



# 2026-2030 Strategic Plan

## Cranbury Public Library

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APPROVED BY THE CRANBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
MARCH 12, 2026

## INTRODUCTION

Since its founding in 1906, the Cranbury Public Library has offered library services to residents out of a number of rented locations, most recently from a space within the Cranbury School from 1925-2020. But the Library Director, Marilynn Mullen (2008-2022), and the Cranbury Public Library Board of Trustees had a grander vision for the library.

Following the generous fundraising efforts of the Cranbury Public Library Foundation founded in 2009, Cranbury residents donated over \$2 million dollars between 2010 and 2017: funds later matched by the NJ Construction Bond Grant. These private donations from a majority of township households (54%), demonstrated a community-wide belief in the value of libraries and Cranbury residents' commitment to see this vision of a grander, standalone public library building come to fruition.

Since the opening of its new standalone building in November 2022, the Cranbury Public Library has experienced significant growth and transformation. In the first full year of opening, 2023, the library saw 34,290 visits, but by 2025 the number of in-person visits increased 21% to 41,518.

The 11,000 sq ft facility has provided the space for the library to offer a broader range of dynamic programs and services to better serve the diverse needs of Cranbury's residents and in the three years since the building's grand opening, the library has become recognized for its busy and robust calendar of events. In 2025, the library offered a total of 560 programs, such as art workshops, weekly community health and wellness classes, outdoor concerts, and senior-focused programs which were not possible in the previous shared space. Additionally, the building's flexible meeting rooms have allowed local community organizations to hold their own meetings and events in a welcoming and centralized community building. In 2025, 53 different organizations held their meetings at the library. Another well-used feature of the new building is the quiet study rooms, which serve as secondary offices for remote workers. In addition, the dedicated teen room serves as an after-school hub for Cranbury School students.

No longer just a place to borrow books or attend educational lectures, the library has worked toward establishing itself as a true community center. As a result, the planning for 2026-2030 will build upon the momentum of the last three years, setting a vision for how the library can continue to be a cornerstone of community life in Cranbury. This plan will thus be informed by the success of the new facility, as it has demonstrated the library's potential to be more than a traditional library, and one that will adapt to the needs of a growing and diverse population.

## LIBRARY MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

**Mission:** The Cranbury Public Library serves as the hub of community life in Cranbury Township by expanding minds, fostering community connections, and inspiring curiosity.

**Vision:** We strive to provide access to information, literature, technology, arts, and culture. Our Library will continually evolve to provide quality resources, programs, facilities, assistance, and education in a wide variety of fields to meet the needs and interests of the community.

### Values:

- A free public library is essential to the public good of Cranbury.
- All Cranbury Public Library users are entitled to a superior level of library service commensurate with the needs of the community and available resources.
- All library users have the right to privacy, confidentiality, and intellectual freedom.
- The Board of Trustees will exercise responsible stewardship in support of the library's mission.



## THE PLANNING PROCESS

Planning for the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan began at the February 2025 Cranbury Public Library Board of Trustees retreat. The Director shared her vision of a community-focused library, and the attendees were energized to update the strategic plan to reflect the next phase of the library's evolution.

The Board of Trustees then decided to form a committee to update the Strategic Plan and the library's goals for the next five years. This committee included the Library Director, Technology Librarian, Board of Trustees Vice-President, Mayor's Representative to the Library Board of Trustees, and Cranbury School Administrator's Representative.

Over the course of 2025, the committee met to update the profile of the community and library. Demographic and census data was used. The committee also identified trends in Cranbury, and ways to align library priorities with those of the Cranbury Township Committee and with the values of Cranbury residents.

In the fall of 2025, focus group surveys were conducted. Focus group participants included new residents to Cranbury at the New Neighbor Reception held in September 2025. These residents provided fresh eyes and an outside perspective to the Cranbury Public Library. Many residents were users of libraries in their previous towns and were acquainted with the different types of services libraries of various sizes can offer to their local communities.

Residents from the affordable senior housing community on Route 130, known as Birchwood, also participated in the focus group survey. Their participation reflected underrepresented individuals in Cranbury, such as those limited by transportation access, age, disability, and income. Feedback from Birchwood residents reflected the experiences of both those that may already use, and those that may not use, the library.



Library staff also participated in the focus group survey. While staff have an insider's perspective of the library, they constantly communicate and receive feedback from patrons on an ongoing basis. Staff also have access to vital statistics on the use of the library's collections, meeting spaces, and program attendance. These statistics provide important quantitative data to support the qualitative results from the focus groups and patron feedback. Staff input and buy in to the strategic plan is essential for the plan's success.

Themes identified in the focus group results included a positive view of the library and its facilities, recognition of excellent customer service, a desire for more of the most used library programs and services, and the vision of the library as a space for both information seeking and community gathering. These results were reviewed by the strategic plan committee and used to further update the library's understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and inform its future priorities described in this strategic plan.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

It is important for the library to share its strategic plan with residents. Doing so may garner valuable feedback and input. It will also hold the library accountable to executing on the plan. As such, the strategic plan will be shared with the public in a number of ways.

- A copy of the strategic plan will be posted on the library's website, and will also be available for public viewing around the library.
- The strategic plan for will be reviewed annually at the Board of Trustees annual retreat.

Members of the public who wish to comment on the plan can by emailing the library's suggestion box: [reference@cranburypubliclibrary.org](mailto:reference@cranburypubliclibrary.org).

## PRIORITIES FOR 2026 - 2030

The Cranbury Public Library aims to be a community center and the focus is shifting from an exclusive focus on library services to fostering an inclusive, dynamic space that serves as a hub for community life. As such, the library's strategic priorities are:

**A. Develop Inclusive Programming and Community Partnerships**

**B. Create a Welcoming, Multi-Use Space**

**C. Build Community Engagement and Advocacy**

**D. Ensure Sustainability and Resource Management**

## A. DEVELOP INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

*DEFINING SUCCESS: The library becomes a go-to place for learning, socializing, and community connections.*

Steps:

- Develop a broad range of programs that cater to diverse age groups, interests, and cultures, such as family-friendly events, technology classes, health and wellness programs, and creative workshops. Monitor and maintain statistical data on programs and attendance.
- Achieve an average programming satisfaction rating of 4.5/5 on the annual survey.
- Strengthen ties and build partnerships with local residents, organizations, schools, municipal committees, and businesses to host events or provide services that benefit the community by offering programs that are developed in partnership with community members and organizations.
- Maintain existing partnerships with local schools, organizations, and businesses such as Cranbury School, Scouts, CHPS, local business sponsorship of Summer Enrichment, and more.
- Actively engage residents of affordable housing communities through targeted marketing efforts of library programs and services.
- Stay abreast of regional and national trends for adults and youth by following social media and major media publications.

## B. CREATE A WELCOMING, MULTI-USE SPACE

*DEFINING SUCCESS: Through the cultivation of a welcoming and flexible environment with desired resources, the library attracts more people from across the community for a wider range of purposes beyond reading and research.*

Steps:

- Develop and promote the library as a dynamic and flexible space that accommodates a variety of uses by purchasing appropriate furniture and upgraded tech. This could include ensuring our meeting rooms and quiet studies have useful and easy to use tech for remote work and that our workspaces are flexible and can meet the needs of both individuals and groups for various types of activities.
- Ensure the library is physically accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities by conducting an accessibility assessment.
- Create an attractive and welcoming space for the community so it serves as the community's living room: a "third space" where people choose to linger outside of home or work. Consider elements like maintaining the quality of the building on an ongoing basis, comfortable seating, seasonal decorating, a coffee station, quiet zones, play zones, and capital planning for interior paint and furniture refreshes.
- Ensure the Library's physical and digital spaces evolve and adapt to the needs and interests of the community by conducting an annual technology audit and soliciting patron feedback.
- Solicit community feedback of the physical space through an annual survey.

## C. BUILD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

*DEFINING SUCCESS: Through continual community involvement and participation, residents develop a stake in the library.*

Steps:

- Foster strong community relationships by actively seeking feedback from patrons and community groups through both informal conversation and an annual survey(s).
- Advocate for the library's role as a key community institution by raising awareness about its offerings, value, and impact through public relations campaigns, social media, and engagement with local organizations and leadership.
- Engage new residents with introductory welcome letters when new housing developments come online and host an annual new resident's reception.
- Communicate the value of the library to parents of students in Cranbury School through an annual Back to School letter and presentation to new parents at the kindergarten registration event.
- Maintain statistical data on library cardholders and program attendance, with specific attention to senior and affordable housing residents when possible.



## D. ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

*DEFINING SUCCESS: The library achieves longevity by maintaining relevance to the community over the long-term*

Steps:

- Complete the Sustainable Libraries Certification.
- Develop an annual environmental initiative at the library and promote to staff and members of the public.
- Manage physical and digital resources in a way that maximizes access, minimizes waste, and promotes fiscal and environmental responsibility (e.g., digital collections, energy-efficient building practices).
- Adapt physical and digital resources and facilities as needed to meet evolving community needs and interests.
- Ensure long-term financial health and sustainability through diverse funding sources, such as fundraising campaigns and community support.
- Maintain ties with Cranbury Public Library Foundation to achieve a 30-60% reserve ratio of the library's annual budget or a minimum target reserve of no less than \$160,000 to provide stable, predictable support for the library. Long term financial planning made in tandem with the Cranbury Public Library Foundation will strengthen the long-term financial health of the library, provide a buffer against fluctuations in the 1/3 of a mil appropriation, allow for long term planning, and future projects of significance.
- Develop annual funding targets in coordination with the Foundation to support the library's goals and long-term plans.
- Coordinate and advertise annual fundraising events and initiatives with the Cranbury Public Library Foundation.
- Work with the Cranbury Public Library Foundation to track donations and donors and identify households for future Foundation support.
- Partner with the Foundation on a 2027 five-year anniversary gala event.
- Create a shared messaging toolkit for staff, Foundation directors, and trustees to educate members of the public on the "why's" of donating to the Foundation to support the financial health of the library.

## EVALUATING

To evaluate the success of the strategic plan, The Board of Trustees, Director, and Staff will annually revisit the plan. In addition, the library will regularly solicit community feedback through surveys, an online suggestion box, discussions with community leaders and organizations, and ongoing patron-staff interactions. The library will also review statistics such as door counts, program attendance, and meeting room use.

When members of the public were asked in the focus group survey, what does success for the library look like in five years, the response was overwhelmingly “a busy, active library.” All of the library’s priorities, and associated activities, described in this strategic plan work toward the same definition of success. The Cranbury Public Library endeavors to be a well-used and well-loved hub of community life in Cranbury.



## APPENDIX

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND FOUNDATION

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#### CRANBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Cranbury Public Library Board of Trustees is responsible for adhering to NJ Library Laws pertaining to Municipal Public Libraries, establishing policy affecting the administration of the library, preparing an annual budget, exercising control of all library funds and assuring that these funds are duly expended and accounted for, hiring and appointing a library director, approving staff positions in the library, and approving compensation for all employees.

The Board consists of nine members. This includes the Mayor (or designated representative), the Superintendent of Schools (or designated representative), plus seven members who serve for a five-year renewable term as appointed by the Mayor, per NJ Library Law. The Library Board of Trustees meets on the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in a Meeting Room at the Cranbury Public Library.

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#### CRANBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATION

**Mission:** The Cranbury Public Library Foundation's mission is to advocate for the library and ensure the community receives the most complete public library services, products, and programs by serving as the philanthropic arm of the Cranbury Public Library.

**Vision:**

Will operate as an IRS nonprofit 501(c)3 to accept and acknowledge funds to further library support and/or specific projects.

Will pursue corporate and community donations, grants (as and if needed), and other funds to enhance library services, infrastructure, and overall community engagement.

Will be a strong advocate for the Cranbury Public Library, informing the community, raising awareness, and garnering public support for its programs and services.

Will work in close partnership with the Cranbury Public Library and the numerous educational, historical, cultural, and civic organizations in the community.

## PROFILE OF CRANBURY TOWNSHIP

Source: American Community Survey 2023

<http://censusreporter.org/profiles/06000US3402315550-cranbury-township-middlesex-county-nj/>

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### POPULATION

As of the 2023 American Community Survey United States Census, 4063 people reside in Cranbury. Per this survey, racial makeup of the township is 63% White, 21% Asian, 5% Black or African American, 0% Native American, 0% Pacific Islander, 5% from two or more races and 3% Hispanic or Latino of any race.

As planning begins for the Round 4 of Affordable Housing as required by the State of New Jersey, Cranbury Township anticipates a minimum population increase of 838 residents or 20% in the coming years. This section will be updated as those demographics become realized.

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### AGE

The ACS states that Cranbury's population constitutes 21% under the age of 18, 57% are between the ages of 18-64 years of age, and 22% are 65 years or older. The median age was 50.5 years. Males and females appear in equal percentage of the population.

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### INCOME

The Census Bureau's American Community Survey showed that the median household income was \$212,250. The per capita income for the township was \$95,929. About 4% of the population were below the poverty line. Most of the wage earners commute to work outside of the immediate area, often to New York or Philadelphia. However, 39% reported working from home at least some of the time.

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### UNIQUE HISTORY

In planning for our community needs, we consider that the area was settled starting in 1697. Cranbury's special characteristics were recognized when most of the village was entered on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places on August 9, 1979, and on the National Register of Historic Places on September 18, 1980. In recognition of Cranbury's historical and architectural significance the nomination stated that "Cranbury is the best-preserved 19th century village in Middlesex County...While there are many small mill towns in New Jersey, few are in such an undisturbed environment as that of Cranbury."

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## FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

The significance of Cranbury's historic district is tied to its agricultural setting. The village grew in order to serve the surrounding farm community and as a result of railway service which started. The sharp edges that remain between farmland and village are very important to the historical nature of our town. Cranbury is a participant in the New Jersey Farmland Preservation Program and to date has placed over 2,000 acres in permanently preserved farmland.

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## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

Cranbury works hard to be environmentally conscious. Cranbury Public Library is working alongside the township to uphold the silver level award in Sustainable New Jersey and is working towards the nationally recognized Sustainable Libraries Certification. We value the United Nations definition of the three pillars of sustainable: ecological, economic, and social.

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## EDUCATION

The educational attainment in Cranbury is high, according to the American Community Survey 2023. 98% of the adults have graduated from high school or attained a higher degree. In addition, 78.3% of these adults have attained a bachelor's degree or higher.

The Cranbury School is well known for top quality education, repeatedly earning the Blue Ribbon Award, most recently in 2016. The school educates students from kindergarten through eighth grade. The high school students go to Princeton High School. Princeton and Cranbury recently signed a new agreement in 2019. Some people move to Cranbury for the good schools for their children. As a result, the enrollment in Cranbury School should remain steady.

## LIBRARY PROFILE

Since the grand opening of the new free-standing library building in November 2022, the library has been re-introducing itself to the community after a three-year period of closures, temporary space, and restricted usage since the library's eviction from the shared school-library space in July 2020.

The library was housed in the school facility, serving as a shared school-public library since the late 1960s. In 2009, a case for a free-standing library was developed, and the Cranbury Public Library Foundation was formed in 2009. A capital campaign kicked off in 2011 and supplemented \$600K in surplus funds with over \$2.0 Million raised from over 800 local residents and businesses through a capital campaign that finished in 2017. In November 2017, a state-wide referendum passed to fund the NJ Library Construction Bond Act.

Cranbury was among the first towns to make an application for a matching grant in March 2020, being awarded a \$2.39 Million matching grant in November 2020. Construction commenced in 2021 and the new library building opened in November 2022.

The library is located on a 14-acre lot of land dedicated to open space, adjacent to the school and municipal building. The new library building consists of almost 12,000 square feet of combined library and community meeting space, including a flexible large meeting room that can be used after the library space closes. A flexible “creative space” is used for crafting, 3-D printing, and other flexible projects. The large meeting space has an adjacent kitchen staging area and can be separated into two smaller meeting spaces. The building’s proximity to the Cranbury School provides easy access for students to meet, spend time, and complete their homework in the dedicated teen room, study pods, and quiet study rooms. The library’s fireplace and comfortable seating encourage use of the library as the community’s living room. It provides a comfortable and attractive space for people to linger and engage with the library and their neighbors. The library also has a conference room, two quiet study rooms, and seating of four noise-blocking study pods to support the trend towards remote work and the academic focus of Cranbury School and Princeton High School. These spaces are utilized by “work-from-home” adults during the day, and students in the hours after school. The library’s interior also features a separate climate-controlled room to house the town’s history archives. The exterior space includes a bioretention basin, a library patio and expansive lawn space that give staff opportunities to put on outdoor programs ranging from Family Outdoor Movie Nights in summer to disc golf lessons to library carnivals.

The library continues to expand its programs and services and has seen a commensurate increase in use:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Programs</b>	<b>Increase From Prior Year</b>	<b>Total Attendance</b>	<b>Increase From Prior Year</b>
<b>2023</b>	349	--	3,510	--
<b>2024</b>	454	30%	5,852	67%
<b>2025</b>	560	23%	6,494	11%

The vast majority of Cranbury residents greatly value the public library and its services. In a town of about 4000, over 900 people attended the library Grand Opening on November 19, 2022. In 2025 about 46% of our population hold library cards, which is far above the STELLA consortium average of about 20%.

PHOTO CREDITS: Photos taken by Deanna Ferrante, September 2025.