

The Ayer Library

Director's Report for August 2020

August Updates to Library Operations

- **SAVE THE DATE! Friends of the Ayer Library Book Sale, October 17th!**

The Friends of the Ayer Library will be hosting an outdoor book sale in the Library's parking lot on Saturday, October 17th (rain date: October 24th). The sale will include items from the currently-closed Friends' Book Sale Room in the Library as well as hundreds of gently-used books, CDs, and DVDs that have been culled from the Library's collection (see below) over the past several weeks. Unfortunately, we still cannot accept donations of used books in any quantity due to lack of space to quarantine them. More details on the book sale will soon be available via the Library's web page. Proceeds from the book sale benefit the Library's public programming.

- **Ayer Library receives Community Development Block Grant funding**

On August 4th, The Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) announced an award of a \$309,510 Community Development Block Grant for COVID-19 State of Emergency Impact, known as CDBG-CV, to the Town of Ayer providing immediate financial relief for small businesses in town and for program assistance to a number of Public Social Service agencies and organizations.

The grant award includes \$17,010 for the Ayer Library to purchase WiFi hotspot devices in order to provide internet access via a cellular phone network to members of the public that can't currently access the Library to do so because of the COVID-19 pandemic. With this funding, the Library will be able to purchase approximately two dozen hotspot devices and pay for two years of service for each device. See below for more information about the timing of rollout of these devices.

- **Summer Reading Wrap up: "Imagine Your Story" June 29-August 31**

Summer Reading is a big deal for public libraries and Ayer Library is no different. By using programs and prizes, libraries try to encourage and promote summer reading among school-aged kids each year. We do this in concert with teachers and library media specialists in our schools because studies have shown that kids that don't read over the summer suffer a measurable loss of reading skills (the "summer slide") and start school in the fall behind their classmates that do read while on vacation.

As the summer approaches, our Youth Services team talks with colleagues at the Hazen Memorial Library in Shirley, and then librarians from both libraries reach out to the teachers and media specialists in the school district to review the summer reading book lists for each grade and suggest new titles that kids might like. Once the reading lists are finalized, we make sure that between Ayer and Shirley we have multiple copies of each title available. Because of the uncertainty around when or if libraries would be able to provide physical books, we purchased many more eBook and digital audiobook copies of these titles than we ordinarily might have.

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Head of Youth Services Amy Leonard typically begins planning events and lining up performers for the coming year's Summer Reading programming about a month after the current year's programs are finished! Because of the pandemic, Amy and the rest of the Youth Services staff had to cancel all of the planned in-person programming this year and reinvent Summer Reading as a primarily online activity. Head of Adult Services Barbara Cheeks took on the task of setting up and training the rest of the staff to use an online program called Beanstack that's designed to help libraries manage summer reading programs. This is Barbara's first summer at the Library and she wanted to get more adults involved in summer reading activities, too.

Beanstack allowed the Library to set up reading goals for each age group and create activities that could encourage further reading and learning. Activities included things such as:

- Trying a new recipe (while encouraging the use of our large collection of cookbooks)
- Visiting museums virtually (noting that they can get discounted passes to some of the linked museums from the library)
- Building obstacle courses
- Trying home science experiments

All links or directions for activities were available on Beanstack. For each activity completed the participants earned a badge. Reading books also earned badges, of course.

Summer Reading Sign-ups	Online in Beanstack	Paper (via curbside forms)	Totals
Children	74	50	124
Young Adults	18	15	33
Adults	58	0	58
Total Participation	150	65	215

Summer Reading Activity	Badges Earned in Beanstack
Children	236
Young Adults	102
Adults	240
Total Activity	578

- The Library's Curbside Service delivered a total of 671 bags of books, DVDs, etc. to patrons in the month of August.
- Coming in September: A version of our popular Children's curbside craft kits for adults!

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- In between curbside service and Summer Reading, Assistant Director Samantha Benoit has been leading the staff through a thorough review of the existing collection of books, DVDs, CD audiobooks, etc. Titles that are in poor condition, that haven't circulated in more than a few years, and/or that are out-of-date (e.g. How to use obsolete computer software) are being removed from the collection to make room for new and more current popular titles. This process is called "weeding" and is a sometimes painful but necessary part of keeping a public library's collection fresh and up to date with the current popular titles. The majority of the weeded titles will be made available for purchase at the Friends of the Ayer Library Book Sale on October 17th.

"Normal" COVID-19 Operations at the Library

- Library staff are working at the Ayer Library Tuesday through Friday from 10 AM to 5 PM and Saturday from 10 AM to 2 PM. The library building remains closed to the public but, since June 9th, curbside pickup of books, DVDs, and other physical items is available by appointment. More details are available on the Library's website (ayerlibrary.org) and on our Facebook page.
- Book drops are open to accept returns. No late fees will be charged on overdue items.
- All in-person Library programs scheduled through the fall months have been canceled or postponed, but video Story Times and other online programs continue, and more are in the works for the fall and winter months.
- Even though the building is closed, library staff members are available to fill requests for books and DVDs to be picked up curbside, to help answer questions, or assist you with online library materials, etc.
- To request assistance from one of our staff members
 - By telephone: Please call 978-772-8250.
 - By email: Send your message to ayerlibrary@cwmars.org and someone will be in touch with you as soon as possible.
 - On Facebook: Message us or post a question to www.facebook.com/AyerLibrary and someone will respond as soon as possible.
- The Library's WIFI network remains on and available 24 hours a day and seven days a week. The signal extends far enough to cover the library parking lot.
- The staff of the Ayer Library continue to work hard to restore library services while also working safely:
 - The staff is divided into two teams of five, with the teams working alternating days to maintain separation.
 - Returned items are being quarantined on tables in the historic Reading Room for 72 hours before being re-shelved or checked out to another patron.
 - Workstations and desk surfaces are being cleaned by staff at the end of each day, if not more frequently, in addition to the disinfecting provided by our cleaning contractor on a daily basis.
 - Staff members do their best to remain physically distant from each other while working, and wear face masks inside the building when they can't do so.

Library Director's Activities:

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- On August 6th, two staff members from the Montachusett Regional Planning Council visited the Library to document compliance with the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. This work is being done as part of a Town-wide review and update of Ayer's ADA Transition Plan. The long-term goal is to make sure that the areas within the library that are open to the public without limitation all meet the ADA standards. As an example, common areas and bathrooms must be in compliance, but rooms that are only accessible by appointment, such as the Local History Room, do not have to comply with the regulations. Most of this work involved measuring entrances, checking grades on ramps, and the placement of grab bars in the bathrooms. Any deficiencies will be noted in the updated Transition Plan and may be addressed over time.
- I participated in CWMARS Directors' meeting via Zoom on August 6th where the discussion centered on current status of delivery and curbside services and plans for the future. A second Zoom meeting on August 25th raised questions about MBLC requirements for open hours during COVID-19, museum passes, and outdoor programming.
- On July 24th our library network organization CWMARS, through its Executive Director Jeannette Lundgren and the Executive Committee composed of directors of member libraries, issued the following statement on racism:

CW MARS stands in support of racial justice and racial equity. We believe that Black Lives Matter and we condemn all forms of systemic racism and discrimination.

We join the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA) in condemning violence and racism towards Black Americans, Indigenous people and people of color (BIPOC).

As an organization, we embrace the core values of equity, diversity and access, and we pledge to take the following actions:

- *Encourage all of our libraries to eliminate overdue fines which present an economic barrier to the access of library materials and services.*
- *Host monthly conversations around race and racial justice.*
- *Educate and train our staff on equity, diversity and inclusion.*
- *Understand and examine implicit and racial bias.*
- *Review existing network policies for any bias and encourage member libraries to do the same.*
- *Review our hiring and recruiting practices to attract a more diverse workforce.*
- *Update policies to encourage BIPOC representation on committees.*
- *Highlight materials in our collections to promote Black authors and antiracism.*
- *Work with state, federal and local agencies and vendors to improve library broadband speeds across the consortium and keep costs affordable for member libraries to best support their communities.*
- *We commit to work together to eliminate racism and build stronger, safer and more connected communities.*

On August 13th, I joined a group of CWMARS staff and Library Directors for an inaugural Zoom meeting on the topic of racism, and how CWMARS staff and member libraries might work to support each other in taking the actions noted in the July 24th statement.

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- I met with two consultants from White Mountain IT Services of Nashua, NH on Monday, August 17th to review the Library's IT infrastructure. This is another small step toward developing a plan/proposal in the ongoing project to install a local network to connect and a service plan to maintain our staff and public computers.
- On August 19th, Ayer's Director of Facilities Maintenance Chuck Shultz delivered a supply of gloves, disinfecting wipes, and hand sanitizer to the Library. He also demonstrated an electrostatic disinfectant sprayer that he'd received for the Fire Department, one of which is on order for the Library.
- On August 19th I met via Zoom with Alicia Hersey and Alan Manoian of Ayer's Office of Economic and Community Development to discuss the next steps in the Library's part of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding that we've been awarded for the purchase of WiFi hotspots. I've submitted a draft policy on user eligibility and circulation of the hotspot devices to Alicia and Alan. They will be meeting with staff from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, the office responsible for managing the CDBG funding, in early September to work out final requirements for spending and reporting on the use of the CDBG funds. It's our hope that we'll receive approval to move forward with activation and distribution of the hotspots by the end of September.
- The Ayer Library Board of Trustees met via Zoom on August 20, 2020. The meeting recording is available on the Ayer Public Access Corporation (APAC) website.
- The Library's administrative STAB (Samantha, Tim, Amy, Barbara) team met virtually on August 6th, 13th, 20th, and 26th.

Library Maintenance:

- Able Landscapers continued to mow and maintain the library grounds, including a half day spent weeding the planting beds.
- On Monday, August 24th, a technician from Moore Enterprises installed two additional phone lines and reprogrammed our phone system so that both workstations on each of the new circulation desks will have individual phones.

My thanks to Amy Leonard, Barbara Cheeks, Samantha Benoit, and the rest of the Ayer Library staff for their contributions to this report.

Respectfully,

Tim Silva
Library Director