

SAUK PRAIRIE LIBRARIES

Strategic Plan 2024-2029

Introduction



*Ruth Culver Community Library,
Prairie du Sac*

Situated along the Wisconsin River's banks and bluffs are the side-by-side communities of Prairie du Sac and Sauk City. Though these two communities are commonly known by one name – Sauk Prairie – each brings a distinct history and story. Their storylines intertwine in many positive and beneficial ways, from a strong school district to a vibrant business ecosystem to a lively arts and culture scene. Sauk Prairie's stunning natural setting and proximity to larger towns and cities such as Baraboo and Madison make the area an appealing destination for visitors and an attractive place to live.

The Sauk Prairie public libraries, Ruth Culver Community Library in Prairie du Sac and George Culver Community Library in Sauk City, serve as essential spaces for discovery, learning, connection-making, and resource-finding. While the libraries are funded separately through their municipalities, both are widely used by Sauk City and Prairie du Sac community members and are perceived as a shared resource serving both communities. In 2023-2024, the Sauk Prairie Libraries took on a joint strategic planning process to update their previous plan and ensure its next chapter is rooted in and driven by their communities.



*George Culver Community Library,
Sauk City*

The Planning Process

The joint planning process kicked off in the fall of 2023. The libraries formed a strategic planning team of staff and board members from libraries and community volunteers. The planning team guided the process, reviewed the information gathered, and helped build and refine the strategic plan framework.

The libraries engaged stakeholders across the Sauk Prairie communities through various channels throughout the joint planning process. The libraries heard from the following stakeholder groups:

- Planning team members
- Library staff
- Library boards
- Library users
- Community members

The libraries and the planning team gathered insights, ideas, and quantitative information through the following activities and channels:

- Community demographics information from sources like the US Census and the American Community Survey.
- A data dashboard of Public Library Annual Report information, situating each library within a comparison cohort of similar libraries around Wisconsin.
- The planning team completed a planning landscape questionnaire to understand the local landscape and community priorities and opportunities they see for the Sauk Prairie libraries.
- A questionnaire for staff at both libraries was shared via email and based on the SOAR planning facilitation approach (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results).
- A questionnaire for board members at both libraries was distributed via email. This questionnaire included both community-focused and library-focused questions.
- A community survey was offered and promoted widely throughout the Sauk Prairie communities and beyond. The libraries received 310 responses to the survey; respondents included regular and infrequent or non-library users.
- Invitations to a community conversation and online form were shared with community contacts, including library users, non-users, and community partners. Consultants from WiLS provided facilitation for the community conversation, which had five attendees. The libraries received sixteen responses to the online form. Conversation and form questions were both community- and library-oriented.



During the summer, the library is a place where school-age students can spend time, including Aniyah, who loves to do puzzles.

"I love living in a small town that doesn't require you to miss out on some of the "big city" luxuries. We have an art gallery, an active theater guild, our own movie theater, and amazing trails, parks, and schools. The big companies that are here support this community, and that is big."

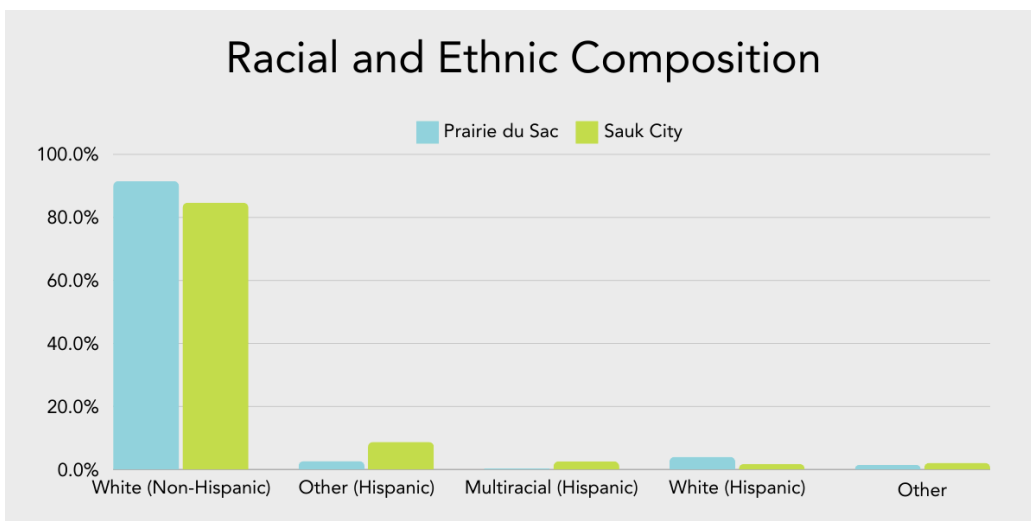
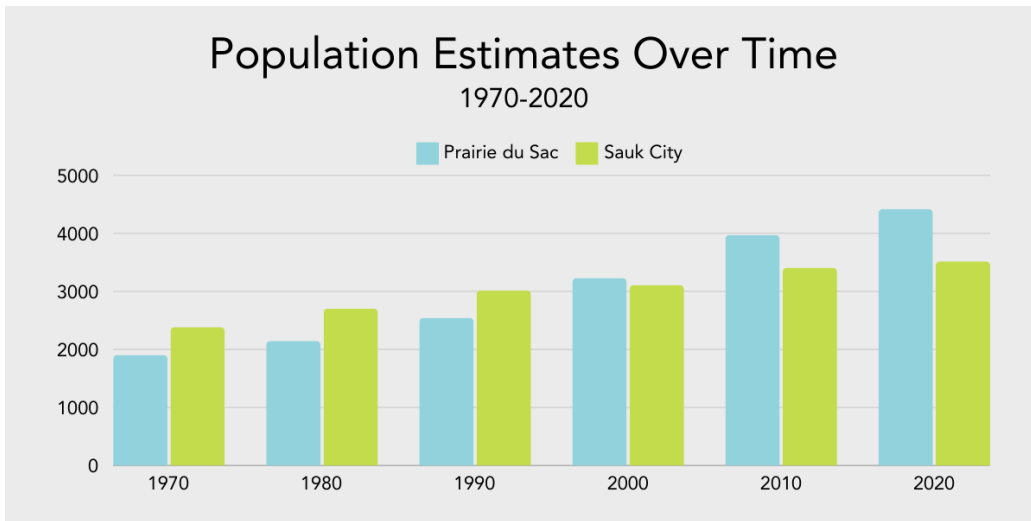
~ Questionnaire respondent

Themes and Takeaways

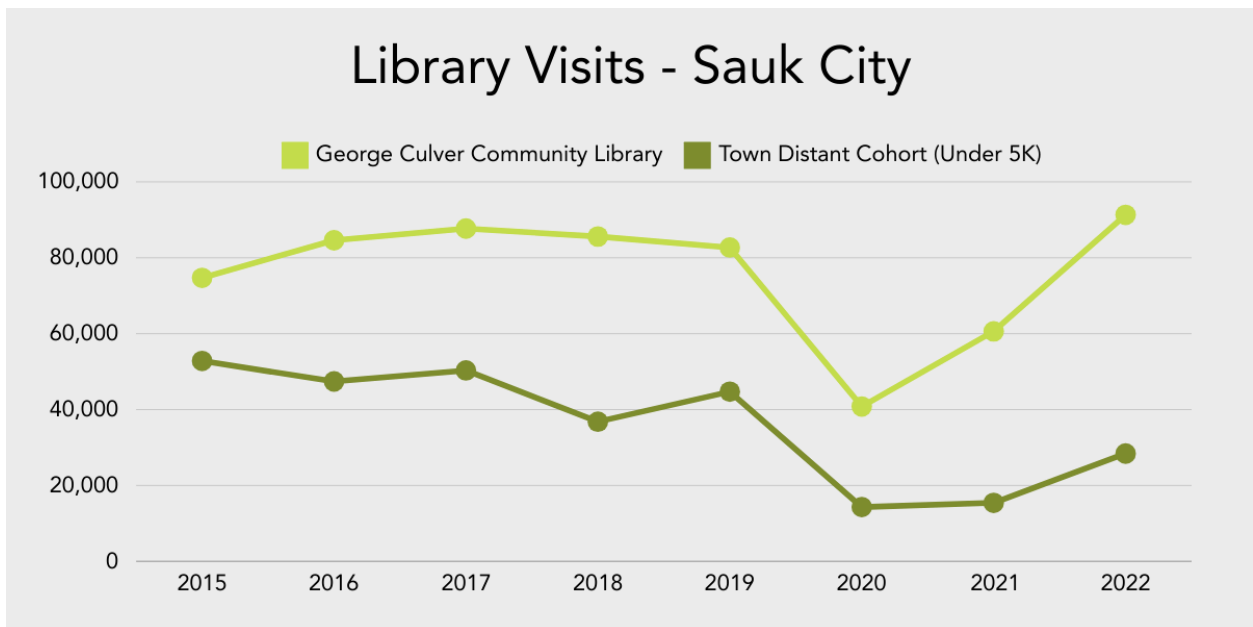
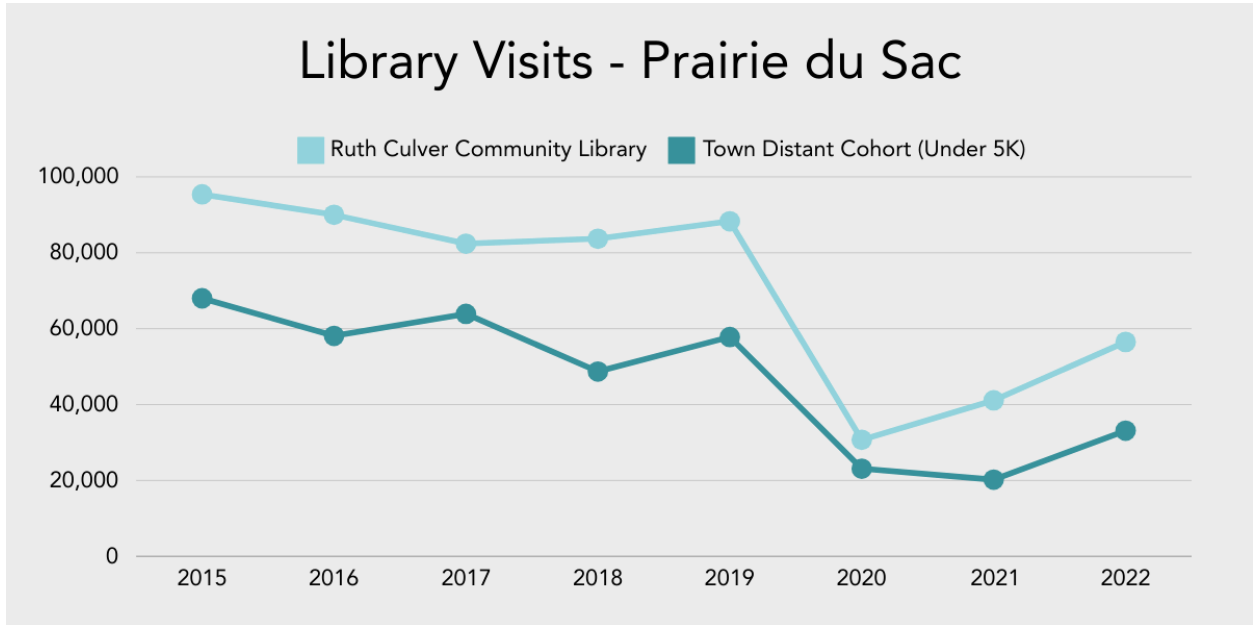
The community information-gathering phase spotlighted many big-picture themes.

The communities of Sauk Prairie are home to many significant existing strengths. People in Prairie du Sac and Sauk City are engaged, energetic, and motivated to help their neighbors and communities thrive. There are established and growing businesses in the communities that can and do provide funding and other kinds of support for civic projects. An active network of community-based organizations and social service providers offers recreational and cultural opportunities and resources to meet baseline needs.

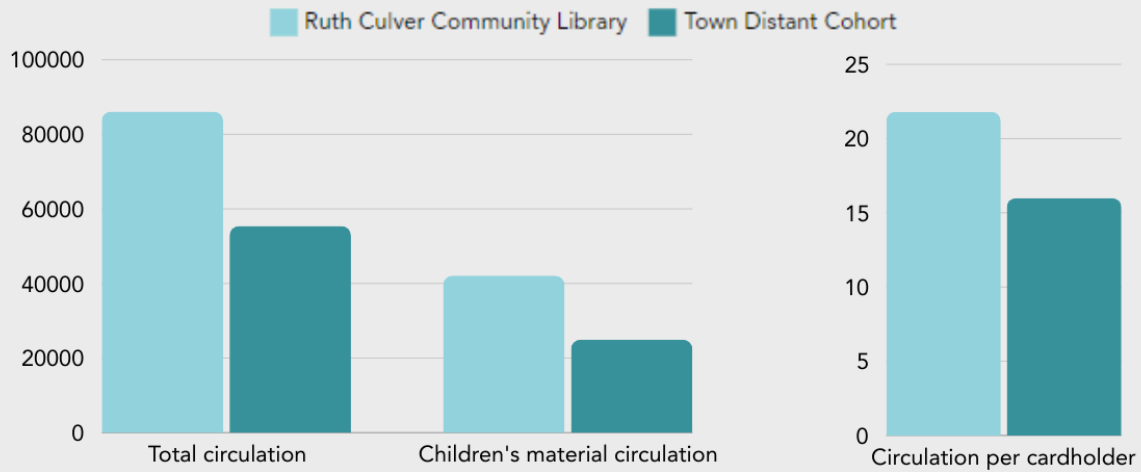
Stakeholders identified childcare, affordable housing, and accessible transportation as opportunities for growth across the Sauk Prairie region in the coming years as the population continues to grow and diversify.



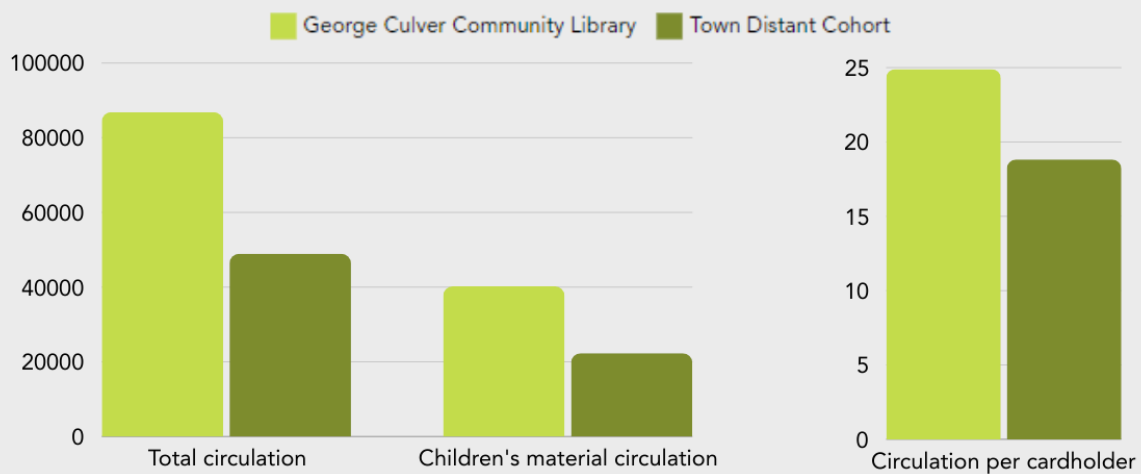
George Culver Community Library and Ruth Culver Community Library are crucial pieces of the Sauk Prairie landscape, demonstrated by the existing strengths identified during the joint planning process. Both libraries are well-used by those who know about them and what they offer; their circulation rates and visits outpace their comparison cohorts. Stakeholders consistently mentioned both libraries' friendly, welcoming, and knowledgeable staff as strong points.



Circulation: Prairie du Sac



Circulation: Sauk City



"I have ALWAYS loved the library. Sauk Prairie is so lucky to have TWO marvelous libraries with outstanding staff to maintain the services."

~Survey respondent

Analysis and theming of the data and information gathered revealed priorities for the libraries that emphasize ways to build on their existing strengths, connect meaningfully with those not yet familiar with the libraries, and leverage the many assets already present in the Sauk Prairie area. These themes are embedded throughout our strategic plan's goals and measurable objectives.

Priorities and Themes:

- Community-Led Libraries
- Facilities & Spaces
- Literacy Focus
- Relevant & Engaging Programming
- Organizational Health



We offer a variety of adult programs at the library and wine bottle art night was a hit!



Our annual adult child art night is something families look forward to!

Strategic Plan Framework

Public libraries seek to provide free and open access to a broad range of materials and services to people of all ages and backgrounds.

Using the information gathered and the priorities or themes identified, the planning team crafted and refined a framework of aspirational, future-facing goals and measurable objectives.

Goal A: Inspiring Learning & Literacy

Sauk Prairie community members can access a wide range of events, collections, and services to deepen or develop new skills and accomplish tasks.

Measurable objectives:

1. Refine programming to reflect specific community audiences and interests (e.g., general adult programming, people seeking language learning and literacy skills, tweens/teens).
2. Increase connections with library non-users through considered partnerships and 1:1 relationship-building, particularly with the Latine population and tweens/teens.
3. Expand access to technology and to technology training and assistance.
4. Utilize communications/marketing platforms to grow community awareness of services, collections, and events.

Goal B: Maximizing Our Spaces

Library spaces offer places to collaborate and socialize, connect with community-based resources, learn something new, or stumble upon a great story.

Measurable objectives:

1. Expand and formalize the libraries' role as a satellite location for social and community-based services.
2. Work toward library spaces that suit the varying needs of users and visitors with clearly designated zones, amenity upgrades, and reconfigurations that address specific audiences and user groups.
3. Redefine/develop the library as a multifaceted literacy, skill development, entertainment, and social connection space.

Goal C: Sustaining Our Organizations

Sauk Prairie libraries leverage their unique relationship to benefit library staff, boards, and all Sauk Prairie community members through shared professional development, communication efforts, and public programming.

Measurable objectives:

1. Strengthen communication between boards, directors, and staff of Ruth Culver Community Library and George Culver Community Library to foster collaboration and streamline services.
2. Improve staff satisfaction through professional development, team-building activities, and advocacy for competitive wages.

Living the Plan



Our bi-monthly Teen Tuesdays events are always popular and teens enjoy a variety of activities including pumpkin carving.

The Sauk Prairie Libraries will implement and activate this strategic plan through intentional steps and action items in the coming months and years.

Activation

The libraries will activate the goals and objectives of the strategic plan through a set of activities or projects to be determined by the libraries on an annual basis. Potential activities were identified during the planning process; however, as local resources and priorities shift, the libraries may add new or discontinue certain activities as appropriate.

Communication

A joint strategic plan requires an extra level of collaboration and communication. Ruth Culver Community Library and George Culver Community Library have an opportunity to cultivate their relationship, and the goals and objectives outlined in this plan provide a shared direction for the next several years.

To be transparent and accountable, the Sauk Prairie Libraries will establish a communication plan to regularly share strategic planning updates with stakeholders, including library staff, members of the library boards, and the broader Sauk Prairie community.

Assessment

The libraries will use various methods to assess this strategic plan's goals and objectives. In some cases, the completion or implementation of an activity may indicate progress; in other cases, qualitative information such as polls, feedback forms, surveys, and even short conversations may be used. The libraries may employ quantitative measurements such as visitor counts, event or program attendance, or circulation counts. Ongoing assessment means that the libraries can gauge their progress on the goals and objectives annually and adjust activities or projects as needed.

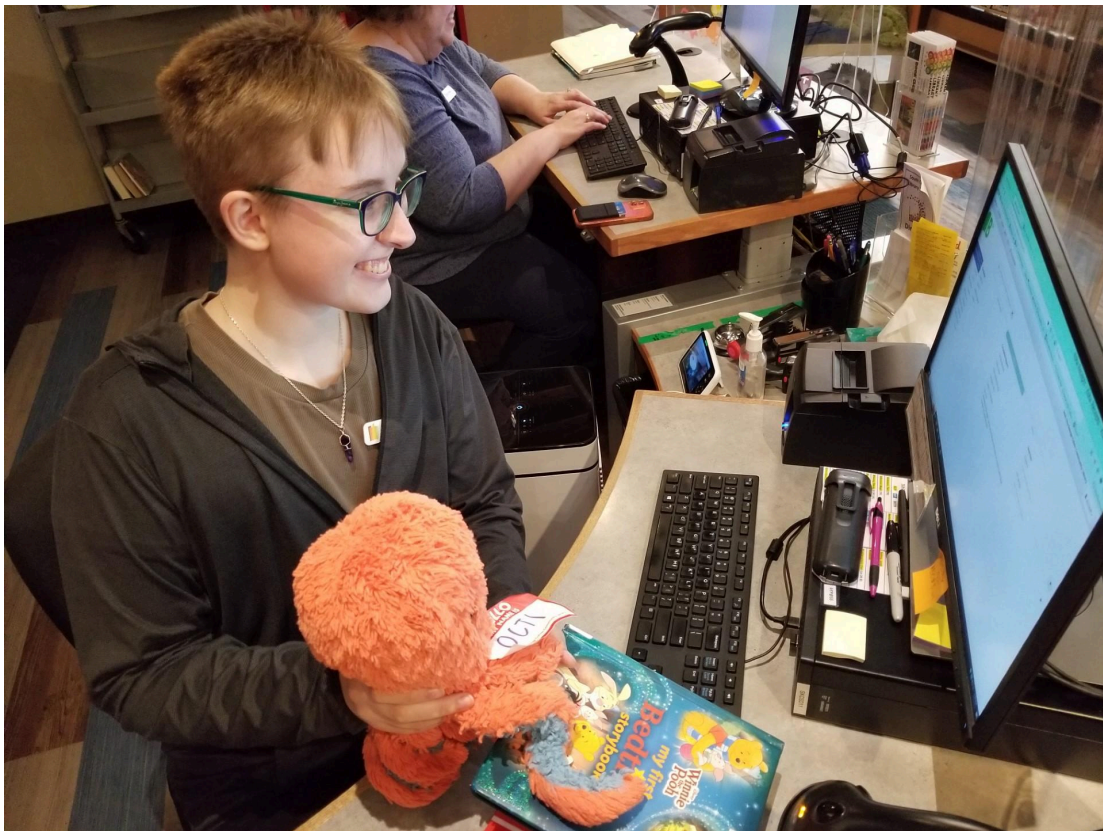
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, the Sauk Prairie Libraries would like to express their gratitude to the hundreds of community members who took the time to complete surveys and questionnaires or attend a conversation.

The libraries sincerely thank the staff and board members who took the time to respond to questionnaires from their unique perspectives as both “library experts” and community members.

Many thanks to the strategic planning team, which included representatives from both libraries, the Sauk Prairie Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Sauk Prairie School District. These team members dedicated many hours to discussions, planning sessions, and asynchronous work to finalize the plan, and the libraries are grateful for their efforts.

The libraries appreciate the work of the consulting team at WiLS (Wisconsin Library Services) who coordinated and facilitated the joint planning process.



Stuffed animal sleepover at the library!