

*Check it Out!*  
AT THE AVALON LIBRARY & HISTORY CENTER



**STRATEGIC PLAN**  
2024-2026



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>PLAN IN A GLANCE .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1 MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS &amp; CORE VALUES .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 MISSION STATEMENT .....	4
1.2 VISION STATEMENT – LIBRARY .....	4
1.3 VISION STATEMENT – HISTORY CENTER.....	4
1.4 CORE VALUES.....	4
<b>2 SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3 PLANNING PROCESS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1 SPRING 2023.....	5
3.2 SUMMER 2023.....	5
3.3 FALL 2023/WINTER 2024 .....	5
<b>4 COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW.....</b>	<b>6</b>
4.1 COMMUNITY OVERVIEW.....	6
4.1.1 <i>Avalon By the Numbers*</i> .....	6
4.2 LIBRARY OVERVIEW .....	7
4.3 HISTORY CENTER OVERVIEW.....	7
4.4 USE 2019-2023 .....	8
4.4.1 <i>Circulation</i> .....	9
4.4.2 <i>Programs &amp; Events</i> .....	10
4.4.3 <i>Engagement</i> .....	10
4.4.4 <i>Members</i> .....	11
<b>5 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6 MEASURES OF SUCCESS .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>7 APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>15</b>
7.1 APPENDIX A. 2023 PLANNING SURVEY SUMMARY .....	15
7.2 APPENDIX B. 2023 AVALON LIBRARY & HISTORY CENTER STAFF SOAR ANALYSIS.....	23
7.3 APPENDIX C. 2024 FOCUS GROUPS SUMMARY REPORT .....	25

## PLAN IN A GLANCE

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### MISSION

- Serving Avalon, near and far, with dedication and accessibility.

### VISION STATEMENTS

- **Library**  
Empowering every Avalon household with the key to enriching experiences – a library card.
- **History Center**  
A lively hub for Avalon's history, where stories are shared, engaging programs thrive, and vibrant exhibits captivate.

### VALUES

- Accessibility
- Accountability
- Collaboration & Engagement
- Education & Enrichment
- Innovation
- Intellectual Freedom
- Preservation
- Service
- Teamwork
- Transparency

### GOALS

- **Strengthening Community Connection** - Foster deeper connections within the Avalon community by leveraging the resources and facilities of the Library and History Center. Promote engagement through integrated programming and outreach efforts and support a sense of belonging, learning, and collaboration.
- **Cultivating Culture in the Community** - Position the organization as a vibrant hub of cultural exchange, education, and community engagement, offering exceptional experiences and connection among Avalon's residents.

### MEASURES

- Collection Relevance and Usage
- Community Engagement
- Facility Utilization and Satisfaction
- Historical Engagement
- Innovation and Evaluation
- Partnership Development
- Programming & Outreach Impact
- User Experience and Visitor Engagement

# 1 MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS & CORE VALUES

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## 1.1 MISSION STATEMENT

Serving Avalon, near and far, with dedication and accessibility.

*The Avalon Library and History Center, is dedicated to creating a welcoming space where everyone can gather, learn, and explore. With diverse offerings including books, tech help, and historical exhibits, we prioritize quality and relevance. Our commitment to excellent customer service, stewardship, and community engagement ensures that we serve as a vibrant hub for Avalon, fostering connections and enriching lives.*

## 1.2 VISION STATEMENT – LIBRARY

Empowering every Avalon household with the key to enriching experiences – a library card.

*Our vision for the Library is to be Avalon's vibrant community center, catering to residents' diverse needs while embracing inclusivity and innovation. We aim to bridge gaps in services, from tech assistance to programs, and engage patrons of all ages through dynamic programming and accessible resources. By fostering a sense of belonging and lifelong learning, we aspire to be more than a traditional library, but a catalyst for positive change in our community.*

## 1.3 VISION STATEMENT – HISTORY CENTER

A lively hub for Avalon's history, where stories are shared, engaging programs thrive, and vibrant exhibits captivate.

*Our vision is to create a lively community hub at the Avalon History Center, engaging residents and visitors in exploring and celebrating Avalon's rich heritage. With interactive exhibits and diverse programming, we aim to foster pride and connection while preserving our history. We envision a welcoming space where all can gather, learn, and share stories year-round, ensuring that Avalon's past remains alive and relevant for generations to come.*

## 1.4 CORE VALUES

**ACCESSIBILITY** Ensuring equal access to diverse resources and spaces for all.

**ACCOUNTABILITY** Being responsive and responsible to the community.

**COLLABORATION & ENGAGEMENT** Active participants and contributors to community needs and interests.

**EDUCATION & ENRICHMENT** Fostering learning through diverse programs and preserving local culture.

**INNOVATION** Embracing creativity and forward-thinking to enhance services.

**INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM** Promoting open dialogue and free expression within a respectful environment.

**PRESERVATION** Celebrating and preserving Avalon's history and cultural heritage.

**SERVICE** Prioritizing patron satisfaction through exceptional customer service.

**TEAMWORK** Leveraging collective strengths through collaboration and open communication.

**TRANSPARENCY** Prioritizing transparency in operations and decision-making processes.

## 2 SUMMARY

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In 2023, the Avalon Library began planning for a new three-year strategic plan, anticipated for 2024-2026. The Planning Committee, made up of Trustees J. Thatcher, L. Schwartz, K. Nestor, and Library administration E. Brown, S. Nagle, and K. Buono convened to outline plans for data gathering and establish a time frame for the process.

Even before expanded data gathering had commenced, it was clear that the coming three years would better support long-term planning, vs. the more short-term and responsive planning required at times during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations were again seeing a return to engagement and with that, making more extended plans for how to best serve their communities in the coming years.

Throughout 2023 and into 2024 the Planning Committee coordinated various efforts to gather data from the community, staff, and stakeholders. These included a staff SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results) Analysis, a community-wide planning survey via mail and email, and multiple in person and virtual focus group sessions.

In addition, the Staff Strategic Committee, developed during previous strategic planning efforts, continues to keep the organization accountable to the plan and its initiatives, while increasing staff engagement in the process. The launch of a new plan in 2024 will result in renewed actions and engagement for the Committee.

## 3 PLANNING PROCESS

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A Planning Committee, comprised of members of the Board of Trustees, Director, and Assistant Directors carried out a planning process from spring 2023 – February 2024. Members of the staff, community stakeholders, and patrons were also involved in the process.

### 3.1 SPRING 2023

Data-gathering began in spring 2023. The Administrative team coordinated SOAR Analysis (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results) analysis sessions for staff. Staff were organized into small interdepartmental groups and worked together on their feedback. Once each group was finished, the responses were compiled and the Director met with each group to review and discuss the findings. ([See Appendix B.](#))

### 3.2 SUMMER 2023

The Planning Committee convened to formally initiate a process for the new plan. Goals:

- Revise Mission Statement, develop separate Vision Statement for History Center activities.
- Ensure data would be gathered from a substantial range of staff, patrons, and community stakeholders.
  - Aim to repeat success of the 2020 Planning Survey by again mailing and emailing a survey to all property owners and users.
  - Expand focus group effort to include in person opportunities.
  - Include feedback gathered from staff SOAR Analysis and 2022 Space Planning activities.

### 3.3 FALL 2023/WINTER 2024

Much of the community data gathering commenced in fall 2023. 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 Administration in person and online.

## 4 COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

### 4.1 COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Avalon is located along the central coastline of Cape May County, New Jersey. The Library and History Center aim to serve as an anchor for both the year-round locals and the seasonal community members who call this seaside haven home.

Avalon embodies a strong sense of community, where residents enjoy close bonds and civic engagement. 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.

For those who see Avalon as a seasonal escape, the allure lies in the promise of days spent exploring the sandy shores and embracing the quiet culture that colors the town. Whether it's the sunny beaches, tranquil bays, or the hidden gems waiting to be discovered in quaint shops, Avalon attracts many due to its opportunities for relaxation and adventure.

The Library hopes to be a beacon of community and connection for all who seek it. Through ongoing efforts to know the community and its visitors, the organization works to be responsive to changing interests and needs.

#### 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.

1,459	Year-round (YR) population
>=20,000	Summer population (Borough of Avalon)
66	Median age of YR residents
74%	Percentage of YR residents 55 or older
11%	Estimated YR population under the age of 18 (approx. 150 individuals)
50%	Percent of female YR population
10%	Veterans
5,407	Housing Units
90%	Single family units
78%	Estimated % of housing units that were "vacant" in 2018-2022 (not owner occupied year-round)
734	YR households
513	YR family units
92%	YR Households without dependent children
29%	YR one person households
52%	YR households with an income => \$150,000
1.9	Vehicles per household
98%	YR Household with a computer
93%	YR Household with a smartphone – vs. 81% in 2022
96%	YR Households with internet access – vs. 90% in 2022
70%	Possess at least a bachelor's degree – vs. 60% in 2023
25%	Possess a post graduate degree
3%	YR Unemployment rate

\*Source unless otherwise noted in parenthesis: 2018-2022 U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS)

The long-term trend toward non-resident home ownership continues, contributing to the Library's challenge of understanding and serving multiple patron groups. At the beginning of 2024, 88% of patrons did not permanently live in Avalon, on par with 2023. 22% were county residents, while 66% lived outside of Cape May County in other areas of New Jersey and 31 other states.

## 4.2 LIBRARY OVERVIEW

The Avalon Free Public Library is a vital hub for year-round residents and seasonal community members. A significant majority of year-round residents possess active library cards and frequently use the Library's resources. Likewise, many seasonal residents hold library cards and avail themselves of various services year-round, including traditional library services, as well as remote options such as Library by Mail, digital content, and virtual programming.

In 2023, the Library conducted a Planning Survey, which drew participation from over 850 property owners, Avalon residents, and community members. 94% of respondents reported utilizing library services either in-person, online, or both. Notably, 73% of respondents comprised property owners who do not reside in Avalon year-round, while 18% are year-round residents. The Library's ability to cater to this patronage hinges upon its robust digital and remote offerings.

Operating seven days a week year-round, the Library is open until 8 pm Monday through Thursday and extends its hours in the summer. Spanning over 9,000 square feet, the facility features a multiuse space serving as the primary library area. Additionally, an agreement with the Avalon Elementary School grants access to multiple onsite event spaces, including a multipurpose room accommodating 125 patrons across 1,798 square feet, and a combined gymnasium/theater space seating 750 patrons within 7,000 square feet. The Library will celebrate its twentieth anniversary in 2025, 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, each year it becomes more apparent that improvements are needed to mirror that level of service in the coming twenty years.

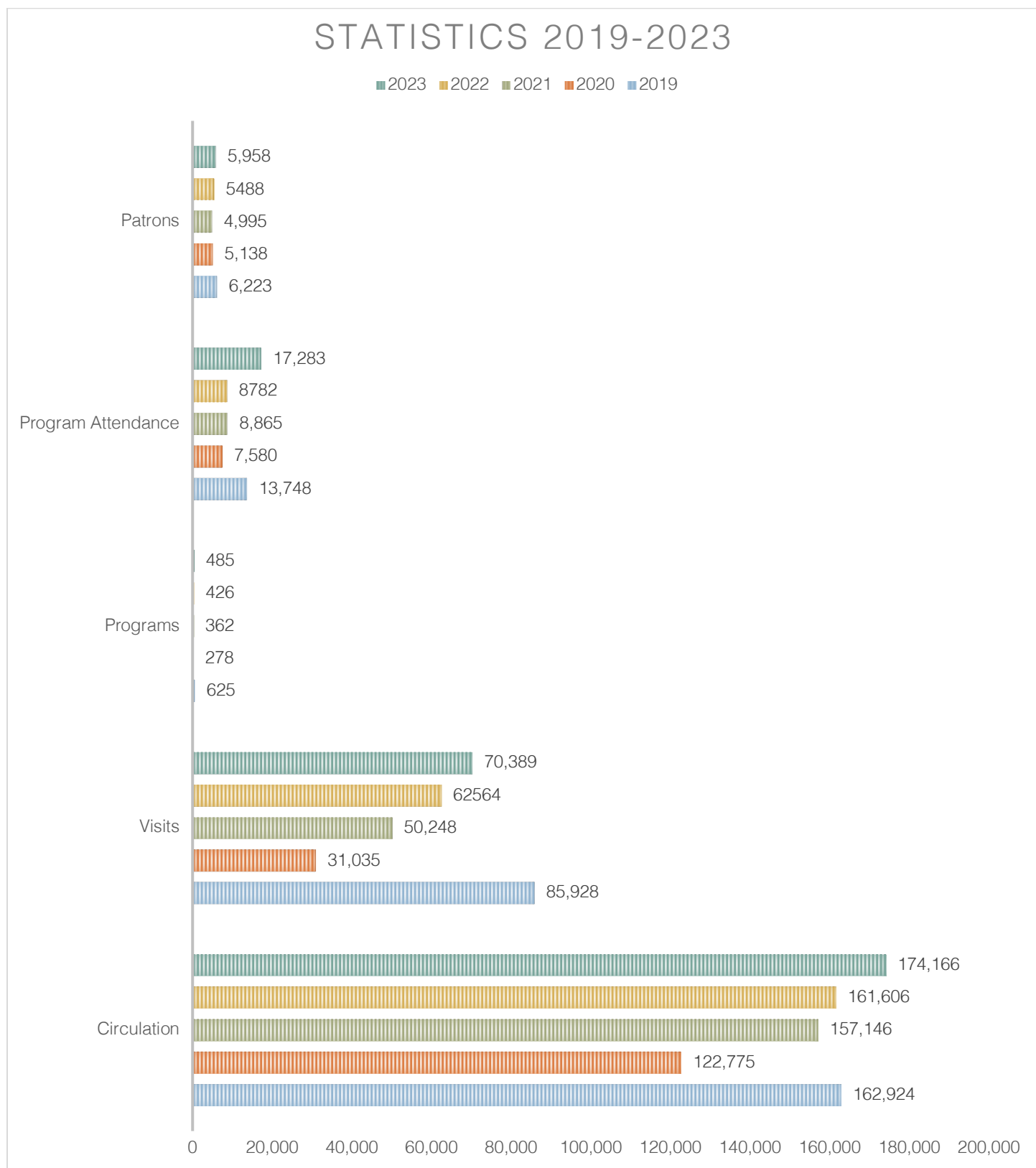
Materials, programming, and educational and cultural opportunities are offered throughout the year. Marketing efforts in recent years shifted to adapt to changing community needs and growing costs for print publications. According to a 2023 communications survey, completed by over 500 patrons, 70% of participants rank library emails as the main way they prefer to learn about library events and services. The Library also asked participants how far in advance they like to plan and feedback was split nearly down the middle between as far in advance as possible and not planning out more than a week in advance. Staff will continue to use these findings and others to refine marketing in the coming years.

## 4.3 HISTORY CENTER OVERVIEW

The Avalon Library's historical collection is housed within the Avalon History Center. The History Center is also home to the organization's local history resources and is the base for all history and Avalon-specific programming. It is a repository of the area's rich heritage. Located within a Borough building on 39<sup>th</sup> Street, the History Center offers visitors a glimpse into the past through its exhibits, displays, and archives.

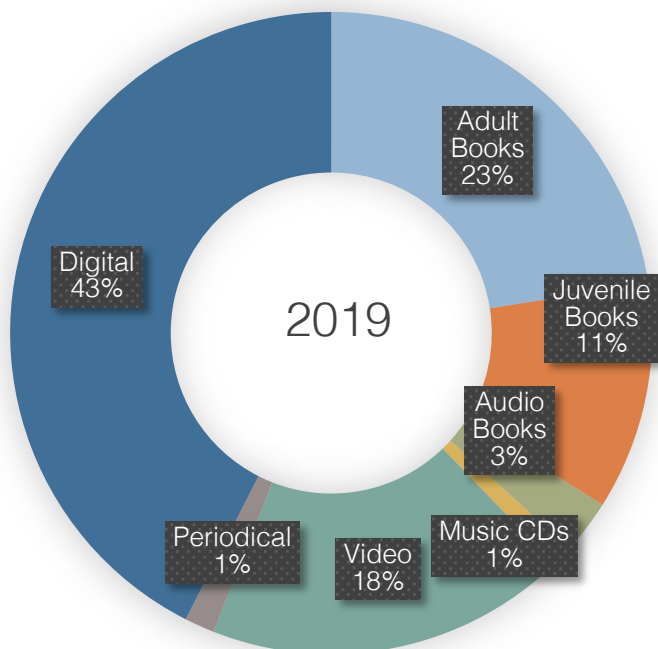
Visitors can explore various aspects of Avalon's history, including its development as a seaside resort, its maritime heritage, and the lives of its residents throughout the years. The Center often hosts educational programs, events, and presentations to further engage the community and visitors with the area's history. Through its efforts, the Avalon History Center preserves and celebrates the unique heritage of Avalon, promoting the understanding and appreciation of the town's past for generations to come.

## 4.4 USE 2019-2023



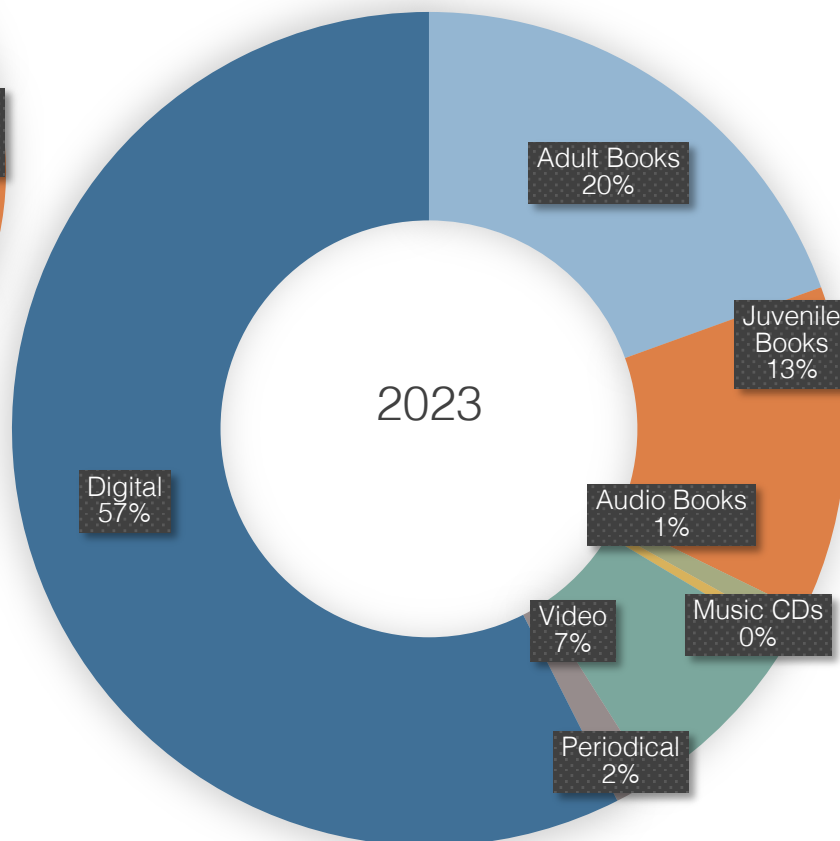
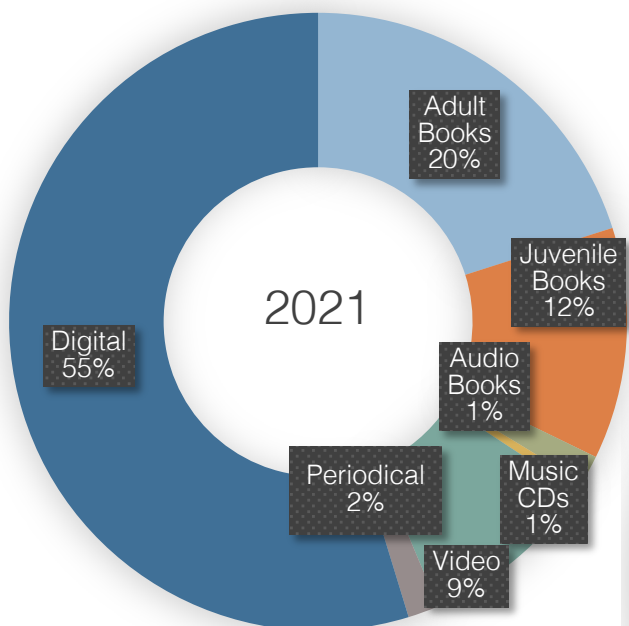


### 4.4.1 Circulation



Between 2019 and 2023, shifting use generated various trends in borrowing for the Library across different formats. While adult and audio book circulation declined initially but stabilized/slightly recovered by 2023, juvenile book circulation showed a steady increase. Music CD and video circulation experienced consistent declines, while periodical circulation fluctuated. The most significant trend was the ongoing growth in digital circulation, which follows the patterns we've been observing and responding to for years, further powered by shifting usage due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

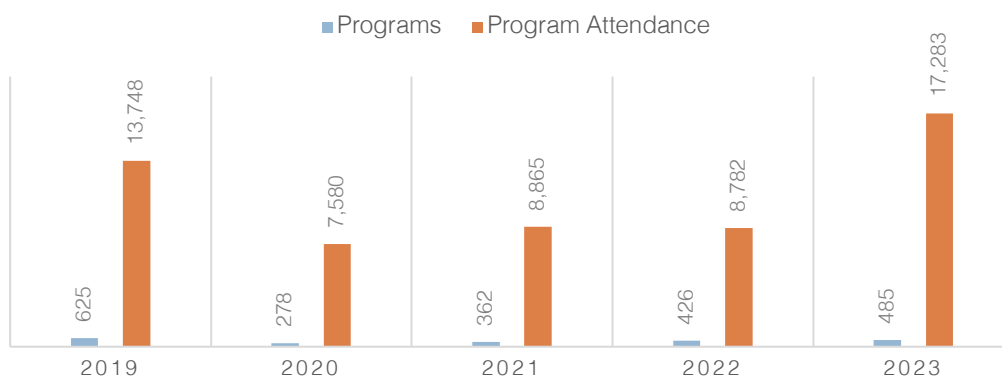
Overall, the data shows how necessary it is for the organization to have an agile plan for collection development to meet evolving patron preferences, both by expanding digital collections and services as well as continuing to meet the needs of patrons who prefer more traditional formats, as voiced in patron feedback.



### 4.4.2 Programs & Events

Offering a wide range of educational and recreational programs throughout the year is a key part of how the organization supports its goal of serving as a cultural center and community hub in Avalon. 2023 delivered the engagement that had been previously anticipated for 2022, showing attendance levels that far exceeded previous years. However, it's important to note that a significant portion of the attendance is due to popular large scale community events, and that some more traditional offerings are still seeing less engagement than before the pandemic. Our conclusions from 2023 carry forward, with awareness that it remains essential to continue finding new ways to encourage the community to get "back into the habit" of using the Library and History Center and attending events. The goal for the coming few years is to merge the recent gains with growth for more traditional in person and virtual events.

### PROGRAMS / ATTENDEES 2019-2023



### 4.4.3 Engagement

Annual evaluation of visitation (door count) has shown how this metric relates so directly to many other statistics, including circulation, programming, and technology use. The table below includes website visits and Wi-Fi use to provide a more comprehensive look at use as we define it. The data indicates a mostly resilient response in adapting to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a temporary decrease in physical visits and Wi-Fi use during the height of the pandemic, there was a continued effort to provide services through the Library's website, resulting in sustained or increased online engagement. As the situation improved and restrictions eased, there was a gradual recovery in onsite visits and Wi-Fi use, reflecting the importance of physical library spaces alongside the growing significance of digital platforms.

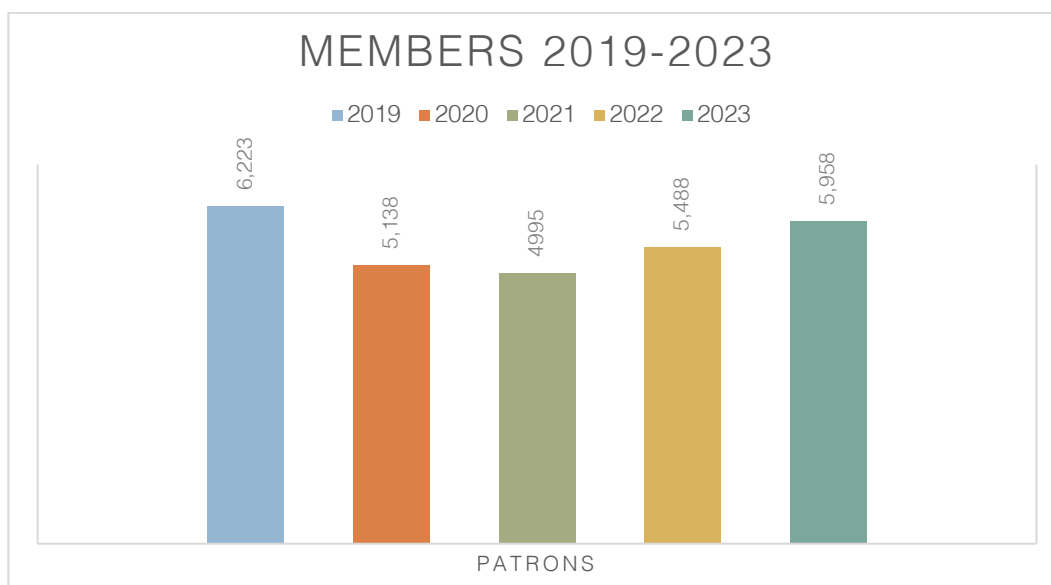


#### 4.4.4 Members

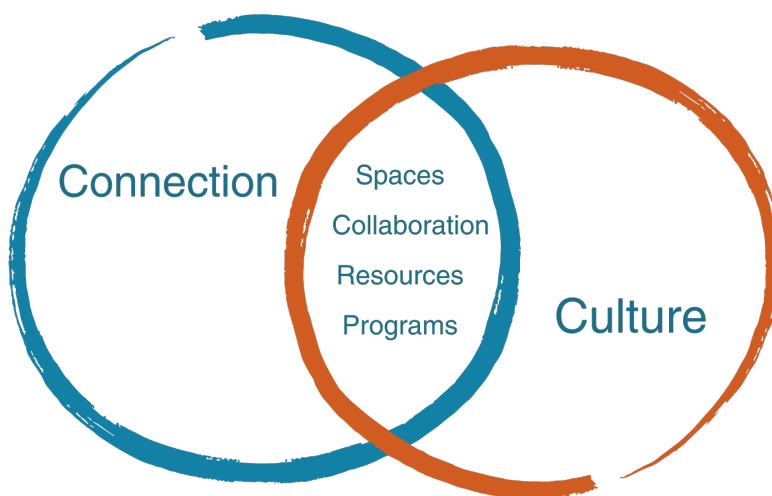
Changing use during 2020 and 2021 led to an overall decline in the number of active members. However, individual patron group continue to maintain ratios similar to pre-pandemic figures. A year-end report in 2019 showed 6,223 active members (3,656 nonresident homeowner patrons and 772 resident homeowner patrons). The same report in 2023 showed 5,958 active members (3,648 nonresident homeowner patrons and 648 resident homeowner patrons).

At the end of 2023, the Library had almost returned to its patron base prior to 2020, noting that much of the recent growth is due to an increase in new nonresident homeowners joining the Library, which directly connect to one of the organization’s measures of success in its 2021-2023 strategic plan.

Even with figures slightly down vs. 2019, when considering patron counts 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.



## 5 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



To develop strategic objectives, we looked to the data gathered in the attached appendices and aimed to answer the question of how the Library and History Center could best serve the community in the coming years. Are there needs or challenges that the community is facing? Did the data gathering uncover gaps or opportunities? We arrived at a few core views:

- Community members need intentional spaces for work, recreation, and socialization.
- Individuals are seeking resources and services that will enrich their lives.
- The community connects to its past through stories and artifacts.
- Avalon strongly values civic organizations invested in collaboration and engagement.

As we zoomed out on these concepts, we kept returning to the ideas of community connection and culture. When the two are combined, we see a vision for the organization's future.

### CONNECTION

Connection is key—to the community, Library, and History Center. Within the community, it's the bonds neighbors and friends share, creating a sense of belonging. At the Library, connection means access to knowledge and resources, bringing the community together for learning and engagement. In the History Center, connection is further found in the stories and artifacts that link community members to the past, fostering understanding and appreciation. In all three places, connection is what ties the community together, enriching lives and experiences in Avalon.

### CULTURE

In Avalon, culture isn't just a concept; it's the traditions, values, and stories that define the community. At the Library, culture takes shape through the array of books, content, and programs. People of all ages gather to learn, explore, and connect with the world around them. They seek high quality events and experiences that will enrich their lives. The History Center preserves the town's cultural heritage through its historical collection and exhibits. It's a place where history comes alive, offering insight into the past and shaping the future. Together, the Library and History Center aim to serve as beacons of culture, lighting the path forward while honoring the past.

### **Strengthening Community Connection**

Foster deeper connections within the Avalon community by leveraging the resources and facilities of the Library and History Center. Promote engagement through integrated programming and outreach efforts and support a sense of belonging, learning, and collaboration.

This initiative aims to enhance the existing links within the Avalon community by emphasizing the importance of connection at the Library and History Center. By fostering an environment that encourages interaction, learning, and collaboration, we seek to enrich the lives of community members.

- 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.
- Ensure facilities meet the needs of community members seeking spaces for study, engagement, and entertainment.
- Identify opportunities for new marketing approaches.
- Ensure fewer barriers in accessing online resources.
- Ensure technology resources provide users with an excellent experience.

### **Cultivating Culture in the Community**

Position the organization as a vibrant hub of cultural exchange, education, and community engagement, offering exceptional experiences and connection among Avalon's residents.

This initiative aims to establish the Library and History Center as a leading destination for cultural enrichment and entertainment in Avalon. By offering a diverse array of programming, exhibits, and resources, the organization seeks to engage residents and visitors of all ages in experiences that inspire, educate, and entertain.

- Prioritize year-round lifelong learning and cultural enrichment.
- Evaluate and reimagine collections to meet current and future community needs.
- Develop spaces and resources that provide exceptional onsite and digital experiences.
- Identify new initiatives to boost year-round and seasonal visitation.
- Increase collections and programming for underserved demographics.
- Expand framework for evaluating resources and programs.
- Evaluate nontraditional resources for identifying new innovations.

## 6 MEASURES OF SUCCESS

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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.

- Collection Relevance and Usage
  - Evaluate collections' alignment with community needs.
  - Observe increase in circulation or usage of newly added resources targeted towards community interests and demographics.
  - Demonstrate reduction in barriers reported by users accessing digital resources.
- Community Engagement
  - Track increase in community members engaged beyond the existing patron base.
  - Identify new connections established with current users through innovative approaches.
  - Effectiveness of new marketing approaches measured through metrics such as reach and engagement.
- Facility Utilization and Satisfaction
  - Gather and track usage statistics for Library and History Center facilities, including study spaces, public spaces, and programming venues.
  - Deploy surveys measuring user satisfaction with facility amenities and accessibility.
- Historical Engagement
  - Track increase attendance numbers for exhibits throughout the year.
  - Obtain feedback from attendees regarding the quality and relevance of programs and exhibits.
  - Evaluate effectiveness of digital engagement through social media and digital resource metrics.
- Innovation and Evaluation
  - Initiate new initiatives implemented to boost visitation and engagement, with corresponding metrics tracking their success.
  - Measure effectiveness of the expanded framework for evaluating resources and programs, gauged through improvements in program relevance and user satisfaction.
- Partnership Development
  - Track number of collaborative projects initiated with community partners and level of satisfaction among community partners surveyed regarding the effectiveness of the partnership.
- Programming & Outreach Impact
  - Observe a wider variety of demographics engaged with programming and outreach efforts.
  - Measure effectiveness of expanded outreach effort, through feedback tools and increased engagement.
- User Experience and Visitor Engagement
  - Measure and report on user engagement metrics for digital resources and online experiences.
  - Track increase in year-round and seasonal visitation numbers compared to previous periods. Identify consistent models for tracking less traditional engagement.

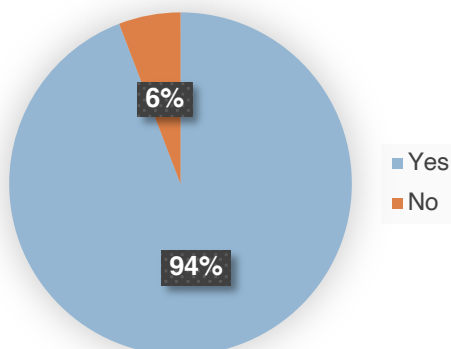
# 7 APPENDIX

## 7.1 APPENDIX A. 2023 PLANNING SURVEY SUMMARY

857 Responses

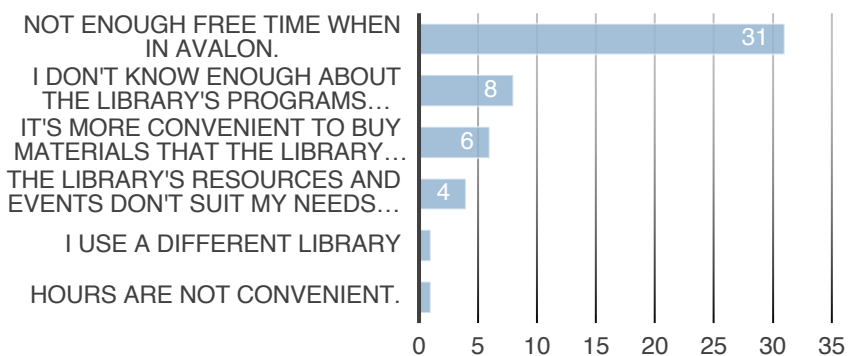
(276 online, 581 via mail)

1.) Do you use the Avalon Library (either in person or online)?

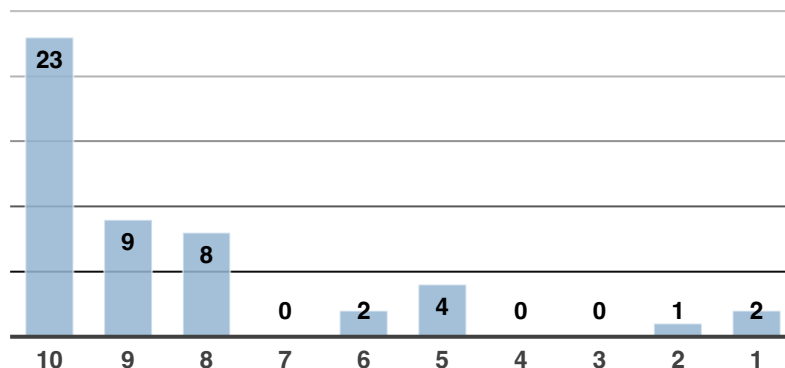


Responses for Questions 2 through 4 are from the 50 participants who answered NO to question 1: Do you use the Avalon Library (either in person or online)?

2.) Are any of the following reasons why you do not use the Avalon Library in person or online? Please check all that apply.



3.) On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being highest, how important are libraries to the community as a whole?



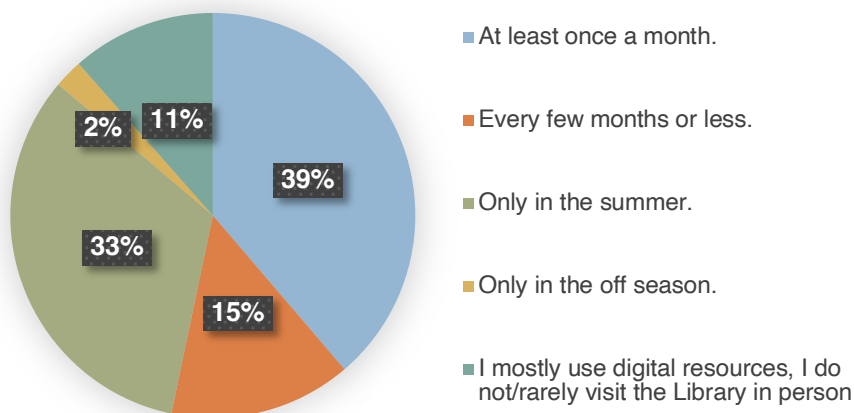
4.) Is there a service, resource, or program the Library might offer that would cause you to use the Library? Please share it here.

*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.*

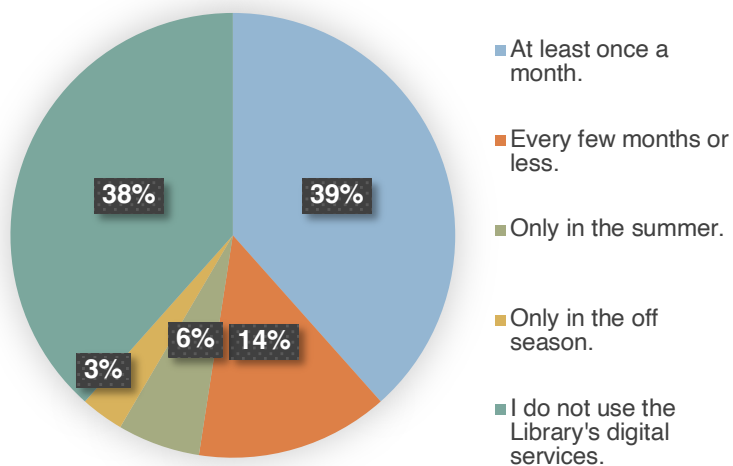
- No (3)
- From what I have read, the library offers many services.
- **Audible books**
- Might use more if retired.
- **A good website to reserve books.**
- Publicize book lending more.
- More speakers

Responses for Questions 5 through 11 are from the 807 participants who answered YES to question 1: Do you use the Avalon Library (either in person or online)?

5.) How often do you visit the Library?

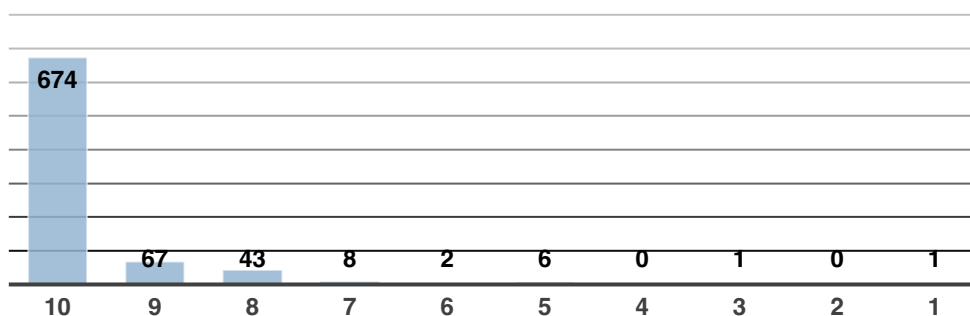


6.) How often do you use the Library's digital services (eBooks, audiobooks, streaming video, databases, etc.)?

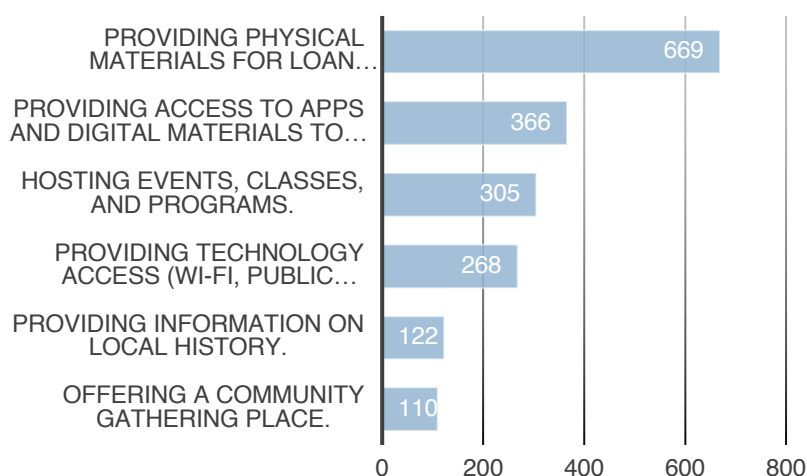




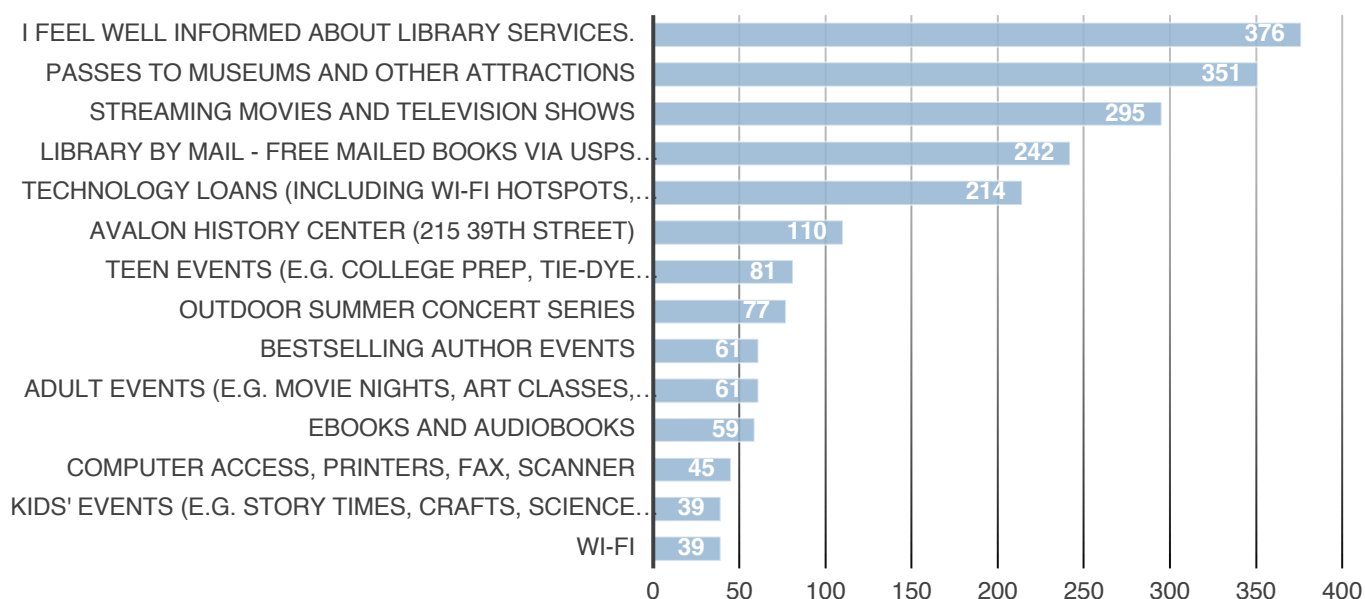
7.) On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being highest, how important are libraries to the community as a whole?



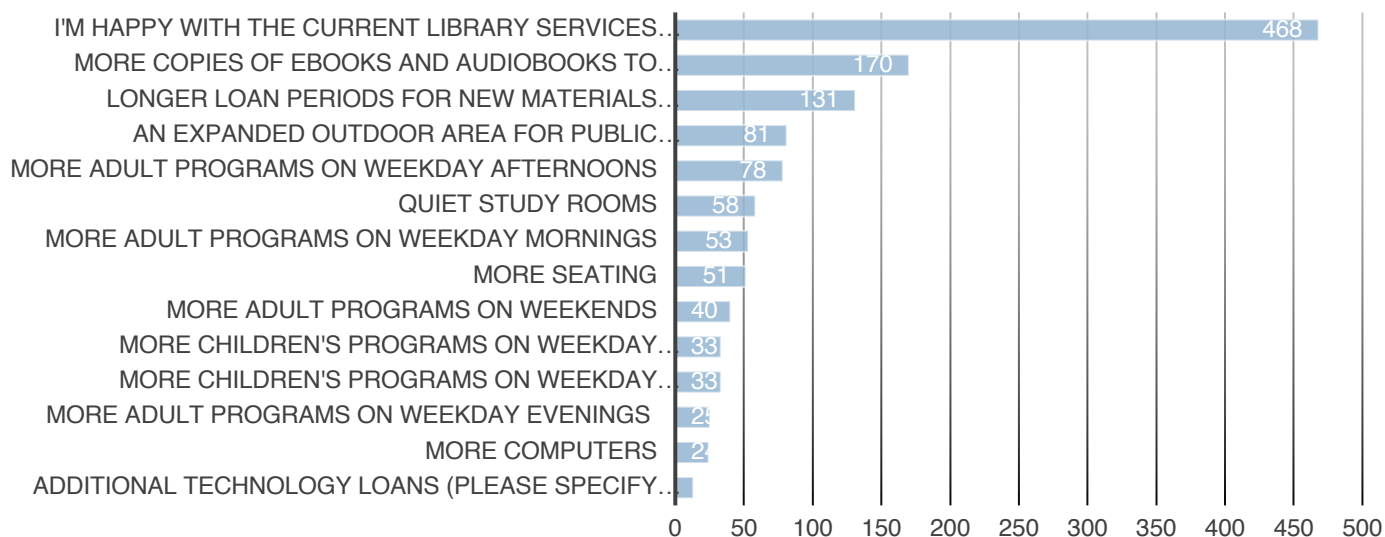
8.) Which of the following services offered by the Library do you use most often or feel are the most important? Please choose two.



9.) Of the Library services listed below, check all that you were unaware are available/offered.



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



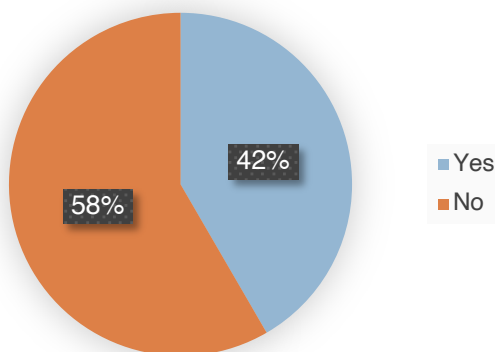
*Over 50% of respondents shared that they are happy with current services. Other strong responses included additional copies of eBooks and audiobook and longer loan periods for new print materials. Patrons are also interest in reimaged spaces, including outdoor seating and quiet study areas.*

11.) 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) Items the library offers or anticipates offering in 2024 are in bold.

*Respondents shared 68 assorted responses in this section, some of which were examples of services or details to support their response in question ten (10). Note, approximately 20% of responses included requests for services the Library already offers. When contact information was provided, staff will reach out for more information.*

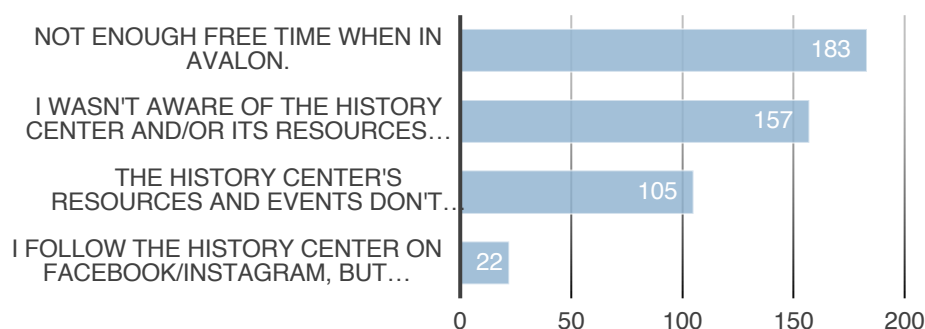
- Shorter wait time for popular or newer releases of eBooks. We would love more children’s programs at any time
- Crafts, author programs, and educational programs
- More Wi-Fi hot spots
- Three weeks for books, five for movies
- Computer classes
- Better quiet study options.
- Outside seating.
- More comfortable seating, i.e., more chairs - sometimes they are full.
- Would love an outdoor area for programs
- More adult programs in the off season
- More audiobook options
- Larger spaces for popular programs such as events too crowded
- Meetings rooms for clubs/organizations
- Virtual events

12.) Do you visit the Avalon History Center, the Library branch housing exhibits about Avalon's history and the Avalon Historical Collection?



Responses for Questions 13 and 14 from the 495 participants who answered NO to question 12: Do you visit the Avalon History Center, the Library branch housing exhibits about Avalon's history and the Avalon Historical Collection?

13.) Are any of the following reasons you do not visit the Avalon History Center (215 39th Street) or attend History Center events? Please chose any that apply.

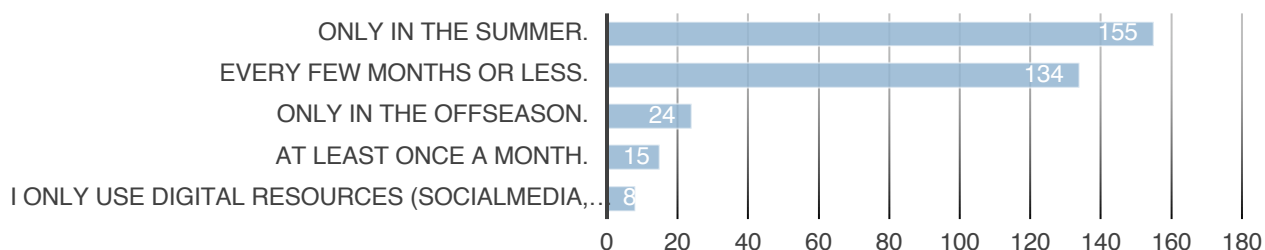


14.) Is there an exhibit, resource, or event the History Center might offer that would cause you to visit? Please share it here.

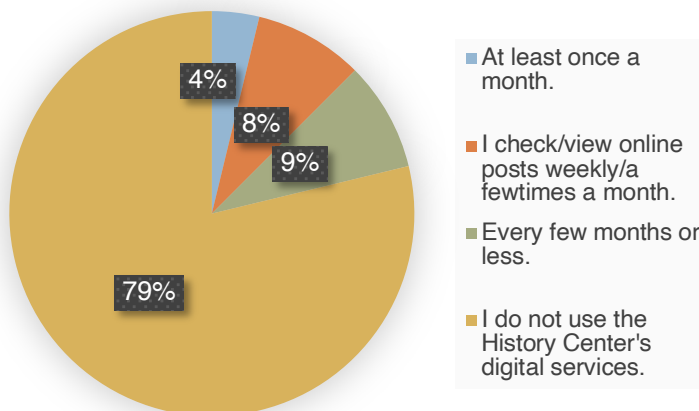
*Respondents shared a range of responses here, but the vast majority communicated no – there isn't anything that isn't already being featured that would be a draw but rather that awareness of the space and time available when in Avalon were the main factors for visitation.*

Responses for Questions 15 through 17 from the 353 participants who answered YES to question 12: Do you visit the Avalon History Center, the Library branch housing exhibits about Avalon's history and the Avalon Historical Collection?

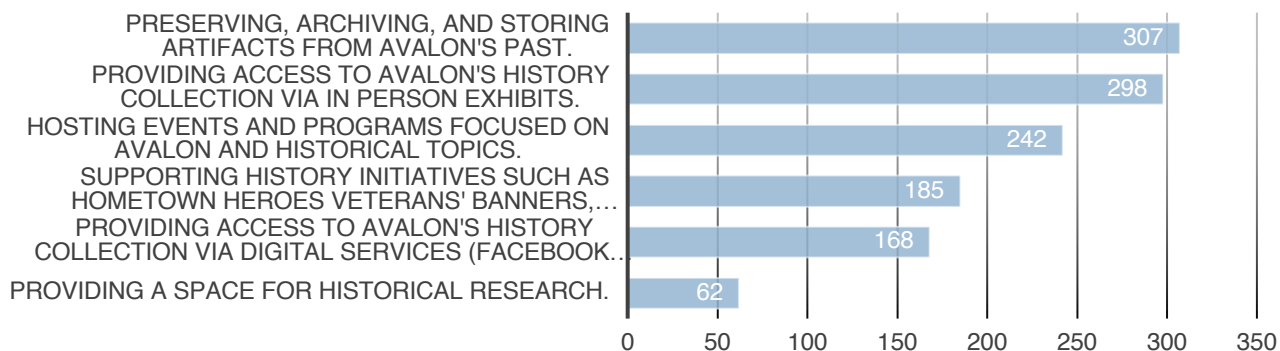
15.) How often do you visit the History Center or attend History Center events?



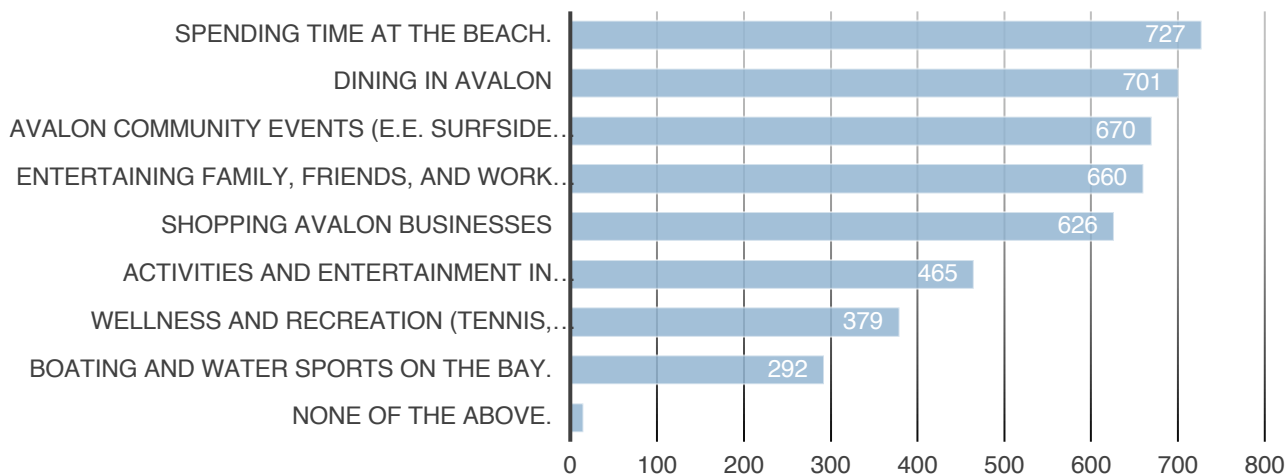
16.) How often do you use the History Center's digital services (view Facebook/Instagram featuring Avalon History, virtual exhibits, online historic photos and archive, etc.)?



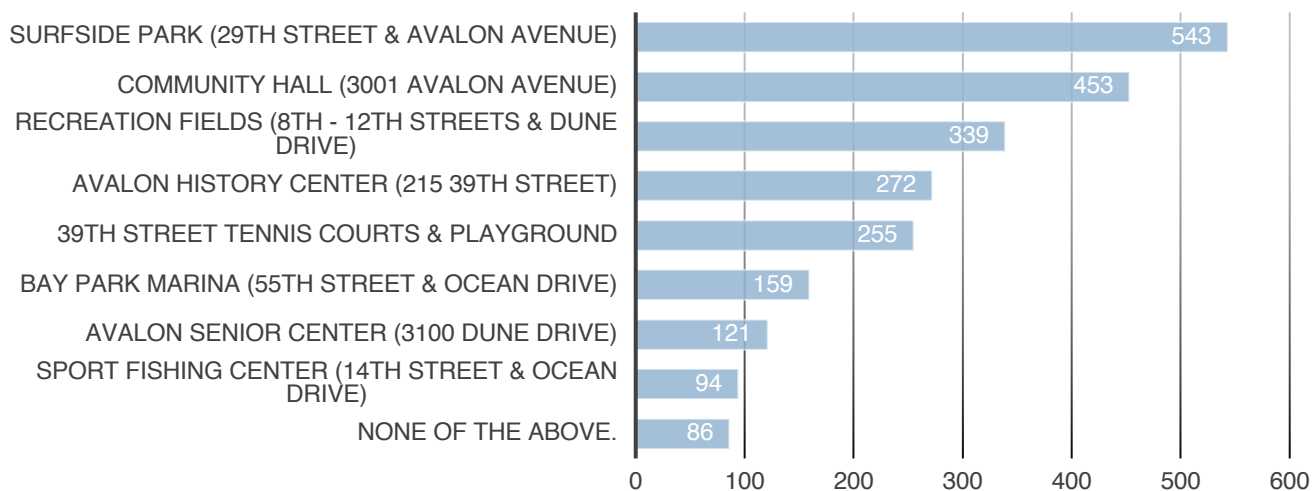
17.) Which of the following services offered by the History Center do you use most often or feel are the most important? Please check two.



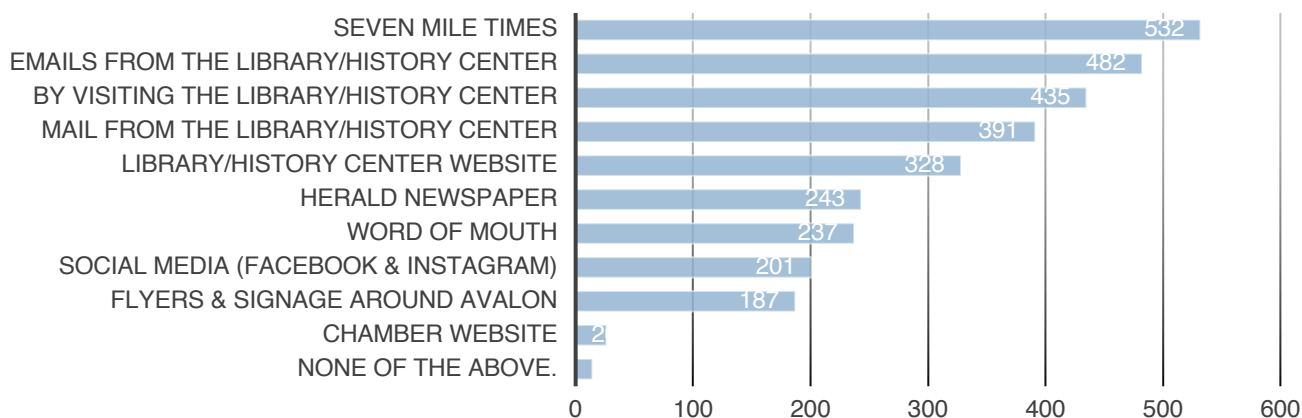
18.) What activities do you pursue while in Avalon? Please choose all that apply.



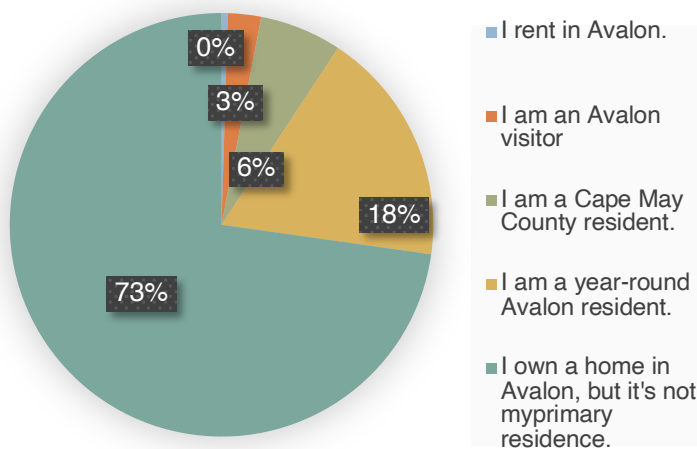
19.) Do you use any of the following community resources? Please choose all that apply.



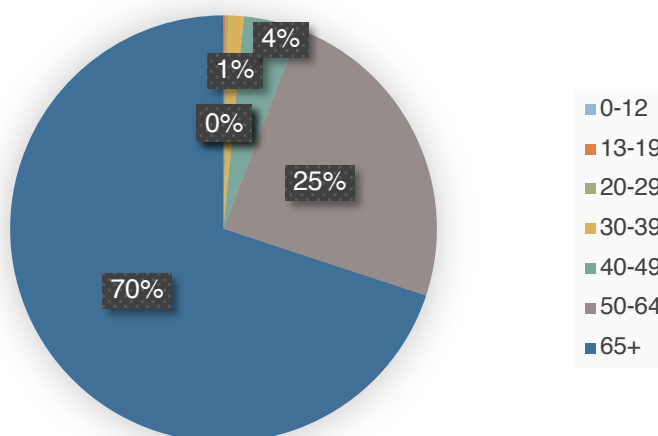
20.) How do you find out about Library and History Center programs, initiatives, and services? Please choose all that apply.



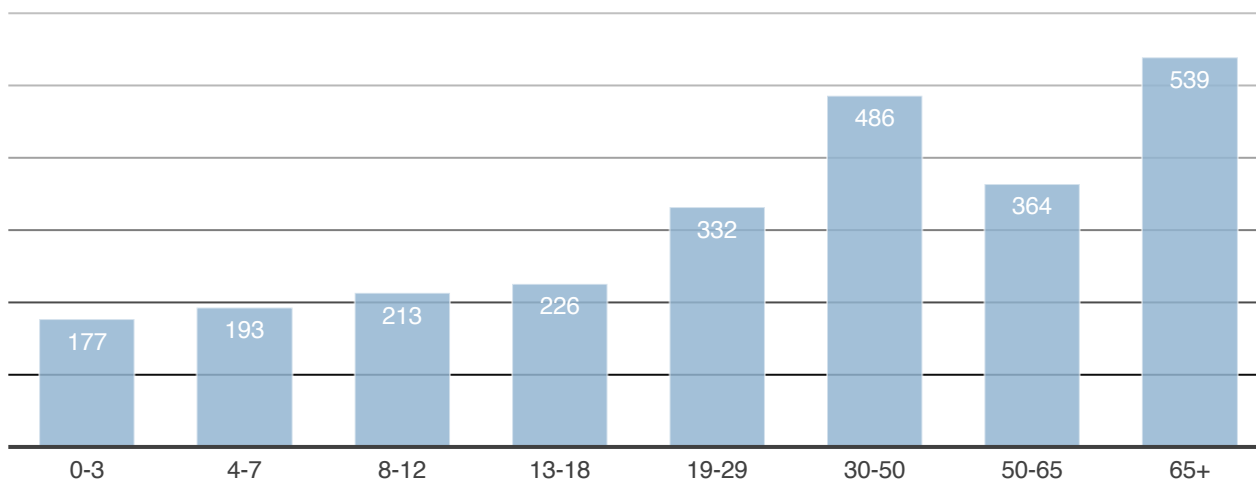
21.) Which of the following describes you? Choose one.



22.) What is your age range?



23.) Please share age ranges for members of your Avalon household throughout the year. (Feel free to include family members who are only in Avalon seasonally.) Please check all that apply.



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

*Hundreds of respondents shared feedback in response to this question, much of it praise for the organization's varied services and in particular, the staff. As seen in staff feedback pieces, employees deeply value providing excellent service, which correlates to the number of patrons who highlighted it here.*

*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. 2023 AVALON LIBRARY & HISTORY CENTER STAFF SOAR ANALYSIS

*Conducted spring 2023*

### STRENGTHS

What can we build on? What makes us unique? What do we provide that is exceptional for our members and community?

- Library
  - Quality of service
  - Access to technology, including services, hardware, and support
  - Quality of resources
  - Range of services
  - Relationships with patrons
  - Central location, near community landmarks
  - Exceptional summer programming
- History Center
  - Rotating exhibits highlighting the collection
  - Significant online presence
  - Special and specific to the Avalon Community
- Both
  - Strong collection to provide content for exhibits
  - Year-round programming
  - Physical presence
  - Stable budget allows for both community needs and innovation
  - Supportive Board of Trustees
  - Community relations
  - Accessibility and format variety across collections and available regardless of patron location
  - Committed, responsive, and informed staff
  - Available hours for the public

### OPPORTUNITIES

What are our stakeholders asking for? Who are possible new members? New markets? New skills?

- Library
  - Gaining a better understanding of patron wants/needs
  - Patron space to work remotely
  - After school programs for younger kids
  - More craft programs
  - Media/Makerspace for staff and patron use
  - More reading challenges (1000 Books Before Kindergarten)
  - Increase seating inside and out
  - Better arrangement and access to collection materials for year-round population (no top/bottom shelf, more LP, LP & audio for book clubs)
  - Contests for community engagement and participation.
- History Center
  - Dedicated programming space
  - Unified online collection platform
  - More kid friendly exhibits, touch exhibits
  - More space.
  - AI Training and Integrating this tech into the History Center
  - Work with AVES/SHES to bring more History programs to the schools
  - Seek items from local organizations and businesses while still operational
- Both
  - Focus on teen and seniors' programs
  - Marketing to County residents
  - Outdoor space for programs and exhibits
  - More indoor space
  - Improve marketing to new homeowners.
  - Better signage
  - Representation at community events from History Center and Library.

## ASPIRATIONS

What do we care deeply about?

Reflecting on strengths and opportunities, who are we, who should we become, and where should we go in the future?

- Library
  - Providing services patrons want and need
  - Be a destination for users
  - Offer more small venue events like movies and music.
  - Kids, Tween, and Teen focused programming
  - Staying relevant as the community changes - re-insert the library into the daily routine.
  - Increase programming in the off-season for year-round residents.
  - Offer a technology center.
  - More physical displays to promote resources (LBM, Tech, Baking).
- History Center
  - Providing accurate and reliable information about Avalon History
  - Safeguarding and archiving Avalon historical items
  - More community member interviews
  - Add more digital exhibits
  - More visibility and foot traffic.
  - Offer interactive exhibits and programs for younger population (e.g. story time at HC)
- Reinstatement program
  - Reinstatement program
  - Create a group called Avalon History Club to meet and talk about "Old Avalon"
  - Hold History Book Club at the History Center
- Both
  - HC and Library in one building
  - Increase spending for big events
  - Expand to best service in the community
  - Engage more in the off season
  - Integrate library and HC into teen and new adult world (through social media and beyond)
  - Ensure patrons have the best possible access to materials and collections.
  - Improve kids and teen involvement
  - Invite teens to complete community service
  - Increase year-round local involvement
  - Connect with local businesses for promotion

## RESULTS

How do we know we are succeeding? What meaningful measures would indicate we are on track?

- Library
  - Increased engagement in surveys and feedback at outreach events
  - Increased foot traffic
  - Positive feedback from patrons
  - Acknowledgement from outside the community
  - More new patrons
  - Increased patron confidence in using services
  - Report digital attendance not just physical engagement
  - Increased program attendance
- History Center
  - Increase in program & building attendance
  - Increase in online collection views
  - Increased and continued donations
  - Report digital attendance not just physical engagement
- Both
  - Increased use by patrons
  - Statistics
  - Reviews and surveys
  - Staff participation in programs, outreach, and services
  - Staff morale



## 7.3 APPENDIX C. 2024 FOCUS GROUPS SUMMARY REPORT

### WHAT ROLE DO LIBRARIES PLAY IN COMMUNITY?

*“gathering spot to create and bolster community”*

*“Libraries are often the center of a community, and should be.”*

*“The more resources...the greater the value!”*

*“the focal point of their community”*

- Role of community center and a library are different because of education component in libraries.
- Provide resources – the library is a resource for services like printing, as well as programs and events.
- Keeping community together.
- Meeting needs of different generations, young to old. Avalon does a good job covering the range of age groups.
- Activities for families.
- Bring education and books to the community.
- Programs and technology support.
- Space for work.
- Maintain records and public information for the community.

### WHAT ROLE DO MUSEUMS PLAY IN COMMUNITY?

Recover what prior generations have created and collected: *“More than just photos. Avalon history has a fabric.”*

- Preserving history of community with a focus on teaching the next generation local history.
- Reminding the next generation to appreciate and value the past. Encourage the younger groups to engage with history.
- Provide a place where people are comfortable in sending their artifacts of Avalon (collections)

## BORROWING & SERVICES

### WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON YOU VISIT/USE THE LIBRARY & HISTORY CENTER?

*“It's like a big store where you can buy anything!”*

*“Staff are incredible”*

*“The things you offer are outstanding”*

*“I stop at the library first thing when down to see what's new”*

*“We use library to find new books and like the quality and quantity of books offered, including new titles”*

*“Love the new section and staff recommendations”*

Excellent library with many services, maybe *“too many for me to get to!”*

Education, resource for reading materials – *“as newcomer, it is a great place to meet people.”*

- Books: multiple mentions for both physical materials and Libby eBooks and eAudio
- Video: DVDs remain popular, one participant noted streaming services
- Community Engagement: multiple mentions regarding the community feel of the space, use for socialization, read (books, magazines, newspapers), and relax

- Events: Authors, symphonies, concerts and many general mentions of program and events for all ages, from adults to kids. Events were also mentions as a means to support connection and socializing, as well as the chance to learn new things.
- Special services: multiple mentions for Library by Mail, printing, also noted – discovery kits and technology help
- Multiple mentions of:
  - Beach reads giveaway books, suggestion for charging for book giveaways
  - Variety offered
- Museum is important – has the power to connect younger generations to Avalon’s history through exhibits (photos) and events.

### *IF YOU BORROW MATERIALS, DO YOU PREFER PHYSICAL OR DIGITAL CONTENT?*

- For participants who shared, there was a solid mix of interest in both print and digital materials. Both groups saw the value of both formats, even when they had a clear preference. Nearly all strongly shared that print books should continue to be supported, even as interest in digital grows.
- Preference is often based on convenience and timing. Digital while away from Avalon, print while on island.

### *HOW CAN WE IMPROVE BORROWING EXPERIENCE?*

- More copies of eBooks. Participants shared that the wait for digital content can feel long.
- Wait for print items was reported as better, except in cases of local book club demand.
- Offer on island delivery/pick up.
- Some reporting they feel it’s great, no improvement needed:
  - “Already convenient, especially the drop box.”
  - Even with access issues for some apps, feels it’s worth the savings from dropping paid subscriptions.
  - Fine free is appreciated, as is the flexibility for returning, especially in the offseason.

### *IS THERE AN ITEM/SERVICE YOU'D LIKE US TO OFFER?*

- Sewing machines
- eSports
- Language learning
- Ancestry access from home (not available from vendor)
- Meditation and mindfulness
- Bookmobile / Home delivery
- More zoom and recorded on demand options
- Host popular programs more than once
- More programs for older kids
- For kids’ drop-in activities, offer more structure (Lego challenges)
- Little Free Libraries (boardwalk)
- Better seating for movies and programs

- HC programs featuring broader history topics
- IT appointments at home
- More partnership with Avalon School
- Improve outside feel, make it more engaging (library walk from school to library entrance)
- Borough/Library/School need to offer something for teens to do in summer, how can the library support this? (Other users noted that this isn't something the library should feel they need to solve.)

## **AVALON HISTORY CENTER**

### *HAVE YOU VISITED THE MUSEUM? WHAT WAS THE REASON FOR YOUR VISIT?*

- Tea Time
- HC programs and lectures
- Annual holiday party, annual house tour
- Once a summer, to see what's new.

### *IF YOU HAVE NOT VISITED, IS THERE A REASON?*

- Will visit soon - "no good excuse" to not have visited before.
- Low profile, more awareness need (3). Marketing for History Center "could use some work."
- Program offerings haven't appealed
- Not in Avalon full-time – have other priorities when in town.
- Feedback made it clear that for some, they think of visiting the HC as a kids/family activity:
  - Kids are older, doing their own things; was easier to remember when kids are younger.
  - Having older kids and being a part time resident makes it hard to get there but it's on the list, along with other local museums.

### *WHAT ARE RESOURCES OR PROGRAMS THAT MIGHT INCREASE YOUR VISITS TO THE MUSEUM?*

*"... event that occurs at both locations such as a fair to increase awareness?"*

*"I would go more if I could attend events in the museum... You need room for that."*

- Comment about promoting each other's sites.
- Make History Center programs and items a focal point within library.
- Be more intrusive with the Avalon HC in library.
- Make a permanent display of local history books in library.
- Museum membership cards when new patrons sign up for library cards.
- Bring artifacts from museum to library to display. (Change location of current exhibit.)
- Dedicate a room at the HC to revolving exhibits.
- Put up signs at Garden Club plant sale directing people to the History Center.
- Comment about past AHS events, was noted that volunteers may be needed, effort to engage new volunteers?
- Do an Avalon timeline history turned into mini-movies that could be shared across website and social media.
- Use projection and digital content in exhibits to make more immersive.

- History of Avalon causal connections – what has come and gone – partnerships with local organizations.
- More social engagement opportunities inside HC.
- More marketing.
- Outdoor programs/exhibits
- Open doors / open sign
- Host programs at the library and have a raffle at the HC to tie in.

***IN ADDITION TO THOUSANDS OF ARTIFACTS, THE COLLECTION INCLUDES A RANGE OF DIGITAL CONTENT. WHAT DIGITAL RESOURCES INTEREST YOU THE MOST?***

*"All have a place, hard pressed to choose one over others"*

- Focus on social media (3), especially sharing photos that trigger nostalgia and engagement.
- Archives
- Genealogy
- One participant shared that their family would say social media but they personally prefer oral histories.
  - Suggestion of an oral history from current and past mayors.
- Improve website.
- Using the potential of the virtual exhibits to bring awareness of the museum to the public.

## **COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT**

***HOW DO YOU LEARN ABOUT LIBRARY AND HISTORY CENTER RESOURCES AND EVENTS?***

*"I go through your summer sheet with a highlighter"*

- Mailers (4)
- Email (6)
- Herald
- 7MT (2)
- Website (2)
- Inside library
- Word of Mouth
- Online (2)
- Renters Packets

***WHAT SOURCES DO YOU PREFER?***

- Email (2)
- Mailers (can be put on fridge)
- Summer guide
- Avalon Times
- 7 Mile Times

- Website
- Combo – email and website
- Summer Guide (3)
  
- Interest in targeted communications based on personal preferences.
- User feels we do communicate our services well in multiple formats but that there is a large segment who don't pay attention to the marketing and are relying too much on word of mouth.

## ***HOW CAN THE LIBRARY & HISTORY CENTER REACH NEW MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY?***

*"Don't sell the card, sell what you have."*

*"Make the library more colorful...use your great location to use banners and flags to get people's attention."*

*"Can you handle more users? You need space to accommodate more users."*

- Texting
- More prominently displayed on Borough website.
- Reach out to new homeowners - three months is too long, but closing is too early to reach out. Monthly welcome letter from the Borough's list of sales.
- Send mailer with water bill
- Try to get new homeowners to support library programs.
- Use relationships with realtors
- Add a video intro to library on website then link out to social.
- Opportunity of adding info when annual rental agreement goes out to homeowners who rent seasonally.
- Billboard as people are leaving Avalon so they remember they can use the library and HC online from home.

## **EVENTS & PROGRAMS**

### ***IF YOU ATTEND EVENTS, HOW CAN WE IMPROVE?***

- Avoid scheduling conflicts, including Borough meetings and activities. Collaborative way – a shared document to house all of the events in the Borough (II)
- In general, "you do a pretty good job" in scheduling events.
- Interesting to be outside for symphony, liked it, also - bring symphony back inside.
- Is it possible to manage playground use during Surfside programs?
- Improve lighting/atmosphere at the Tennis Building for HC programs.

### ***SUGGESTIONS FOR PROGRAM CONTENT/OFFERINGS***

*"...things you offer are so great I am looking to do it again."*

*"variety is wonderful"*

*"More of the same!"*

- Likes the puzzle swaps
- Offer more family events

- Cookie decorating.
- Building in more sessions, maybe go to three sessions, especially for popular events.
- More cooking classes.
- Any other "affinity groups" like Italian Culture, doesn't have to be origin-based, could be interest-based like pickleball for example.
- Use historical Philadelphia connection to explore programs of interest to public and solicit online to people from those areas
- Language classes
- Programs for older kids – late afternoon/early evening is best in summer.
- Author events like pre-pandemic
- Tents outside library as a fun place to hang out
- Read to a therapy dog
- More movie nights
- Expand museum programs, theme programs around HC
- Share expertise locally with members in the community. Ask audience to share about themselves.
- Vet to talk about pets, teach pet owners, dog contest with themes
- Environment, climate change, topics to address social issues
- Dance program/composers/DJ for teenagers - find out what kids/teens want.
- Show movies during the summer
- Events on Saturday night in the summer
  - It's hard to get family together for Fri/Sat plans
  - Thursday is easier to get family to come to an author event
  - Offer Sunday evening events. More weekenders might attend on a Sunday night during summer.
  - Leave Friday/Saturday alone
- HC Programs day/time discussion
  - Do evenings and avoid Saturdays, try Monday nights in the summer
  - "If I'm down there I'm usually down there on the weekends"
  - "1:00 seems neither here nor there" prefers evenings or mornings
  - Host HC programs during evenings in summer (Off season programs 3:30)

## ***IF YOU DON'T ATTEND PROGRAMS, WHAT COULD WE DO TO ENCOURGE YOUR ATTENDANCE?***

*"Surfside Park is not big enough."*

*Concerts outside is difficult for some older residents, "wish we had indoor/outdoor theater."*

- Some prefer not to drive at night.
- Leave the Community Hall doors open and have people in there.
- Record presentations to be able to watch later.

## FACILITIES

### WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT LIBRARY FACILITY?

*"What a wonderful challenge to face, growth and improvement"*

*"Comfort level at library is great"*

- Hominess
- Ambiance and welcoming are branded. Transitional space (porch)
- Outside book drop
- Amount of light/openness.
- Seating in magazine/newspapers area.
- Current facility seems sufficient but user can see we are restricted from much growth.
- Flow works for participant, who likes where the circ desk is, feels it's user-friendly. Another participant suggested moving circ desk to center of library.
- Potential for new building. Option to leverage school space during summer?

### WHAT DO YOU LIKE LEAST ABOUT LIBRARY FACILITY?

*"School appears to have wasted space in their part of the new building. Can the library use it?"*

*Not enough "kid space"*

- Building frontage and front entry doors.
- Parking lot lighting (especially in the northeast corner- light shines on ground not on lot).
- Insufficient curb cutouts in high curb between lot and drive.
- Landscaping improvements needed, enhance and more maintenance.
- Uncomfortable program seating.
- Lack of quiet study/telehealth area. No space to reserve cubicles.
- Lack of outdoor space for families.

### WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT HISTORY CENTER FACILITY?

- Example of Borough agencies working together.

### WHAT DO YOU LIKE LEAST ABOUT HISTORY CENTER FACILITY?

*Rooms and event space tight, building would need a "huge expansion" to accommodate more people.*

*"Rooms are too close in the back."*

- Consensus that there is not enough parking or program space.
- Front doors are too heavy.
- Tennis building is insufficient for programs and HC needs more collection storage. Ability to accept larger artifacts.
- Not enough space for exhibits.
- Need a better meeting room.
- Need improvements to Tennis Building if it will continue to be used for programs. Better lighting, less wood.

## OTHER

**FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN IN (VISITING OR LIVING) AVALON SINCE BEFORE 2020, WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU OBSERVED IN THE COMMUNITY IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS?**

*“Big changes”*

*“...bigger houses and more empty houses”*

*“More dogs & more baby carriages”*

*“Limited activities are part of Avalon's charm.”*

*“people are looking for more to do”*

*“How much to grow? ... do you need more space or need to use existing spaces more wisely?”*

- Shift from folksy-town. Losing the Mayberry quality.
- Tax base going up, “How does this change who is buying houses?”
- Surfside Park improvements a striking change.
- Not the library’s job, but increasing need to maintain Avalon's charm – prevent overdevelopment. Being conscious of restrained growth.
- More year-round families. Younger demographic in the summers. Multigenerational houses, especially summer.
- Groups are in their own world and less interested in engaging.
- More teenagers hanging out at Wawa, kids are less likely to have summer jobs.
- Blue theme in town - mixed reactions to the blue.
- Cooler by \_\_\_ campaign suggestion
  - Cooler by a Museum Visit, Cooler by a Library Card

**ANY ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK YOU WANTED TO SHARE BUT HAVEN'T HAD A CHANCE TO COMMUNICATE?**

*“Library is the best asset in Avalon”*

*“Community collaboration is key.”*

*Discuss the variables internally – “can’t change demographics, what can be changed?”*