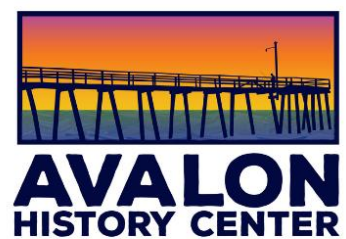Check it Out!
at the AVALON FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

AVALON FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
STRATEGIC PLAN
2021–2023
APRIL 2021

AVALON
FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

AVALON
HISTORY CENTER

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PLAN IN A GLANCE

MISSION

Inform, inspire, and enrich the Avalon community near and far.

VISION

A library card in every Avalon household.

VALUES & CULTURE

Accessibility
Provide an inclusive space in the community for connection, collaboration, learning, and relaxation.

Accountability
Listen to the community and work to improve whenever possible.

Innovation
Foster an environment of creativity and foresight to deliver experiences and resources that surprise and enrich our members.

Service
Exceed expectations to deliver responsive service.

Teamwork
Foster a culture of collegiality and communication.

Transparency
Be trustworthy stewards of community resources.

GOALS

- ENGAGE – Connect with the entire Avalon community, near and far.
- ENHANCE – Develop spaces and resources that provide exceptional onsite and digital experiences.
- ENVISION – Use foresight to create plans that are responsive to community needs.

MEASURES

- Even ratio of property owners to satisfied patrons
- Positive feedback and community satisfaction via surveying and data collection
- Borrowing, program attendance, use, and community engagement increased/maintained
- Staff retention and positive morale
- Successful facility improvements

1 CORE VALUES & MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

1.1 MISSION STATEMENT

Inform, inspire, and enrich the Avalon community near and far.

1.2 VISION STATEMENT

A library card in every Avalon household.

1.3 CORE VALUES AND CULTURE

ACCESSIBILITY
Avalon Free Public Library strives to cultivate a sense of welcoming such that all community members look to us as a space in the community that fosters an environment of diversity, equity, and inclusion to support information access and enrichment. We are focused on providing an inclusive space in the community for connection, collaboration, learning, and relaxation.

ACCOUNTABILITY
Avalon Free Public Library respects our responsibility to the community. We believe in holding each other accountable as a means to support transparency, solve problems, and achieve the best results possible. We are committed to listening to the community and working to improve whenever possible.

INNOVATION
Innovation is an essential part of the Avalon Free Public Library's strategy. We believe it can support every area of service. We foster an environment of creativity and foresight to deliver experiences and resources that surprise and enrich our members.

SERVICE
Among the Avalon Free Public Library's highest priorities is patron satisfaction. Staff endeavor to provide a positive experience to every community member that comes through the door. Great customer service is a consistent focus. We want to exceed expectations to deliver responsive service.

TEAMWORK
Avalon Free Public Library is only as strong as the team that drives our mission. We value our colleagues and the experience and talents they contribute. We foster a culture of collegiality and communication.

TRANSPARENCY
Avalon Free Public Library belongs to the community. In response, staff endeavor to deliver resources that directly meet the needs of our members. We acknowledge this responsibility and aim to be trustworthy stewards of community resources at all times.

2 SUMMARY

In winter 2020 the Avalon Free Public Library began planning for a new three-year strategic plan, anticipated for 2021-2023. The Planning Committee, made up of Trustees J. Thatcher, L. Schwartz, K. Nestor, and Library administration E. Brown and S. Nagle, convened to outline plans for data gathering and establish a time frame for the process. Shortly after these plans were set, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic became clear and services were quickly shifted to remote. Planning priorities changed overnight and the immediate goal was learning how to guide the organization through this unprecedented time. However, the Library still managed to find opportunities to gather data from the community, staff, and stakeholders as the year unfolded. Shifted staff schedules in spring 2020 allowed for the planned staff SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis to occur remotely. The annual planning survey was outlined in summer 2020 and community focus groups were planned in the fall. These efforts grounded Library staff at a time when very little was certain. Never has it felt more urgent to have a plan in place for the organization's future.

The Library's approach to strategic planning has evolved in the past three years. While the 2018-2020 plan served the organization well, staff also learned a great deal as they worked to be accountable to the plan. The experiences shared by the Staff Strategic Committee and the unique challenges of serving the community during COVID-19 illustrated the value of an agile plan for the future.

3 PLANNING PROCESS

A Planning Committee, comprised of members of the Board of Trustees, Director, and Assistant Director carried out a planning process from fall 2019 – January 2021. Members of the Library staff, community stakeholders, and Library patrons were also involved in the process.

3.1 FALL 2019/WINTER 2020
In fall 2019, the Planning Committee convened to identify a process for renewed strategic planning. This meeting resulted in the following goals for the plan:
- Revise the Vision Statement.
- Gather data from staff, patrons, and community stakeholders.
    - Work with staff to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
    - Use our increasingly successful mail marketing tools to connect with a wider range of property owners for the annual survey.
    - Hold focus groups to solicit feedback from a range of community groups.
- Use data gathered to formulate new strategic initiatives.

3.2 SPRING 2020
Data-gathering began in April 2020. The Director coordinated a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis session for staff while employees were working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. (See Appendix B.)

3.3 SUMMER 2020
During Summer 2020, the Director began research options to produce a stronger community response for the annual planning survey. An outline of the survey was drafted and distribution was planned for fall 2020.

3.4 FALL 2020/JANUARY 2021
Much of the community data gathering culminated in fall 2020. The Planning Survey (see Appendix A) was sent via eNewsletter and by mail to all Avalon property owners at their primary tax address. Focus Groups (see Appendix C) were coordinated by Library administration via video conferencing.

4 COMMUNITY AND LIBRARY OVERVIEW

4.1 COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

The Borough of Avalon is a coastal resort community in Cape May County, NJ. As with other seasonal resorts, the Library works to serve both the year-round and seasonal communities that make up the town. Adults and families residing in Avalon year-round enjoy the pleasures of a small, close-knit, civic-minded community. Children attend the local public school, residents make use of restaurants, shops, and recreational facilities and participate in a variety of civic and social organizations throughout the year. Those who consider Avalon to be a seasonal destination tend to spend the majority of their time on the island during the summer months and occasionally on weekends and holidays throughout the year. Typically, these seasonal residents come to Avalon during their leisure time seeking a variety of recreational and cultural opportunities. They take advantage of Avalon's beaches, bays, and ocean, as well as shopping, restaurants, and recreational facilities, including the Library.

4.1.1 Avalon By the Numbers*
The majority of the data below reflects the year-round residents of Avalon and is noted as YR.

1,406	Year-round (YR) population
>15,000	Summer population (Borough of Avalon)
66	Median age of YR residents
73%	Percentage of YR residents 55 or older
52%	Percent of female YR population
12%	Veterans
5,392	Housing Units
92%	Single family units
92%	Homeowner units
7%	Rental units
726	YR households
499	YR family units
90%	YR Households without dependent children
28%	YR one person households
1.7	Vehicles per household
93%	YR Household with a computer
81%	YR Household with a smartphone
90%	YR Households with internet access
46%	YR residents work in management, business, sciences, or arts occupations
61%	Possess at least a bachelor's degree
28%	Possess a post graduate degree
2%	YR Unemployment rate

*Unless otherwise noted, US Census data (2015-2019)

The trend toward non-resident home ownership intensified in the second half of the last decade, increasing the Library's challenge of understanding and serving multiple patron groups. At the beginning of 2021, 87% of patrons did not permanently live in Avalon. 26% were county residents, while 61% lived outside of Cape May County in other areas of New Jersey, 2021: 32 other states, and 1 foreign country (UK). New Jersey residents comprise the largest patron population 2021 (2486, or 49% of Library patrons). Outside of New Jersey, the largest group of Library patrons come from Pennsylvania 2021 (2221, or 44% of Library patrons). Non-resident homeowners in 2020 were responsible for 45% of physical circulation. Non-resident homeowners in 2019 were responsible for 52% of physical circulation.
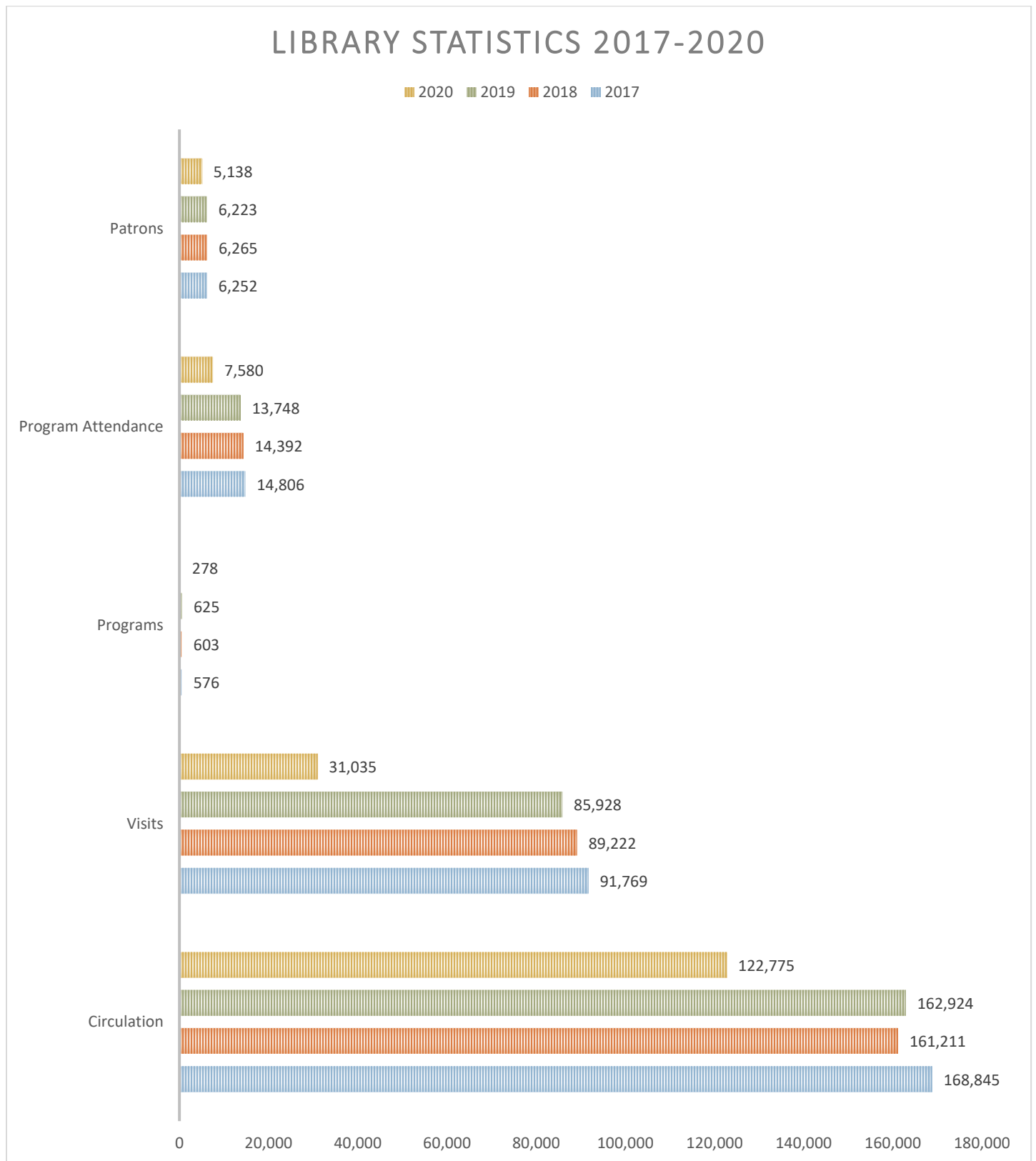
4.2   LIBRARY OVERVIEW

The Avalon Free Public Library serves as a hub for both year-round and seasonal communities. A significant majority of year-round residents have active library cards and use them often. Many seasonal residents also have cards and use them throughout the year, taking advantage of both traditional library services as well as remote services such as Library by Mail, online resources, and virtual programming. Over 1,300 property owners, Avalon residents and community members participated in the 2020 Planning Survey. 94% of respondents reported that they use library services either in person, online, or both. 74% of respondents are property owners who do not reside in Avalon year-round and 14% are year-round residents. The Library's ability to serve this range of patrons relies on robust digital and remote services.

When following a typical schedule, the Library is open seven days per week year-round, with hours until 8pm four-five days per week. The facility includes the >9,000 square foot multiuse space that serves as the primary library area as well as access to multiple onsite event spaces due to an agreement with the Avalon Elementary School. These spaces include a multipurpose room that accommodates 125 patrons in 1,798 square feet and a combined gymnasium/theater space that seats 750 patrons in 7,000 square feet. The Library celebrated fifteen years of service in 2020 and stakeholders and patrons often share they never could have imagined all that the Library would provide for the community. While the facility has served patrons well over the past decade and a half, it becomes more apparent every year that improvements are needed to mirror that level of service in the coming fifteen years.

Materials, programming, and educational and cultural opportunities are offered throughout the year. Marketing efforts in 2019 and 2020 expanded the use of print mail resources to better reach property owners not in Avalon full-time. In addition, marketing was focused on increasing awareness about the Library's digital resources, as well as communicating with patrons via print and digital marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3   LIBRARY USE 2017-2020

LIBRARY STATISTICS 2017-2020

Legend: 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017

Patrons
- 2020: 5,138
- 2019: 6,223
- 2018: 6,265
- 2017: 6,252

Program Attendance
- 2020: 7,580
- 2019: 13,748
- 2018: 14,392
- 2017: 14,806

Programs
- 2020: 278
- 2019: 625
- 2018: 603
- 2017: 576

Visits
- 2020: 31,035
- 2019: 85,928
- 2018: 89,222
- 2017: 91,769

Circulation
- 2020: 122,775
- 2019: 162,924
- 2018: 161,211
- 2017: 168,845

4.3.1 Circulation

2016

Adult Books 21%
Digital 34%
Juvenile Books 11%
Audio Books 3%
Periodical 2%
Music CDs 2%
Video 27%

The figures here provide an overview of circulation by format in 2016, 2018, and 2020. The most significant shift continues to be se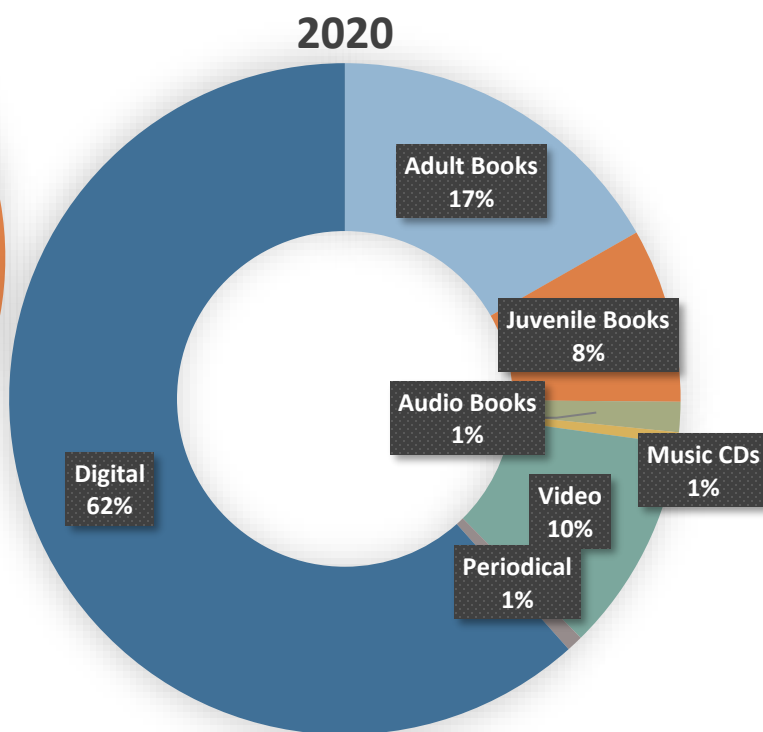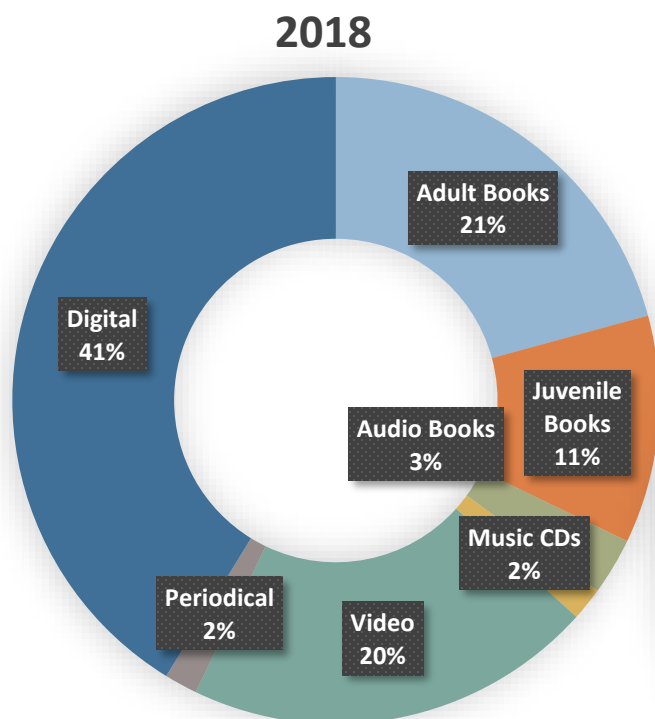en in the decline of physical video and music circulation. In 2020, during the months that the Library was open, this decline was consistently offset by the dramatic increase of digital circulation, especially eBooks and eAudio. As projected in 2017, use of these resources continues to grow - from 13% in 2014 to 43% in 2019. Only time will tell if the increases due to resource shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic will be maintained as services evolve in the future.

While physical book circulation for adults and children saw a decline in 2020, overall, this area of borrowing has been generally maintained since 2017. 2019 and early 2020 saw dramatic growth for non-traditional collections such as tech loans, discovery kits, and museum passes. Borrowing in these areas was disrupted during 2020, but is expected to grow again as access to these resources resumes.

2018

Adult Books 21%
Digital 41%
Juvenile Books 11%
Audio Books 3%
Music CDs 2%
Periodical 2%
Video 20%

2020

Adult Books 17%
Juvenile Books 8%
Audio Books 1%
Music CDs 1%
Digital 62%
Video 10%
Periodical 1%

8

4.3.2 Programs

Programming is one of the main ways the Library serves the community. Offering a wide range of educational and recreational programs throughout the year is a key part of how the Library supports its goal of serving as a cultural center and community hub in Avalon. Efforts over the past five years to better engage the community about their interests, streamline program administration, and ensure adequate staffing in the department have helped the Library achieve this goal. In late 2019, Library staff began testing hybrid in person/virtual models for programs, to find ways to better serve patrons not in Avalon full time. Only a few months later, COVID-19 would immediately put this experience to use, shifting all programming to a virtual model. As in person programs and events resume, the Library will use this experience to continue offering programs that serve both in person and remote attendees.

PROGRAMS / ATTENDEES 2017-2020
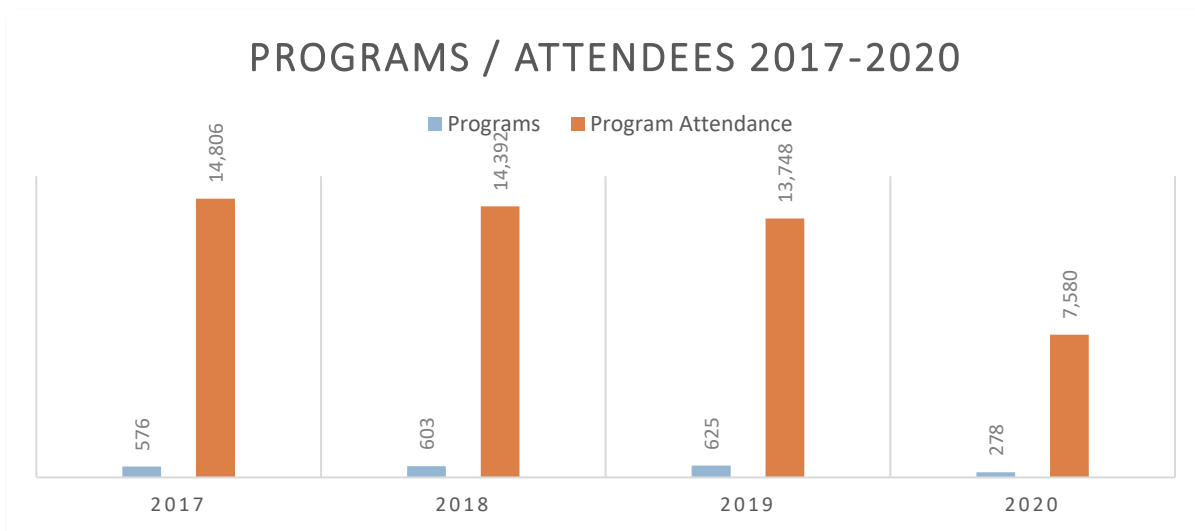
4.3.3 Library Use

Annual evaluation of the Library door count has shown how this metric relates so directly to many other statistics, including circulation, programming, and technology use. Providing services during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 further expanded the definition of use, which is why the table below includes website visits and Wi-Fi use.

USE IN PERSON & ONLINE 2017-2020

9
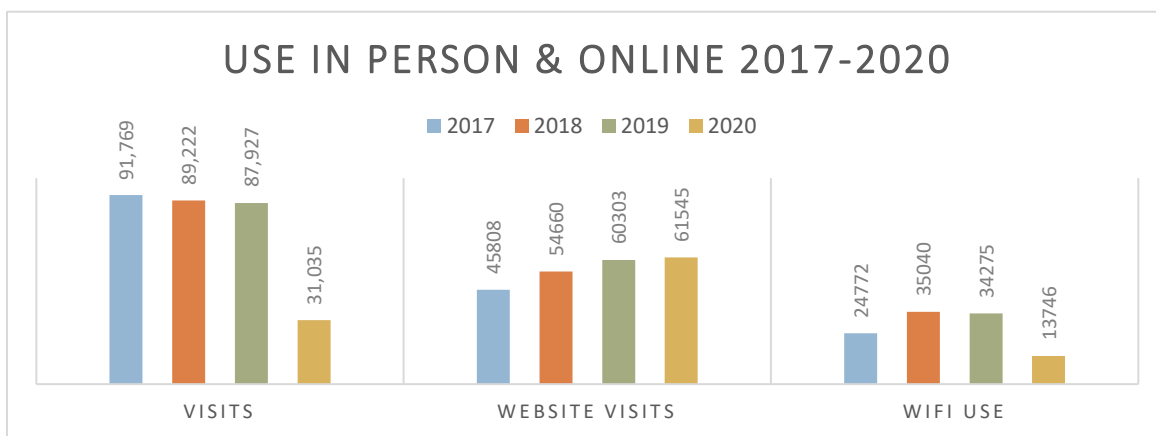
4.3.4 Patrons

Between 2016 and 2017, the Library changed the metric for active patrons to provide a rolling pattern. The steady levels between 2017 and 2019 show that the patron base was maintained with inactive patrons offset by new members. Patron statistics are valuable in that they provide an overview of reach in the community. The Library is fortunate to have a strong base of both resident and nonresident Library patrons. A year-end report in 2019 provided the following details:

- 6,223 patrons
  - 3,656 nonresident homeowner patrons
  - 772 resident homeowner patrons

The majority of new patrons gained in 2020 signed up for their cards remotely while additional patrons renewed in person or via email or phone. However, these new and maintained accounts were not on par with typical annual patron gains and 2020 ended with a lower total patron base than previous years. Even so, when considering these figures against the demographic data shared in the community overview above, it remains clear that Avalon property owners largely value and use their public library regardless of their primary home's location. Connecting with the patrons missed in 2020 and maintaining the previous level of use remains a goal and helps drive the planning process.

5 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Engage – Connect with the entire Avalon community, near and far.
A library isn't a library without its patrons. Staff and Trustees are committed to serving the whole community, whether a patron is across the street or across the country. Refining current practices and finding new ways to connect will serve this effort.

- Reach community members beyond our patron base and connect with current users in new ways.
- Create opportunities for community members of diverse interests, ages, and heritages to connect.
- Collaborate with community partners.
- Identify opportunities for new marketing approaches.
- Increase collections and programming for underserved demographics.
- Identify new initiatives to boost year-round and seasonal visitation.

Enhance – Develop spaces and resources that provide exceptional onsite and digital experiences.
As the Avalon Community evolves so must its resources. Enhancements to facilities and services will support efforts to prepare the Library and History Center as they move into the future.

- Rework and renovate facilities with an eye on the future.
- Ensure technology resources provide users with an excellent experience.
- Prioritize year-round lifelong learning and cultural enrichment.
- Evaluate and reimagine collections to meet current and future community needs.
- Curate digital resources to ensure they are innovative and relevant.
- Ensure fewer barriers in accessing online resources.

Envision – Use foresight to create plans that are responsive to community needs.
The Library strives to be responsive by both providing what its users are asking for, and by anticipating resources and services they will find useful. Various approaches are taken to structure organizational planning, including committees, information gathering, and reporting tools. Making planning a priority serves both patrons and staff.

- Reimagine framework for data gathering and analytics.
- Evaluate the organizational chart with a focus on long-term planning.
- Refine strategic status review process. Develop improved reporting.
- Expand framework for evaluating resources and programs.
- Evaluate nontraditional resources for identifying new innovations.

6   MEASURES OF SUCCESS

One of the most essential parts of the plan concerns our ability to gauge our progress. Below are a set of measures we will use to ensure we are meeting our objectives. They will be reviewed regularly with the Board of Trustees.

1) **Even ratio of property owners to satisfied patrons**
   Ensuring the community's property owners possess and use their Library cards has always been a tenet of the Library. An even ratio of property owners to card holders shows that those who fund the Library are making use of its collections and resources.

2) **Borrowing, program attendance, use, and community engagement increased/maintained**
   By tracking use against the current rate of active card holders, Library staff can be sure services and resources are aligned with community interest, and when needed, make adjustments.

3) **Positive feedback and community satisfaction via surveying and data collection**
   Periodic surveying and other means of data gathering provide timely feedback as the library evaluates existing initiatives and takes on new projects and ideas. The Library values evaluation and the need to use data to drive or redirect efforts as needed.

4) **Staff retention and positive morale**
   The Library is only as strong as its staff. Ensuring that they can work in an environment of cooperation and collaboration is key to the Library's success. By fostering a setting that supports its employees, along with their talents and innovation, we are working to ensure the Library is a creative and dynamic place for staff and patrons alike.

5) **Successful facility improvements**
   The Library anticipates a period of focus on its physical spaces. Due to the investment of resources and time for these projects, it is key that all efforts are supported by extensive planning and focus on long-term community needs.

7 APPENDIX

7.1 APPENDIX A. 2020 PLANNING SURVEY SUMMARY

1,323 Responses (601 online, 722 via mail)

1.) Do you use the Avalon Library (either in person or online)?
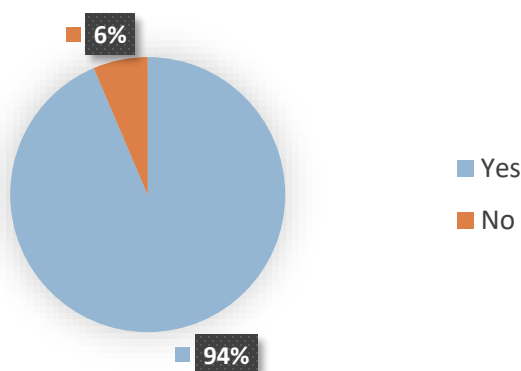
1,245 respondents use the Library in person or online. 88 do not. Approximately 75 of the nonuser responses were returned via mail.

2.) Are any of the following reasons why you do not use the Avalon Library in person or online? Please choose all that apply.
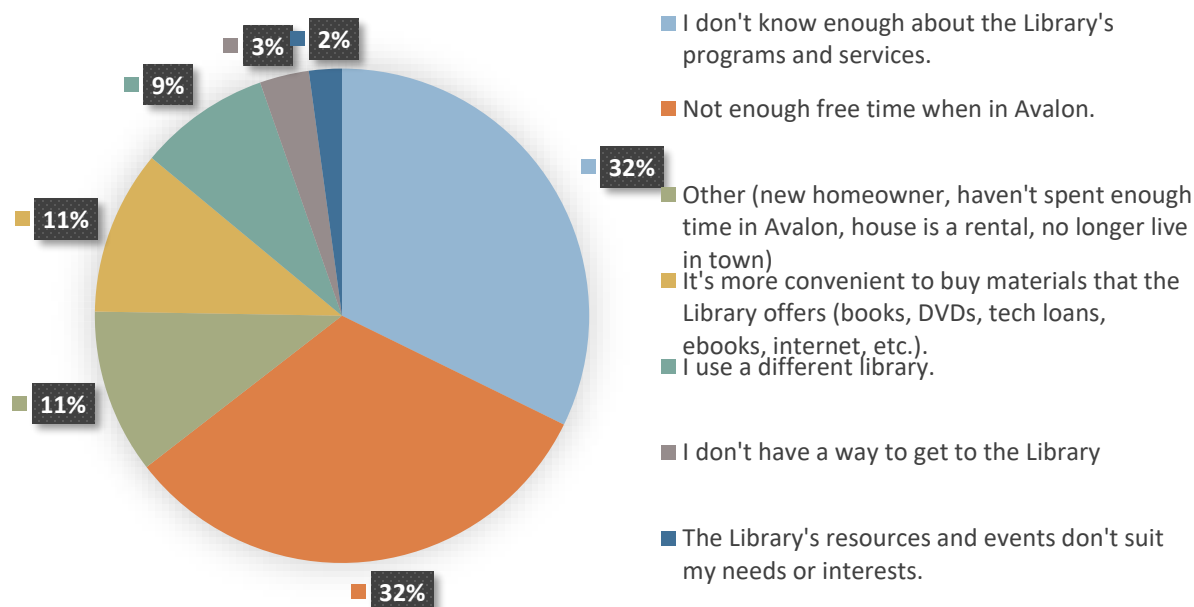
Respondents who identified as nonusers were asked this question. The 88 respondents who do not currently use the Library, reported the reasons above as why. They were permitted to select more than one option. They also could provide additional reasons and a few patrons contributed that they were new homeowners who just hadn't had a chance yet, or that they feel the Library is a valuable resource, even though they do not make use of it.

3.) Is there a service, resource, or program the Library might offer that would cause you to use the Library? Please share it here.

Respondents who identified as nonusers were asked this question. **Items in bold are services the Library offers**. *If contact information was provided, staff will reach out to the respondent to follow up, or for more information.*

- **Access to electronic books**
- More subject specific and advanced computer classes
- **Author talks**
- **Children's programs**
- **crafts, dance, exercise programs**
- **Events for kids or guest speakers. Classes on new technology**
- Free courses
- **Hosting more programs, events and classes**
- **Lectures on local history or subjects like investing**
- More books and newspapers
- **More virtual programs beyond COVID-19**
- **Programs designed for seniors**
- **Speaker series, happy hour, lectures**
- **Wi-Fi**

4.) How often do you visit the Library?

Legend:
- At least once a month.
- Only in the summer.
- Every few months or less.
- I only use online resources, I do not visit the Library in person.
- Only in the off season.
- Once a week or more

Pie chart values: 7%, 2%, 0%, 38%, 17%, 36%
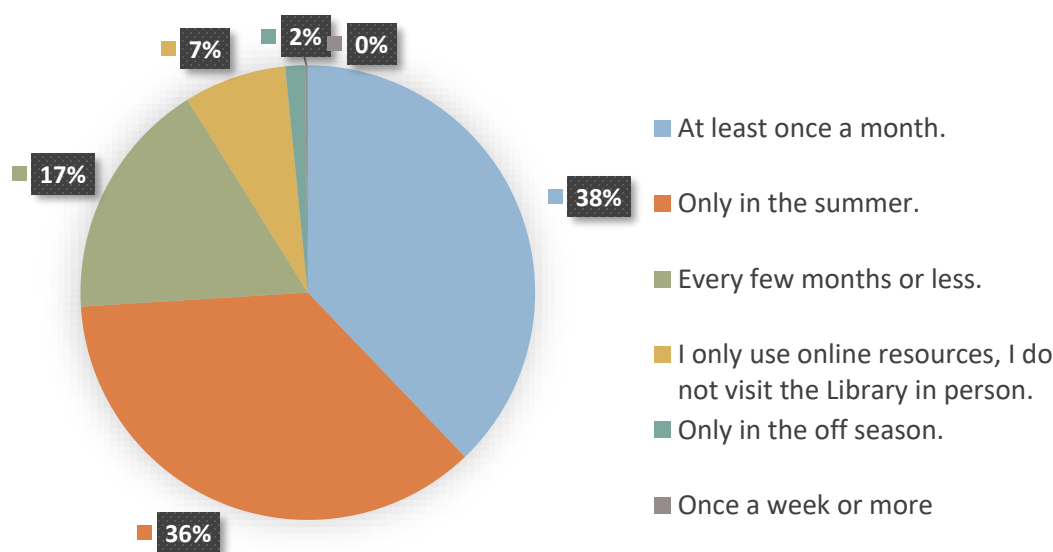
Respondents who use the library (in person or online) were asked this question. The majority of respondents either visit at least once a month or only in the summer months.

Check it Out! at the AVALON FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

5.) How often do you use the Library's online services (downloadable ebooks, audiobooks, streaming video, databases, etc.)?

- I do not use the Library's online services.
- At least once a month.
- Every few months or less.
- Only in the summer.
- Only in the off season.

2% · 6% · 17% · 38% · 37%
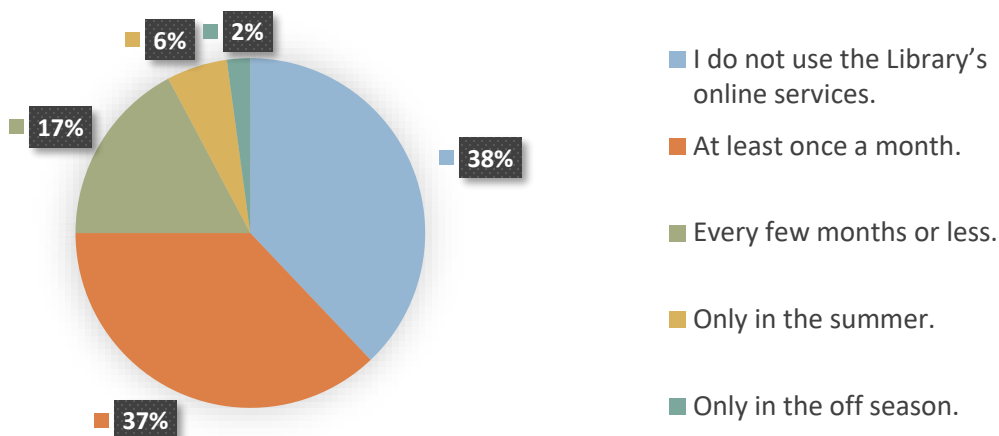
These responses tell us that over 60% of users access online services at some point throughout each year, with nearly 40% doing so frequently.

6.) Which of the following services offered by the Library do you use most often or feel are the most important? Please choose three.

- Providing physical materials for loan (books, DVDs, music, magazines, etc.), using computer/printer/copier
- Providing digital materials for remote loan (ebooks, streaming video)
- Hosting events, classes, and programs.
- Providing technology access (Wi-Fi, public computers, printing, etc.) & tech help.
- Providing access to apps and online resources to use the Library remotely.
- Offering a community gathering place.
- Providing information on local history.
- Other

3% · 4% · 6% · 9% · 15% · 15% · 17% · 31%

Respondents **prioritized providing physical and digital materials for loan, hosting events, classes, and programs, and providing technology access** as the services they either use most often or feel are the most important.

15

7.) Did you know the Library offers the following resources? Please choose all that apply.

Chart Title

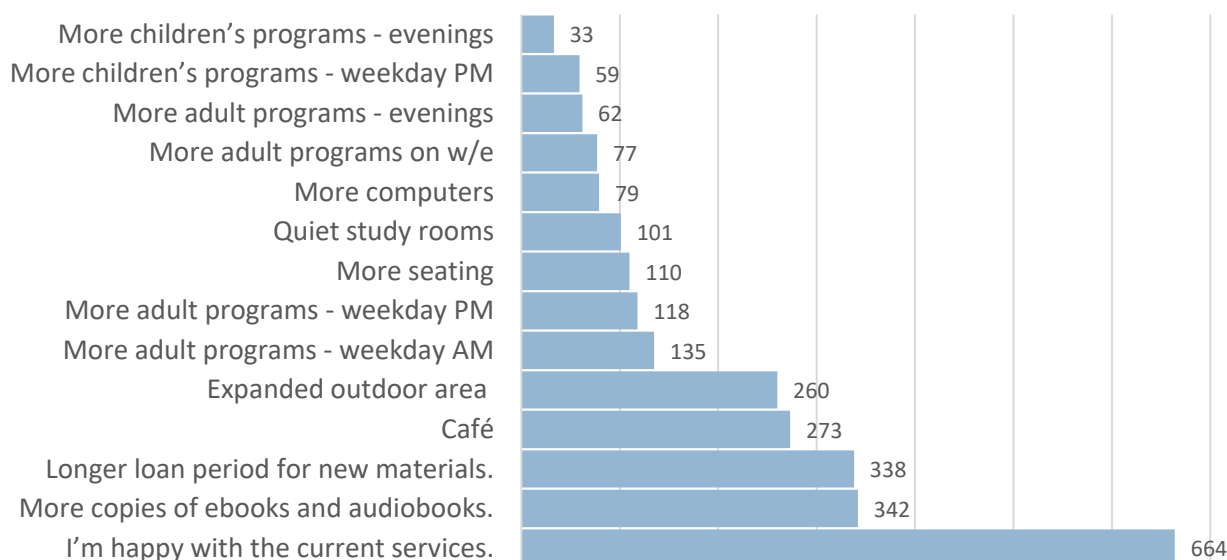| Resource	Value
Wi-Fi	1042
Computer access, printers, fax,…	1041
ebooks and audiobooks	993
Adult and children's programs	982
Summer concert series	727
Library by mail program	710
Avalon History Center	685
Tech classes	601
Streaming content	445
Genealogy classes	408
Passes to museums	385
Technology loans	329
Winter movie series	302
Book clubs	151
I didn't know about any of these…	98

Question number seven is designed to give perspective about the services patrons are connecting with through use and marketing. The services patrons prioritize are also those that are most known. This question also served to provide any nonusers with more information about available services.

8.) I wish the Library had... Please choose all that apply.

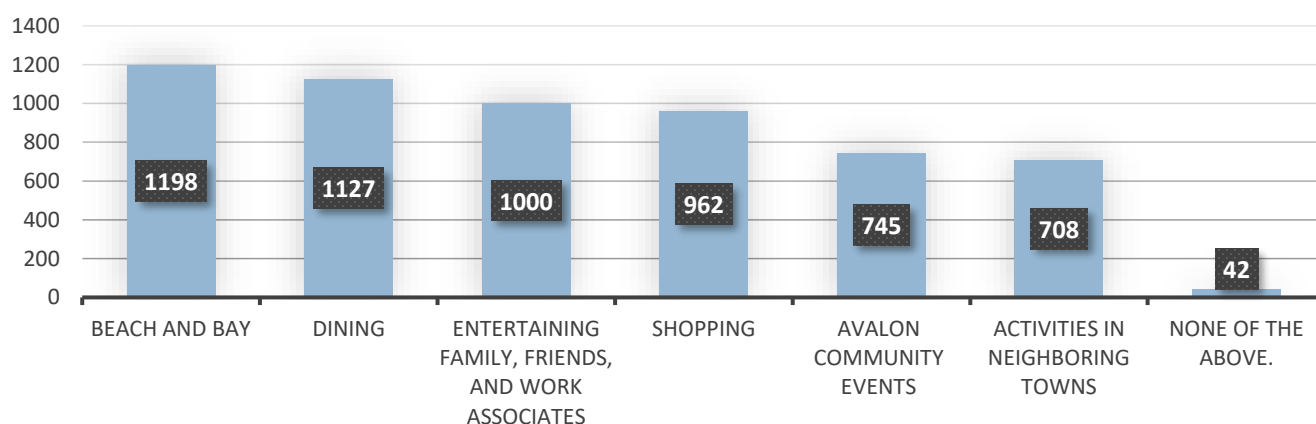| Option	Value
More children's programs - evenings	33
More children's programs - weekday PM	59
More adult programs - evenings	62
More adult programs on w/e	77
More computers	79
Quiet study rooms	101
More seating	110
More adult programs - weekday PM	118
More adult programs - weekday AM	135
Expanded outdoor area	260
Café	273
Longer loan period for new materials.	338
More copies of ebooks and audiobooks.	342
I'm happy with the current services.	664

50% of respondents reported they are happy with the current services and resources. Other strong responses include requests for more copies of ebooks and audio, longer loans for new materials, a café, and expanded outdoor facilities. A list of approximately 65 individual suggestions that included items the Library does and doesn't currently offer will be reviewed by staff and responded to, provided the patron supplied contact details.

9.) If you chose an item in the previous question that required more details or an example, please share it here. (i.e. technology loan suggestions, different hours)
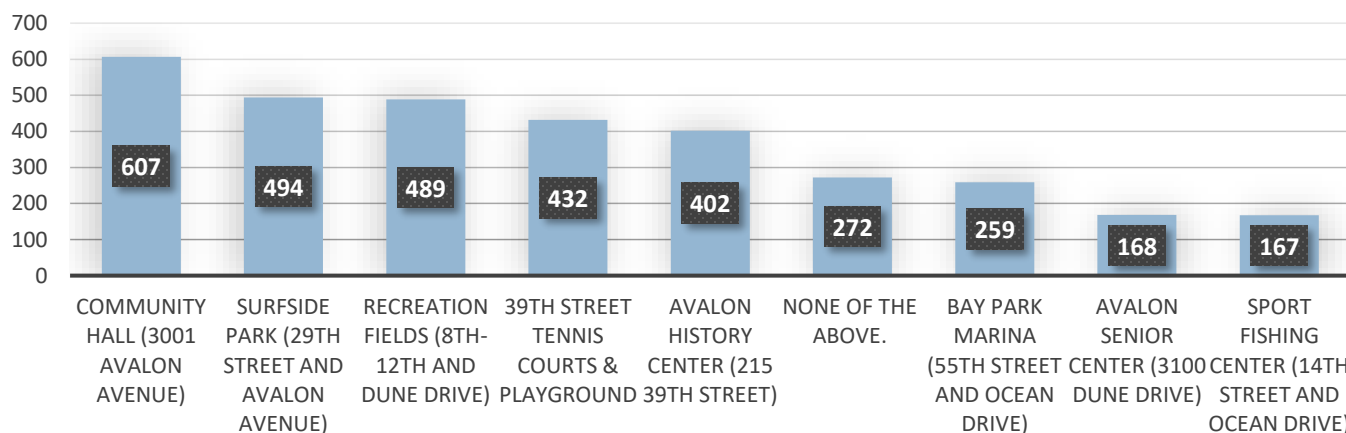
Respondents shared 139 assorted responses in this section, some of which were examples of services or details to support their response in question eight (8). The most frequently repeated are bulleted below. **Note, approximately 25% of responses included requests for services the Library already offers.** When contact information was provided, staff will reach out for more information.

- Details for expanded hours for weekends (Note: The Library does anticipate expanding hours again when COVID-19 protocol and staffing permit.)
- More ebooks and audiobooks
- Details in support of a café / coffee
- More author events
- Positive feedback for the Library/staff
- Reasons study rooms are needed
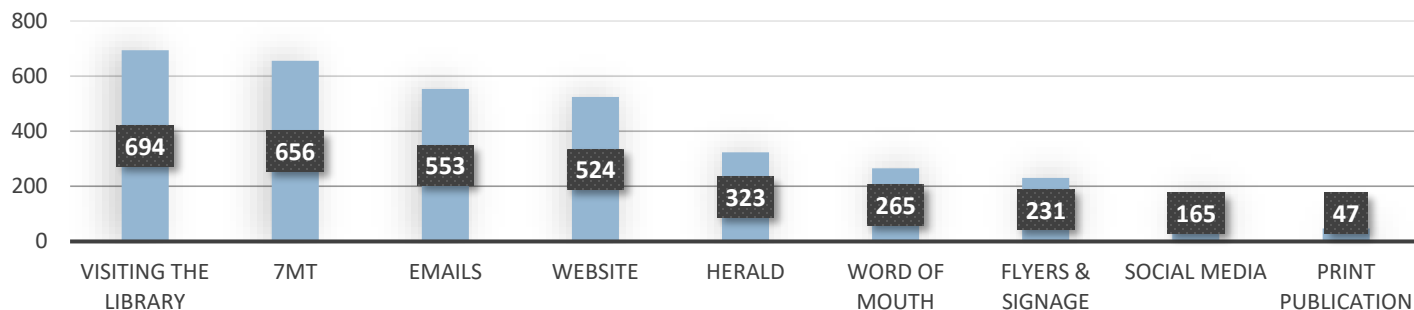- Prioritizing tech help

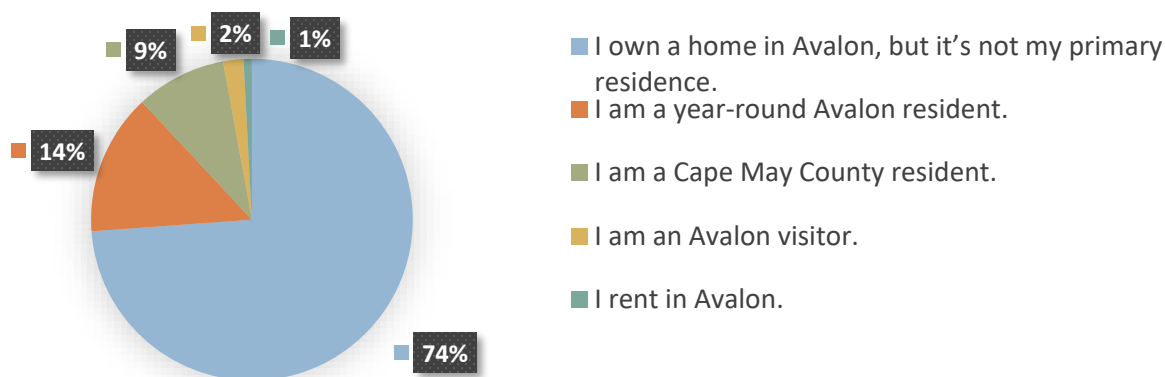## 10.) What activities do you pursue while in Avalon? Please choose all that apply.

Bar chart values:
- BEACH AND BAY: 1198
- DINING: 1127
- ENTERTAINING FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND WORK ASSOCIATES: 1000
- SHOPPING: 962
- AVALON COMMUNITY EVENTS: 745
- ACTIVITIES IN NEIGHBORING TOWNS: 708
- NONE OF THE ABOVE.: 42

11.) Do you use any of the following community resources? Please choose all that apply.

Bar chart values:
- COMMUNITY HALL (3001 AVALON AVENUE): 607
- SURFSIDE PARK (29TH STREET AND AVALON AVENUE): 494
- RECREATION FIELDS (8TH-12TH AND DUNE DRIVE): 489
- 39TH STREET TENNIS COURTS & PLAYGROUND: 432
- AVALON HISTORY CENTER (215 39TH STREET): 402
- NONE OF THE ABOVE.: 272
- BAY PARK MARINA (55TH STREET AND OCEAN DRIVE): 259
- AVALON SENIOR CENTER (3100 DUNE DRIVE): 168
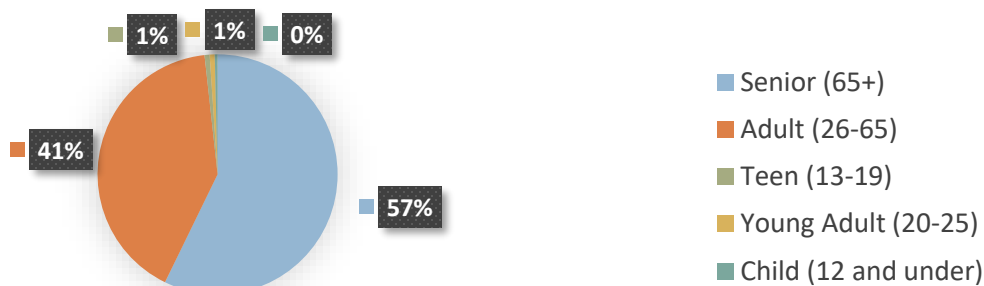- SPORT FISHING CENTER (14TH STREET AND OCEAN DRIVE): 167

12.) How do you find out about Library and History Center programs, initiatives, and services? Please choose all that apply.

13. Which of the following describes you? Choose one.

- I own a home in Avalon, but it's not my primary residence.
- I am a year-round Avalon resident.
- I am a Cape May County resident.
- I am an Avalon visitor.
- I rent in Avalon.

14.) What is your age range?

- Senior (65+)
- Adult (26-65)
- Teen (13-19)
- Young Adult (20-25)
- Child (12 and under)

15.) Is there anything else you would like to share?

Library staff were overwhelmed by the hundreds of heartfelt responses to this question that noted appreciation for the Library and its staff. In a year that was unlike any other, receiving this feedback lifted spirits and helped us feel confident about the efforts we've put forth so far and are working to achieve moving forward.

Patrons also used this section to inquire about specific resources or concerns. As with previous questions, if contact information was provided, we will reach out to the respondent to follow up, or for more information, if needed.

7.2 Appendix B. 2020 Staff SWOT Analysis

The Planning Committee identified various tools for data gathering, including a SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats) analysis for Library and History Center Staff. The results of these efforts were used to guide the planning process. A summary of the data gathered is included below.

What are our strengths?
- Committed, experienced staff focused on patron needs
- Community support and engagement
- Organization-wide focus on service to our patrons and the community
- Bright, welcoming facility
- Adaptable, always seeking opportunities for improvement
- Variety of collections
- Stable source of funding
- Communication and collegial support
- Able to innovate and reach patrons remotely
- Extensive program offerings
- Tech Help and Digital Library

Where can we reassess and improve?
- Analyze shifting community demographics, both short and long-term
- Explore space needs, including seating, shelving, and flexible patron-use areas
- Identify more nondigital resources for patrons
- Provide more year-round access to programs
- Increase visibility in the community, more partnerships
- Connecting with community members who aren't library users

What can we do to meet community needs?
- Find ways to serve telecommuting patrons spending more time in Avalon
- On-island delivery, homebound delivery
- Expand digital outreach, online offerings and resources
- Collaborate with area libraries and groups
- Offer more year-round community activities
- Expand technology help and explore new technologies
- Offer virtual museum and online exhibits
- Provide more academic and research tools

What stands in our way?
- Shifting demographics
- Physical Location
- Nonresident homeowners not visiting as frequently
- Growing population of patrons who have trouble accessing the Library and programs.
- Paid streaming services and digital resource usability
- Increased competition for remote programs

7.3   APPENDIX C. FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

WORD ASSOCIATION FOR "AVALON LIBRARY"

Three groups were invited to participate in the focus group process. Due to the volume of interest from some groups, multiple sessions were coordinated as needed in order to ensure the video conferencing sessions were effective. Responses within have been summarized.

- Property Owners who own a home in Avalon but do not reside there year-round
- Year-round Residents of Avalon
- Community Partners

Participants were provided with six focus areas and one free response/question section.

- **FACILITIES**: What are your thoughts about the physical aspects of the Library and/or History Center facilities?
- **BORROWING**: Do you borrow materials? In person or online? Thoughts about either experience, including the process to locate materials onsite or online?
- **COMMUNICATION**: Do you feel like you have a good sense of the Library's services? How do you learn about content and events?
- **TECHNOLOGY HELP**: What is your experience with Library tech help and classes?
- **EVENTS & CLASSES**: Have you attended Library or History Center events? If yes, is there anything you might suggest to improve scheduling, marketing, or the programs themselves? If not, is there something we might do to change that?
- **LOCAL HISTORY**: Have you visited the Avalon History Center? What was your impression?
- **OTHER**: What motivated you to volunteer to participate? Did you have feedback in mind at that time that has not been reflected here today?

PROPERTY OWNERS

FACILITIES
Positive response to internal space of the Library

- Connection to school
- Bright, airy and welcoming
- Children's room
- Reading area (missing this and associated resources during COVID-19)
- Makes the most of available shelving
- Computer lab

Seeking more usable outdoor space or inside space that opens up to outside. Incorporate:

- Native nature
- View
- Playground

Space as related to programming:

- Value of in person programs made evident by COVID-19
- HC needs more space for in-person programs, improve AV

Suggestions:

- Dedicated quiet areas
- Intermediate space for programs other than gym/multi
- More space onsite for books

BORROWING
All borrow materials, in different ways:

- In person only, In person in summer and mostly online in winter (plus praise for **Library by Mail**), or online primarily
- Use depends on patron location

Comments

- Browses in Library but checks out on **Libby**
- Displays are useful
- Request process is responsive
- Focus on new books
- Loan times sufficient
- **Library by Mail** is valued
- **Check It Out** collection is a plus
- Online resources—appreciate variety of options
- Appreciate staff flexibility

Suggestions

- Finding books can be difficult the way things are organized. Improve signage.
- Tends to ask where the section that they are looking for is located.

- Catalog is good, but would prefer one place to search that could take you out to where the item is located.

COMMUNICATION
All participants said they feel they have a good sense of services offered by the Library.
Learn about services from:

- Postcards, mailer, and online, including eNews
- Social media, appreciation for use of multiple media
- Schedule in the Summer Guide, magnets, bookmarks.
- Brochure at desk is a go-to resource
- Word of mouth
- Marquee coming into town is a good source

Comments

- "Communication from Library is excellent"
- "No improvement needed"

Suggestions

- Bundle mailers with water bill or other bill to save postage
- Online advertising with the Herald and 7 Mile Times might reach more people
- Focus on targeting online advertising in areas where a large percentage of patrons come from

TECHNOLOGY HELP
Approximately half of participants have used **Tech Help**, all feel it is valuable.

- "Tech Help is great...gotten a lot of help with it"
- "Having someone dedicated to tech help is an amazing use of the Library's resources."
- "Tech help feels accessible."

Suggestions

- Appointments are a valuable service and preferred option.
- Make recordings of classes available, OnDemand approach
- Feature guest speakers on different topics—tap community for speakers.
- Helping people get comfortable with virtual services that prevailed during pandemic, like Zoom.

EVENTS & CLASSES
- Programming is great
- Didn't care for author presentations—miss the in-person dynamic—seems too much like lecturing when online
  - Love the in-person authors—didn't attend online author events
- Book clubs as hybrid, like with romance book club work
- Programming will be more important than ever as people want to grow and explore.
- Use should increase as hours expand
- Even with virtual, more prone to participate when in town.
- In person events are highly valued

Suggestions
- Series events like beginning language classes are appealing, shorter series better for time-commitment
- Hybrid model for classes challenging - from teacher experience
- Connect more to nature and have more programming based on local resources (natural and cultural).
- People who are working remotely from Avalon who weren't before are an untapped resource
- Work with realtors to spread the word about events
- Local programming in the morning, i.e., coffee and a book talk.
- Weekend programming (all ages/locations) is really valuable for those who work during the week or spend more time in Avalon during weekends

LOCAL HISTORY
- "History Center is really well done."
- **Home Town Heroes** program appreciated
- "Have been coming to Avalon for 60 years and think that they are doing a great job"

- Like the physical space to interact with the exhibits, like online exhibits, thought the virtual exhibit opening was great. Appreciates tea time.
- Staff do a great job interacting with small groups and gaining insight into history from visitors.
- History Center seemed closed, open up more to the community

Suggestions
- Find a way to make the exhibits more interactive, particularly for groups?
- History Center does a great job getting interaction about Avalon history on Facebook. Is there a way to use that in-person for engagement?

OTHER
- "I love the Library."
- "Library is an amazing place, especially compared to how it was prior to 2004. It's nice to tell you that you're doing a great job but see you're also motivated to make it even better."
- "Great respite in the summer, like to help make better."
- "…our whole family has enjoyed the Library so much…it's such a nice break to go there. The availability of material is better than [at home library]"
- "You guys make Avalon a place you want to be"
- Appreciates the need for strategic planning and learning that the Library participates in strategic planning

Suggestions/Questions
- Have difficulty using catalog to find books. Catalog not user friendly.
- Interested in knowing more about how the Library is focusing on its social responsibility
- Would like to be sure the Library is thinking about ways to support communities that have a greater need

YEAR-ROUND RESIDENTS

FACILITIES
- Library has a welcoming feel.
- History Center can feel small.
- Would like circ desk in center of Library
- Library: great to be connected to the school. Safety has been taken into consideration and the sharing of space has been beneficial to the Library.
- Computer room has been well used by Library.
- "When the Library first opened it didn't look quite as small as it now does."
- Like the new items, not cluttered, easy to browse, well organized,

Suggestions/Questions
- History Center: Aren't there plans for an addition, with a meeting room?
- History Center space for programs is too small.
- Will a new space be redundant when considering Community Hall and Senior Center? Would not like to see a community space that isn't used.
- Have you explored ways to increase shelf space?
- Have you toured other libraries to see how they handle their spaces?

BORROWING
All participants are borrowers, mostly both physical and online. News sources were of particular value.
- Nice variety of resources but concerned that everyone doesn't know about them.
- Library by Mail valued
- Appreciates options (holds, porch pickup, in person browsing)
- Curbside service well-executed
- Always find the new and popular books they are seeking
- Overdrive recommend feature valued

Suggestions
- SH school items in catalog confusing. Can you hide those books or make them able to be borrowed?
- Use information in patron request to promote item.
- Wait times are mostly ok but extremely popular books on Overdrive are a long wait—OD indicates sometimes as much as 14 weeks

- Improvements to due date updating at check out.

COMMUNICATION
- Communication is excellent across many avenues, most commented that they feel well informed.
- Awareness that even with the current tools, there is a need to get people who don't know about the Library through the door, suggestions shared below.

Learn about services:
- Online, email newsletters, website banners and calendar
- Postcard is great—uses it to mark off interesting events
- Marquee at Visitor Center as a reminder of programs

Suggestions
- Bulletin board at Hoy's and Avalon Market to place flyers.
- Suggestion to put a sign/banner on Dune Drive to direct people to the Library.
- Suggestion for a Library flag at Borough Hall that changes to alert patrons to the Library and events.

TECHNOLOGY HELP
- "It's been great--I need it all the time."
- Liked tech classes very specific to a topic, classes are forward-thinking. "Sean does a great job."
- It's good for basic questions but for more advanced topics, service plateaus. Some staff members are more knowledgeable than others.
- Just discovered **"Niche Academy"** tutorials, impressed and found it useful.

Suggestions
- Recorded tech programs would be useful. Cord-cutting mentioned.
- Improve process to ensure staff direct people to different avenues when the questions are more advanced and the staff member does not know the answer.
- Formalize class agendas and communicate them at beginning to improve structure, include worksheets.
- Rather than informal drop-in help, use specific times or appointments.

EVENTS & CLASSES

- In virtual, some popular in person events are losing attendees (book clubs) while other events are gaining new participants (Italian Culture, Genealogy).
- Multiple statements that Zoom sessions with authors were fantastic, great, enjoyable.
- Creative writing group attendee mentioned that it has been attended by new people from far afield, some don't stay but some come for multiple sessions.

Suggestions/Questions

- Will the Library consider a hybrid model when in person programs resume?
- Provide more time at the end of presentations for people to type questions
- Suggestion for events about self-care, mental health.
- Tap into community for presenters.

LOCAL HISTORY

- Find virtual and in person programs valuable. Happy that the History Center programs are available on-demand for a time in case of missing the date.
- The new exhibits are fascinating. A larger space would help get more people in there.
- Liked the mini exhibit in the Library…good way to connect to the larger exhibits at the History Center.

OTHER

- "I was thrilled to be able to be a part of what is going on at the Library…"
- "I wanted to be sure to be able to say how I think it's one of the greatest places in Avalon."
- "being part of the community it's nice to help out but even nicer to be asked to participate"
- Well-run town, especially the Library

Suggestions/Questions

- There are a lot of bikes chained that haven't moved. Can that be dealt with?
- Can you identify a group that is underserved by the Library? The Library uses the budget well but is there any other group the Library could help?
- How do you promote literacy?
- Is there a way to book rooms for use in the Library?

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

FACILITIES

- Love the foyer, porch area
- Would like the History Center to have more space for events.

Suggestions

- Need help finding people—who does what, who do I ask? On the screen in the foyer have a video intro for staff members, who they are and what they do.
- DVD section needs more signage.

BORROWING

- Doesn't feel website is user-friendly, finds it difficult to navigate using menus.
- Hard time locating items with catalog.
- Enjoys the new items emails.

COMMUNICATION

- Marketing is good. It's up everywhere, all over town.

Suggestions

- Use Community Hall to put up information about the Library and History Center.
- Video marketing can be more eye catching.
- Arrow signs for different places in town, suggested location: Surfside Park

TECHNOLOGY HELP

- "Tech help is absolutely fantastic…"

EVENTS & CLASSES:

- Great classes and programs. "Great selection…something for everyone".
- Accessibility is great, as is variety.

LOCAL HISTORY

- Concern that people don't know the History Center is there. Suggestions include:
  - Signage on the corner of 39th and Dune
  - More mini-exhibits around town like the Library has in the foyer display case
  - More community engagement post COVID-19

OTHER

- Was happy to be invited
- Learning about the process