

SEWARD MEMORIAL LIBRARY
STRATEGIC PLAN
2015-2018

Members of the 2015 Strategic Planning Committee:

- Becky Baker, Library Director, Seward Memorial Library
- Megan Boggs, Library Assistant II, Seward Memorial Library
- Renee Coufal, Seward Area Chamber of Commerce President
- Joshua Eickmeier, current Mayor of the City of Seward
- Roger Glawatz, former Mayor of the City of Seward and current Seward County Commissioner
- Jeanie Hecker, Friends of Seward Library President
- Juanita Hill, Seward Memorial Library Board President
- John Hughes, Seward Library Foundation President
- Jonathan Jank, Seward County Economic Development Executive Director
- Nancy Lamberty, Seward Memorial Library Board Vice-President

Process:

This group of individuals met in the spring of 2015 to review the strategic planning process as outlined by the Nebraska Library Commission. After looking at available information, they developed a survey (copy attached) which was distributed using both hard copies and electronic means. Committee members also agreed to share comments from observations made during the process. The group next met in August 2015 to review the results of the survey. They also looked at the SWOT analysis of the library that was initiated by the library staff. They shared comments about what they had observed in the community and what they had heard from its citizens. They discussed how the library might act to help meet some of the needs of the community as highlighted from what they learned from observation and conversation and also from an earlier survey done by the Seward County Economic Development Corporation. A final meeting was later held to review the draft of the plan before

it was submitted to the Nebraska Library Commission for approval. They will reconvene in the future to update the plan by reviewing the outcome of the existing goals and objectives, evaluating the success of actions taken and determining any changes or updates needed to keep them relevant.

CITY OF SEWARD PROFILE
2015-2016

Population Statistics:*

- Population: 6,964 (up 8.2% from 2000, 96.8% white) – the 2013 estimate is 7,120
- Public School Enrollment for 2015-2016: 1,397
- Median Age: 32.7 years
- Family Median Income: \$50,275
- Unemployment Rate: 3.1%
- Persons Below Poverty Rate: 5.7%
- Persons 25 Years and Older With High School Education or Higher: 91.8%
- Persons 25 Years and Older With 4 Year College Degree or Higher: 31.8%

*Majority of statistics taken from the 2010 Census

Local Economy:

Basic economic activities of Seward, a county seat and college town, include manufacturing, retailing, medical and educational services, farming, cattle and hog feeding, trucking, printing, banking, and agricultural research.

Seward's agriculturally rich economy is boosted by deep well irrigation. Hughes Brothers, Inc., Tenneco, Inc., and KapStone Paper and Packaging provide a solid base for employment which has resulted in a balance between industry and agriculture.

Geography:

Seward, the county seat of Seward County, is located in southeastern Nebraska, 25 miles west of Lincoln and 82 miles southwest of Omaha. The land around Seward is flat to rolling and is comprised of loess plain and glacial drift soils (black and fertile), therefore, drainage is good. The elevation of Seward is 1,500 feet above mean sea level.

Transportation:

The transportation network in Seward is comprised of one U.S. Highway, a State Highway, and an Interstate Highway. U.S. Highway 34 travels in an east-west direction in the southern portion of the city and extends across Nebraska into Iowa on the east and Colorado on the west. State Highway 15 bisects the City of Seward in a north-south alignment and extends across Nebraska to South Dakota to the north and Kansas to the south. In addition to these major thoroughfares, Seward enjoys the accessibility of Interstate 80, located 6 miles south of the community on Highway 15. Interstate 80 links Seward with many cities and metropolitan areas throughout the nation. Finally, Seward is home to a small airport located a few miles south of Seward, and is less than 30 minutes away from the Lincoln Municipal Airport.

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

A review of census statistics for the City of Seward generally paints a picture of a homogenous (97% white), mainly financially stable (median income \$50,275 and unemployment rate 3.1%) community. The trend for the next five years (forecast using Esri community analyst software) indicates a steady growth of median income as well as a steady population of those less than 25 years of age and an increase in the population of 55 and over.

A survey that was completed by the Seward County Economic Development Corporation in late 2012 indicated that those who completed the survey felt the need for more:

- affordable housing
- quality childcare
- professional jobs and
- family and/or youth activities

In the spring of 2015 a survey (attached) which was created by members of the Strategic Planning Committee of the library was conducted. The results of this survey indicate that most of the 2012 concerns were still valid issues in 2015. The top ten most often mentioned topics of concern from the 2015 survey are:

1. Lack of restaurants (overwhelmingly the most often mentioned issue)
2. Lack of stores/empty storefronts/grocery choices – need to add and maintain more businesses in town
3. High taxes and utility costs
4. Street/Road repair and maintenance and other traffic issues
5. Need for more entertainment/family activities
6. Lack of community wellness/rec center – no indoor pool

7. Need greater transparency/accountability from City Council and Mayor
8. Citizens need to be more friendly/welcoming, especially to newcomers
9. Need more affordable housing
10. Need more well-paying, professional jobs

Other topics mentioned less frequently that the committee identified as potentially connecting with the library's mission include needing more art and cultural events that highlight diversity, providing social networks for working moms, and that better coordination and communication regarding community events is greatly needed. This last topic provoked a lot of discussion by the committee as this was a topic many had also heard during individual conversations held with community members.

On the other hand, the most frequently mentioned topics about what citizens felt positive about are:

1. Friendly, helpful people
2. Safe, low crime, good law enforcement
3. Schools
4. Small town atmosphere
5. Clean, neat, orderly, pretty
6. Location close to Lincoln
7. Great place for families
8. 4th of July celebration
9. The library
10. Community pride being evident

Just as with many surveys, some of the positive comments seem to directly clash with some of the negative ones. The library hopes to not only look at what can be improved in Seward, but also how to support what is already seen as good so that our quality of life can remain high. In the 2015 survey 84% of respondents felt their current quality of life was good or excellent with 48% of those who completed the survey saying it had improved a little or a lot in the last five years.

SEWARD MEMORIAL LIBRARY PROFILE
2015-2016

Library Mission Statement:

The Seward Memorial Library enables and encourages our community to

- READ frequently and diversely
- LEARN continuously and objectively
- CONNECT locally and globally

History:

The Seward Public Library was first organized as a reading room in 1888. In 1913, despite a tornado which tore through the town, the reading room was reorganized as a city library and was housed in a new building made possible through local donations and a grant from Andrew Carnegie. Major renovations took place in the late 1960s and in the mid 1980s. In 1990 the Seward Library Foundation was formed to raise money for a new library building and on September 2, 2003 the new Seward Memorial Library opened its doors to the public.

Building:

The design of the new Seward Memorial Library, completed in 2003, is based on the architectural style that was prevalent in Seward and the plains during the first half of the 20th century. This style, usually referred to as Arts and Crafts, is marked by low-pitched roofs, wide eave overhangs with triangular knee braces, transomed windows, and a mixture of brick and stone on exterior walls. The octagonal tower facing the intersection at 5th and South Streets is the library's tallest element, which is meant to draw patrons inside to experience the world through a wide array of services and resources.

The interior of the library features cherry wood trim and furniture, a two-sided fireplace in the reading room, and comfortable seating throughout. In addition to room for a much larger collection, the new 25,775 square foot library features a technology lab, meeting rooms, handicap accessibility, off-street parking, and a geo-thermal heat pump system.

On October 6, 2013 the lower level of the library was dedicated. The expansion into the previously unfinished space added many meeting rooms (one with a kitchen), a larger genealogy room, greater space for the fiction collection, and the accompanying renovations on the main level created added space for every print collection of the library.

Budget:

The budget for the 2014-2015 year is \$503,954.00. Most of this budget comes from city property taxes. Expenses from the 2013-2014 year totaled \$440,121.67. The city's population was 6,946 at the last census but is estimated at 7,120 in 2013, giving us a current per capita budget of \$61.81. We generally receive a small amount of state aid from the Nebraska Library Commission though this is not guaranteed annually. In addition, the Friends of Seward Library and the Seward Library Foundation often contribute funds for special projects.

Statistics:

In 2013-2014 circulation increased by 5,679 from the previous year, which is a 4.9% increase. Attendance decreased by 5,770 or 7.5% over that same period. Staff guesses that this large drop was mainly due to the many construction crews who were in and out of the doors during the earlier year, affecting the automatic door counters. The library collection increased by 9,970 items; thanks to the expansion in the lower level there is now room for collections to grow.

Library Services:

The collection, as of October 1, 2014, consisted of 45,374 books, 1,529 video and 1,612 audio tapes along with a variety of other types of materials for a total collection count of 57,176. The library is part of Nebraska's OverDrive consortium allowing our patrons access to 16,285 downloadable e-books and 7,870 audio titles. This brings the total collection number to 73,461. Patrons also have access to several online databases that we subscribe to, as well as the NebraskAccess databases provided to state libraries by the Nebraska Library Commission. Our circulation and catalog systems have been fully automated for many years, and a few years ago we migrated to a hosted automation system. We offer 16 public computers with access to the Internet and the technology lab is not only used by individuals, but is also scheduled for classes by the library, the county extension office, and other agencies. Thanks to the generosity of the Seward Library Foundation, the library offers wireless Internet access in the building. Many of the county newspapers are available on microfilm in the Heritage Room, along with other local historic and genealogy resources. The library will soon be undertaking a project to get the filmed newspapers posted online. This will require at least \$30,000 to accomplish.

Library Programs:

The Seward Memorial Library currently offers fall and spring sessions for preschoolers and children in K-8th grade. In the fall of 2010 a very successful "Pre-Three" lap sit program was offered. This has been repeated at various times in the years since and continues to be popular. Summer reading programs are offered in June and July and are open to children through 8th grade. In 2014 the library was accepted as a Maker Camp affiliate site which greatly enhanced what we were able to offer to summer participants. Our "Leading to Reading"

program was updated in 2010 and continues to be an important part of our library's mission, with 250-300 postcards mailed out each month. Each card supports reading aloud to children and suggests an appropriate book title.

In January 2005 four monthly book clubs for adults began meeting, three of which continue to meet today. In addition to these regular programs the library sponsors special events including speakers from the Humanities Nebraska or author visits and other presenters. In 2015 we will sponsor our 12th *All Seward Reads Together* program, a community reading event which culminates with several special programs.

Unique programs the library has offered recently include learning how to play Bridge for adults and 3-D printing classes for adults and children. Young people have also been invited to get creative with LEGO[®] blocks and to play chess and Pokémon

We continue to offer computer classes as well as scheduling one on one time to help patrons with specific computer questions. E-reader classes and individual assistance with devices have also become very popular.

Outreach programs include a weekly home delivery program (RAH) as well as visits to nursing homes, assisted living facilities, the extended care unit at the hospital, and the Seward Manor (low income housing).

Staff and Hours:

The current staff at the Seward Memorial Library numbers 14, including 3 full-time and 10 part-time and substitute employees as well as a part-time janitor. We currently have several adult volunteers who come in weekly to help with regular and special projects and several high school volunteers who come in when they can.

We are open 67 hours a week from August 15 through April. These hours include evening hours and hours 7 days a week. During the summer we are open 55 hours a week.

Additional Support:

The Friends of Seward Library provide funds to the Seward Memorial Library for extra projects not addressed in the city budget. In the past they have purchased computers, a FAX machine, encyclopedia sets, a refrigerator, and other furniture. They have continually supported programs we have offered by purchasing prizes or supplying refreshments for participants. Finally, they have raised money for the Seward Library Foundation and its major projects.

The Seward Library Foundation not only paid for the new building that opened in 2003, they also paid all costs for opening the lower level in 2013. Most recently they purchased the land, paid for the paving, and contributed to the landscaping of the public parking lot east of the library. They currently maintain some endowment funds that support the library's collection and computer acquisitions. Finally, they hope to assist as needed with future maintenance issues for the building.

LIBRARY SWOT

Internal Strengths:

- Our new facility has many great features. It is centrally located and offers many meeting rooms as well as a die-cut room, a drive-up window for added convenience, and the most recent improvement of an expanded parking lot east of the library.
- We offer programs for all ages, including our own Leading to Reading literacy program, preschool and after-school programs for children, summer reading programs for all ages, travelogues, book groups, technology classes, and more.
- Staff longevity has allowed for many community connections to be formed over the years, helping to keep us responsive to community needs; yet we remain flexible and progressive in what we offer thanks to the staff's strong desire to remain relevant.
- Services that we feel are strengths include our online presence and improved connection with patrons through constantly improving library technology, the home delivery service that has been in existence for over 25 years, inter-library loan, free WI-FI, offering technical assistance to patrons, being a NebrasKard library, providing the ability to reserve items, offering courtesy cards to senior citizens in the county, and many others.
- We receive great local support from the Friends of Seward Library, the Seward Library Foundation, our many volunteers, and the general public. This is evidenced not only in the financial support received in the past to build our new facility, but in the ongoing public interest in our programs and services.
- Patrons have access to a wide variety of formats in our collections (books in regular and large print, graphic novels, local history items, DVDs, CDs, periodicals, cake pans, OverDrive and other databases, and Fit4Seward items).

Internal Weaknesses:

- Having to make choices based on availability of staff which is often stretched pretty thin. Hiring more part-time staff is not possible because of budget constraints and city administration wishes. Also, current part-time staff is not always flexible enough to cover for others because they all have other jobs.
- Not allowing food or drink (except for water) often puts the staff in a negative light with patrons given the widespread lifestyle change (more casual now) that seems to have occurred across society in recent years.
- The current City policy does not allow us to accept electronic payments.
- No public phone is available (we have only one business line besides the lines for our fire alarm system and our elevator and we can't afford another; plus pay phones are not financially feasible) or FAX (because of e-rate restrictions on charging for this).
- No public laminating machine, something that is often requested. This may be added to the die cut room in the near future.
- Little use by teens/tweens indicates staff may not have found the right things to offer to involve them in more library activities – a teen advisory board should be reconsidered.

External Opportunities:

- Concordia University professors and students and the library are resources for the entire community, including the public library. Their students use our library and our patrons use theirs. We each know the strengths of the other's collections so are happy to make referrals. This also helps budgets go farther. Professors from Concordia are often willing

speakers at library programs here and many of our adult volunteers have Concordia connections.

- Teenagers in town may often be looking for things to do, so they may be available as volunteers for kids programs, collection advisors, to serve on an advisory board, and more.
- The future addition of a rail yard south of town may bring more people to town to fill the jobs that are created.
- Increased tourism due to the National Guard Museum opening in the future may mean more visitors at the library, plus the possibility exists that we may be able to work together on programs for the community.
- Providing additional numbers of, and more “on target” family and youth activities, as well as better promoting what we already offer, may address needs voiced in previous surveys.

External Threats:

- Economy can be an issue – when dollars are tight city department budgets are also tight. Plus, no current financial support exists from the County government.
- The spread of misinformation and the public’s mistrust in government given the political situation over the last months needs to be addressed.
- The fast pace of changing technology, especially in how information is delivered electronically, is a challenge to keep up with for the library’s budget and staff.

- Competing social activities can prevent good attendance at some programs. Along this line, businesses and organizations need to have a reliable and up-to-date way to keep track of what is happening in the community to better coordinate their efforts.
- Being a bedroom community keeps citizens of Seward from getting to know each other and from participating in many local opportunities and groups. This may make Seward appear less than friendly to those new to our community.
- Lack of retail options and empty storefronts in town is a misleading reflection of Seward's growing economy. Many recent changes at the Chamber of Commerce keep a more directed plan from being fully developed but hopefully this will improve once their permanent staff comes on board. This may help fill some storefronts but being so close to Lincoln may remain an obstacle to keeping shoppers local.
- Students seem to be overloaded with schoolwork and have a lot of school activity choices so we need to be cognizant of schedules and also of areas of interest that might not be addressed through school programs.
- The location of the library is no longer close to schools (the new school buildings are all at the north edge of Seward) so it may be more difficult for after-school program attendees to get here. This is an issue the library staff needs to keep in mind as after-school program schedules are developed and promoted.
- Lack of quality daycare spaces is an ongoing concern that was heard in both the 2012 and 2015 surveys. The community also needs to look at ways of supporting working parents.

THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY

While it is apparent to the Strategic Planning Committee members and the library staff that we cannot independently create more affordable housing or increase the number of professional job openings in Seward, we do feel that other opportunities exist for the library to help improve conditions here. For instance, we can offer more in the way of activities for older youth and families. Working together with other government departments, civic groups, and local businesses to address the issues raised regarding better communication of events will be necessary for the continued success of our community. Thinking outside the box and involving the library in non-traditional library ventures such as yoga or other fitness programs may provide new opportunities for local citizens that they feel are lacking by not having a public fitness center. These kinds of programs may also help newcomers to Seward feel more welcome as they become introduced to fellow citizens in a non-threatening environment. It is important that concerns raised by citizens are addressed by the library or others – making sure this happens is something the library can monitor even if not directly involved.

Community Need: Better coordination and communication regarding community events is greatly needed, according to the team's observation and conversations. Too many organizations, institutions and businesses maintain their own calendar of events and often these events overlap each other, causing low attendance numbers and possibly loss of sales, etc. To help keep citizens engaged in Seward events as opposed to going to Lincoln, something needs to be done to address this issue.

Goal 1: A type of "community calendar" service becomes the resource that citizens, groups, and businesses refer to for information about upcoming local and regional events taking place in the Seward area.

Objective: Form a coalition of interested parties to outline the plan of attack by 12/1/2015.

Objective: By 4/1/2016, research will be completed reviewing available formats, software programs, etc. that might fill the community's need for this type of information.

Objective: Make a decision on the specifics of the service and develop a team qualified to input data on this type of "calendar" by 8/1/2016.

Objective: Create promotional materials about the new service by 10/1/2016 and spread the word to local citizens, groups and businesses using a variety of methods (talks to civic groups, newspaper article, applicable websites, library newsletter, etc.) over the next 12 months.

Objective: Evaluate the success of the service every six months after its initial kickoff. This will be done by library staff and Board.

Community Need: The need for more entertainment and/or family activities was mentioned in both surveys looked at by the planning committee. Because Seward is so close to Lincoln, many individuals currently prefer to go there for leisure activities. Doing a better job of developing activities of interest to Seward citizens of all ages needs to take place as well as improving the promotion of all there is to do in Seward currently.

Goal 2: Both the number of and attendance at social activities at the library for Seward families will increase.

Objective: The number of children attending the library's after school programs will increase 5% in the 2015-2016 year as the library will offer daily programs that coordinate with the elementary school's after-school program schedule.

Objective: A teen advisory board is re-formed by 11/1/2015 and used to determine activities and program topics for Seward youth.

Objective: Use of the new library conference center for public programs will increase by 10% in the 2015-2016 year and may include sports shows being projected or popular movie showings using additional movie licenses obtained by the library.

Objective: Ten percent more adults will attend stand-alone days or weekly tournaments of board and/or card games that are offered throughout 2015-2016. Instructors and participants will be recruited from a variety of local resources. Connections with Concordia University's strong gaming program will be made. Seward's City Recreation department will also be involved to help arrange tournaments.

Community Need: The lack of a public community wellness or recreation center is a concern for many in the Seward area. Citizens of all ages need easy access to programs that improve their physical well-being. Creating a mindset that being healthy and fit can be fun is important for the community as a whole.

Goal 3: While the library is not a complete fitness center, programs suitable for a library environment that focus on fitness will be offered.

Objective: An updated Fit4Seward program will be offered annually over the summer months. Kickoff for each program will take place on the Saturday of National Library Week and the conclusion will vary depending on the year. Working with the City Recreation Department and local businesses is vital to the success of this program.

Objective: Yoga and other “no-sweat” fitness programs will be offered during the 2015-2016 year and beyond. At least four programs will be offered to the adults in our community. Teaming up with local fitness businesses and organizations to locate instructors is essential for this to succeed.

Objective: Information on diet and other health-related topics will be shared through three jointly sponsored programs throughout the 2016 year. Memorial Health Care Systems is a great partner for this service.

Evaluation:

The library staff will take the primary role in the development and implementation of the above objectives, tracking all required statistics as well as making observations during this process.

The plan as a whole will be reviewed each January by the staff and Library Board though specific objectives may require more frequent review as listed. Because change occurs so quickly in current society, being flexible with objectives will improve the potential of a goal being successful; this means ongoing (not once a year) conversations between all interested parties will be a requirement. New objectives may be developed as current ones are completed or if they are not feasible once they are more closely examined. In the spring of 2018 all goals will be re-evaluated by the strategic planning committee, Library Board, and library staff to ensure they are still relevant and if not, what new goals should be addressed.

Seward Memorial Library will remain a vital part of our community, continuing to respond to local needs as we support what makes our citizens proud.

Seward County's 2015 Community Strategic Planning Project

Please respond ONLY ONCE and by **May 15**. Your answers will assist with future planning for a variety of agencies including Seward County, the City of Seward, the Seward County Economic Development Corporation, Seward Memorial Library, the Seward Area Chamber of Commerce, and others. If you include your contact information on the attached slip, you will be entered in a drawing for \$25!

Please mark where you live:

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beaver Crossing | <input type="checkbox"/> Goehner | <input type="checkbox"/> Staplehurst |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bee | <input type="checkbox"/> Milford | <input type="checkbox"/> Utica |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cordova | <input type="checkbox"/> Pleasant Dale | <input type="checkbox"/> Rural Seward County |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Garland | <input type="checkbox"/> Seward | <input type="checkbox"/> Former Seward County resident |

Please indicate your age range:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 18-35 | <input type="checkbox"/> 36-55 | <input type="checkbox"/> 56 and up |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|

Survey Questions

- A. When you are talking about your community in Seward County to others, what 3 things do you boast about MOST often?
- B. What 3 things do you like LEAST about living in your community in Seward County?
- C. How would you describe the current quality of life in your community in Seward County right now? (circle one)

- | | | | | |
|----------------|---------|------------|--------|----------|
| 1. Exceptional | 2. Good | 3. Average | 4. Bad | 5. Awful |
|----------------|---------|------------|--------|----------|

Why do you feel this way?

(OVER)

D. Over the last 5 years, do you believe the quality of life in your community in Seward County has:
(circle one)

1. Improved
a lot

2. Improved
a little

3. Stayed
about
the same

4. Worsened
a little

5. Worsened
a lot

E. Would you recommend your community in Seward County to your family and friends as a good place to live?

Yes No (check one)

List your main reason for answering as you did:

F. What would you say are the three most critical issues facing your community in Seward County today?

G. If you could, what are three things that you would change in your community in Seward County over the next five years?

H. Other comments:

Return to Seward City Hall, your village clerk, or the

**Seward Memorial Library
233 S. 5th Street
Seward, NE 68434**