

# The Future of the Bloomfield Public Library and the Bloomfield Public Library of the Future: We Want To Hear From You - Community Survey Summary

*I like the Prosser because it's small and very family oriented. You're bound to run into people you know, and the atmosphere is just cozy. I've been to Prosser on many, many occasions by myself to read magazines or get on the computer for a while. My daughter LOVES to be able to browse the many books from when she was little to now at 12. Glad when things are back to normal from (Pandemic/COVID) so we can go again. McMahan is very convenient because it's right up the street from my house and my daughter and I always walked there.*

From January 22<sup>nd</sup> to March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 a survey was shared with the public. A thoughtful and concerted effort was made to reach as many Bloomfield residents as possible. The initial digital distribution was sent to 5,952 email addresses via the library's email data base and email newsletter. This was followed by digital shares of the newsletter by the library and library partners. The library also extensively promoted the survey through its Facebook and Instagram platforms, on every page of the library website and was promoted through the Bloomfield School District and a PSA by Mayor DeBeatham-Brown. A print copy was mailed to every delivery address (10,000+) in Bloomfield. and to every visitor to the libraries. Incentives were offered to encourage participation.

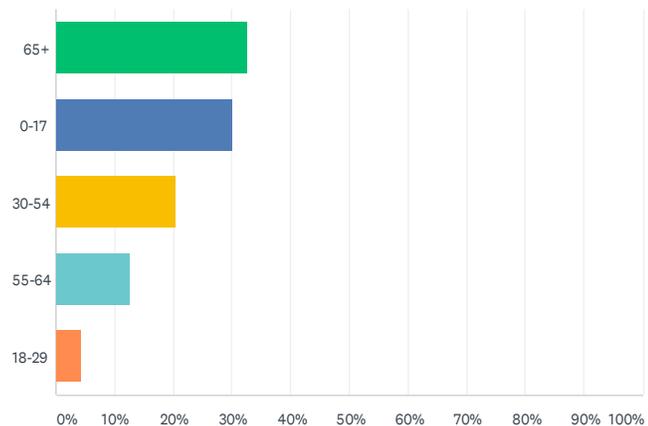
The purpose of the survey was to learn more about the Bloomfield community's perceptions about the current libraries and their aspirations for the future in order to inform library planners, which includes the 16-member Bloomfield Library Building Committee, the Town Council and the elected Bloomfield Public Library Board of Trustees. The survey was not intended as a public referendum on any aspect of a future library. Planning decisions about location, size and cost are iterative ones based on a community's needs, aspirations and finances and eventually voted on in a public referendum.

Both the online and the print survey began with this introduction:

## We Want To Hear From You!

**Bloomfield Public Library (BPL) is in the process of planning new or modernized libraries to better serve you, our community. Your thoughts and needs are important to us as we move forward. Please help us envision a 21st-Century future for BPL by responding to this brief survey. We're here for you!**

More than 1,700 people completed the survey by March 7, 2021 (8.5% of the Bloomfield population). The survey was completed 100% with no dropped, or unfinished surveys reported. The age breakdown on respondents was:



Of those taking the survey, 66% had Bloomfield Public Library cards. Another 6% of respondents use cards from area libraries other than Bloomfield, 4% use the library without a card and 10% report that their card has expired.

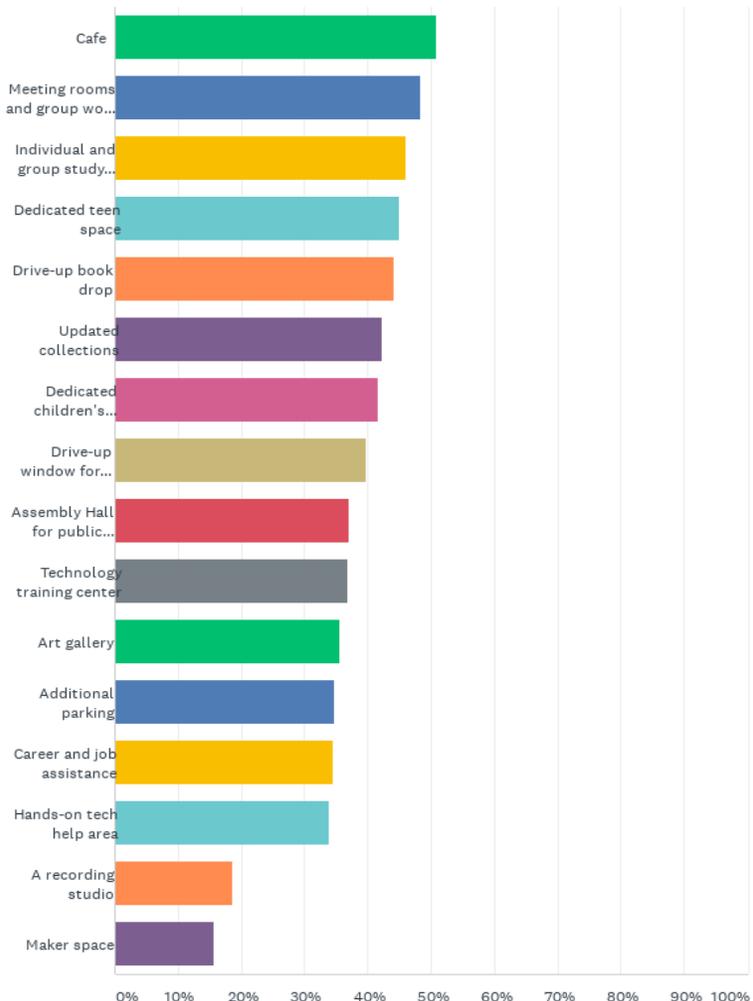
Many respondents report using the Bloomfield Public Library exclusively. Those who use other libraries choose these area libraries: West Hartford Public Library (34%), Hartford Public Library (29%), Windsor Public Library (27%), Simsbury (20%) and a smaller number at other area libraries. Reasons for using other libraries include easier parking, better browsing, better hours, to attend a program, to pick up a specific book, along with a preference for more modern and easier to use facilities.

*Our family is so grateful to the Prosser Library Staff for getting us through this pandemic in such a positive and helpful manner. We'd like to express our appreciation for your help and professionalism*

When asked how important the library was to the respondent and his or her family, 72% indicated it was extremely or very important. In response to how important the library is to the Town of Bloomfield, 90% said extremely or very important. The 18% gap between these two is an indicator of the once in a lifetime opportunity Bloomfield has to reimagine and renew its libraries to meet the challenges of the next

generations of Bloomfield children, families and all residents. The need to provide attractive and modern facilities and services will deliver experiences and resources that all residents desire and deserve.

When asked to select features of modern library space that may appeal to them, respondents' leading choices include a café, meeting rooms and group work rooms, group and individual study spaces and dedicated teen space.



*Don't just make the building pleasing to look at, make it where people can feel comfortable to go inside.*

*Have a little place in the library where kids can stop and buy a snack when they get hungry but don't eat around the books*

When asked how the libraries could be improved, approximately 756 people offered suggestions for improvements to Prosser, and 410 for McMahon with many indicating a need to improve facilities, technology, meeting space, study and workspace, programs, hours and collections. Approximately 230 respondents made suggestions to improving BPL Online, though many are related to the library's ILS catalog and borrowing policies rather than the digital resources or social media platforms.

When asked what they like most about the Bloomfield Libraries, the top reply was about the staff (mentioned over 420 times). They are seen as friendly, welcoming, helpful and going out of their way to meet people's needs. Also high on the list are comments about convenience of locations, hours, ability to engage with stimulating programs and with other Bloomfield residents from all neighborhoods and ages. Perhaps the comments about the experiences, and need, to engage with other residents is a feature often mentioned.

The satisfaction and pride in the Bloomfield Public Library's civic role seems to have reached a breaking point though, because of decline of the facilities and resident frustration with the overdue need for an investment in creating modern libraries. Pre-Covid library statistics revealed a low number of library card holders as a percentage of the total population and a modest door count for both locations. A number of people responding to the survey have rarely or never been to the libraries. That coupled with the number of people who regularly visit other libraries, indicates a growing dissatisfaction with Bloomfield's libraries. Investing in the town's libraries will increase use, build a stronger community and ensure that Bloomfield's children have access to libraries that will contribute to their educational success.

*The staff is always informative and courteous. Excellent programs and events. I always find what I'm looking for. Community-based. Very inviting place to meet people*

*It's closer to my house and I like the employees the way they treat us when we come to visit*

*There are 2 in town*

*Bloomfield Public library has been a great resource for our family as our children grew, a place where all residents could come together.*

*The adult and Children's Department staff are fabulous--helpful, welcoming and knowledgeable*

*Convenient, accessible, friendly, helpful*

When asked what they liked least about the Bloomfield Libraries, the top responses are related to parking, dated and tight facilities, technology, children's space, moldy odors, old bathrooms, outdoor lighting, not fully accessible and lack of Sunday hours. The need for all residents, especially children, to become digitally fluent to learn, live and compete in our digital world will be at the top of the list for new library spaces and staff competence.

*It is not appealing to the younger crowd. Small area for toddlers. Compared to Windsor and West Hartford, it just needs overall visual updates*

*Prosser location prone to dramatic flooding; inadequate, poorly designed parking; little attention to landscaping around the Prosser building ; inadequate outdoor lighting; old restrooms*

*Access in and out of the parking lot is difficult and risky due to traffic coming around the corner*

*It is too small and does not have advanced technology. A larger library is needed. However, I think the size of the library should be in proportion to future anticipated growth within the Town*

*The parking lot; the ancient elevator ; the lack of study or conference rooms for public use*

*Physical facilities are too small. Prosser is in a state of major disrepair. McMahon lacks meeting space. The print collection is limited and needs development.*

*The buildings are old and outdated*

There were many varied comments about facilities, library locations and about the future of the Bloomfield Public Library. Many opinions were eagerly shared. Here are a few:

*The location. I think the new main library should be located in the center of Town for the convenience of all Bloomfield citizens. The McMahon is a great location for the Blue Hills avenue area*

*I would like to thank you all for considering our thoughts and opinions. It is very important that we keep our libraries. If all changes that the survey feels would be great can be obtained. Maybe a few can happen and just guarantee we will keep both locations*

*Support teens in growth and development. Offer safe/warm spaces and creative/intellectual stimulation. Equalize access to technology and academic support*

*Having two library locations in town is very important. I've lived in town for 30 years and my family and I enjoy the library*

*Prosser location prone to dramatic flooding; inadequate, poorly designed parking; little attention to landscaping around the Prosser building; inadequate outdoor lighting; old restrooms; inadequate storage and suitable backroom workspace for staff; poor area for Friends of the Library to organize donated books*

*Physically-- Prosser's location in the center; its open main floor with abundant natural light which ads to warmth that persists; balanced collection (for the most part) Programs -Diverse offerings of varied programming for all ages (which calls for better programming spaces) Personally - attentive, well-informed, friendly staff*

*Maintain diverse collections of materials for all ages with elegant, coordinated display opportunities. Location of library in the center of town-Important symbol and anchor of commitment to cultural and educational life of the community and emphasizes this importance. Important for strength and vitality of town's center. I would add to dynamic space for children , babies and all who care for and work with all children*

*Encourage the project to proceed while interest rates are historically low -- don't miss this opportunity and have future regrets*

*I hope the library stays in its current location, with an upgraded building. It's an important anchor site for the town center*

*Libraries and public schools saved me from a very poor and dysfunctional life as a child. Became an avid reader, although in hospital for long periods. Became a teacher and member of the middle class. Love libraries*

*New library on Blue Hills*

*More central location-near Rec and Senior Center*

*I would like to see the "main" library be located in the town center*

*Whatever improvements are made to the library I think it is of the utmost importance to keep it in the center of town*

*I think it is time for new library in the Center of Town*

*I think the entire library needs to be updated. You are way behind other libraries. It is old + smells in there*

*Thank you for this survey! I am hopeful that this endeavor be successful and that the Bloomfield Library be the cornerstone of the town, as a library should be*

*We need to think big. This is a worthy investment in the future of our town and our young people who will compete with students from surrounding affluent communities*

*Along with library improvement, please also consider the impact upon the town center (architecturally, putting people on the street, etc.)*

*I favor keeping Prosser in the Town Center*

*Do your best to keep Prosser in present location.*

*Our town needs & deserves a state-of-the-art library for all our citizens, especially our students*

*The town of Bloomfield truly wants to grow and thrive, it needs a 21st Century library and we need an adequate one now*

*McMahon should expand and be modernized as well*

*A new building*

*Bloomfield libraries are small, welcoming and cozy, but the town is growing and updated or new libraries are necessary pillars for the community. For Bloomfield to positively bloom, its members/individuals, (old, current, new, or prospect) needs updated or new libraries to better achieve enlightenment, feel limitless, and to pleasingly feed curiosity*

*Both libraries must attract and serve all demographic groups in Bloomfield and encourage social interaction among them. Plan events and collections to avoid East Side/West side bifurcation*

*Important to take advantage of the Town Center transportation, cooperative events in center and population density to create and exciting community resource*

*A library shouldn't try to be EVERYTHING. I would like to see our existing buildings updated. "Prosser" needs to be expanded; it's too small (and shabby). But it shouldn't be abandoned*

*The wording of the question on public space is strange: what would a "welcoming and vibrant public space" for only a portion of the community look like? Any public space in Bloomfield is for the "entire community" - not sure how a public space would be restricted. Library connectivity with other community assets, e.g. Filley Park, Town Hall, Park River, Greenway (when it reaches the town center) is important*

*For those of us with physical problems, the current building IS a problem. Poor layout, inaccessible bathrooms, antiquated physical plant that needs to go*

*Combine and have one state of the art modern building*

*I do not use (McMahon) but my students did and I was thankful that there was a library in the neighborhood*

*New Expanded functional building designed for all kinds of community interactions (see Simsbury and Avon for wonderful plans for new buildings. Simsbury is multifunctional and draws all ages and interests. I would pay more taxes to have this type of library*

*Both because it's iconic and it costs a third less to renovate we should save Prosser. And add at least 20,000 square feet. The Riley acquisition gives us ample parking. Several alternative flood prevention measures are practical including walls and levitation*

*Combine Prosser and McMahon*

*Why not save taxpayers money and eliminate it? One library is enough (McMahon)*

*location and space are not conducive to today's needs*

*Needs new location overall (Prosser)*

*Building (Prosser) should be renovated and expanded - Town took old Masonic Temple by Eminent Domain, purchased Riley which could be used for parking. How about renovating library and establishing a dog park at the rear of Riley Lumber parcel? It's connected to Filley Park. The Center without the Library will decline further*

*We need a library like Simsbury's, with friendly reading and research spaces, good meeting rooms, and an attractive presence in the town center*

*New location with no flooding; individual quiet rooms for study or concentration; wheelchair access to all facilities (including restrooms and elevator)*

*A new modern library at a new location*

*It should be renovated or rebuilt in a no flood zone*

*Location of Prosser Library right in the center of town. Feeling of "cozy" inside, not sterile or institutional*

*The Prosser branch is convenient to me. I am a resident of the Duncaster retirement community*

*Ease of access: Prosser is close to my home and in travel path; Wintonbury less so*

*(Prosser) location in the center of town, accessibility*

*Prosser is a center of town icon, a cornerstone of the center. The McMahon Wintonbury branch is also very important to the Blue Hills neighborhood*

*It's integral to the center of Bloomfield and to the community it serves*

*I like how centrally located the library is and that it is open on Saturday's. I like the museum passes and how they are easy to obtain*

*Convenience to town center shops*

*It's convenient, centrally located (many similar comments)*

*It's located in the center of town, convenient parking, friendly and helpful staff, It's the heart of the community*

*Should be updated. Center of Town*

*Do your best to keep Prosser in present location*

*Friendly and knowledgeable staff! Center of Town location*

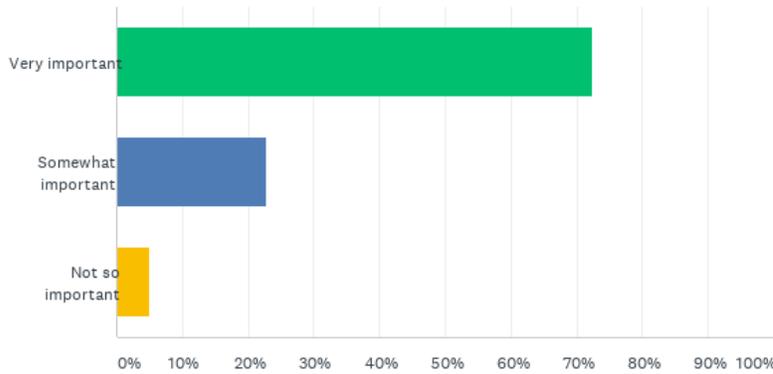
*Close to the center and the rest of the commercial hub*

*It is right in the center of town and is a vital resource*

*I love Prosser Library. I grew up in the library ...my young and tender years were impacted by a love of learning, which was made possible by the ability to browse all*

*sorts of books and topics. I became a professional writer. I am sure the Prosser Library had much to do with this*

When asked about the importance of creating a fun and dynamic space in the libraries where toddlers and children can learn and socialize, 93% of respondents replied that it was somewhat or very important. The role of the library in providing a place for print and digital literacy and as a place to learn about oneself and others is important for Bloomfield residents. reimagining of the new BPL will be iconic facilities that Bloomfield's children will request to return to often.



## What We've Learned from the Survey

The Library Building Outreach Subcommittee should be pleased with the response to the survey. More than 1,700 community members shared their ideas about the future of Bloomfield's libraries when asked. The Bloomfield Public Library staff and Board of Trustees will also use the survey information as they make decisions about the future of the library. The information from the survey will be used to inform planning for new library space, improve digital and print collections, enhance programming, and ensure that the Town of Bloomfield provides reimagined 21<sup>st</sup> century libraries to meet the needs of this and future generations.

Community engagement efforts will continue through a series of community meetings, telephone interviews and information sessions about the library project, and ultimately a concept plan for new and expanded libraries that will meet the needs of the community for many years to come.

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