuits on Paper, Coding for Kids, a pop-up sewing studio to make a drawstring backpack.
- Art Exhibits with the winners of the 2019 Teen Photography contest.
♦ **Author Visits.** At their annual meeting, the Friends of the Fanwood Memorial Library hosted Alan Sepinwall, who highlighted his book, *The Soprano Sessions*. Lawrence Hogan spoke about his book, *Jackie Robinson: An American Icon*; and NASA Solar System Ambassador Paul Cirillo’s *From Apollo to Tomorrow: What’s Next for Human Space Travel?* was a fascinating presentation celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing mission and musing about the future of humans in space. Author Linda Barth presented *New Jersey Originals: Technological Marvels, Odd Inventions, Trailblazing Characters and MORE*.

♦ This year’s **summer reading program theme was “A Universe of Stories.”** It was celebrated by a wonderful series of space-themed Monday night special events and other programming and craft opportunities, underwritten by the Friends of the Library.

♦ **Watermelon Day** was celebrated on August 15 with free slices for everyone.

♦ For **Halloween**, we transformed the entire facility into a haunted library for a very successful program that delighted families who toured the spooky building. This will likely become an annual event.

### VII. Looking Forward

With thanks to the Mayor and Council for their support, we will continue to build on the goals outlined in the previous Strategic Plan, as we embrace the challenges of our new plan that emphasizes the need for a new facility, and includes the application for matching grant funds to accomplish that. The continued focus on the building project will allow us to pursue our goal of securing an expanded, renovated, and universally accessible facility for all Fanwood residents.

In order to continue providing world-class library services now, and into the future, we will create a 21st century library that residents can take pride in, and one that contributes to the community’s current and future economic stability and growth. Passage of the Library Construction Bond Act in November of 2017 helped galvanize support for the library improvement project, and we anticipate that in 2020 we will see matching funds secured and the project started.

We continue to seek to increase our outreach to community groups, home-based business entrepreneurs and telecommuters, retailers, schools and clubs, and to sharpen and expand our use of media to promote our services, continue to further staff development, and actively identify and pursue alternative funding opportunities.

**We embrace the challenge and responsibility of being the most used public building in Fanwood. And will continue to keep a focus on, and remain responsive to, the library, literacy, and the information and community needs of all Fanwood residents through a broad selection of programs, materials, and universally inclusive, accessible services.**