



# Phoenicia Library

## **Plan of Service 2023-2028**

**December 2022**

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# Introduction

The Phoenicia Library's previous Plan of Service, adopted in 2016, was written after the library had functioned for a year in its new and expanded space. Much has changed since then. The demographics of Shandaken have shifted in palpable ways. A global pandemic has touched almost every aspect of life. Instability reigns in the political, economic and societal fronts.

In the Fall of 2022, the Board convened a two-person committee to organize a short online survey to better understand both the general concerns of residents and their suggestions for the library. The committee met to frame an updated Plan of Service, and presented it to the board for approval in 2022. The current plan is an update rather than a complete reworking. A future board should not hesitate to engage in more in-depth planning if it has more time prior to 2028. In the meantime, this document details the Phoenicia Library Plan of Service and provides direction for the Board of Trustees and staff for the coming years.

## **Background**

The Phoenicia Library is located in Phoenicia, Town of Shandaken, Ulster County, NY. Shandaken is a rural community of 2,866 residents as of the 2020 census. It is known for its natural beauty with glacier-carved streams and rugged forested mountains.

The Phoenicia Library serves users primarily from Shandaken, of which Phoenicia is its largest hamlet. It also serves families with more than one home, seasonal or part-time people in rentals and vacation homes, and residents of nearby areas. The library strives to be a community builder. As such, in addition to traditional books and digital resources, the library offers access to programs that assist our community members in "living their lives," including Medicare counseling, tutoring in ESL and math, legal volunteers, and resilience efforts such as food distribution, and free covid tests and masks. The library also serves vacationers who seek information about local activities and amenities, and use the internet. A unique Phoenicia Library asset is our world-class Jerry Bartlett Memorial Angling Collection.

In 2021, over 21,000 items were checked out and total program attendance was over 5,706 people, with over 130 kids programs offered (mainly in person), and 113 programs (in person and on Zoom) for adults.

## **Demographics**

Demographics have changed significantly, most notably in the number of residents, with a 7% drop in population in the last decade, and close to a 12% cumulative drop over the last 20 years. A fluctuation like this may seem large, but has happened a few times since the town was founded in 1804, especially during the period 1910-1940. There have been many national and local factors at play in the waxing and waning of the population. One new factor, mentioned here because it appears frequently in survey responses, is Short Term Rentals (STRs), which enhance an already robust tourist economy and now comprise 12% of residences in Shandaken.

## **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges**

Based on the opinions of surveys, feedback from patrons, usage statistics from the Annual Report to the State, and impressions of the staff and Board, there is general agreement on the strengths and weaknesses of the Phoenicia Library as of fall 2022.

**1. Strengths** fall into four groupings of environment, staff, collection, and programs.

Patrons find the building environment to be friendly, comfortable, clean, and bright. Patrons appreciate the energy-efficient design.

The staff and director are described as kind, friendly, and helpful.

Patrons like the selection of books, movies/DVDs, including e-books and access to the Mid-Hudson Library System. On-site computers, internet, and Wi-Fi cell service are important.

Programs hosted in the library are appreciated and the patrons would like to see more.

**2. Weaknesses** In general, most patrons feel the library is doing a great job as it is. If anything, patrons want the library to do more of what it already does: more programs for adults and children, and a greater selection of books.

### **3. Opportunities**

Areas of identified opportunities include: developing the Friends of the Library, and increasing the number of trustees.

### **4. Challenges**

1. The top challenge continues to be funding the library operations. This requires the community to pass a ballot measure to ensure sufficient funding of living wages for the staff. In an era of steep inflation and economic uncertainty, this is more challenging than it has been in the previous decade.
2. The second biggest challenge is ensuring we can attract and retain staff. The pool of workers has dropped, cost of living has sharply increased, and most staff members have to supplement their work with spousal income or better paying side jobs, sharply limiting their availability.
3. Fundraisers beyond the basic operations ballot measure are needed. Cultivating donors and creating fundraisers is difficult without an active Friends of the Library group of volunteers.
4. More trustees are needed. Like other local volunteer organizations, the library is experiencing a drop in the number of full time residents available to work on behalf of the community. This shifts board matters onto staff, who are already stretched thin.

# Plan of Service

## Phoenicia Library Mission Statement

The Mission of the Phoenicia Library is to provide and maintain access to a world of enlightening and educational resources in all media. We strive for excellence in all areas of service to our community and recognize our responsibility to encourage a life-long love of learning in our community’s children. We wish to provide a welcoming and safe space for all ages as well as guidance in the pursuit of knowledge.

In fall of 2022, the Board reviewed the goals of its operations. The Board identified the following three goals consistent with the Phoenicia Library Mission, and specific, measurable steps to meet these goals.

### Goal 1. Create Young Readers: Emergent Literacy

Objectives	Activities
Continue outreach to children	Summer reading program, Books for Babies, Partnership with Shandaken Rec.
Partner with the schools	Onsite programs, outreach to PTA, visits by individual classes, Math Tutoring
Continue off-site programming	Preschools, Shandaken Rec, Phoenicia Farmers Market, Phoenicia Elementary School
Outreach to diverse populations	ESL population – offer language learning programs

### Goal 2. Satisfy Curiosity and Develop Skills: Lifelong Learning

Objectives	Activities
Digital Literacy – adult learning programs	Computer Fixer monthly help
Provision of Information for Living Life	Medicare Counseling, Legal Information, Insurance Navigators, Support for Caregivers
Provide excellent materials	Keep lending library fresh – weeding collection and adding new books based on circulation trends and patron requests.
Adult Programming	Continue to offer broad range of programming including education, local history, fishing, music

### Goal 3. Maintain a Harmonious Environment for the Community: Public and Virtual Space

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Comfortable physical environment	Clean, well lit, uncluttered, well maintained physical space with comfortable seating and tables
Highlight local talent/culture	Design programs led by local residents in their area of interest/expertise
Staffing	Friendly, skilled people with low turnover through living wage and benefits
Outreach communications	Facebook, calendar, bulletin board, website
Programs designed to foster community communications and civic responsibility	Telehealth Program, Medicare, healthcare navigation, voter registration, legal assistance
Offer patrons a choice of relaxing, social and quiet space	Quiet zone in Angler's Parlor, with quiet areas to work also in the Meeting Room and Nonfiction Room.
Partner with local business, town, and civic groups	Provide meeting space; Attend meetings of Phoenicia Business Association, Town Board, and host meetings of local committees and citizen groups.

# Implementation of the Plan of Service

## 1. Economic Sustainability

At the heart of delivering the plan of service is ensuring the Phoenicia Library has sustainable funding. As recommended by Mid-Hudson Library System, Phoenicia Library will endeavor to cover all its essential functions through the guaranteed funding of the property tax levy. When demand for services exceeds the levy, the Board will return to the voters to decide whether to have additional funding so that there is not a state of deficit or austerity. Should the town reject the request for increased funding, services will be cut back so that they are within our means. Essential functions include, for example: programming costs, annual additions to the collection, personnel costs, building expenses and maintenance, and administrative costs (insurance, accounting, legal). Non-essential functions can be covered by donations such as extra programming and events for the community. The Board will commit to reviewing tax levy funding annually, with a commitment to do a ballot measure campaign (414) at least every two years if funding is no longer adequate.

## 2. Strong & Effective Staff

The staff is the heart of the functioning of the library. Staff must be selected with care, and adequately trained. Ongoing training and staff meetings should occur regularly so that staff is kept up-to-date in best practices. Adequate funding must be in place to be able to provide staff with wages and benefits sufficient to attract and retain staff so there is not constant turn-over or skill deficit.

## 3. Strong & Effective Board

The Board of Trustees provides oversight, determines policy, and fundraises. The Board will engage in regular Trustee Training with Mid-Hudson Library System for each board member every year to keep up to date on their responsibilities. The Board will monitor anticipated retirements from the Board, and work to recruit good candidates. Board candidates will be vetted through inviting potential Board members to participate on a committee, in volunteer activities, or in the Friends of the Phoenicia Library prior to being invited to join the Board. This is to ensure Board members who are skilled, reliable and work well with others. Prospective Board members will be given the Trustee handbook and realistic understanding of expectations for their commitment.

Consideration should be given to the specific skills someone has to offer that might be useful on the Board (i.e. p/r, legal, accounting, communications, fundraising, etc.)

#### 4. Cultivate Long-term Membership in Friends of the Phoenicia Library

The Friends of Phoenicia Library function as an event and fundraising arm of the library. They also offer support as volunteers when needed, such as during the ballot measure (414 tax levy) operating expenses campaigns. Cultivating a strong, long-term membership of the Friends of the Phoenicia Library is an important goal for the future. Board support by attending meetings and involving Friends in special event planning is a necessary component.

#### 5. Policy

Up to date policy for the library keeps the library functioning fairly, safely and optimally. The Board and director will review the policy every five years, and add or change policies when the need arises.

#### 6. Physical Building

The integrity and aesthetic of the building is important to the experience of the patrons of the library. The director and the board building committee will oversee maintenance and repair. The staff will maintain the building interior on a weekly basis.

#### 7. Relationship with Local Officials and the Town of Shandaken

A good relationship with Local Officials and the Town is essential for good library service to residents. The Town Board and the Town Clerk provide information on the needs of residents, as well as offer resources and feedback for the library. The Director will maintain ongoing communication with the Town Supervisor and Town Clerk. The Director will work with the Town to share each institution's outreach publicity and to create collaborations for educational or Town events. Trustees will attend Town Board meetings regularly to speak about the library's activities and to keep current on what the issues are in town that the library should be aware of, especially in creating programming.

## 8. Yearly Review

The Plan of Service will be reviewed annually to ensure the library staff and Board are following its guidelines. Each June, the director and Board will evaluate strengths and weaknesses in each of the plan's categories. In July, the results will be presented to the community during the Annual Meeting. If necessary, a revised Service Plan for the following year will be considered and adopted by the Board in September.

# APPENDIX A

## Phoenicia Library

### Survey 2022

#### Summary

A brief online survey was designed and responses were collected for six weeks. Paper copies were available in the library and the survey could be downloaded. Unlike the prior lengthy survey of 2016, this year's survey, working with limited time and resources, focused on how the community felt about itself, its dreams and challenges, and how the library could support those. By mid-November 2022, approximately 40 surveys were collected and analyzed. Because of the low response rate, conclusions cannot be drawn. However, the responses provide an anecdotal snapshot of the concerns of community members, both library users and nonusers.

#### 1. What are your GOALS AND DREAMS for Shandaken?

Most respondents mentioned preservation of community resources, such as:

- "retain small town energy"
- "protect the wilderness"
- "to stay put"
- "It stays the same"

Paired with a desire for specific improvements, such as:

- "affordable housing"
- "a cultural and outdoor Mecca for the city"
- "for people raised here to be able to thrive"
- "more restaurants/active recreation/arts"

#### 2. What do you see as the CHALLENGES and PROBLEMS for Shandaken?

"Lack of affordable housing" was the most commonly cited problem. Other infrastructure issues included:

- Lack of cell service and reliable internet
- Lack of infrastructure "crumbling, unsafe roads"
- Threats caused by flooding and it being "warmer"

Negative cultural change was felt by many respondents, though there was disagreement on the cause

- “severe change”
- “hipsters coming to the Catskills and not respecting nature”
- “too many city people and part-timers renting out their places to strangers”
- “Us vs them. Old vs new. Divisiveness along political lines.”
- “gentrification”

### 3. What do you see as the STRENGTHS of Shandaken?

The most common response was the natural resources

- “beautiful location”
- “Nature”
- “lots of outdoor activities”

The second most common response was the strength of community itself

- “community spirit and passion and love”
- “Open mindfulness”
- “caring people”
- “the Community is strong”
- “Kindness and community”

### 4. What role do you see for the PHOENICIA LIBRARY in supporting the community?

On one hand there was a feeling that the library was already playing a strong role

- “deeply committed to community”
- “excellent convener”
- “great job already making programming available”
- “diverse programming”
- “helping to educate and encourage”

On the other hand, there was an equally strong desire for the library to increase its activities and scope

- “continue to expand”
- “better selection” of new books
- “be an honest broker for all well-meaning points of view”
- Specific suggestions were to increase programs, such as: civics, nature programs, partner for smart growth, kids programs, and mutual aid
- “bridge divides”
- “expand in-person offerings”

Conclusion

Among respondents, there was both a pride in the community and the natural environment, and a fear that change was threatening both. There were significant concerns about the challenges the town faces, and no clear way to solve them. Simultaneously, there was a nearly unanimous recognition that the human ties in the community remained strong.

Regarding the library's role in the town's goals and challenges, there was an overall agreement the library is doing a strong job. However, a significant proportion of respondents expressed interest in the library playing a larger role as a facilitator, mediator, builder, and/or protector of Phoenicia's social and physical environments. Responses included requests to amplify the library's offerings: more programs/activities, more children's programs, more and better selection of books, and more community-hub activities.

We are grateful for those who participated and these suggestions will all be taken into consideration with implementation based on the library's staffing and budget.