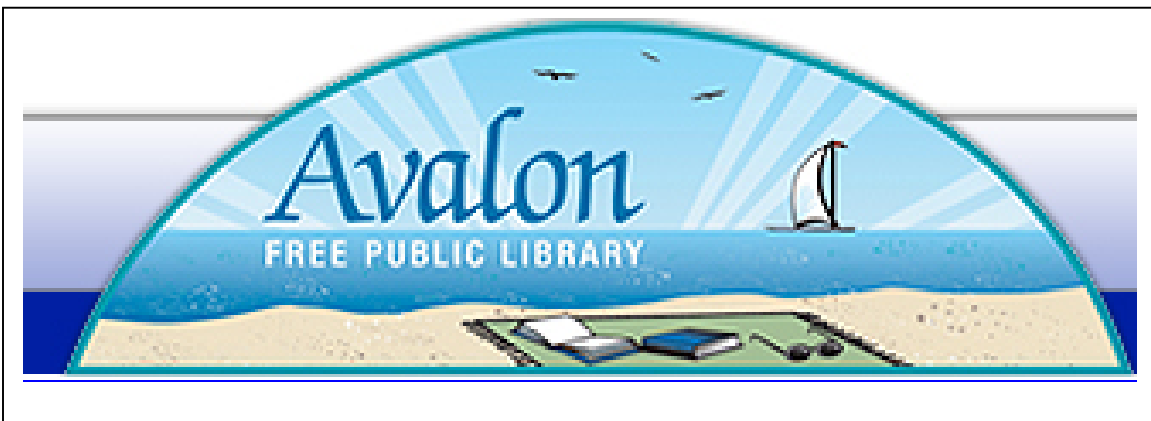


The Gateway to Avalon:

A Strategic Plan for the Avalon Free Public Library 2007-2009



**Prepared by
Avalon Free Public Library Planning Committee**

with assistance from
Library Development Solutions

September 2006

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Message to residents

The Gateway to Avalon, our first strategic plan is the result of many hours of work on the part of staff, board members and community participants who created a shared vision for our new library for the near future. We thank them for their thoughtfulness and commitment.

Our community has changed in recent years. Citizens require electronic technology, new media formats and other non-traditional library services, as well as traditional library services, both of which are a prime focus of this plan.

Our new library is a unique institution in Avalon. The Library serves as the place for residents to meet and share ideas, to be entertained, educated, and informed. It is the locus and focus of our entire community in all seasons of the year. The library is unique in that it was born out of an interlocal, collaborative agreement of the Borough, the Avalon Elementary School and the newly formed public library. On September 24, 2002 residents voted to approve this proposition that a new public library would be built in Avalon and would become a partner with the Borough and Avalon Elementary School in creating a new Avalon institution with local control. Mayor Pagliughi and the Borough council provided vision and leadership to lead to the creation of an independent Library Board of Trustees and the new Avalon Free Public Library.

This plan provides a roadmap for building upon and enhancing those resources so that we can fully realize the potential value of the Library to our community. We would like to invite all of the community to renew our commitment in bringing first class library services to Avalon.

Pat Coyle
President, Board of Trustees

Tony Lampazzi
Planning Committee Chairperson

Executive Summary

In 2006 the Avalon Free Public Library began a Strategic Planning process to develop long and near term strategies for delivering and improving library services to all residents. The Board established a Planning Committee made up of Board members and library staff to work with planning consultants in developing a plan.

The Planning Committee met in a number of sessions over the past nine months to evaluate the results of the community focus groups, town meeting and survey that provided suggestions for delivering and improving services, to review information about initial library use statistics and determine how the Library Board and staff will respond to community needs in the future.

This plan represents the culmination of the analysis and planning. The plan describes a long term vision to guide the development of library services in Avalon – ***The Avalon Free Public Library will serve as the informational and cultural Gateway to Avalon for all residents and visitors. The library will be a welcoming, warm and friendly gathering space for all.***

The Plan also describes the library's mission – ***The Avalon Free Public Library encourages a literate and informed community by providing free and open access to first class collections, services and programs that inspire, inform and enrich our community.***

The plan also details the goals and objectives and outlines the strategies to guide their implementation. The goals are to:

1. Expand library collections to meet current needs in all formats. This will be achieved by reviewing and expanding the current collection development policy, developing collections to meet specific community needs, increasing the collections of popular titles and materials and increasing the materials budget for needed resources.
2. Sustain and expand the library environment that allows a friendly, knowledgeable staff to provide responsive services. This includes assessing current hours and reviewing the existing space to create a more comfortable, easier to use destination for library users.
3. Expand services and programs for lifelong learning from toddlers to seniors. This will be achieved through the development of additional programs, services, cultural activities and staffing for children, teens, adults and seniors and through greater collaboration with other Avalon organizations.
4. Build a broad base of support and advocacy for the library by improving community awareness of the library, its programs and services, through marketing, advocacy and increased user activities.

The Avalon Free Public Library

The Avalon Free Public Library is nearing its first birthday. However it is really at least 5 years old. Since 2001, Avalon's mayor, council and involved citizens discussed the possibility of an Avalon Free Public Library. The community had been served by a branch and the resources of the Cape May County Library System. In 2002, Avalon residents voted to leave the county system and establish the Avalon Free Public Library. They also voted at that time to renovate the existing school space and include the library as part of that renovated space.

Achievements

The Avalon Free Public Library can already celebrate many accomplishments. Among the achievements that deserve attention are:

- Developed the interlocal agreement among the Borough, School Board and Library Board for building the library/school facility
- Established a new Board, bylaws and infrastructure of a democratic institution
- Planned and built the new library
- Hired and developed a professional and competent staff
- Increased local library card holders by 50%
- Provided 18 computers for public use
- Developed popular adult and children's programs
- Created a new library web site
- Established a wireless network.
- Created a well used opening day collection and ongoing collection
- Created greater attention and emphasis on customer service
- Increased popular community support for the library
- Appointed trustees who support the library and understand the importance of their role as library advocates

Library Use

Use of the library continues to grow every month since its opening. Despite the fear that the Internet, Google and Wikipedia would make libraries obsolete, the opposite has happened. People are coming to the library to use high speed connections that allow them to access information more quickly than at home; or as their only source of Internet access. And to the surprise of many, people still continue to read and use libraries to explore new avenues for learning.

The Avalon Free Public Library is a very busy library so far. The interesting and amazing statistics for 2006 to date are:¹

- From January through the end of August more than **62,263** items were borrowed, including
- **43,245** adult items

¹ See the Table I in the appendix for a breakdown of these numbers by type of format and age group

- **16,576** children's items
- **2,442** teen items

Gateway to Avalon: A Strategic Plan for the Avalon Free Public Library

The vision and mission set the stage for the library to achieve its goals during this planning cycle. The goals and objectives provide a roadmap to the strategies that the Library Board and staff will use to achieve the vision.

Vision

The Avalon Free Public Library will serve as the informational and cultural Gateway to Avalon for all residents and visitors. The library will be a welcoming, warm and friendly gathering space for all.

As the library works to fulfill this vision, library users will experience the following as they use the library, its facility and services.

The Library will:

- Inspire people to read, learn and grow
- Develop a first class offering of collections, services and programming
- Create a library experience that brings people together in a sense of community, discovery and celebration
- Offer an exciting, easy to use space that accommodates a variety of activities at the same time
- Provide a library with digital resources available 24/7 through the library and the web site
- Collaborate with other community organizations for the benefit of the community
- Make Avalon an even better place to live and visit

Mission

The Avalon Free Public Library encourages a literate and informed citizenry by providing free and open access to collections, services and programs that inspire, inform, educate and enrich the entire community.

The library is fortunate to have a community that understands the importance of the library in its overall cultural and intellectual health. It's now up to the Library Board and staff to create new opportunities to attract more people to the library and to increase use and support for all that the library has to offer.

Goals and Objectives to Help Achieve the Library's Vision

The Avalon Free Public Library Director, Board of Trustees and staff will focus on these key goals to help achieve the vision. The plan accomplishments will be reviewed annually.

Goal One: Patron Services

Avalon Free Public Library users will find easy access to 21st Century resources, services and tools that they need.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Provide an annual budget for library materials and technology. Develop separate technology development and replacement budgets
- 1.2 Increase the number of new and popular titles to reduce wait time and satisfy needs
- 1.3 Establish a popular CD collection for all ages
- 1.4 Expand program offerings-create a yearly program plan for all ages
- 1.5 Establish computer instruction and add required staff or volunteers to assist, including instruction on email, databases, MS Word and Internet use
- 1.6 Locate all resources on the library website to accommodate use from home and improve the website to be a 24/7 interactive branch
- 1.7 Provide tech services and web development and hosting for other institutions in Avalon
- 1.8 Add additional wireless notebooks for inside borrowing

Goal Two: Library Space, Comfort and Convenience

Avalon residents and all library users will be drawn to the Avalon Free Public Library as a welcoming destination of knowledgeable, innovative and traditional library services.

Objectives:

- 2.1 Review the configuration of library space to meet needs of users. Use trends and statistics to determine needs for technology, materials, reference, furniture and space
 - Reconfigure meeting room space to meet needs based on first year experiences
 - Review library space requirements
 - Review school/library space for refinements and improvements
 - Provide outdoor furniture for relaxed outdoor use on entrance area
 - Consider vending or vendor resources for coffee and snacks
 - Change end cap uses to accommodate displays and books

- 2.2 Review and change key aspects of the library to improve access and use:
- Plan for additional hours on weekends and holidays, through a preference survey
 - Provide access to printers from all computers
 - Review the need for a self checkout computer
 - Review all access issues such as the need for automatic doors and ease of use of all space for older and/or disabled residents
 - Change the drive through drop box to face the drivers side
 - Develop a staff development plan to keep the staff engaged and learning as they provide service
 - Create more space for book and other displays
 - Examine and enhance the exterior of the library to be more welcoming and warmer, such as banners, signage, menu board of events

Goal Three: Collaboration and Community Relations

Develop strategic and principled partnerships with Avalon community organizations which will benefit the library, the organization and the community. Develop the principles necessary for consideration of collaboration proposals.

Objectives:

- 3.1 The strategic planning committee will analyze methods of collaboration to provide homebound delivery of materials, web hosting and assistance for Avalon institutions and to determine complementary programs and potential for shared space and resources
- 3.2 The Avalon Free Public Library has a cultural and learning mandate. A key element of the library's identity is collaboration to advance the cultural mission of the library. Any proposal for collaboration has to clearly enhance our ability to provide those values to the community. We will identify likely collaborators and reach out to them. These may include such institutions as the Avalon Historical Museum, the Borough of Avalon, Avalon Elementary School and others
- 3.3 Work with the Borough to identify historical data throughout the community to increase access for residents and visitors and assist in cataloging and promoting its use

Goal Four: Governance, Library Management and Marketing

Continue to develop a responsive and responsible governance structure and measurement tools and insure sustainable funding and advocacy to continue improvements and respond to community needs:

Objectives:

- 4.1 Continue to develop strong relationship between the Director and the Board
- 4.2 Continue to develop and manage the relationship among the interlocal agreement partners
- 4.3 Operate monthly Board meetings with transparency and concern for all Avalon resident's concerns
- 4.4 Develop a Board succession planning process to ensure ease of change in officers
- 4.5 Use an annual online survey to measure user satisfaction with services and collections
- 4.6 Conduct a twice yearly statistical review of circulation, visits, programs and all other significant measures
- 4.7 Review trend analysis of material circulation including hold-to-order ratios
- 4.8 Review the interlocal agreement annually to adjust for changes in the uses of resources and space
- 4.9 Purchase and use software such as *Contribute* to permit staff involvement with content development on the web site
- 4.10 Create new server space to allow for expansion, especially to accommodate new hosting responsibilities, expand space into school or lease space
- 4.11 Develop improvements to Ill catalog through customization with an outsourced programmer
- 4.12 Maintain a furniture replacement plan and sufficient surplus in the budget to address needs as they arise due to damage, weather, use, expansion
- 4.13 Develop a professional identity, marketing and awareness campaign – allocate budget and staffing:
 - Hire a graphic designer to design icons, colors and images for the library
 - Redesign and energize the web site by contracting a professional web designer
 - Use Constant Contact or similar software to develop an email newsletter for residents and visitors to keep them informed of the library news and events
 - Develop a print newsletter to be mailed to every household
 - Increase card registration over the next 3 years
 - Create a Friends of the Library organization to develop advocacy and support
 - Market the library's identity in everything the library does

Creating the Plan

The Planning Committee considered many factors in developing a plan for the Avalon Free Public Library. Demographic trends and projections, emerging trends affecting the community's overall development, the outcomes from the community focus groups, and input from the staff all assisted the Planning

Committee. With less than a year of statistical data, the Planning Committee made assumptions about the future of the library.

Planning Assumptions

A number of key assumptions helped lay the groundwork for this plan. Planners agreed that:

- The year round population of Avalon Borough will not continue to grow and will probably stay flat. There is still a need to “catch up” with the expectations of newer residents for facilities and services that meet modern needs.
- The budget will grow at a steady rate and we will always budget responsibly.
- There will be fewer school age children in the future of Avalon and more 50+ year round residents.
- We need to make decisions about how to evaluate the interlocal agreement plus the use of space by the partners and reallocate space when needed.
- The population will continue to reflect a change in the range of ages with fewer young families with children and increasing numbers of older adults.
- The housing market will stay strong with most residents living in single family dwellings and weekend/seasonal residents remaining steady.
- The need to collaborate will continue as the community demands greater coordination between its local institutions.
- The library is identified as Avalon’s front porch and gateway to information for residents and visitors.

Avalon Demographics

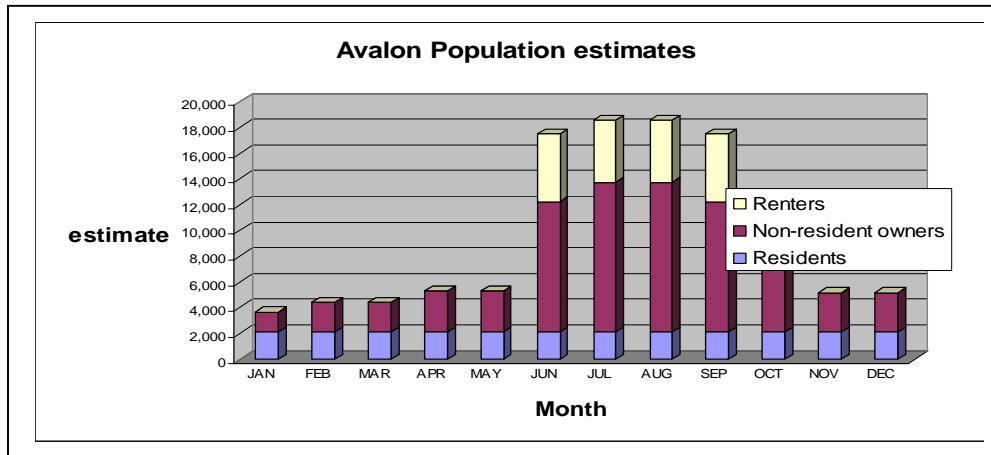
Avalon’s year round population is 2,143.² The town’s full time population is expected to remain flat or slightly decrease. However, renovated homes are always larger than the home they replaced and accommodate more people. The main demographic issue facing the library is the dynamic changes in volume and velocity of activity by season and the library’s ability to change with the seasons and changing populations. The chart and table below describe the changes in population and residents by month.³

- According to the 2000 US Census, 17% of the town’s population is under the age of 24 while 67% is over 45 years old, compared with 36% in New Jersey.
- The average age of an Avalon resident is 51.3 years, considerably older than the statewide median age of 37.2 years.
- Avalon residents are well educated with 38% of those over the age of 25 with a bachelor’s or graduate degree, compared to 30 statewide%.

² 2000 US Census

³ Analysis reinforced by the recent Avalon Home and Land Owners Association Survey-2006

- Also according to the 2000 census, Avalon residents are relatively affluent with a median household income of \$59,196 well above the statewide median of \$55,146.



Emerging Trends

The Planning Committee and staff identified community, state and national trends that need to be considered in planning for future library services. A number of major trends are driving the design and delivery of library services:

- **People are rediscovering reading but are less patient about waiting for library material.** They want to come to the library with a reasonable expectation that there is a good supply of recently published material available for them to borrow. Early literacy and pre-literacy programs in nursery schools and child care centers are helping children get ready to learn. Reading and family literacy is emphasized in schools as educators understand more about the connection between reading and educational success. Busy adults are finding that reading can be an enjoyable, stress-relieving pastime and a way to share experiences with others in their communities.
- **The physical environment of community spaces has become important for library customers.** The popularity of chain bookstores and coffee houses, where customers can relax, read, attend a program or browse for hours indicates a need for pleasant community gathering spaces. People expect the library to adapt to the need for the varied ways that people want to use the library. The library is expected to have differentiated spaces for quiet study and reading, space for computer use, space for collections of print and non-print materials and space to accommodate informal community gatherings, conversations, discussions and programming.
- **The use of technology has changed the way that many people seek and use information at home, at work, at school and at the**

library. The expectation that the library serve as the community's navigator for electronic as well as print information has expanded the library's traditional role. The library's wireless network, online catalog, reference databases and its website are a response to the community's growing need for electronic guidance and resources. People also expect an increased level of instruction in how to use these resources.

Community Focus Group Discussions⁴

Library Development Solutions conducted a series of focus group discussions in which they spoke with over 80 people, including library staff, about their ideas for the future of the library. The discussions were helpful in discovering initial comments and suggestions from residents about their first experiences with using the library.

Focus group participants generated the following ideas:

- Initial reactions to the library are very positive. Participants report finding the titles that they want, receiving excellent service from staff and are pleased with the comfortable environment in the library.
- The library is viewed as the potential social, cultural, and technological center of community activity for residents and visitors, in other words, as Avalon's front porch.
- Participants highly value the library and expect additional services, programs and collections to help enhance the local quality of life.
- People want convenient access to library resources and programs to meet their needs. Additional hours are also requested.
- Many residents are unaware of all that the library offers. The library needs to create continual communication and marketing to all residents.
- The library is viewed as a destination of choice to use an Internet computer, and to receive instruction in computer use. The library is expected to be current with computer technology and instruction.
- Residents expect to find multiple copies of new bestsellers and library shelves stocked with recent fiction and non-fiction titles.

⁴ See *Voices of Avalon, A Summary of Comments from Avalon Residents about the Avalon Free Public Library* – June 2006

- Residents also expect to see recent DVDs and new CDs and audio books.

The Planning Process

Library trustees, members of the planning committee, library staff and many Avalon residents contributed to this planning process and the development of the Avalon Free Public Library Strategic Plan 2007-2009. They were assisted by Alan and Leslie Burger of Library Development Solutions, a Princeton, New Jersey-based library consulting firm.

In order to begin this planning effort, library planners determined that a successful plan must reflect the needs and interests of the community served by the library. Through the use of focus groups, a town meeting and a survey the library involved many individuals in the community and elicited ideas and suggestions to make the new library an integral part of their daily lives. Library planners listened carefully to the community, identified the most frequently mentioned suggestions and worked together to devise a plan to improve library service. Overall 80 residents and library staff were involved in the development of this plan.

The planning process included:

Data Analysis

Library staff gathered a variety of data that was analyzed and shared with the Planning Committee to obtain insights about initial trends relating to library use, programs and services. There is less than one year of statistics available, though planners did look at earlier data from the county branch. Demographic trends were considered using data from the 2000 U.S. Census.⁵

Focus Groups

Over 80 library staff, trustees and community residents met in a series of focus group sessions and a town meeting. During the sessions participants discussed their initial comments and experiences with the new library and shared what they liked best, as well as identified areas in the library needing improvement.

Staff Interviews and Meetings

The consultant met with library staff in one-on-one interview sessions to learn more about the current service program, staffing issues and their ideas for the future of the library.

Meetings with the Planning Committee

⁵ Local data and analysis was assisted with information by Jim Thatcher

A planning committee comprised of staff members and trustees met to review the results of the focus groups and town meeting, develop a vision and mission to guide the library, determine strategic direction, review staff recommendations for implementing the plan, and determine future library directions.

The Planning Committee:

- Identified social, technological, educational, demographic and other trends likely to have an impact on the delivery of library service and assessed the library's ability to accommodate those trends.
- Assessed the library's strengths and capacity to deliver first class service including the capabilities of the current library/school space.⁶
- Developed a vision to guide the library's future and created a mission statement that incorporates the library's primary purpose and values associated with delivering library service to the community.
- Considered strategic roles and service responses for the library to shape the way that library service will be delivered.
- Discussed and agreed upon priorities, goals, and objectives to guide the library's development for the next three years.

⁶ See this SWOT analysis in the appendix – Table II

Appendix

Table I

| Media | Number of Circulations | Number of items |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Adult DVDs | 19,445 | 1,761 |
| Adult videocassettes | 767 | 149 |
| Juvenile DVDs | 4,535 | 541 |
| Adult CDs | 3,102 | 1,336 |
| Juvenile CDs | 200 | 76 |

| Books & audiobooks | Number of Circulation | Number of items |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Adult tape audiobooks | 608 | 291 |
| Adult CD audiobooks | 1,143 | 511 |
| Adult fiction | 7,882 | 6,479 |
| Adult Large Print | 588 | 391 |
| Adult non-fiction | 6,034 | 11,554 |
| Magazines | 1,405 | 167 |
| | | |
| Children's fiction | 5,908 | |
| Children's non-fiction | 2,577 | |
| Teen fiction | 576 | |
| Teen non fiction | 79 | |

| Cardholders | Through 7/6/06 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Total cardholders | 4,395 |
| Avalon cardholders | 2,854 |
| • Non resident homeowners | 2,010 |
| • Year round residents | 895 |
| Stone Harbor Residents | 114 |
| Cape May Courthouse residents | 56 |
| Lower Township residents | 48 |
| Cape May County residents | 250 |
| Sea Isle City residents | 29 |
| Wildwood residents | 6 |
| Juvenile cardholders | 489 |
| Adult cardholders | 3,603 |
| Avalon student cardholders | 100 |
| Borough employees | 31 |
| Library employees | 19 |
| Seasonal visitors | 160 |
| Avalon school faculty | 24 |

| Programs Jan-June | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Total Programs | 166 |
| Adult videocassettes | 3,945 |
| | |
| Reference Questions | 70 per week |
| | |

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

The Planning Committee conducted a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis to identify the environmental factors that impact on the planning process and the library's future. This analysis was then used to assist in developing the plan.

Table II

Strengths

- The way staff treats people-stark contrast to old branch
- Staff will order any book you request and they don't have
- The location is convenient
- The library facility is comfortable with a pleasant ambience and environment
- The computer classes are good
- The children's programs
- Excellent community support so far, even from original skeptics
- Internet connection is fast and good quality
- The seating/reading area near the periodicals and the large windows is a great space
- Commitment of the new Board of Trustees

Weaknesses (Challenges)

- Not enough hours
- Still not enough computers when busy
- Need more space when busy – expand to other areas
- The catalog is not user friendly, needs custom work
- The web page is poor and needs custom professional work to become informative and interactive
- School book collection very weak – collaboration with school to remove obsolete books and refill with new books
- Difficulty staffing library due to seasonal peaks and valleys and commuting issues
- Continual improvement of the collection
- The ACCC classes for pay were not understood and not successful
- Follow up on punch list for both library and school has been difficult

Opportunities

- Finish punch lists and follow up on unfinished construction and furnishings issues
- Make the library Avalon's front porch
- Innovate and be flexible in the way we do things
- New and expanded services and programs for adults-to socialize and learn together-may be the key to the future of the library
- Continue offering instruction in

Threats

- Lack of use by young people
- Complacency with accomplishments-not looking to create a first class library-need to make more than marginal improvements after first few years
- Review use of school computer center, group room, art room and music room and how the library should use these school resources
- Board policies and governance expertise needs further development
- Need for continued positive and

- computer, catalog, Internet use
- Future role in partnerships with other Avalon public non-profit institutions
- Continue to develop a true synergy with between the school and library with programs and collections
- Alternative delivery of services and materials-electronic, off site, kiosks, wireless, outside seating, audio downloads, homebound or even all delivery
- Development of listening and viewing areas-soundcards, headphones, CD and DVD collection
- The library lobby needs to have an Avalon theme

forward looking community relations