AUBURN PUBLIC LIBRARY
STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-30 INPUT
ADULT FOCUS GROUPS SUMMARY REPORT 2025

INTRODUCTION

As part of the Auburn Public Library (APL) strategic planning process, **two 90-minute focus groups** were conducted to gather input from adult community members about their experiences, perceptions, and aspirations for the Library. Participants were invited to share their thoughts on how they use the Library, what they value most and least, and what improvements they would like to see in the future. These discussions also explored topics such as programs and services, physical space, technology, and the Library's role in the community.

A total of **ten adult participants** volunteered to take part in a focus group on July 22 or July 24, 2025. In these sessions, participants provided thoughtful and candid feedback that offers valuable insight into community priorities and expectations. This report summarizes the key themes and highlights that emerged from their input.

---

1. **What are the very first TWO words you think of when you think about the Library?**

    FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Participants offered a mix of **positive, nostalgic, and descriptive responses**. The comments reflected both **affection for the Library's welcoming atmosphere and community role** and an awareness that the facility feels **small and dated** compared to more modern counterparts.

    Word cloud: Books, Dated, First Job, Petite, Older, Ample Parking, Kids, Community, Free, Information, Convenient Location, Book Lovers, Safe Place, Cozy, Events, Friendly

    - **POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS AND STRENGTHS**
        - **Books, Learning, and Information**
            - Unsurprisingly, several participants immediately associated APL with **"books"** and **"book lovers,"** underscoring that reading and access to information remain at the core of the Library's identity.
            - The words **"information"** and **"events"** also reflect the Library's role as a place for learning and discovery beyond traditional book lending.
        - **Community and Accessibility**
            - The words **"community,"** **"safe place,"** and **"friendly"** highlight how participants view the Library as a **welcoming and inclusive gathering space**.
            - **"Convenient location"** and **"ample parking"** were also noted as practical strengths that make the Library accessible and easy to use.
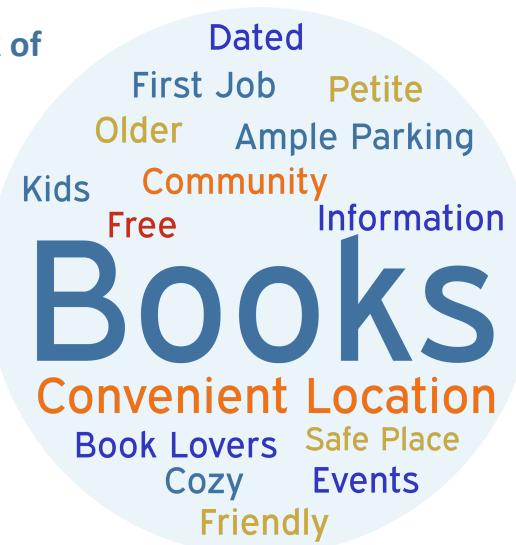
- o **Warmth and Connection**
  - Descriptors such as **"cozy"** and **"free"** reflect a sense of comfort and appreciation for the Library as an **open, no-cost community resource** available to everyone.
  - Several participants associated APL with personal experiences, including one who noted it was their **"first job,"** suggesting that the Library plays a meaningful role in local lives.

- **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**
  - o **Aging Facility and Perceptions**
    - A small number of responses, including **"dated," "older,"** and **"petite,"** indicate that while the Library is valued, its **physical appearance and scale** may not fully reflect the vibrancy of its services.
    - These perceptions align with other feedback suggesting that **modernization, rebranding, and facility updates** could strengthen APL's image and appeal to new generations of users.

OBSERVATIONS: Participants' first impressions of the Auburn Public Library strike a balance between **warmth and nostalgia**, while **acknowledging its limitations**. The Library is viewed as a **friendly, safe, and community-centered space**, known for its accessibility and its core mission of connecting people with books and information. At the same time, comments about the APL's **size and dated appearance** suggest a community desire for **renewal and investment** to ensure the Library continues to inspire pride and engagement in the years ahead.

2. Which Library resources or materials do you use most frequently?

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: The focus group findings highlight the Library's success in balancing **traditional Library strengths**, such as access to books and helpful staff, with a growing emphasis on **digital resources and flexible spaces**. Participants' comments suggest ongoing community appreciation for the Library's welcoming environment and staff, coupled with a desire for continued innovation that responds to changing interests and technologies.

- **FREQUENCY AND PATTERNS OF LIBRARY USE:** Participants demonstrated a wide range of engagement with the Library, often influenced by life stage and family needs.
  - o Parents of young children are among the most frequent users, visiting multiple times per week for **storytimes**, **children's materials**, and **book holds**.
  - o Adults without young children tend to visit less frequently but occasionally use APL as a **quiet workspace** or for **Friends' events and book sales**.
  - o Several participants indicated that they **used the Library more regularly when their children were younger** and now stay connected primarily through **digital services**, such as **Libby** or **Friends' email communications**.

- Overall, the Library is regarded as a **welcoming, family-friendly community resource** that provides a convenient place to learn, work, and connect. However, engagement often tapers once families age out of youth programming.

- **MOST VALUED SERVICES AND RESOURCES:** Participants identified both **digital access** and **traditional Library services** as key strengths.
  - **Digital Resources:** The **Libby app** for eBooks and audiobooks was cited most frequently as a valued service due to its ease of use and wide selection.
  - **Collections and Programs:** Physical books, new releases, museum passes, the Seed Library, and programs that introduce new topics or skills were all mentioned as important offerings.
  - **Community and Support Services:** Participants value the **Children's Room**, **meeting spaces**, and **tax assistance**, all of which enhance the Library's role as a community hub.
  - **Staff and Service:** Librarians were praised as knowledgeable and approachable. Several participants emphasized that librarians themselves are a valued part of the experience, reinforcing the human connection and personalized help that APL provides.
  - **Innovation and Future Interest:** Several participants expressed enthusiasm for the idea of a **Library of Things**, suggesting community interest in expanding access to nontraditional items and experiences.

- **LEAST VALUED OR OUTDATED RESOURCES:** A small number of services and materials were viewed as less relevant or underused:
  - **Print Reference materials** and **microfiche** were considered outdated by multiple participants.
  - **DVDs** were mentioned as declining in popularity.
  - Some participants indicated that they do not use children's resources.
  - One participant expressed nostalgia for **audio** cassettes ("Don't lose audio cassettes!").

3. How can the Library's physical space be improved?

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Participants consistently described the Auburn Public Library's physical environment as **dated, uninviting, and lacking comfort**.

- The building was referred to as **"uninviting"** both inside and out, and **"not a relaxing or welcoming atmosphere."**
- Several participants emphasized that the **space has not been reconfigured in many years**, contributing to a feeling of stagnation.
- The **institutional furniture**, **tall shelving**, and **narrow aisles** were cited as contributing to an overall sense of **clutter and discomfort**.
- A few attendees noted that they prefer to use other nearby libraries, such as **Northborough**, due to their more **modern and inviting environments**.

- **DESIRED IMPROVEMENTS:** Participants expressed strong interest in **modernizing the building**, improving **comfort and usability**, and creating **distinct, flexible areas** for different types of users. Common themes included:
  - **Comfort and Atmosphere**
    - Desire for a **more welcoming and relaxing environment**, modeled after **bookstores such as Barnes & Noble**, with **comfortable seating**, **side tables**, and **a small coffee area**.
    - **Coffee shop** and **food truck** ideas were mentioned as ways to make the Library more social and appealing.
    - **Outdoor seating** and **a dedicated social area** were suggested to encourage informal use and community connection.
  - **Functional Layout and Space Use**
    - Participants recommended a **reconfiguration of interior spaces** to better support various uses:
      - **Separate study and reading spaces** to balance quiet and social needs.
      - **Additional individual workspaces** and **small study rooms**—ideally with **online reservation systems**—to support remote work and tutoring.
      - **Second-floor reading areas** featuring **comfortable, private seating** were repeatedly suggested.
    - An improved **workspace design** was identified as a high priority by several participants.
  - **Accessibility and Wayfinding**
    - While overall physical accessibility was considered **good**, several participants described **difficulty orienting themselves upon entering**.
    - The **tall shelving** and **visual clutter** make the space feel overwhelming and confusing, especially to first-time visitors.
    - Attendees recommended **clearer signage**, **hanging directional signs**, and **more visible labeling of meeting rooms and key areas**.
    - Narrow aisles were noted as **challenging for wheelchair users**.
    - The **main entrance** was specifically cited as needing to be **more welcoming and visually appealing**.
  - **Staff Presence:** Participants expressed a desire for **more consistent staff availability at service desks**, suggesting that a visible, approachable staff presence contributes to a sense of comfort and welcome.

OBSERVATIONS: The feedback reflects a clear community interest in **transforming the Auburn Public Library's facility into a more comfortable, flexible, and contemporary environment**. Participants envision a space that balances **quiet study areas** with **social and community zones**, offers **comfortable seating and modern amenities**, and provides **better visual orientation and signage**. While accessibility is generally strong, opportunities exist to **improve wayfinding and the first impression upon entry**.

Overall, attendees expressed a desire for a Library environment that feels **inviting, current, and aligned with contemporary community and work habits**, supporting both **learning and connection**.

4. How can the Library improve its programs and services?

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Participants shared thoughtful feedback on how Auburn Public Library can expand and improve its programs and services to better serve the community. While some attendees noted they currently attend programs **only a few times per year**, they expressed clear interest in **more diverse offerings**, **expanded scheduling options**, and **stronger promotion** of events to boost awareness and participation.

- **PROGRAM PREFERENCES AND INTERESTS**
  - **Adult and Lifelong Learning:** Participants voiced strong interest in programs that support **personal and professional growth**, highlighting a desire for more **educational and practical workshops**:
    - Topics suggested included **career transitions**, **small business development**, **college admissions**, and **Social Security benefits**.
    - **Educational success programs** for students and families were also mentioned, including academic skills workshops and **peer tutoring by high school students**.
    - Participants expressed a preference for **more adult programming overall**, with special emphasis on **convenient scheduling**—evenings and weekends were favored over sessions held during dinner hours.
  - **Cultural and Community Events:** Participants encouraged the Library to offer programs that bring people together through culture, creativity, and shared experiences:
    - Interest was expressed in **virtual and in-person author talks**, **poetry readings**, and opportunities to **host local artist exhibits**.
    - Attendees also mentioned interest in **networking events**, **community-building activities**, and **Dungeons & Dragons** (D&D) or similar interactive programs to engage multiple age groups.
    - Several participants cited enjoyment of current community events, such as the **Friends book sales**, **off-site programs**, and **seasonal celebrations** like the Halloween event.
  - **Family and Youth Programs:** Parents and caregivers requested more **family-friendly options**, particularly **evening and weekend programs** to accommodate working families.
    - Suggestions included a **pajama storytime** modeled after Barnes & Noble and expanded **storytime offerings** at accessible times.
    - **Educational enrichment** and **intergenerational programs** were viewed as valuable ways to engage both youth and adults.

- **SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS AND PROMOTION:** Beyond programming content, participants highlighted several ways to enhance overall service delivery:

- Better promotion of events was a recurring theme, suggesting that current offerings may not be widely known or effectively marketed.
- Expanding outreach through **digital platforms**, community calendars, and partnerships could help increase participation.
- Participants also suggested exploring **innovative service models**, such as a **bookmobile**, to reach underserved or busy community members.
- Continued support for services like **tax assistance** was mentioned as valuable and appreciated.

OBSERVATIONS: The focus group findings indicate strong community interest in **a broader and more flexible program schedule**, with **expanded adult learning opportunities**, **creative and cultural events**, and **family programming** that aligns with modern lifestyles. Participants view APL as a trusted community hub that could further its reach by offering **diverse, educational, and social experiences**—and by **enhancing communication and visibility** around those opportunities.

5. What <u>TWO</u> words would you use to describe the librarians who assist you?

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Participants provided a range of observations about Auburn Public Library staff, with most comments reflecting **positive impressions** of staff members' **helpfulness, friendliness, and professionalism**. While several attendees praised the staff's approachability and strong service orientation, others identified opportunities for **more consistent visibility and proactive engagement** with patrons.

> Pleasant
> Young
> Friendly
> **Knowledgeable**
> **Helpful**
> Need Staff to be More Proactive in Greeting and Assisting Patrons
> Children's Staff are Great
> Professional
> Staff Not Always at Circulation Desk
> Not Very Knowledgeable
> Underpaid

- **POSITIVE DESCRIPTORS AND STRENGTHS**
  - **Helpful, Friendly, and Professional**
    - The most frequently used words to describe the librarians were **"helpful"** and **"friendly."**
    - Participants expressed appreciation for staff members who are **pleasant**, **approachable**, and **willing to assist** when asked.
    - Several attendees described librarians as **professional** and **knowledgeable**, noting that they are a key part of what makes the Library welcoming and easy to use.
    - The **Children's Department staff** received specific praise for their warmth and skill in working with young patrons and families.
    - A few participants also remarked that Library staff appear **underpaid**, reflecting community recognition of the dedication required to deliver public service.
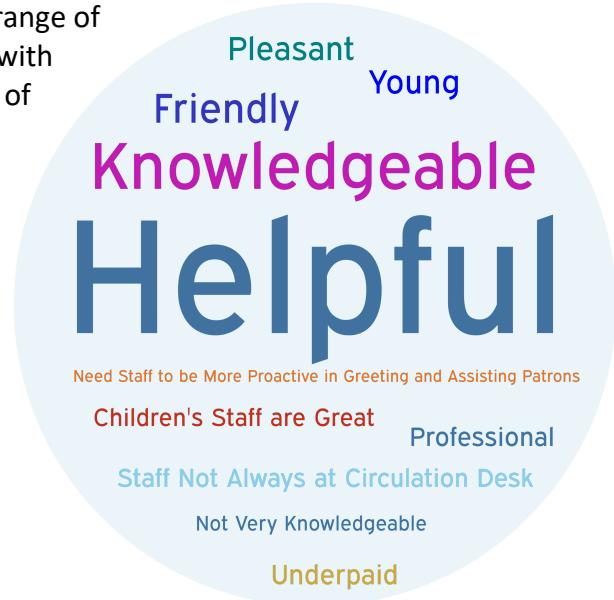
- **INCONSISTENCIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**
  - **Visibility and Proactive Service**
    - Some participants mentioned that **staff are not always visible or present at the circulation desk**, making it difficult to know where to seek help upon arrival.
    - Others noted that staff presence varies. Staff are sometimes visible and available and sometimes not, suggesting the need for **greater consistency** in how assistance is offered.
    - A few attendees suggested that librarians could be **more proactive in greeting patrons**, offering help before being asked, and making personal connections to enhance the sense of welcome.
  - **Perceived Knowledge Gaps**
    - While most participants viewed staff as knowledgeable, a few indicated that **some employees may be less familiar with certain resources or technology tools**.
    - This feedback suggests opportunities for **ongoing staff training and cross-departmental communication** to ensure consistent service quality across all patron interactions.

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Focus group participants generally described Auburn Public Library's staff as **helpful, friendly, and professional**, recognizing their strong commitment to service and community. However, they also expressed interest in seeing **more proactive engagement**, **consistent visibility at service points**, and **continued skill development** to support all areas of patron need. Overall, staff are seen as one of the Library's **most valuable assets**, and maintaining their **approachability, professionalism, and presence** will be key to strengthening public perception and satisfaction.

6. Which Library technology resources do you use either at the Library or via the Library's website?

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Participants expressed a range of familiarity and comfort levels with the Library's technology resources, both in-house and online. While some attendees regularly use digital tools and online services, others were **unaware of the APL's website or its full range of technology offerings**. The discussion highlighted both the **value of existing technology resources** and a **desire for modernization, improved awareness, and expanded instructional support**.

- **CURRENT USE OF TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES**
  - **In-Library Technology**
    - Several participants reported using **public computers** for **internet access** and **word processing**, as well as **printers** for personal or professional needs.
    - These resources remain essential for patrons who lack reliable access to technology at home.

- o **Online and Digital Resources**
    - ▪ **Libby** was the most frequently mentioned online service, valued for access to **eBooks and audiobooks**.
    - ▪ Other tools cited included the **online catalog**, **museum pass reservation system**, and the **online event calendar**, all of which support convenience and remote access to Library services.
    - ▪ A few participants mentioned using **Kanopy** for streaming content and **online registration forms** for Library programs.

- **AWARENESS AND ACCESSIBILITY**
    - o Several participants indicated they were **not aware that the Library has a website**, or were unfamiliar with the range of **digital offerings** available through it.
    - o The website itself was described as **dated, difficult to navigate, and not optimized for mobile use**.
    - o Participants expressed interest in having a **dedicated Library app** or a **mobile-friendly redesign** to make online resources easier to access.
    - o Improved **promotion and visibility** of digital resources, especially Libby, Kanopy, databases, and downloadable materials, was seen as an important next step.

- **DESIRED TECHNOLOGY ENHANCEMENTS:** Participants shared enthusiasm for **expanding technology learning and access opportunities**, including:
    - o **Technology classes** for all levels and topics, helping patrons become more comfortable with online tools, devices, and digital literacy.
    - o **Hands-on and youth-focused programs**, such as **summer coding camps** and **workshops on new technologies**.
    - o Interest in the addition of a **3D printer** and similar creative technology tools to support innovation and STEM learning.

OBSERVATIONS: The feedback indicates strong community interest in **improving technology access, visibility, and education**. While patrons appreciate existing tools such as Libby and public computers, there is a clear need for a **more user-friendly digital interface**, **increased awareness of online services**, and **expanded programming that builds digital confidence**. Participants envision Auburn Public Library as a modern, connected hub that empowers patrons to learn, create, and access information through technology.

7. What technology do you think the Library should focus on over the next five years?

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Participants expressed strong support for APL to expand and modernize its technology resources over the next five years. The discussion reflected two major themes: the need for **greater community education and awareness** around existing digital tools, and the desire for **new, creative, and advanced technology offerings** that align with evolving user interests and workforce skills.

- **TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION AND AWARENESS**
  - Participants emphasized the importance of **instructional support** to help patrons learn how to utilize the Library's **digital collections and online platforms**, including eBooks, databases, and streaming services.
  - They recommended **hands-on workshops and classes** that cover both basic digital literacy and emerging technologies, ensuring that all community members can participate, regardless of their skill level.
  - Several participants called for a **more proactive marketing and communication strategy** to raise awareness of the technology resources the Library already offers.
  - Suggestions included **ongoing technology help sessions** and **clearly promoted tech tutorials** on the Library's website or social media.

- **EXPANDED TECHNOLOGY OFFERINGS:** Participants identified several potential technology investments that would help position the Auburn Public Library as a **modern learning and innovation space**:
  - **Creative and Makerspace Tools:** Requests included **3D printers**, **laser cutters**, **digital drawing pads**, and **CAD software** to support hands-on learning, creativity, and STEM exploration.
  - **Digital Art and Design Software:** Several participants suggested the addition of programs such as **Adobe Photoshop** and other advanced software that individuals may not have access to at home.
  - **Access to Online Research Resources:** The group expressed interest in providing **access to academic journals** and similar subscription-based databases to support students, professionals, and lifelong learners.

- **DIGITAL LITERACY AND SAFETY PROGRAMMING:** In addition to hardware and software, participants emphasized the importance of **technology-centered programming** that helps patrons use technology safely and responsibly:
  - Suggested topics included **digital privacy**, **media literacy**, and **understanding new technology trends**.
  - Such programs would help patrons build awareness, confidence, and critical thinking skills in an increasingly digital world.

OBSERVATIONS: Focus group participants view technology as a **core component of the Library's future mission,** not only as a tool for access, but as a means of learning, creativity, and connection. Their feedback suggests that APL has an opportunity to strengthen its role as a **community technology hub** by combining **instructional programs**, **creative tools**, and **enhanced communication** to ensure all residents can benefit from technological innovation.

8. **Are there any barriers to service—things that impede your ability to receive the service you need or want from the Library?**

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Participants identified several barriers that limit their ability to fully access or utilize Auburn Public Library services. While feedback was generally positive about the Library's offerings, attendees emphasized the need for **expanded hours**, **improved digital access**, and **clearer communication tools** to make services more convenient and user-friendly.

- **ACCESS AND HOURS OF OPERATION**
  - The most frequently cited barrier was **limited operating hours**, particularly in the **evenings and on weekends**.
  - Participants noted that extended hours would make it easier for **working adults and families** to visit the Library in person.
  - Several attendees described difficulty finding time to access the Library during the current open hours, especially for in-person programs or research assistance.

- **WEBSITE AND ONLINE NAVIGATION**
  - Many participants expressed frustration with the **Library's website**, describing it as **outdated, difficult to navigate**, and **not optimized for mobile devices**.
  - The website's **layout and scrolling requirements** were cited as obstacles to finding key information, such as **event details** and **museum pass availability**.
  - Several participants reported confusion when attempting to **reserve museum passes online**, suggesting the need for clearer and more intuitive instructions.
  - Participants recommended that the Library **develop a mobile-friendly website or dedicated app** to simplify access to online resources, calendars, and reservations.

- **RESOURCE ACCESS AND COLLABORATION**
  - A few attendees suggested expanding **interlibrary loan (ILL)** options to include items from a **Library of Things**, allowing patrons to borrow nontraditional materials from other libraries.
  - This feedback highlights a desire for **greater flexibility and resource sharing** across the Library network.

OBSERVATIONS: The focus group feedback indicates that the most significant barriers to service are **limited hours** and **digital usability issues**. Participants are eager for APL to offer **extended evening and weekend access** and to **modernize its online platforms** to make it easier to navigate and use Library services remotely. Improvements in **communication, website design, and interlibrary collaboration** would enhance the user experience and ensure equitable access for all patrons.

9. How important is it to have a good Library in our community?

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Participants expressed a strong and nearly unanimous belief that having a **good public library is essential to the well-being of the Auburn community**. The discussion reflected deep appreciation for the Library's role as a **community anchor, educational resource, and democratic institution** that serves residents of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

- **A VITAL COMMUNITY RESOURCE**
  - Participants described the Library as **"very important,"** emphasizing that it provides **free access to information, education, and enrichment** for everyone, regardless of personal resources.
  - The Library was viewed as **especially valuable for those who may not have technology, internet access, or other learning opportunities at home**, ensuring equitable access to knowledge and opportunities.

- **A GATHERING PLACE AND TOWN CENTER**
  - Many attendees envisioned the Auburn Public Library as the **heart of the community**—a potential **"town center"** where people can meet, learn, and connect.
  - Participants saw the Library as a place that **"brings people together,"** fostering social connection and civic engagement.
  - Several emphasized that improving and investing in the Library could strengthen Auburn's sense of community identity and belonging.

- **A PILLAR OF DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC LIFE**
  - The Library's role as a **"pillar of democracy"** was highlighted repeatedly. Participants recognized that public libraries embody the principles of **free access to information, open dialogue, and equal opportunity**.
  - Comments reflected strong emotional attachment, with one participant remarking that losing the Library would be deeply felt. A participant said they would be **"sad to see it go"** or even jokingly said that there would be **"riots in the street."**

- **COMMUNITY PRIDE AND ASPIRATIONS**
  - While participants expressed pride in their Library, some also noted that Auburn's facility feels **"dated"** when compared to other libraries in the region.
  - Aspirations were voiced for the APL to match the quality, design, and innovation of **neighboring libraries such as Worcester Public Library**.
  - These comparisons reflected both **community pride** and a **desire for continued improvement** to ensure Auburn's Library remains a strong and relevant community institution.

OBSERVATIONS: Focus group participants overwhelmingly view the Auburn Public Library as a **cornerstone of civic life**—a place that supports democracy, fosters connection, and provides free access to information and opportunity for all. Their comments reflect not

only **deep appreciation** for what the Library represents but also a **shared aspiration to see it thrive as a modern, welcoming, and well-resourced community hub**.

10. What issues now facing the town do you think may impact the Library?

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Participants discussed a range of community issues that could influence the Auburn Public Library's future, including **economic development, municipal funding priorities, community identity, and social challenges**. The conversation reflected both optimism about Auburn's growth and concern about maintaining the local character, as well as support for public services such as the Library.

- **COMMUNITY GROWTH AND CHANGING CHARACTER**
  - Several participants noted that Auburn is **"losing its small-town feeling"** as new commercial and retail developments, including big-box stores, continue to expand.
  - This growth was viewed with **mixed sentiment**: while some lamented the shift away from a small-town atmosphere, others recognized that **new businesses broaden the town's tax base**, which could **help fund the Library and other municipal services**.
  - Participants stressed the importance of ensuring that, amid this change, the Library remains a **central gathering place** that preserves Auburn's **sense of community and connection**.

- **MUNICIPAL FUNDING CHALLENGES**
  - Participants expressed concern about the **competition for funding** among various municipal priorities.
  - Given the town's recent investment in **new public construction projects**, some believed it would be **difficult to secure additional funding** for major Library improvements in the near term.
  - At the same time, attendees emphasized that the Library remains **"one of the last free places you can go,"** underscoring the value of continued investment in accessible public resources.
  - Several suggested that the Library should **strengthen advocacy and community support efforts** to help sustain and expand its funding base.

- **PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND CIVIC ROLE**
  - Participants observed that the Library can play a **supportive role in addressing broader community issues**, such as **public health, safety, and civic well-being**.
  - They saw potential for the Library to act as a **trusted source of information** and a **safe, inclusive gathering space** for residents navigating these challenges.

- **INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND PRIVACY**
  - Concerns about **censorship** and the **protection of patron privacy** emerged as important issues.

- Participants emphasized the importance of the Auburn Public Library **safeguarding free access to information** and upholding its commitment to **intellectual freedom**, particularly in an era of heightened public scrutiny and political polarization.

OBSERVATIONS: Focus group participants identified both **opportunities and challenges** for the Auburn Public Library arising from community growth and shifting municipal priorities. While economic development may enhance funding potential, **competition for resources** and **changes in town character** could also pose obstacles. Participants underscored the importance of maintaining the Library's role as a **free, inclusive, and civic-minded space**—a place that champions **intellectual freedom**, **community connection**, and **advocacy for continued public investment**.

11. What could the Library do to better serve Auburn? What advice do you have?

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW: Participants shared a wide range of constructive ideas for how the Auburn Public Library could expand its reach, strengthen community connections, and adapt to evolving needs. Their suggestions centered around **youth engagement**, **community connection**, **outreach and marketing**, and **innovative programming**. The discussion reflected a shared vision of the Library as both a **safe gathering place** and a **central hub for learning, creativity, and civic life**.

- **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT, TEEN ENGAGEMENT, AND TEEN SERVICES**
  - The most common theme was the need for the Library to **create more services and dedicated spaces for teens**.
  - Participants emphasized the importance of **seeking direct input from teens** to ensure programs are relevant and appealing.
  - Ideas included **after-school programs**, **safe hangout spaces**, and **interactive opportunities** such as **online gaming**, **storytelling**, and **creative writing groups**.
  - Engaging youth, participants noted, would also help **attract younger parents and families** to the Library.

- **CONNECTION AND COLLABORATION**
  - Many attendees envisioned the Library as the **"center spoke on the wheel"** of the community, with APL serving as an **anchor institution** that connects residents to **local organizations, services, and one another**.
  - The Library could serve as a **primary place to learn about the town**, promote **local resources**, and act as a **safe, trusted hub** for information and connection.
  - Participants also suggested **partnering with community experts and volunteers** to deliver educational and enrichment programs.

- **OUTREACH, MARKETING, AND VISIBILITY**
  - A recurring theme was the need for a **stronger marketing and outreach strategy** to raise awareness of the Library's services and programs.

- o Participants recommended a **"rebranding" effort** to modernize the Library's image and highlight its community value.
- o Suggestions included:
  - ▪ Expanding use of **social media** and **local online platforms**, such as the *Oxford Express*.
  - ▪ Utilizing **local radio stations** for announcements and features.
  - ▪ Taking advantage of **the adjacent park** to **advertise programs and events** in visible community spaces.
- o Attendees also noted that **librarians being more visible and approachable** ("getting out from behind the desk") would enhance the welcoming atmosphere and personal connections with patrons.

- **PROGRAMMING AND CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES**
  - o Participants encouraged the Library to **broaden its range of programs** to include **creative and social offerings** that bring people together.
  - o Suggestions included **art competitions**, **creative writing workshops**, and programs that **foster interaction across age groups**.
  - o The goal, as expressed by several attendees, is to help the Library **"grow and adapt as times change,"** ensuring it remains relevant and responsive to evolving community interests.

OBSERVATIONS: The focus group feedback highlights a strong desire for Auburn Public Library to **embrace its role as a dynamic community connector**—a place that welcomes all ages, celebrates creativity, and strengthens local ties. Participants view the Library's future success as dependent on **strategic outreach, youth engagement, modern marketing, and expanded collaboration** with the community. By positioning itself as both a **hub of connection** and a **source of innovation**, the Library can continue to thrive as a vital civic and cultural resource.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the adult focus group discussions revealed a deep appreciation for the Auburn Public Library as a valued community resource that offers access, connection, and learning opportunities for residents of all ages.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining a welcoming environment, **responsive staff**, and **a balance between traditional and modern library services**. They also expressed enthusiasm for **enhanced programming**, **technology**, and **facility updates** that reflect the community's evolving needs.

Across all conversations, the Library was viewed as both a **trusted cornerstone of civic life** and a **vital gathering place** where people come together to learn, share, and engage. The insights gained through these focus groups will help inform Auburn Public Library's ongoing efforts to strengthen its role, adapt to change, and continue serving as a dynamic center of community life.