UPPER HUDSON LIBRARY SYSTEM

Together. For Better Libraries.

Library Planning Focus Group
RCS Community Library
Wednesday 9/16/15 & Tuesday 9/22/15

Summary information

There were two focus group sessions held at the First Reformed Church of Bethlehem in Selkirk and the Coeymans Fire Station in Coeymans. Each session started at approximately 7:10pm and wrapped up at approximately 8:40pm. There were 13 total participants ranging in age from late teens to ~70+.

Agenda
1) Welcome/Introductions
2) Purpose
3) Ground rules
4) Engagement questions
5) Exploration questions
6) Exit question
7) Next steps/conclusion/thanks

Warm-up question

1)   **What do you remember about the public library experience as a child?**

Engagement Questions

2)   **What do you like most about living in this community?**

3)   **How do you think this community is changing?**

Exploration Questions

4)   **What role do you think the library plays in the community?**

5)   **What do you think is great about the library?**

6)   **What do you think is not so great about the library?**

7) **What might the library do to better serve your needs and encourage you to use the library more?**

8) **Thinking about the future, what threats and opportunities do you see for this library?**

<u>Exit Question</u>

9) **Is there anything else you'd like to share or suggestions you might have about the library to help the trustees plan for the future of library service in Ravena, Coeymans, and Selkirk?**

<u>Facilitator Script</u>

1) Welcome/Introductions

   Thank you for taking the time to be part of this focus group to learn more about the RCS Community Library.
   On behalf of the Trustees of the RCS Community Library and the Upper Hudson Library System I want to tell you how much we appreciate your participation.
   TB/MF intro - I'll be serving as the facilitator for tonight's focus group
   MF/TB intro - I'll be serving as the recorder for the group
   Ask members to introduce themselves:
   - name
   - where in town do you live
   - how long you have lived in the RCS area

2) Purpose

   We have been asked by the Board of Trustees of the library to conduct this focus group as part of the library's long range planning process.
   In addition to the focus group process, the library has also done a community survey to help inform their planning efforts.
   All of this information will be used by the trustees to create a plan for the future of the library, so thank you in advance for your honest and open thoughts and ideas this evening.
   Housekeeping rules - We plan to be done in 90 min or less and we don't plan to take an official break, but please feel free to get up anytime to use the restroom, grab some food, etc.

3) Ground Rules

We do have a few ground rules for the group:
- **We want you to do the taking** - we would like everyone to participate; if I haven't heard from you in a while I may even call on you.
- **There are no right and wrong answers!** - every participant brings a different experience and different opinions to the table tonight.
All opinions are important and we want to hear a wide range of opinions.
Feel free to speak up whether you agree or disagree with something, but we do want to stay on track -which is my job!
- **Please be brutally honest.** That's the best way to ensure that this process helps the library provide the best services to the community.
- This may be the only time you ever hear Ravena, Coeymans, or Selkirk compared to Las Vegas - **but what happens here, stays here!** Your input is being recorded (both with a tape recorder and by the human recorder), but no names will be attached to the report that we prepare for the trustees. We want you to feel confident in the confidentiality of this process.

4) Icebreaker question - Just to get everyone warmed up a little we'll start with a question for everyone -

What do you remember about the public library as a child?

The facilitator and the recorder will go first - but this is the only question we'll be answering tonight…the rest are on you!

5) Focus group questions

6) Next Steps/Thanks - That's all the questions we have for you tonight. We will synthesize what you've shared tonight and put it into a report for the trustees for them to use in their planning discussions. If you think of anything else you'd, like to share please use the contact information on our business cards to let us know.

Any other questions?

Thank you again for your ideas, your energy, and your patience. This was an important step in defining the future for your library.

Facilitator summary

Group description

In general, all of the participants could be characterized as "library supporters" and "library users", and more than half could be described as "library lovers."

All of the participants appreciated the opportunity to assist the library=y in its planning process and thanked the library for inviting them.

One participant wanted the results of the focus groups to be shared with the public.

Takeaways on the Community

Participants liked the small town feel and most felt safe

Participants were concerned that there were not enough services in the community and that it was becoming more difficult to attract and keep new businesses in town

These changes will make it harder for resident to "grow old in place".

There is a noticeable demographic shift to 1) more high needs people and families who are struggling economically; and 2) more diversity of backgrounds and nationalities

Takeaways on the Library

Participants see the library as a center for community information and activity, which is much needed for this community.

Participants value the library's role as a place for young people to go after school and during summers and vacations.

The new building was popular for its location, space, and "newness."

The new building's acoustics can be a problem sometimes and the layout may not create enough separation and "quiet spaces" for users.

The library staff generally received high praise for their helpfulness, attentiveness to users, and creativity. But there are a few staff members who need additional customer training.

The quality, creativity, and variety of the programs for kids/teens received high marks. The adult programs were also favorably commented on.

It was suggested that the library should engage the community to survey and/or hold a brainstorming session for people to suggest adult programming that would be of interest to the community. Consider the value of community based "peer programming" provided by users/residents.

The number of public computers was seen to be sufficient and the availability and the quality of the staff assistance with the computers was especially noted.

Participants want more and different hours for service (some earlier hours during weekdays and Sunday hours were mentioned several times).

Participants felt that there are times during the library's hours of operation that the staffing levels were not adequate to provide good service.

The need for a more comprehensive and consistent plan to market library programs and services to the whole community, and particularly targeted outreach to some of the high needs areas (i.e. Oak Brook). Some specific areas mentioned in this discussion include – the website, social media, better publicity of the e-newsletter, hard copy fliers posted on community boards (churches, laundromats, etc.), and even hand-delivered information to high needs areas.

Some participants felt the library book collections could be improved, but appreciated the limited resources of the library. The process for users recommending items for the collection should be advertised and encouraged. The idea of using local library user reviews as a way to encourage use was discussed.

There was concern about the general perception of the value of the library in the general (non-user) community and that that would negatively impact ongoing support for the library.

It was felt that the partnership and working relationship with the schools needs to be improved, but the group recognized that the library is trying and the resistance is likely on the school side.

Possible actions for consideration – Short term

Conduct a survey/hold a forum on adult programming to generate new ideas, interest, etc.

Examine current hours and experiment with some "tweaks" to redistribute or, if possible, increase hours as noted.

Develop and/or more widely advertise the "recommend to library" process for the library's physical collections.

Consider some additional customer service training and perhaps individual counseling (if needed) for the library staff.

Install a shelf for books, etc. in the restrooms for users to set items while using the facilities.

Possible actions for consideration – longer term

Explore building layout for acoustics, quiet space, etc.

Develop and marketing plan for the library which would address the communication and outreach concerns expressed.

Renew efforts to partner with the schools.

Have the library take the lead on a project to create and distribute a "new residents" packet. Possible partners could include local government, local real estate association, local businesses, etc.

Develop a plan to target some of the high need areas in the community to connect them with the library programs and services.