

2021

TURNING OUTWARD REPORT & FINDINGS



Clinton Community Library

Turning Outward Project Team

Carol Bancroft
Library Director

Chris Johnson
Member, Board of Trustees

Susan Rohrmeier
Programming Assistant

Mary Pat Sternberg
Vice President, Board of Trustees



BRIEF HISTORY OF Clinton Community Library

The Town of Clinton is divided into seven distinct hamlets, four school districts, two fire districts, four voting districts and five zip codes. It is a predominantly rural town without a town center. The majority of the town's population is over 60, but during the COVID-19 pandemic we saw more young families relocating to Clinton. The town is also the vacation home to many part-time "weekend residents." Since 1965, Clinton Community Library has drawn residents together as a community.

CCL was founded in 1965 when a group of Clinton citizens worked with the Clinton Town Board to establish a "reading center" in the loft of the Clinton Town Hall with an initial collection of 2,000 books. Between 1965 and 1973, the town population doubled, and the need for more library space became apparent. An addition was built onto the Town Hall in 1975 largely with community funding. The expanded library was granted non-profit status in 1995 and in 2003 New York State issued a provisional charter. Clinton voters approved a sustainable funding measure in 2017, which led to the New York State Board of Regents presenting CCL with a permanent charter in 2018. The NYS Regents Advisory Council presented CCL with the Joseph F. Shubert Library Excellence Award for the positive impact the Optimistic Aging program series has made in our community.

The library serves as an all-age learning center and a multi-gear vehicle for accessing materials and resources from other libraries in the Mid-Hudson Library System. CCL continues to embrace our role as a major provider of support, services, and access for our small community.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Clinton Community Library is the heart of the Town of Clinton. It serves as a community center, a sponsor of a variety of programs for all members of the community, a vehicle for accessing library materials and resources through the Mid-Hudson Library System, and a learning center for children and adults.

STATEMENT OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Clinton Community Library is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the promotion and practice of intellectual freedom, and its leaders are individually and collectively responsible for creating and maintaining physical and virtual spaces, programs, services, collections, and practices that ensure we reach, engage, and value all of our community members, regardless of ability, age, cultural background, ethnicity, faith, gender, gender identity, ideology, national origin, race, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

PLANNING SUMMARY

In 2021 Clinton Community Library began a strategic planning process to better identify the needs and concerns of Clinton residents. A team made up of library trustees and staff members engaged in the American Library Association's "Libraries Transform Communities: Turning Outward Initiative."

"Turning Outward" is a step-by-step process developed by The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. It entails taking steps to better understand communities, changing processes and thinking to make conversations more community-focused, being proactive around community issues, and putting community aspirations first.

Over the course of two months, CCL's Turning Outward team facilitated a series of community conversations in the Town of Clinton, meeting both in-person and online. The team also took advantage of opportunities to meet with community members, community leaders, and community stakeholders one-on-one when meeting with a group was not feasible. During these conversations participants were asked what type of community they want to live in, what challenges they face in realizing these aspirations, and what changes are needed to overcome them.

The following pages represent the translation of comments made during these conversations into goals that the Clinton Community Library looks forward to working collaboratively to support those community aspirations



CLINTON COMMUNITY LIBRARY

THE KIND OF PLACE PEOPLE WANT CLINTON TO BE

People who live in Clinton told us that the things they love most about the town are its rural character and the privacy residents are afforded by living here. They want to maintain the country feel of the town, and protect its natural resources.

People also want a community that cares for one another. Many express a strong desire to know their neighbors and feel connected. They want to help young parents and the elderly who may need assistance with chores, shopping, or just need company or a break.

Several community members stated that they want to live somewhere with a vibrant spirit of volunteerism, where everyone is willing to lend a hand to make Clinton an even better place to live.



It is worth noting that our conversation participants stated that COVID made them feel a sense of isolation and loneliness, and the reduction of social events made them realize how important these types of programs are for a rural town like Clinton.

We heard that people want a central place to gather. The Library currently serves that purpose in many instances, but some thought that parks could be used for town-wide events.

Overall, residents have a lot of positive things to say about the Town of Clinton, and they are willing to do the work to make it an even better place to live, as long as they are given some direction and know where to start.

**"I LOVE THE PEACE AND
QUIET WE HAVE LIVING IN
CLINTON, BUT I ALSO
WANT TO FEEL LIKE PART
OF A COMMUNITY."**

ISSUES AFFECTING THE COMMUNITY

Connection & Identity

Every conversation noted that there is no town center in Clinton. This, combined with the rural character and four school districts make meeting people a challenge. In our conversations, we learned that there is a very strong desire for opportunities that bring folks together around one identity.

Another concern is the lack of understanding about what businesses actually are in Clinton. There is confusion over addresses being Rhinebeck, Staatsburg, and Salt Point -- yet still being part of Clinton. (One example is The Omega Institute, which technically is in Clinton yet most people associate with Rhinebeck because of its address.)

- **No Town Center**
- **Geography & Logistics**
- **What defines "Clinton?"**
- **Hard to meet people**

Communication

With no local newspaper, learning about town news and events is difficult. Some organizations send out emails and newsletters, but that is only helpful to those who opt-in to receive them. Likewise, websites like Facebook and NextDoor are helpful, but only for those who have accounts and are active users.

One participant said that it would be nice to learn more about what is happening in the areas -- not just events, but small-town news that we can all celebrate (e.g., positive news about local children, awards received, anniversaries, retirements, birthdays, etc.)

- **No local newspaper**
- **Hard to learn about local organizations**
- **Confusion where to go in town for information**

ISSUES AFFECTING THE COMMUNITY

Safety & Environment

People noted that the issue of speeding on country roads in Clinton is a serious problem that they would like to see addressed. Residents want to walk on the roads, but because of the lack of sidewalks and the risk of speeding cars, they don't always feel comfortable doing so. Roadside litter was also mentioned as a concern, though "not as bad as it used to be." Garbage and cans strewn across the shoulder are unsightly and environmentally unsound.

- **Speeding on town roads**
- **No sidewalks - not safe to walk**
- **Litter on roadsides**



Respect

Many community members acknowledged an "us vs. them" mentality that exists within the town (political; multi-generational residents vs. people who have lived in Clinton for years with no family connection vs. new residents vs. weekenders). We should work together to make everyone feel welcome and recognize that no matter your background, there is always something we can learn from each other. People also expressed concerns about accountability and perceived favoritism within the Town, which may also be due to lack of communication.

- **Accountability**
- **Favoritism**
- **Us vs. Them Mentality**

WHAT WILL CLINTON COMMUNITY LIBRARY DO?

- Partner with community organizations to host programs & events
- Engage community members who want to get involved



Moving into 2022, the Clinton Community Library will continue to nurture relationships with existing community organizations and will seek out opportunities to develop relationships with new groups. Partnering with complementary agencies will benefit the Town of Clinton as a whole. Together, we can work toward developing programs.

We are already starting to take action based on our conversations. People told us that they wished there was better communication in Clinton. In particular, they noted a desire for a directory similar to what the Clinton Business Association put out years ago. The Friends of the Clinton Community Library have put together a directory that not only includes information on local businesses, but also information on community groups, a brief history of the town, and more. This directory will be updated annually and delivered to new residents.

We are using the information we learned in the conversations to guide library programming so we can offer more community-building events. We will make a concerted effort to reach out to new residents and make them feel welcomed. Additionally, we will reach out to our partners to further develop services that will benefit town residents and help address the aspirations that conversation participants shared.

Clinton Community Library has heard the voices of community members who took part in our Community Conversations, and we hope to continue the dialogue. We invite other community members to engage with us in our efforts and take action to realize our goals. The Library will keep an open door and a listening ear ready for anyone who would like to continue the conversation beyond this project. Together, we can build a stronger community that we all can be proud to call our own.

MOVING FORWARD

How can other organizations make an impact?

The people who spoke with us showed a desire to improve life in the Town of Clinton, but few knew where to start, or who was the appropriate person to approach about taking action. The Recreation Department was named as one agency that might be able to help by expanding youth programs and developing adult programs, as well. Some people noted that getting local businesses and restaurants involved might bring them attention and increased patronage.

Political divisions were noted several times, and people suggested that non-partisan events might ease rifts, allow for dialogue, and inspire people to work together.

Organizations like 4-H, Settled & Serving in Place (SSIP), The Lions Club, local churches, scouting organizations, and clubs have opportunities to gain membership through outreach and community engagement.



TRUSTED ORGANIZATIONS THAT MIGHT TAKE ACTION

- Clinton Historical Society
- Omega Institute
- Town Government (particularly Rec Dept.)
- Library
- Fire Departments
- 4-H Clubs

WHAT'S NEXT?

Goals, Objectives & Ideas that can be built upon by town governments, organizations, and community members

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL RESIDENTS TO GATHER AS A COMMUNITY

- A "Taste of Clinton" event involving local restaurants & businesses.
- A mentoring and skills exchange program.
- A community service fair to introduce local organizations.
- Mixers to welcome new residents.

BRIDGE GAPS IN IDEOLOGY & HISTORY TO TOWN

- Organize events that focus on our collective patriotism, but are not political, to show our shared pride in our town and our country.
- Historical storytelling programs would allow people who have lived here for generations to pass on information and education to those who have more recently moved to the Town of Clinton.



IMPROVE COMMUNICATION REGARDING LOCAL NEWS & EVENTS

- Create a directory of businesses & organizations in and nearby Clinton.
- Share information more readily online via an email newsletter, town website, Facebook/Next Door.
- An attractive "tourist map" of the area with businesses, restaurants, locals interest sites, and historical sites identified.
- Cross-promote events at programs hosted by local organizations.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Together we can brainstorm more ways to encourage community engagement and work toward our shared goals.