



TRANSFORMING  
UNDERSTANDING

**STRATEGIC PLAN** 2013  
2017

# TRANSFORMING UNDERSTANDING



OUR AUDACIOUS GOAL IS TO BE A TRANSFORMATIONAL FORCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WATERLOO AND ITS CITIZENS.

OUR PURPOSE IS TO FULFILL THE MULTIPLE LITERACY NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY.

OUR VALUES ARE: LEARNING AND GROWTH, FREE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS, BEING ENGAGED AND RESPONSIVE TO NEEDS, RIGHT OF EVERYONE TO ACCESS INFORMATION, BELIEF IN OUR CUSTOMERS.



#### MESSAGE

The Waterloo Public Library (WPL), at the heart of a growing city, is a community asset that offers many exciting and challenging opportunities for citizens to explore the changing landscape of information and knowledge. In Waterloo, we are surrounded by ideas, technology and creativity—each demanding a new set of skills, knowledge, and language, a new type of literacy. WPL embraces these new literacies and aims to engage the community in exploring the multiple understandings that are required to navigate the world. We will do this by keeping the needs of Waterloo citizens at the centre of our work: becoming a creative catalyst, moving beyond our walls, telling everyone our story, designing connections and creating engagement.

Our Strategic Plan, Transforming Understanding, reflects the significant and influential position your library holds in the development of this community, and expresses the changing role of the library, changes being seen across Canada's libraries. Our goal, to be a transformational force in the community, inspires and drives us toward this future. Waterloo is a city uniquely positioned to embrace this transforming world.

Through implementation of this strategic plan we intend to unlock the power of ideas at WPL, helping individuals and families explore, experience and share.

We're inviting you to be part of this exciting future at your library.

**Laurie Clarke**  
Chief Executive Officer



## WATERLOO PUBLIC LIBRARY IN CONTEXT

Your library is composed of three locations: the Main Library on Albert Street, the McCormick Branch on Parkside Drive, and the newest addition, the John M. Harper Branch on Fischer-Hallman Road North. In 2012, these locations served over 63,000 members and circulated over 2.0 million items, while almost 15,000 people visited in person, and 13,000 visited electronically every week.

As a contributing organization of the City of Waterloo, your library plays a central role in the development of literacy for citizens. We offer traditional library services, including access to our collections and programs, as well as services that provide access to technology-driven resources.

We maintain and nurture many key community partnerships in response to the varied literacy needs of the citizens of the City of Waterloo. Moving forward, your library will explore new partnerships to further expand literacy programming to meet new and emerging needs.

## WATERLOO IN CONTEXT

With its roots as a “barn building” community, Waterloo is a strong, contributing member of Canada’s Technology Triangle, and has been for decades. Our city has proven its resilience through the ability to adapt to even the toughest economic climates.

A large component of our city’s employment is knowledge-based and part of a creative economy, with most careers centred in technology, insurance, not-for-profit, social entrepreneurship and education. With a large student population enrolled at University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Conestoga College, young, educated citizens are a significant percentage of our community. Waterloo is also quickly becoming a top choice for international residents.

Our John M. Harper and McCormick Branches are located within minutes from the David Johnston Research and Technology Park. Our Main Library neighbours include the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), the Balsillie School of International Affairs, Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, and the Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery. These organizations attract world-class researchers and artists to our city, while engaging the public through lectures and other events.

Coupled with our university and professional work environment, Waterloo is a city of ideas striving to be a leader in innovation and excellence. It works toward this goal by encouraging collaboration between its organizations. WPL is privileged to be part of the city’s vibrancy and leadership.

## STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

We completed a series of community engaging activities moving through our strategic planning process. In order to find out what new ideas citizens had for our future, we ran two corresponding events. We then used these ideas as central input as we held a two-day session for members of our Library Board and staff.

The first event, our Big Audacious Goal evening, was held at the Main Library and was a great success. Participants generated new, bold ideas that we could potentially implement at the library given no constraints on time or money. We also asked participants to complete a Cover Story activity, in which they explained why and how our library “made it onto the cover of their favourite magazine”. The Cover Story activity was also made available at all of our locations for a period of time afterwards, helping us capture even more ideas from the community and staff.

After these ideas were collected and synthesized, members of our Library Board and staff were brought together to collaboratively explore the library’s vision for the next 3 – 5 years. During this two-day intense session, we explored obstacles and developed strategies to respond to them. The ideas presented in this strategic plan are a result of the activities completed at these various events.

These ideas streamed into five strategic directions or themes, each subsequently paired with a literary work containing similar themes. These books are the first step in communicating and understanding our strategic plan, and ultimately bringing it to life.



## CHANGING SYMBOLS

As our city and society changes, the symbols we use to navigate our understanding of the world begin to change. For instance, symbols that we associate with weather have transformed to express a new meaning in the digital age. An arrow within a cloud radically changes the meaning of the symbol from “it’s cloudy outside” to “you’re uploading to the digital cloud!” This shift is one example of a new type of literacy now required by our citizens.





## DIRECTION ONE: Becoming a Creative Catalyst

WPL's Creative Catalyst strategy will see the library embrace the role of community asset and driver of transformation within the city. By becoming an organization that recognizes the role of placemaking, WPL will contribute to the lively urban experience of the UpTown. As a place to study, explore, socialize and learn, new partnerships will be catalysts to creativity within the city.

### Embrace placemaking by animating public space in UpTown Waterloo

**Action:** Culture Corner library festivals in UpTown Waterloo

- Hold annual festivals at the Main Library that engage citizens of all ages in the urban life of Waterloo

### Create a community learning and discovery environment

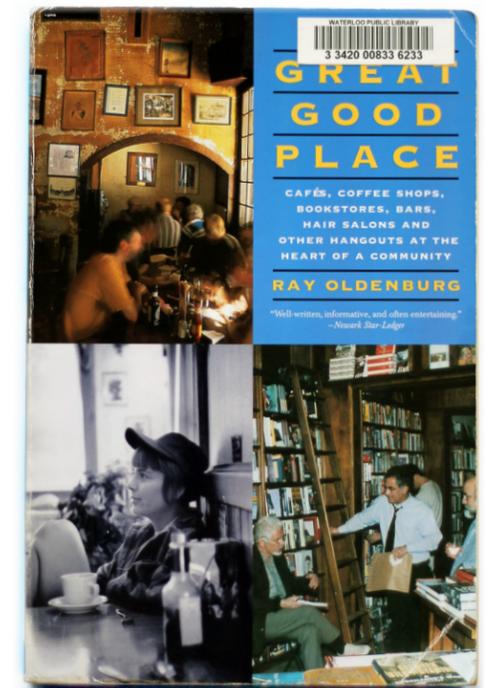
**Action:** Maker Space—Play-based tech for all ages

- Integrate technologies into programs and services, creating opportunities for hands-on discovery and innovation

### Embrace creative technologies

**Action:** Redesign tech for children's and youth services

- Introduce new technology options for children and youth in the library, transforming their spaces into creative, collaborative discovery areas



We believe the library is one of the “great good places” in the City of Waterloo. Like Jane Jacobs, Ray Oldenburg is interested in what creates the lively, vibrant and engaged cities we love, cities where we feel connected and alive, cities that provide “third spaces” that are not home nor work, where citizens experience communal space and where the opportunities for refreshment, inspiration, social interaction and spontaneous activities arise.

## DIRECTION TWO: Moving Beyond Our Walls

Transforming Understanding requires the library to go where we're needed, and will use new partnerships to extend our reach. An innovative approach to bringing WPL to the community will improve the delivery of services and programming.

### Outreach to non-traditional users

#### Action: Tech Connect On the Go

- Take WPL's 'Tech Connect' program on the road, promoting and teaching technology skills

### Develop community outreach approach

#### Action: McCormick community conversations

- Engage the neighbourhoods surrounding the McCormick Branch in transformational community building

### Expand digital content delivery

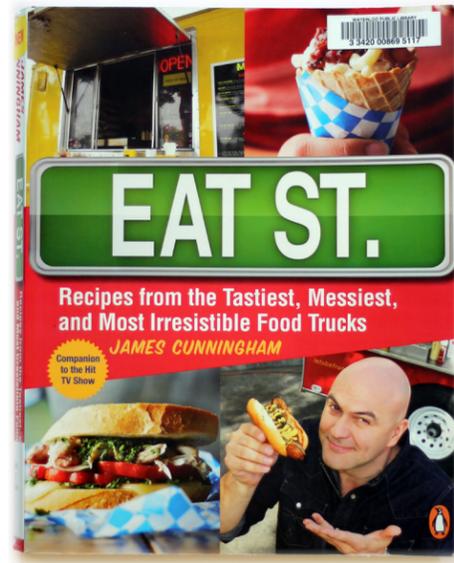
#### Action: East-side digital library outreach

- Expand virtual library service to East-side customers

### Expand point-of-need service through automation

#### Action: Hand-held wireless check-out pilot

- Implement hand-held wireless check-out for use in the library and off-site



In the hyper-competitive and unforgiving world of restaurants, food trucks have found success by moving the kitchen to the customer—wherever those diners may be. We believe that the success of WPL's reach into the community demonstrates the importance of engagement that goes beyond the walls by expanding partnerships and collaboration.

## DIRECTION THREE: Telling Everyone the Story

The transforming role of a library in the 21st century, coupled with learning from our own successes gives WPL a platform for telling our story. We are a community leader and will be a dynamic contributor to the life of the City of Waterloo.

### Develop expertise in storytelling with new media

#### Action: Invest in new media expertise

- Create opportunities to incorporate media into communication and programming

### Establish enhanced measures of outcomes, impact and success

#### Action: Measure of success

- Develop strategic measures for qualitative impacts

### Establish marketing & fundraising capability

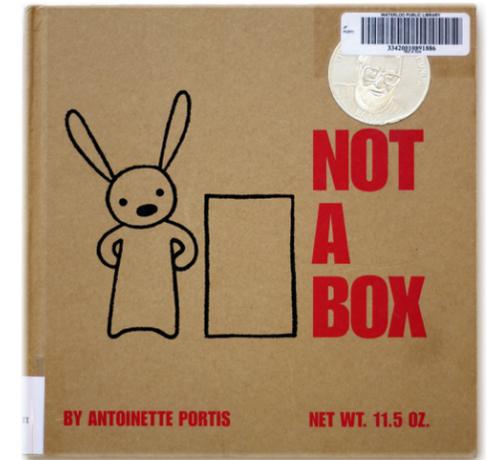
#### Action: Invest in marketing & fundraising expertise

- Utilize strategic expertise in marketing and fundraising roles

### Expand fundraising program

#### Action: Develop fundraising profile

- Create and launch a community profile for attracting donors



To this creative bunny what you see is not a box. In fact it's anything but a box. It's a catalyst for imagination and it fuels journeys of discovery, near and far. This is "not-a-box." Libraries are like that. They are more than what you see on the surface. They are a community space for life-changing transformation and exploration. Libraries live outside the box.

## DIRECTION FOUR: Designing Connections

WPL will design a next generation service experience. We will connect with users through social media, reaching wider audiences, and we will promote interaction while supporting and empowering staff to be multi-literacy leaders.

### Engage with a wider range of stakeholders

- Action:** Develop social media strategy
- Develop a comprehensive strategy for engagement through social media

### Design the user experience

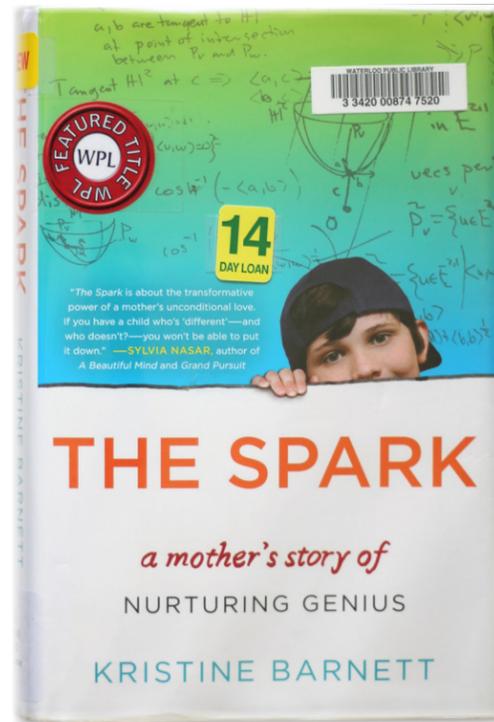
- Action:** Main library service design
- Redesign service approach at the Main Library to take advantage of expanded opportunities for face-to-face interaction with customers

### Empower staff to be multi-literacy leaders

- Action:** Change the narrative of tech at WPL
- Expand staff expertise in new technologies to equip them to confidently serve the public

### Improve online service experience

- Action:** Website redesign
- Remodel the website to engage with the community as a transformational force in the development of expanded online opportunities



For Kristine Barnett, it was the commitment to noticing what connects and inspires, and to providing an experience of “muchness” for her severely autistic son Jacob that led to his immersion in physics, from preschool to a place at the Perimeter Institute at the age of fifteen. Libraries are a place of muchness, with capacity to fuel creativity. By designing connections, WPL will invite citizens to experience discovery and spontaneity @ the public library.

## DIRECTION FIVE: Creating Engagement

To continue to meet the needs of the community, WPL will embark on a journey to discover opportunities with new partners. We are looking for dynamic, innovative and creative programming that builds on the incredible ideas and knowledge being explored in Waterloo. This is not about new programming at the expense of basic literacy services, but will drive WPL to engage with a new set of users, volunteers and partners.

### Leverage strategic partnerships

- Action:** STEAM [Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math]
- Leverage partnerships with Waterloo's leaders in technology and education to create program opportunities that meet the multiple literacy needs of the community

### Expand new partnerships

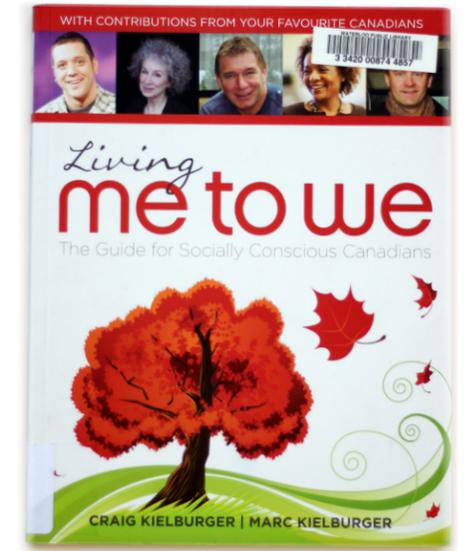
- Action:** Program packaging with *Culture Corner* partners, “Road trip to the library”
- Using the Main Library as gateway, introduce the community to the cultural and educational opportunities at the corner of Caroline and Erb Street

### New volunteer opportunities

- Action:** Create volunteer strategy
- Utilize volunteers to support and amplify the key directions of this plan

### Focused basic literacy services

- Action:** Every Child Ready to Read 2
- Implement family literacy initiative based on the American Library Association's revised Every Child Ready to Read curriculum



Individuals and communities are recognizing the power of engagement to make the world a better place. At the heart of the community, the library too is seeking opportunities for dynamic and innovative programming that builds connection and contributes to a strong and sustainable community.

### **Main Library**

35 Albert Street  
Waterloo ON N2L 5E2

### **McCormick Branch**

500 Parkside Drive  
Waterloo ON N2L 5J4

### **John M. Harper Branch**

500 Fischer-Hallman Road  
North  
Waterloo ON N2L 0B1

 519-886-1310

 wpl.ca

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