

FROM BARRIERS TO BRIDGES

Becoming a Pillar of Public Value
STRATEGIC PLAN
2025 – 2028



Guelph Public Library
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“[The Library] provides a hub for people to gather, a safe place for reading, using computers, for some shelter for part of the day. It provides learning opportunities for children and a social hub.”

PARTICIPANT, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

At the Guelph Public Library, we envision a community where knowledge, creativity, and connection are the cornerstones of opportunity and growth. Guided by this vision, our 2025–2028 Strategic Plan, *From Barriers to Bridges*, lays the foundation for a library system that is bold, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of a dynamic and evolving city. At this moment in history, it can feel like we are often called to accept less. This Strategic Plan represents a reaffirmation of the Guelph Public Library’s commitment to our city, an invitation to expect more from your library; to expect empowerment.

Our new Strategic Plan was shaped by thousands of collective voices—from community members in every neighborhood to partners and collaborators across diverse sectors. In each conversation, we heard a clear message: Guelph’s residents need better access to inclusive, welcoming spaces; improved digital literacy; support for workforce development; platforms for civic engagement; and consistent customer experiences.

That feedback has been used to develop three strategic pillars that will guide our work over the next four years. These priorities allow us to plan for the long term while remaining responsive to change. At the heart of our plan is a commitment to putting the community first, with the ambition of building resilience, success, and well-being

for our city and its residents.

Four years from now, when we look back at the work detailed in this Strategic Plan, the community will see the Library foster trust through integrity, nurture curiosity through creativity, deepen belonging through accessibility and diversity, and cultivate resilience through adaptability. The Library, its staff, and its Board will use this plan to demonstrate every day, the GPL’s role as a critical piece of civic infrastructure.

We are looking forward to this exciting next chapter in our story. By working together with our colleagues, partners, and community, we can empower all to thrive. Together, we will build a stronger, brighter future for this incredible city.

Expect Empowerment.

DANNY WILLIAMSON
Guelph Public Library Board Chair

DAN ATKINS
CEO

OUR VISION

Expect Empowerment

Empowerment is defined as “the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights.” In many ways this is exactly what the Library strives to offer to the community—space, resources and support to grow, overcome barriers and craft lives of our own choosing. Our aspirational goal is that our community, staff and partners have “the expectation of empowerment” each and every time they interact with us!

This is our vision of who we are and what the library represents in the community. We encourage our community to hold us accountable to this expectation and we will hold ourselves accountable to this expectation. We are excited to commit to this strategic plan that we feel will help us achieve this standard.

OUR MISSION

The library offers inclusive, sustainable spaces and opportunities for people to engage their curiosity and create community.

OUR VALUES

TRUST

We foster trust by acting with integrity, holding ourselves and others accountable, and consistently delivering compassion in our services.

BELONGING

We deepen belonging by offering accessible, diverse services and space that promotes the individual and collective wellness of our community members.

CURIOSITY

We nurture curiosity and creativity; we model lifelong learning and literacy.

RESILIENCY

We cultivate resilience by embracing change as an opportunity to grow and transform, adapting to the evolving needs of our community. We create an environment where everyone feels empowered to be vulnerable and show up authentically, knowing they are part of a community that cares.



Our Plan Vision

Becoming a Pillar of Public Value

Four years from now, our new central library is successfully opened and all of the library branches are vibrant hubs of community engagement, where everyone feels welcome and empowered. Barriers to access have been reduced or removed, making our spaces fully inclusive, with partnerships and outreach ensuring the community knows and uses our resources. Membership has grown, with new user groups drawn to our diverse collections and programming. Customer service is praised for its inclusivity, and our digital channels have reached non-users effectively. Through community-informed programming and cultural competency, we've deepened social connections. The library is now a cornerstone of public value, fostering connection, growth, and a thriving, engaged public.

Create welcoming and inclusive spaces

We will know we have reached this milestone when we have fostered new partnerships, conducted accessibility audits, and engaged in community outreach to ensure that our spaces are welcoming and inclusive. By promoting the resources we already have and addressing barriers to access, we will improve the public's ability to engage with us, both physically and digitally.

Engage people in new and innovative ways

We will know we have reached this milestone when we have increased membership, engaged new user groups, and enhanced the customer service experience by expanding youth programming, developing dedicated communication channels for non-users, and leveraging technology to meet diverse needs.

Cultivate social connections through community-informed programming

We will know we have reached this milestone when we have delivered programs shaped by community feedback and insights, created consistent engagement touchpoints with the community, and we have engaged in cultural competency training for staff. Lastly, acknowledging room for growth, we will create continuous feedback loops to adapt programs to evolving community needs.

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 1.0 Invest in our team

Continuous investment in our team is the foundation of enhancing our service delivery and achieving our mission and plan vision effectively. Investing in our team cultivates an environment of growth, collaboration, and mutual respect where every member feels valued and empowered to contribute. Reframing the mindset around training aims to foster a culture that not only facilitates continuous learning but also builds strong, trusting relationships within our organization.

Key Results

KR 1.1—Ensure training is consistent and aligns with staff input

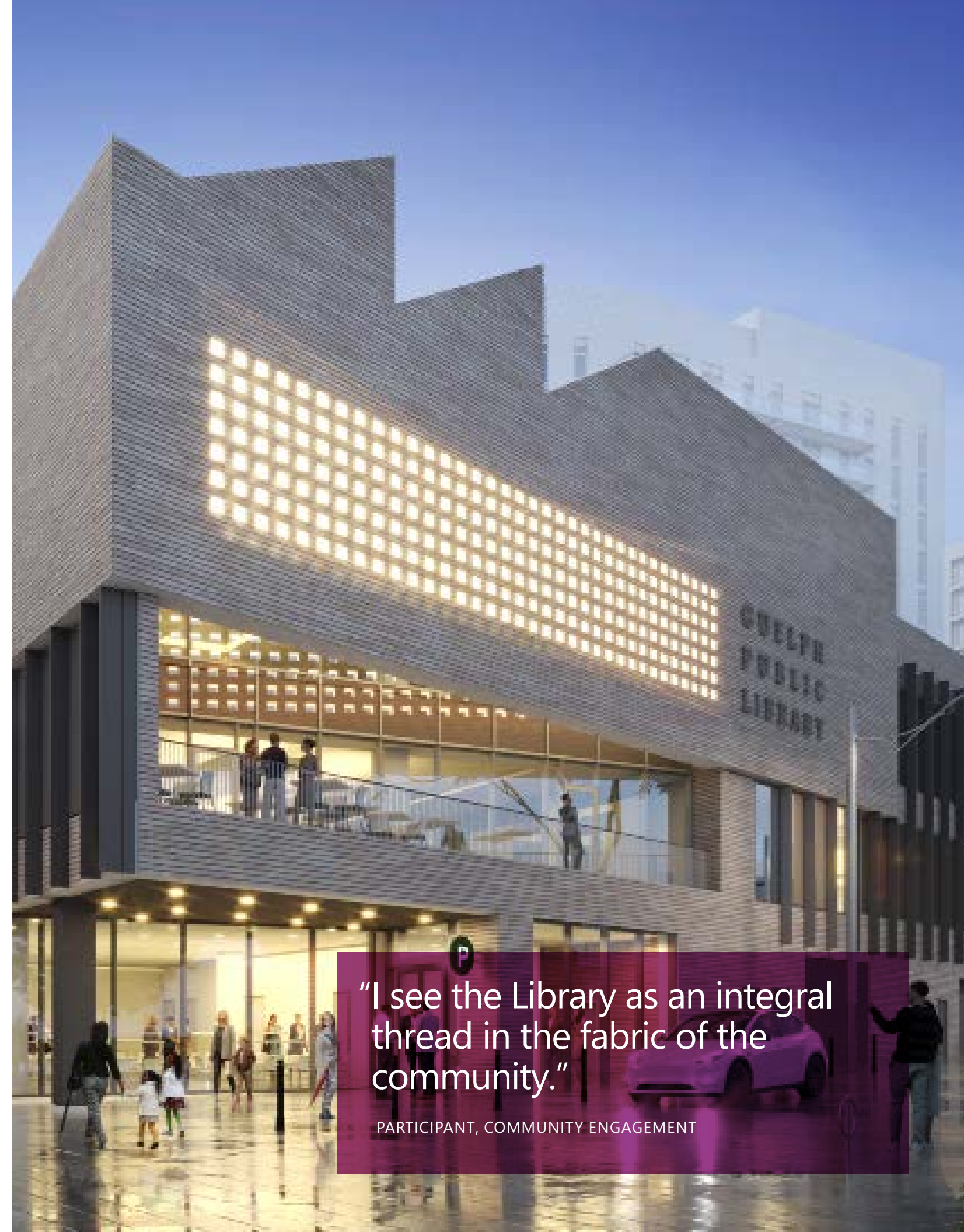
We will know we have reached this milestone when we have created a record capturing staff training accomplishments and better mapping our training process.

KR 1.2—Grow the team's knowledge and size

We will know we have reached this milestone when we have adequate staff for all roles. Staff should feel they have the capacity to pursue innovation and develop new skills as part of their roles.

KR 1.3—Build and maintain staff trust

We will know that we have achieved this milestone when staff report that they experience an open constructive flow of communication between all levels of staff. Staff should also report that they feel they have an understanding of and agency in the new strategic plan.



"I see the Library as an integral thread in the fabric of the community."

PARTICIPANT, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Objective 2.0 Amplify our stories

Our aim is to strengthen the narrative of our library's services and impact within the community. Actively sharing our unique experiences, successes, and values will foster a deeper connection with patrons and community stakeholders. We want to arm defenders of the library with a "quiver of arrows" so they can become champions for us. This initiative emphasizes the importance of collective storytelling, where every voice contributes to a richer, more comprehensive understanding of our library's role in the community and the value we offer.

Key Results

KR 2.1—Celebrate who we are

We will know that we have reached this milestone when customer satisfaction metrics have increased and staff report improved client interactions, we have stronger relationships with external media, and we see a shift in community sentiment on the value of the library and any staff, no matter who they are, can articulate our purpose.

KR 2.2—Grow community partnerships

We will know we have reached this milestone when we evaluate and determine that at least 75% of our partnerships are mutually beneficial. We will also set out clear guidelines on how we amplify each other's work (for example in MOUs or Partnership agreements).

KR 2.3—Improve internal communications

We will know that we have reached this milestone when our board and library allies know when and how to advocate on our behalf and we see higher levels of staff engagement and staff report that they understand the "why" of key decisions.

Objective 3.0 Build future-focused libraries

Our goal is to position the library as critical infrastructure. By thoughtfully executing GPL's facilities plan and master plan we will further solidify the library's role as our community's third space—essential hubs of learning, connection, and cultural enrichment. The first major step in this journey is well underway, by successfully opening and integrating the new downtown branch we will create a new platform by which to welcome our community.

Key Results

KR 3.1—Successfully open new central library

We will know we have reached this milestone when we have successfully moved to the new central library. (Including staff, services, collections that meet community needs, and positive feedback).

KR 3.2—Align services and programming across our branches

We will know that we have reached this milestone when staff report feeling comfortable working at all locations, there is an established branch standard, and each branch reflects its community intentionally.

KR 3.3—Plan to meet Guelph's growth

We will know that we have reached this milestone when we have successfully crafted and are executing against our Facilities Plan and Library Master Plan. We would expect to also see the following outcomes: our overall membership increases, customer satisfaction / feedback improves and the public reports getting value for tax dollars invested in the library.

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Want to learn more?
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