



Strathcona County  
**LIBRARY**

# 2014 Community Consultation Summary

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## COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

### STRATHCONA COUNTY COMMUNITY PROFILE



Strathcona County is a specialized municipality with a population of over 95,000 in urban, farm, and rural communities spread over nearly 1,200 square kilometres of central Alberta heartland. It is a vibrant and growing community, attractive to young families, seniors, small business owners and more. In 2014, MoneySense Magazine ranked Strathcona County as third among Canada's "best places to live".

### STRATHCONA COUNTY LIBRARY PROFILE

Strathcona County Library (SCL) is a mid-sized public library that provides a variety of accessible services from a 64,000 square foot Central Library in the Strathcona County Community Centre and its unique and award-winning Bookmobile. In 2014, the Library was visited in person over half a million times, and circulated 1.4 million materials.



The Library works collaboratively with many community organizations to deliver services to Strathcona residents, and has strong partnerships in the library community as well. In 2014, the Library and its Metro Edmonton Library partners won an Alberta Municipal Affairs Minister's award for making shared library access a reality for residents throughout the metro area. The project, called ME Libraries service, has since been extended to all Alberta residents and libraries.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In 2014, Strathcona County Library conducted a community consultation in preparation for its Plan of Service 2016-2020. The consultation followed a process outlined in Sandra Nelson's book, **Strategic Planning for Results** (Chicago: American Library Association, 2008). Invitations were extended to community leaders who represented a wide variety of constituents and who could provide different perspectives and opinions. A group of 26 people participated in two full-day facilitated meetings to discuss the future of the Library.

Through a series of exercises, the group described a five-year vision for Strathcona County residents, identified community gaps and needs, reviewed where other local organizations were already working to fill those needs, and then discussed the Library's potential roles. In between the public consultation sessions were a series of feedback sessions for library staff and Library Board members, which allowed for communication to flow back and forth between the groups. By December of 2014, the Library had a clear set of strategic directions from the community, and a list of benefits and outcomes to work towards when delivering materials, programs and services.

### SERVICE RESPONSES

Sandra Nelson's text outlines a series of 18 potential Service Responses, or roles that public libraries often play in their communities. During the Library's 2009 community consultation, a 19<sup>th</sup> role was created for Strathcona County Library by participants. This role, "Participate and Connect: Be Engaged in the Community" became a focus for the Library for 2010-2014, and participants in 2014 elected to keep it among the role choices. Group discussion about the library's potential focus roles was lively and informative, and participants learned a great deal about public libraries in general, about Strathcona County Library, about the community, and about each other.

After careful consideration and with the approval of the Library's Board and staff, Strathcona County Library's focus roles for its Plan of Service 2016-2020 are:

- 1. Participate and Connect: Community Engagement.**  
Residents will know about programs, services, and activities provided by community agencies and will have opportunities for community dialogue, collaboration, partnerships and civic engagement.
- 2. Create Young Readers: Early Literacy.**  
Children from birth to age five will have programs and services designed to ensure that they will enter school ready to learn to read, write, and listen.
- 3. Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning.**  
Residents will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives.
- 4. Understand How to Find, Evaluate and Use Information: Information Fluency.**  
Residents will have the skills to search for, locate, evaluate, and effectively use information to resolve issues, answer questions and satisfy their needs.

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## GOALS

Within the context of the chosen focus roles, Library Board and staff members worked together to set five goals to guide the library's work in 2016-2020. Linked to each goal are objectives and supporting actions to help track and measure progress.

1. Residents will have opportunities to connect with each other and with local resources so that they feel engaged in the community.
2. Children from birth to age five will have support to develop their emergent literacy and social skills so that they can continue to thrive and enjoy the benefits of reading and learning throughout their lives.
3. Families and caregivers of children from birth to age five will have support to build their knowledge, skills and confidence so that they can encourage the development of emergent literacy and social skills in their children.
4. Residents will have opportunities to explore topics of personal interest and express their creativity so that they can fuel their curiosity and continue to learn throughout their lives.
5. Residents will have opportunities to develop their information fluency skills to make informed and effective use of information and their digital literacy skills so they can participate with confidence in digital environments.

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## NEW MISSION AND VISION

The final step in Nelson's strategic planning process is for the organization to review its mission and vision in light of the insights gained through the community consultation. The intent is to ensure that the mission and vision reflect the organization's new set of focus roles and goals. In the spring of 2015, the Strathcona County Library Board chose the following as the Library's new mission and vision for the period of 2016-2020.



**Vision:** The heart of a connected, informed, and inspired community.

**Mission:** Reaching out across urban and rural Strathcona County, the Library promotes engagement, sparks imagination, and provides the tools for building skills and knowledge.

The Library has chosen the following guiding values on which to focus for the period of its Plan of Service 2016-2020: equitable access, responsiveness, intellectual freedom, accountability, and collaboration.

### THE NELSON PROCESS

Strathcona County Library's last community consultation was held in 2009. Following the direction of the Alberta Libraries Act, which states that public libraries must check in with their communities every 3-5 years, the next consultation was due in 2014. The intent of the Libraries Act is to ensure that libraries are providing materials and services that meet current community needs. The process recommended by the Public Libraries Branch of Alberta Municipal Affairs is the one outlined in Sandra Nelson's **Strategic Planning for Results** (Chicago: American Library Association, 2008). Strathcona County Library was the first Alberta library to use Nelson's method in 2009. It was such a positive experience that the Library chose to use it again in 2014.

Nelson directs libraries to invite community leaders with a deliberate mix of backgrounds and views to a set of structured dialogues about the library's future. The consultation team is led through a series of exercises over two separate days to focus discussion on five major topics:

- The group's five-year vision and desired benefits for community residents.
- Community needs, preferences, and gaps over the next five years.
- The roles local organizations are currently playing to address community needs.
- Some roles that public libraries often play in their communities.
- What roles the public library should play over the next five years.

At the end of the first dialogue, the community consultation group is asked for recommendations about where they feel their library should focus its efforts in the next five years. These recommendations are brought to the library's staff and Board to consider, and their feedback is recorded. The feedback is presented to the community consultation group at the start of their second dialogue. Participants discuss the feedback, learn more about the library's strengths and challenges, and delve further into potential library roles before producing a set of final recommendations. Focus roles are chosen when the library's staff and Board approve of the community consultation team's final recommendations.

Strengths of the Nelson process include that the broad range of experience and knowledge of the people in each room generates creative and enlightening conversation. The sharing of information back and forth between the community, staff and Board groups allows internal and external voices to be heard, and builds toward a system of collective wisdom. Exploring community needs and resources together gives all participants valuable insight into how their contributions help to build community on personal and professional levels. Many come away with a greater appreciation for the Library and for other organizations active in the community – and this opens doors for partnerships, joint advocacy efforts, and other kinds of collaborative projects that benefit the community overall. As one participant in the Library's recent consultation said, "Having community members involved in shaping the future for the community is the best recipe for success."

In 2014, Strathcona County Library contracted with its trusted facilitator and Nelson specialist, Anne Smith of J.A. Consulting, to lead the consultation meetings. Anne helped the Library to add a key element that had been missing from the Nelson process: clear discussion about the outcomes that participants were hoping to see as a result of the Library's work within each focus role. The resulting conversations helped to clarify how participants were interpreting each focus role, and this helped the Library with both the language and intent of its goals and objectives.

## 2014 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION HIGHLIGHTS

The table below shows the variety of backgrounds for the 26 members of the Library’s community consultation group. Invitations were sent out to a wide variety of community leaders and organizations with an eye to gathering a broad set of perspectives. Attendees were chosen that would represent different views and constituents, could speak knowledgeably and comfortably during the dialogue, and who could commit to two full-day mid-week meetings. The Library was honoured and grateful to the enthusiastic people who dedicated two days of their time and expertise to helping the Library with its future.

**TABLE 1 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION ATTENDEES BY TITLE AND BACKGROUND**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Title</b>
Alberta Health Services, Strathcona County Health Centre	Registered Dental Hygienist
Alberta Health Services, Strathcona County Health Centre	Registered Nurse, Community Health Services
Arabian Horse Reading Literacy Project	Owner
Beaver Hills Initiative	Chair
Elk Island Catholic Schools	Library Technician
Elk Island Catholic Schools	Library Technician
Elk Island Public Schools	Teacher/Teacher-Librarian
Elk Island Public Schools	Innovation Consultant
Friends of Strathcona County Library Society	Marriage Commissioner/Friends Chair
Hastings Lake Community Association	Botanist/Author
Information & Volunteer Centre for Strathcona County	Executive Director
Robin Hood Association, Children and Youth Services	Administration Facilitator
Servus Credit Union, Wye Road Branch	Branch Manager
Sherwood Park & District Chamber of Commerce	Executive Director
St Thomas Anglican Church	Rector
Strathcona County Community Mediation Society	Program Coordinator
Strathcona County Community Services	Associate Commissioner
Strathcona County Emergency Services	Communications & Marketing Specialist
Strathcona County Family and Community Services	Older Adult Services Specialist
Strathcona County Family and Community Services	Manager, Family Resource Services
Strathcona County Library	Assistant Manager, Materials Management & IT
Strathcona County Library	Donor Relationship Specialist
Strathcona County Library Board	Chair
Strathcona County Library Board	Member
Strathcona County Recreation Parks and Culture	Community Wellness
Sun Media Corporation	Director of Strategy & Insights

The first exercise helped the group to think about the future of the community, and to describe the benefits they would like to see for community members within a five-year framework. Below are the benefits described by the group's five-year community vision.

**TABLE 2 FIVE-YEAR COMMUNITY VISIONS AND BENEFITS FOR ALL RESIDENTS**

- Community cohesion, connection, inclusion, integration. Everyone has opportunities for connection, including children, youth, seniors, newcomers, people with disabilities or who face other kinds of barriers.
- Community development: community members getting together and taking action - not waiting for action from outside of the community. Set priorities and act upon them.
- Recognition that we are both an urban and rural community; urban and rural interaction.
- Creation of public spaces and preservation of natural gathering places. Physical spaces are in place for community gatherings.
- Transportation: all modes of transportation like walking biking, and buses; we are more than a car community.
- Healthy community: holistic approach to health with health defined broadly to include prevention and treatment. Health to include emotional, mental and physical well-being. Health is a community priority, including access to specialized medical care, recognition that one size does not fill all, and support for people struggling or facing barriers. Community awareness and support for people with disabilities.
- Education: delivery in a variety of ways. Lifelong learning.
- Support for diversity and for people new to the community and/or to Canada. Welcome, awareness/education about diversity, demonstration that it is valued, connections and sharing across cultural groups.
- Access to information about community programs and services; help for people to find and access community resources.
- Opportunities for all ages including children and seniors to be engaged and active, to have social interaction, to have fun and play and create.
- Safety and security.
- Robust economy.
- Affordable housing, including for young families, seniors and newcomers.
- Clean air and water.
- Intergenerational: connections across age groups. Seniors and youth share and exchange knowledge and experience. Mutual benefit. Seniors mentor youth.
- Opportunities for both youth and seniors to remain part of the community and contribute their energy and expertise.
- Support, encouragement, and investment in County youth: opportunities for leadership and volunteerism, youth justice committee utilized, youth-accessible transit routes to all parts of the County, and attention paid to social emotional development and to encouragement for traits like acceptance, resilience and healthy living in all of its aspects.
- Community support for local businesses, and encouragement for diversity and strong local networks for business owners.
- Sustainable community partnerships. Community agencies and groups work together: integration, strong networks so that agencies are not competing for resources.

**Note:**

- Efforts are underway to build the vision.
- Several participants noted that benefits discussed for specific target groups (e.g. children, youth, seniors, people with disabilities) would be meaningful for all residents.

The group took its five-year vision for Strathcona County, above, and compared it to the “current state” of the community, as they saw it. They identified the gaps, or community needs, they felt would need to be filled over the next five years in order to bring the community’s current state closer to the community of their vision. The list below is what resulted from the discussion.

**TABLE 3 FIVE-YEAR COMMUNITY NEEDS**

- Partnerships/community connections across sectors and groups
- Promote community info and resources that already exist
- Newcomer centre
- Involve more youth in volunteer opportunities: coordinate opportunities with organizations, encourage participation, remove red tape
- Support community members to ask for help, “normalize” asking for help
- Recruitment and retention of volunteers: find new ways to engage and use volunteers, adapt culture e.g. Use volunteer energy for service; find another way to access funds
- Awareness and support of local businesses
- Community communication—centralize way to get information
- Support emotional/social learning among young children and their families
- Support/respond to seniors—recognize demographics ahead of curve
- Affordable housing (affluence)
- Proactive community culture
- Easier access to services and opportunities (streamline)
- Fully functional hospital
- Urban planning with the five-year community vision in mind (e.g. front porches)
- Better networking/joint planning between community organizations
- Facility for coordinating agriculture events (agriculture centre)
- Thinking “we” rather than “me”
- Cultivate neighborhood safe spaces and cohesive development, “me” → “we”
- Free space available/accessible, community hall network
- Stronger transportation routes—walkable, all means, re-zone in some rural areas
- Share and utilize coordinated approach to information about community services
- Diversified age base
- Local agricultural support for restaurants/markets/health food
- Strong integrated system for business growth and development

The group found several needs on the list that they felt the Library could play a role in addressing. These were matched up to a set of possible public library roles that Nelson calls “service responses” to help everyone achieve common language and understanding. At the end of the first dialogue, following discussion of how other local organizations were already working on some of the listed needs, the group selected a preliminary set of service responses for the Library to consider. The group was assured that regardless of which focus roles were chosen, the Library would maintain its existing physical facilities, maintain Internet access for library users, and maintain current levels for its programs, services, collections and resources.

In between public dialogues, Library staff and Board reviewed the preliminary set of service responses and provided feedback about how adoption of those roles might impact the Library and its users. The Library also prepared information about collection and service usage, service level demand, library market and industry trends, and about collaborative projects already underway that could affect the selection of focus roles for 2016-2020.

When the second dialogue convened, the community consultation group used library feedback to help them delve more deeply into how Nelson's service responses translate into actions for a library and its community. The Library spoke frankly about its strengths and challenges, and the community group had some productive and sometimes difficult discussions about how Strathcona County has changed and what that means for its future. Trends like diversity, technology, lifelong learning, and economic instability were all explored, and a common theme emerged around the need for greater collaboration within and amongst community organizations in order to reach out to the diverse and growing Strathcona population.

The final exercise for the second Nelson dialogue asks participants to vote for the roles that they feel are of highest priority for the Library. When the 2014 community consultation group voted, four strong focus roles emerged. These were supported unanimously by the Library's staff and approved by its Board in December of 2014.

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2. **Create Young Readers: Early Literacy.**  
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3. **Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning.**  
Residents will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives.
4. **Understand How to Find, Evaluate and Use Information: Information Fluency.**  
Residents will have the skills to search for, locate, evaluate, and effectively use information to resolve issues, answer questions and satisfy their needs.

These focus roles formed the framework for the Library's 2016-2020 Plan of Service. The Library's staff and Board went on to develop broad goals and measurable objectives within each focus role, drawing on the ideas and language captured during the community consultation for inspiration.

## APPENDIX: MATERIALS INDEX LIST

Participants in the Library's 2014 Community Consultation process were provided with a package of information to help inform them and stimulate their discussion about the current state of the community, the library industry, and Strathcona County Library itself. Following is a list of materials from the attendee package.

### ABOUT STRATHCONA COUNTY

**Strathcona County Facts & Stats 2014.** Strathcona County.

The County's vision, strategic priorities, and some informative statistics about County services.

<http://www.strathcona.ca/local-government/about-strathcona-county/strathcona-county-facts-and-stats/>

**Strathcona County Community Social Profile Excerpt.** Family and Community Services Department.

A social portrait of Strathcona County: community demographics, social issues and trends. Full report:

<http://www.strathcona.ca/departments/family-and-community-services/social-plans-social-information-and-surveys/>

**Early Years & Early Literacy: Long Term Impacts.** Strathcona County Library.

Highlights from significant research findings related to early literacy services in Strathcona County. Includes local information about the Early Childhood Development Mapping Initiative, a province-wide research project that looked at the factors that may influence healthy child development.

<https://education.alberta.ca/admin/ecs/ecd/>

### ABOUT THE LIBRARY INDUSTRY

**Designing 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Libraries**

A comparison of library trends past, present and emerging and how they affect facility design. Authored by architect Peter Gisolfi, featured in the Spring 2014 issue of Library Journal's *Library by Design*.

**Libraries as a Reflection of a Community's Needs and Values**

Answers two key questions for the future of libraries: why invest in libraries in the digital age, and what does a relevant, contemporary library look like? Authored by library director Robert Pasicznyuk, featured in Vol.53, no.4 of *Public Libraries*.

**National Reading Campaign Research Excerpts**

Highlights from recent research conducted of Canadians and their reading habits and about why reading matters. Published by the National Reading Campaign. <http://www.nationalreadingcampaign.ca/>

### ABOUT THE LIBRARY

**Key Trends Affecting Strathcona County Library 2015-19**

Trends identified by Library staff and Board members as being those likely to occur, and with high impact on the Library, over the next few years.

**Strathcona County Library Annual Report 2013**

Highlights from the Library's activities and finances in 2013.

<http://www.sclibrary.ab.ca/docs/annrep/anrep13.pdf>

## COMMUNITY CONSULTATION TIMELINE

Community engagement is an important part of the library's future planning. The Library's 2014 community consultation took place over two meetings in the fall, and the resulting recommendations were used by the Library to create its Plan of Service 2016-2020. Community members, Library Staff members, and Library Board members all played a key role in this process.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Strathcona County Library would like to extend its thanks to the many people who participated in its 2014 Community Consultation. A lot of hours and effort were expended on the project by the Community Consultation Group, facilitator Anne Smith, the Library Board, and the Library's staff. The Library looks forward to putting the wealth of ideas, opinions, perspectives and suggestions shared throughout the process to work through its Plan of Service 2016-2020.



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