

Grimsby Public Library Strategic Plan (2026 – 2030)

Ready for What's Next

Prepared for: Grimsby Public Library

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Executive Summary

The Grimsby Public Library is an important part of community life. It is a trusted place where residents come to learn, connect, access resources, and explore new ideas. As Grimsby continues to grow and evolve, the Library must also continue to grow and adapt, ensuring it remains responsive to changing needs while continuing to deliver the core services and supports the community values.

Ready for What's Next sets a clear direction for the Library over the next five years. Informed by community input, perspectives from Library staff, the Library Board, Town representatives, and background research, the plan reflects a vision for the future of library service in Grimsby. It recognizes the Library's important role not only as a provider of collections, programs, and services, but also as a welcoming public space and community connector.

Vision, Mission, Values

At the heart of this plan is a renewed vision, mission, and set of values that reflect the Library's role in the community. These statements provide a strong foundation for decision-making and service delivery.

Our vision:

Integral to a thriving community, we are Grimsby's home for learning, creativity, and connection.



Our mission:

We bring knowledge, resources, and experiences within reach, helping people navigate and participate in community life.

Our values:

- **Community First:** We connect people to information and one another. Grounded in the needs and interests of our community, we ensure our offerings reflect the people we serve.
- **Learning for Life:** We support curiosity, creativity, and literacy in all its forms. Across life stages and learning styles, we provide opportunity for people to build knowledge, develop skills, and engage with new ideas.
- **Everyone Belongs:** We create a welcoming, inclusive environment where everyone is reflected and respected. Cultivating a sense of belonging shows up in how we design our offerings, ensuring all people feel comfortable at the library.
- **Access for All:** We create opportunity for all by removing barriers and providing equitable access to knowledge, technology, spaces, and experiences.
- **Trusted and Open:** We ensure the library is a space for open dialogue and the exploration of ideas. We uphold and respect intellectual freedom with integrity and accountability.

Strategic Priorities

Guided by this foundation, the plan is organized around three strategic priorities: **Delivering What Matters**, **Connecting Our Community**, and **Growing with Grimsby**. These priorities position GPL to build on its successes, respond to emerging opportunities, and continue serving as a trusted, innovative community hub that is **ready for what's next**.

Priority 1: Delivering What Matters

This priority builds on what's working well, ensuring that the Library continues to deliver the high-quality programs, collections, and services valued most, while evolving offerings as community needs evolve.

Our objectives include:

- 1.1** Establish the Library as a go-to-destination for learning, technology, creativity and exploration.
- 1.2** Evolve in-branch services with a focus on accessibility, flexibility, sustainability, and ease of use.
- 1.3** Enhance visibility, understanding, and use of library offerings.



Priority 2: Connecting Our Community

This priority strengthens GPL's role as a connector by deepening partnerships, linking residents to resources and supports, reaching new and underrepresented audiences, and building community support.

Our objectives include:

- 2.1** Emphasize the Library's role as a community connector.
- 2.2** Improve collaboration with the Town in support of coordinated planning and an integrated response to shared priorities.
- 2.3** Meet people where they are through proactive outreach, community partnerships, and targeted engagement.
- 2.4** Deepen community support and cultivate philanthropic partnerships.

Priority 3: Growing with Grimsby

This priority ensures GPL has the staffing, spaces, systems, and advocacy tools needed to keep pace with a growing and changing community.

Our objectives include:

- 3.1** Ensure staffing capacity is aligned with current and emerging service demands.
- 3.2** Invest in library spaces and service models that improve the user experience and meet the demands of a growing Grimsby.
- 3.3** Embed organizational practices that support effective service delivery now and in the future.
- 3.4** Strengthen the Library's advocacy and ability to demonstrate its value within the community.



1. Introduction

Grimsby Public Library (GPL or the “Library”) is a respected and treasured community asset, delivering meaningful impact with the resources currently in place. The Library has cultivated healthy levels of engagement, with approximately 32% of residents holding library cards and visitation on the rise. Participation in programs also continues to grow, reflecting a varied mix of offerings that resonate with the community.

At its core, GPL functions as more than a place to borrow books. It is a community hub that brings people together, supports learning at all stages of life, and contributes to the overall quality of life in Grimsby. Its ability to connect with residents through programming, services, resources, and welcoming spaces speaks to a clear understanding of local needs and a commitment to serving them well.

At the same time, this success is beginning to place pressure on the Library’s existing capacity. Limitations related to space and staffing are becoming more apparent as demand grows, creating constraints on the Library’s ability to enhance services and fully realize new opportunities.

In addition, Grimsby is continuing to evolve as a community, with population growth and shifting community expectations expected to influence how community members access and use library services. This Strategic Plan charts GPL’s priorities for the next five years, building on its existing strengths while ensuring the Library is well positioned to grow alongside the community it serves.



1.1. The Planning Process

This report was developed through a multi-layered approach combining internal and community engagement, background research, and analysis conducted by Nordicity. The process was designed to build a well-rounded understanding of GPL's current state, informed by both internal perspectives and community insights.

Background research included a review of key Library and municipal documents, including findings from GPL's recent Feasibility Study. This review helped ground the Strategic Plan in previously identified needs and opportunities, and helped point to areas of alignment with municipal priorities.

Engagement activities included the following (engaging an estimated total of 95 participants):

- Focus groups with Library staff and the Library Board
- Focus groups with Town of Grimsby staff and Members of Council
- Discussions with representatives from various community organizations in Grimsby and the Niagara region
- Community pop-ups at the Peach King Centre, YMCA, and GBF Community Services Thrift Store
- An in-branch engagement station inviting community participation at the Grimsby Public Library
- Site visit and observational research at the Library and areas of planned growth in the community

These conversations and touchpoints provided valuable qualitative insights into how the Library is experienced, where it is performing strongly, and where there may be opportunities to strengthen its role to meet the needs of an evolving Grimsby.

Research streams were compiled into a Key Findings Report that was shared with the Planning Committee and Library Board for review ahead of a Strategic Planning Workshop held in April 2026. During this workshop, members of the Planning Committee and Library Board refined a set of priorities and objectives for the plan, as well as new vision, mission, and values statements. Nordicity then prepared the final plan for GPL's review before it was finalized and approved by the Library Board in June 2026.



2. The Grimsby Context

2.1. Supporting Community Priorities

Governed by an independent Board under the Ontario *Public Libraries Act* and funded primarily through the municipal tax base, GPL fulfills a distinct mandate while remaining an integral part of the Town's overall service landscape. The Library plays an important role in advancing broader Town of Grimsby priorities related to quality of life, inclusive growth, innovation, and community well-being. Even as municipal priorities evolve, the Library remains an essential partner in sustaining a supported and connected community. Through its programs, services, collections, and physical space, the Library supports opportunities for residents to connect with one another, learn new skills, and participate in community life.

The Library contributes to a high quality of life in Grimsby by offering a welcoming, low-barrier environment where community members can access information and participate in programs. It also provides a space to spend time – whether individually or with others – in a free setting that is open and inviting to all. This multi-faceted role helps to ensure that residents of different ages and backgrounds have equitable opportunities to build skills and explore new interests.

GPL also supports the development of a complete and connected Grimsby. Located in the downtown core, the Library contributes to local activity while serving as a shared gathering place and a key local community hub. Partnerships with organizations such as the Grimsby Public Art Gallery and the Grimsby Museum further extend the Library's community role by creating unique opportunities for cross-programming and cultural engagement.



In addition, the Library contributes to local economic and social outcomes by supporting access to learning, skill development, hands-on support, and practical resources. Through a mix of programming, digital tools and equipment, and staff support, GPL helps residents navigate information, build confidence with technology, and access resources that support everyday needs – from filing taxes to supporting mental well-being.

2.2. Community Profile

As Grimsby continues to grow and evolve, its demographic and socio-economic profile is shifting in ways that have direct implications for Library services. Understanding these trends provides important context for how the Library can continue to meet emerging needs.

Growing Pressure on Library Services

Grimsby's population grew by 5.7% between 2016 and 2021 and is projected to increase by an additional 27% by 2035, reaching approximately 36,800 residents.¹ This growth is also reflected across the Niagara region, driven in part by increases in immigration (up 19% from 2014 to 2024) and interprovincial migration (up 42%), supported by improved regional infrastructure, relative affordability, and overall quality of life.² Non-permanent residents have also accounted for a significant share of growth (up 61% over the same period). These trends point to a growing and evolving population, including more newcomers, with implications for the Library's role in connecting residents to information, services, and community resources.

Continued growth is expected across the municipality with particular concentration along the west end near the GO Station and the downtown core, with some growth anticipated in the north and eastern areas of Grimsby.³

As the population expands, pressures on community services and infrastructure will continue to increase. Findings from GPL's Feasibility Study highlight that Grimsby is already experiencing a shortfall in library space, estimated at approximately 12,000 square feet. Without additional space, this gap is projected to grow to 15,000 square feet by 2035 and 27,000 by 2045, highlighting clear implications for GPL's ability to meet future demand.⁴

Changing Patron Expectations

Housing affordability and availability continue to influence migration patterns into Grimsby, particularly as households relocate from larger metropolitan areas such as Toronto and Peel Region. Many new residents

¹ Statistics Canada 2021 Census.

² Workforce Collective 2025. <https://workforcecollective.ca/how-niagaras-population-is-changing-and-why-it-matters-for-our-workforce>

³ Town of Grimsby. Intensification Strategy.

⁴ Additional context about the Library's space is provided in Section 3.3. Operations, Governance, and Space.



are seeking more attainable housing options and larger homes, contributing to population growth in the community.

This shift may also influence expectations of local services. Residents arriving from more urban environments may anticipate access to a broader range of digital services, extended hours, and self-service technologies (e.g., self-checkout kiosks and other automated services). As such, there may be an opportunity for GPL to consider how its service model continues to evolve in response to changing expectations.

Serving a Range of Life Stages

Grimsby's population reflects a relatively balanced age distribution, with the largest cohort aged 45–59 (21% of the population). Regional data for Niagara suggests that growth is occurring among both younger working-age adults (particularly those aged 25–44) and older adults aged 65 and over.⁵

This evolving demographic profile reinforces the need for a range of services and programming that can support residents across different life stages. From early literacy and family programming to services that support aging in place, the Library is positioned to play a flexible and responsive role in meeting these varied needs.

Increasing Diversity

While Grimsby's population is currently predominantly of European background, approximately 9.7% of residents identify as part of a visible minority.⁶ Between 2016 and 2021, this population increased by approximately 95%, reflecting broader shifts in the community's demographic profile, with the most significant growth among South Asian, Arab, and West Asian populations.⁷ Population growth in Grimsby is also being shaped by immigration, contributing to an increase in residents who are new to Canada and bringing a range of cultural, linguistic, and lived experiences to the community.

As the community becomes more diverse, there will be a growing need for services and programming that reflect a wider range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Addressing this change in community needs could include multilingual materials, culturally responsive programming, and targeted outreach to ensure that newcomers feel welcomed and supported in accessing library services.

Supporting Skill Development and Lifelong Learning

Grimsby's educational profile is weighted toward secondary and college-level attainment, with fewer residents holding university degrees compared to the provincial average. Approximately 13.3% of the labour force lacks formal educational credentials. Key employment sectors include health care and social assistance, retail trade, manufacturing, and construction.⁸

⁵ Town of Grimsby Economic Development – Strategic Action Plan 2022-2025.

⁶ Statistics Canada 2021 Census.

⁷ Statistics Canada, Counts of visible minority groups, 2016, 2021

⁸ Town of Grimsby Community Profile and Statistics Canada 2021 Census.



These characteristics point to the Library's ongoing role in supporting practical learning, skills development, and access to information. GPL can continue to contribute by providing resources, programming, and spaces that support workforce participation, lifelong learning, and economic participation.

Providing Equitable Access to Resources and Opportunity

Grimsby's average household income (\$124,800) exceeds the provincial average (\$116,000), and the overall cost of living remains slightly lower, indicating that Grimsby is a relatively affluent community.⁹ At the same time, not all residents experience this prosperity equally. A portion of the population continues to face financial and economic challenges, with 5.2% of residents living below the Low-Income Measure (LIM-AT).¹⁰

These findings highlight the importance of maintaining accessible, low-barrier services, while also reflecting a community with potential capacity to support enhanced, fee-based programming. The Library plays a key role in ensuring equitable access to information, technology, and learning opportunities, particularly for residents who may face financial or systemic barriers elsewhere.

⁹ Statistics Canada 2021 Census.

¹⁰ Statistics Canada 2021 Census.



3. GPL Today: Current State

Grimsby Public Library plays an active and valued role within the community. This section provides an overview of the Library's current state, drawing on background research, engagement findings, and site visit observations. It examines how the Library is operating today across three key areas: its offerings (collections, programs, and services), the experiences of those who use and interact with the Library, and the operational and physical context that supports service delivery.

These findings highlight areas of strength where GPL is seeing strong impact that can be built upon, while also identifying where challenges and opportunities exist to meet the demands of an evolving community.

3.1. Library Offerings

GPL delivers a wide range of offerings that reflect its multi-faceted role as a modern library. Across collections, programs, services, and creative technology, the Library supports literacy in its many forms, access to resources and information, and community connection in ways that extend well beyond traditional book lending.

Evidence from both library usage data and engagement findings points to strong and growing community use. Engagement findings also suggest that the types of supports residents look for through the Library are evolving. While GPL remains firmly rooted in its literacy, learning, and community-building roles, it is increasingly part of a broader local support ecosystem, helping to connect residents to other services, provide access to trusted supports, and respond to emerging needs.



In this context, the Library's role is not only to deliver services directly, but also to facilitate access through partnerships and community connections. As demand increases and needs continue to change, there is a growing need to ensure these offerings remain visible and accessible.

Collections

Collections remain a core part of GPL's offering and continue to play an important role in how residents engage with the Library.

Use of physical materials remain widely used and valued, with total borrowing of items increasing steadily between 2022 to 2024. This trend aligns with broader increases in visitation at GPL, reinforcing the continued relevance of physical collections within the community. At the same time, patterns of use are evolving. Digital material usage has grown significantly in recent years, with digital material downloads increasing by 84% between 2022 and 2025. This growth reflects growing demand for e-books, audiobooks, and other online resources. Engagement findings suggest that while these resources are valued, awareness and ease of use remain uneven, with some users continuing to rely primarily on analog formats while others are expanding their usage into digital platforms.

In this context, GPL's collections support a broad range of literacy needs from early literacy and reading development to digital and information literacy. Programs such as the TD Summer Reading Club were frequently identified through engagement as foundational in connecting children and families to reading and building long-term habits.

GPL's collections are further strengthened through regional partnerships. Through the Libraries in Niagara Cooperative (LiNC) and reciprocal agreements with other systems (i.e., the St. Catharines Public Library), patrons have access to a shared catalogue that significantly extends the reach of local holdings. While this model enhances access, engagement findings suggest that awareness of this expanded system remains somewhat limited.

The Library of Things represents an important extension of GPL's collections. Items available for borrowing range from practical tools such as Chromebooks and Wi-Fi hotspots, to recreational and creative resources like musical instruments, board games, sewing machines, and outdoor activity kits. Engagement participants consistently identified these resources as distinctive and valuable, noting their role in supporting hands-on learning, creativity, and access to equipment that may otherwise be cost-prohibitive. There is a clear desire to see the Library of Things collection continue to grow, with particular interest in creative equipment (e.g., recording equipment).

Collections also play a role in reflecting community identity and supporting local connection. Examples such as aligning book displays with Grimsby Museum exhibitions and participation in initiatives like One Book, One Niagara demonstrate how collections can support broader cultural engagement and inclusion within the community. As Grimsby's population continues to evolve, there is also an opportunity to expand multilingual and culturally responsive collections over time, ensuring materials reflect the needs and interests of a more diverse community.



Programs

Programming is widely recognized as one of GPL's core strengths and a primary driver of engagement. Between 2022 and 2025, the Library has significantly expanded its programming, with the number of programs increasing by 340% and overall attendance rising by 200%. This growth reflects both strong community interest and a proactive effort by the Library to expand its offerings to meet community demand.

Engagement findings consistently point to high-quality, well-delivered programming and strong participation, particularly among children, families, and older adults. Flagship and seasonal offerings (such as March Break programming, movie nights, music programs, Storytimes, summer programs, and author talks) were frequently cited as highlights, contributing to the Library's positive reputation in the community. Some participants also noted a willingness to pay for select special events such as the GLaM gala and author talks – which can help offset costs and support the delivery of enhanced programming – while emphasizing the importance of maintaining free, accessible programming as a core part of the Library's offering.

GPL has also demonstrated responsiveness to specific community needs. Through engagements, the Homeschool Hub was highlighted as a strong example of targeted programming that fills a local gap. At the same time, engagement findings suggest gaps in participation among working adults, teens, and local businesses and entrepreneurs. These gaps mainly reflect areas where the Library's programming has not yet been able to expand, in part due to staff capacity and the need to prioritize core, high-demand offerings. Engagements revealed interest in expanded offerings, such as life skills programming (e.g., coding, AI literacy, job readiness), teen-focused activities, and evening or weekend options. There is also an opportunity to continue evolving programming to reflect changing community demographics, including more culturally responsive and inclusive offerings over time.

In addition to these gaps, there are opportunities to refine how programs are delivered. Engagement findings highlight interest in more evening and weekend programming, flexible drop-in formats (vs. programs that require advance registration), and outreach or off-site delivery models that bring the Library into other community spaces. In Grimsby's commuter context, convenience plays a key role in participation, suggesting that timing and format is just as important as content in expanding reach.

Demand for programming is strong and growing; however, the Library's ability to scale its offering is constrained by available space and staff capacity. Physical limitations within the branch restrict program size and the ability to run concurrent activities, while current staffing levels affect the ability to plan, deliver, and sustain an expanded program offering.

Services and Access

Beyond collections and programs, GPL plays an important role as a point of access to information, support, and community resources. The Library serves approximately 32% of Grimsby's population as active cardholders – in line with the provincial average – reflecting healthy engagement while also indicating



opportunity to reach and engage more residents.¹¹ Following pandemic-related declines, both visitation and cardholder activity have rebounded significantly, with visits more than doubling between 2021 and 2022 and continuing to grow, reaching 152,426 in 2025. This sustained increase reflects renewed community interest and growing reliance on the Library as a physical and social space.

Engagement findings highlight the value of the Library as a low-barrier, trusted environment where residents can access support including staff assistance with technology and online tools, guidance toward learning and employment resources, and connections to community services in an inviting and non-stigmatizing setting.

GPL is already serving as a community access point for community services through partnerships and service delivery models. For example, the presence of a mental health clinic operating at select times from the Library, partnerships with Therapy Tails to provide kids and teens, along with resume and interview workshops held on occasion via Employment Ontario, illustrates how the Library can connect residents to practical supports without directly duplicating services that exist elsewhere. Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to further strengthen this role as a connector and convenor within the community, helping residents navigate available services, creating clearer pathways to partner supports, and serving as a trusted point of entry for those who may not know where to begin.

Creative Tools & Technology

GPL also provides opportunities for hands-on engagement with technology through its creative tools and equipment. Resources such as 3D printing and other maker technologies support learning, experimentation, and skill development in a practical, accessible way. These tools – particularly the 3D printer – are popular and were consistently identified as valuable, particularly for residents interested in exploring new technologies and creating without the need for personal investment.

There is potential to expand these creative technologies and further integrate them into programming. As an example, the Library's proximity to the FORT Youth Centre presents an opportunity to expand engagement with youth – particularly teens – through craft- and technology-based activities, which would align with their interests and provide a creative outlet. That said, the ability to expand these resources and associated programming would require additional staff resources to coordinate delivery. As an interim step, embedding the Library's creative technology into regular programming could help position them as a more visible and active part of GPL's offering.

¹¹ Based on the Ontario public library statistics published by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, the average percent of population with an active library card was 31% in 2024 (the most recent statistics available at the time of writing).



Key Takeaways (Library Offerings)

Strengths

- Strong and growing community engagement, with increasing visitation, program participation (up by 200% between 2022 and 2025) and approximately 32% of residents as active cardholders.
- High-quality, well-attended programming with a strong reputation, particularly among children, families, and older adults, supported by popular flagship and seasonal offerings.
- Collections remain highly valued and evolving, with sustained demand for print alongside growing digital usage and expanded access through LiNC partnerships.
- Library of Things and creative tools are distinctive and valued, providing shared access to equipment and supporting hands-on learning and exploration.
- The Library serves as a trusted, low-barrier access point for community support, with strong examples of partnership-based service delivery (e.g., mental health clinic, employment supports).
- Responsive and inclusive service model, including initiatives such as fine removal and targeted programming (e.g., Homeschool Hub).

Challenges & Gaps

- Limited space and staff capacity constrain the ability to scale offerings, particularly programming and creative technology integration.
- Uneven reach across key audiences, including working adults, teens, and local businesses.
- Awareness of available services and resources appears uneven, particularly for digital offerings and collections accessed through partnerships (e.g., LiNC).
- Program timing and formats do not always align with residents' schedules, particularly in a commuter community where availability is limited.

Opportunities

- Strengthen visibility and promotion of offerings, particularly digital services, partnership-based collections, and creative tools, to increase uptake and reach new users.
- Expand engagement with underrepresented audiences, particularly teens, working adults, and local businesses and entrepreneurs, through targeted programming, services, and partnerships.
- Strengthen the Library's role as a connector and convenor, building on existing partnerships to support access to community services and position GPL as a trusted point of entry.
- Explore ways to expand capacity over time, including through staffing, space optimization, and alternative delivery models to meet growing demand for programs and services.



3.2. Community Engagement and Experience

Across the engagement process, participants consistently positioned GPL as a trusted and valued community asset, with a strong reputation for being welcoming, inclusive, and responsive. At the same time, findings point to a gap between how the Library is experienced by active users and how it is perceived across the broader community. While the in-library experience is highly positive, overall engagement is shaped by uneven awareness and visibility, perceived convenience of access, and the Library's ability to balance evolving and sometimes competing needs within its existing space and capacity.

Community Role

GPL is widely understood as more than an access point for information and resources – it is a space for connection and everyday use. Community members, partners, and Town and Library representatives consistently emphasized its role as a trusted and welcoming environment that reflects Grimsby's close-knit, community-oriented identity.

This role is not only functional, but symbolic. The Library was frequently described as embodying what residents value about their community: accessibility, inclusivity, and a shared sense of place. In this way, GPL serves as both a civic asset and a reflection of the town's character.

Perceptions

Based on engagement findings, there appears to be strong awareness of the Library's full range of offerings among active users. In addition to collections, users spoke frequently about the quality and value of programming – particularly for children and families – and the importance of the physical space, including the Library's integration with the Grimsby Public Art Gallery.

However, this level of understanding about the Library's offering and value is not consistent across the broader community. Many residents continue to associate the Library primarily with books and traditional services and are less aware of the modern, expanded role it plays in the community. Pop-up engagements with the community particularly reinforced this disconnect. Several participants indicated that they were not aware of available services and programs or unsure how to access them, and some assumed that library hours were more limited than they are in practice.

Awareness and Visibility

Barriers to using the Library are less about the in-library experience or offerings and more about awareness and visibility, and how the Library fits into residents' day-to-day. Based on engagements, there is a sense from those who do engage with the Library that it is welcoming and relevant. The challenge lies with community members who do not engage with the library, do not understand what it offers, or see it as part of their regular routine.



Awareness challenges are particularly evident among specific groups, based on engagement findings. Residents in newer neighbourhoods, such as Grimsby-on-the-Lake, tend to be less connected to the downtown where the Library is located. With access to local amenities within their own neighbourhoods and limited visibility of the Library's physical location, awareness and engagement appear to be lower.

Working adults also remain a less visible user segment, which aligns with broader sector trends. While it is possible that this group engages more through digital services, current data does not link digital usage to demographic information.

Engagement with the local business community is similarly limited, in part due to a lack of awareness of the Library as a relevant resource. There is an opportunity to position the Library as a space for programming, community connection, and professional development – one that not only connects entrepreneurs and local businesses to information and resources, but that also connects them directly to the local customer base.

Patron Experience (In-Branch and Online)

Across engagements, the in-library experience was consistently described as warm and welcoming. GPL is seen as a space where people feel comfortable spending time, whether to attend a program, meet others, work quietly, browse, or simply be present without pressure to spend money or justify their use. Staff are central to this experience, with feedback consistently highlighting their friendliness, approachability, and willingness to help, contributing to a strong sense of comfort and familiarity for patrons. This low-barrier quality is a defining feature of the Library. It offers a distinct and complementary experience to other civic spaces, providing informal, everyday access without advance planning or cost.

The flexibility of the space is also highly valued. Patrons appreciate that the Library can support a range of uses within the same footprint, with adaptable features such as seating, display areas, and a large screen for movies and gaming contributing to this versatility. At the same time, the patron experience is increasingly shaped by pressure on the existing space. A consistent theme across engagements was the lack of quiet or bookable space for reading, studying, meetings, or group work. This issue affects patrons differently. While many continue to value the Library as a lively, well-used space, others (particularly some older adults) indicated that they have stopped using the Library because it no longer offers a clearly designated quiet reading area. Feedback suggests that the concern is not with the level of activity itself, but with the lack of spatial separation between different types of use.

Digital services are an important part of GPL's offering and appear especially relevant for patrons who may not use the physical space regularly, including working adults. While these resources are valued, they are not always fully understood or easy to access. Common barriers include limited awareness of available digital services beyond e-books, friction in logging in or navigating platforms, and uncertainty about what is available or how to use it. There were also several comments pointing to Kindle use as a barrier, reflecting a broader issue of platform incompatibility with Ontario public library e-book systems. While this is a specific issue, it points to a broader user experience challenge: even where digital resources exist, limitations or lack of clarity can reduce uptake. Overall, there is an opportunity to strengthen both the visibility and user experience of digital services as part of the broader patron experience.



Community Reach and Partnerships

GPL is widely seen as a strong and valued community partner. Community organizations consistently described Library leadership and staff as collaborative, responsive, and open to new ideas. Existing partnerships (particularly with cultural organizations and community groups) are viewed as positive and effective.

At the same time, partnerships are shaped by available capacity. In some cases, external organizations noted the need to initiate collaboration, with the Library responding where possible. There is very limited capacity for the Library to proactively initiate outreach, develop and nurture long-term partnerships opportunities, or broaden coordination with partners across the community – despite clear interest from and alignment with potential partners.

Looking ahead, partners expressed strong interest in the Library playing a more active role in connecting organizations, supporting program delivery, and helping residents navigate available services and opportunities. This role includes acting as a point of connection for residents seeking information about programs or supports availability in the community, allowing the Library to embody a true community hub. There is clear recognition from inside and outside the Library that this type of role would require additional capacity, both in terms of staffing and space.

Planning for Evolving Community Dynamics

While GPL is currently experienced as a safe and welcoming environment, many libraries across Ontario – and in neighbouring communities – are navigating increasingly complex social challenges within their spaces. These challenges include responding to verbal and physical disturbances, mental health needs, and substance use, including overdoses. In systems where these issues are present, they impact not only day-to-day operations for staff, but also the overall patron experience, including perceptions of safety and comfort – sometimes leading to a decline in use, especially among families.

These dynamics are not currently reflected in Grimsby. However, as the community grows and evolves – through intensification and broader economic and social pressures – there is an opportunity to consider how the Library, in partnership with the Town and other service providers, can proactively plan for and respond to changing community needs.

GPL is well positioned to take a proactive approach in planning for potential pressures. By learning from the experiences of neighbouring systems, there is an opportunity to put in place approaches that help maintain a positive, inclusive patron experience for all community members over time. Proactive measures could include developing clear policies and protocols around codes of conduct and public washroom access, as well as supporting staff (e.g., through regular check-ins and incident debriefs).



Key Takeaways (Community Engagement & Experience)

Strengths

- GPL is widely valued as a trusted, low-barrier community gathering space, offering free, flexible access for a range of everyday uses (e.g., reading, working, socializing, and informal use).
- The in-library experience is consistently described as warm, welcoming, and inclusive, with staff playing a central role in creating a comfortable and approachable environment.
- Flexible, multi-use space that supports a variety of activities and adapts to different needs over the course of a day or week.
- Strong reputation as a collaborative and responsive community partner, with existing partnerships viewed as positive and effective.

Challenges & Gaps

- Gap between how the Library is experienced by active users and how it is perceived across the broader community, with many residents still associating it primarily with traditional services.
- Barriers to engagement are driven more by awareness, visibility, and relevance to daily life than by the quality of services, limiting reach among newer neighbourhoods, working adults, and the business community.
- Limited capacity to proactively expand outreach, build awareness, and develop or sustain partnerships over time.
- Overlapping uses and user needs in the Library's open, common space can sometimes cause friction in the user experience.

Opportunities

- Strengthen awareness and visibility of the Library's full range of offerings (particularly programs, Library of Things, and digital services) to better connect with residents who do not currently engage.
- Expand engagement with underrepresented audiences, including residents in newer neighbourhoods, working adults, and the business community, through targeted outreach, services, partnerships, and alternative service models.
- Further position the Library as a community connector and point of access for local programs, services, and supports, building on its strong reputation and existing partnerships.
- Take a proactive approach to planning for evolving community needs, including strengthening policies, staff supports, and partnerships to maintain a safe, inclusive, and responsive space.



3.3. Operations, Governance, and Space

Engagement findings and background research indicate that GPL is operating from a position of strong internal culture and community trust, supported by a committed staff team and positive working relationships with partners. At the same time, the Library's ability to sustain and expand its role is shaped by a set of interconnected factors: governance and municipal alignment, staffing capacity, and the limitations of the current facility.

While the Library is effectively maximizing available resources, findings point to opportunities to strengthen alignment, introduce more formalized structures to support growth, and plan for expanded capacity over time.

Operations

GPL operates with a highly collaborative and committed team culture. Staff, leadership, and partners consistently describe the organization as supportive and strongly service-oriented. This internal cohesion enables the Library to deliver a broad range of services with a relatively small team and contributes to a high-quality patron experience. Positive feedback was consistently heard across all levels of the organization. Leadership is seen as supportive and partnership-oriented, program staff (particularly in children's services) are highly regarded, and frontline staff are frequently described as welcoming, helpful, and well-known to patrons on a first-name basis, contributing to a strong sense of familiarity and trust within the community.

This culture is reflected not only internally, but externally as well. Community partners consistently describe the Library as approachable, responsive, and easy to work with, highlighting its openness to new ideas and strong track record of collaboration, particularly in arts and culture programming through partnerships with the Grimsby Public Art Gallery and Museum.

At the same time, much internal and external collaboration remains informal, with partnerships emerging on a case-by-case basis. Cross-functional coordination and partnerships often rely on individual initiative rather than defined structures or processes. While this approach has enabled flexibility and responsiveness to date, it has also been supported by the Library's small team and single-branch model, and may become a challenge to sustain as the organization grows or as demands on staff increase. There is an opportunity to build on this strong cultural foundation now by introducing more structured approaches to collaboration over time, while preserving the nimble, team-oriented environment that is clearly valued by staff and the community.

Staff themselves emphasized the importance of maintaining this balance. Engagement findings highlight that much of the Library's success is rooted in close, day-to-day interaction with patrons, particularly through the circulation desk. This direct connection supports a strong understanding of community needs and enables staff to respond quickly to feedback. While there is growing interest in service enhancements such as self-checkout options, personal interaction remains a defining feature of the GPL experience and is highly valued by both staff and patrons.



Capacity constraints are a defining feature of the current operating context. GPL is managing an expanding scope of responsibilities associated with a modern public library, with a relatively small staff complement. These constraints limit the Library's ability to expand programming and service offerings, extend hours or special events, proactively develop and sustain strategic partnerships, and undertake consistent outreach to non-users, new residents, and underserved groups – needs that will become more important as the community continues to grow. This staffing constraint is highlighted by benchmarking data contained in the recent Feasibility Study. GPL's staffing complement sits at 0.39 FTE per 1,000 population, which is far below the average (0.5) of neighbouring municipalities of similar size in the Niagara Region. Without new staff to support demand for library service, this gap will continue to widen.

Governance and Municipal Relationship

GPL operates within the governance framework established by the Ontario *Public Libraries Act*, with an independent Library Board appointed by Town Council and the municipality serving as the primary funder through the municipal tax levy. This model is designed to balance local accountability with operational independence: the Board provides focused oversight of library services and long-term direction, while municipal funding and shared services enable alignment with broader community priorities and efficient use of public resources. In addition to this funding relationship, the Town provides a range of shared services to the Library (e.g., IT, HR, facilities), contributing to overall operational efficiency. Such arrangements are common in the public library sector, where municipalities often provide administrative and infrastructure services as part of their overall support to library boards.

In the Grimsby context, there are areas within this legislative and operating framework where roles, expectations, and decision-making processes are not always clearly aligned in practice – particularly in relation to authority, planning, and accountability. While some level of ambiguity is not uncommon across Ontario library systems, engagement findings suggest that these challenges are more pronounced in Grimsby and directly impact the Library and Town's working relationship, both operationally and strategically.

At a working level, there are positive and productive relationships between the Library and several Town departments, particularly the Grimsby Public Art Gallery, Museum, and, more recently, Community Services. These collaborations are seen as effective and mutually beneficial. Additionally, the regular appointment of a Town Councillor to the Library's Board has been key to supporting communication and connection to Council. However, at a broader organizational level, planning processes are not consistently aligned. Town departments typically engage in coordinated annual work planning across senior leadership, allowing for open dialogue, shared prioritization, and resource alignment, while the Library undertakes its planning through a separate process. As a result, priorities, timelines, and resource considerations can become misaligned, representing a missed opportunity for coordination, efficiency in planning and resource allocation, and collective impact for Grimsby residents.

There is a clear opportunity to strengthen alignment and communication between the Library and the Town at both operational and strategic levels. Initial steps are already underway, including plans to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This process presents a key opportunity to clarify roles, establish shared expectations, and support more coordinated planning and decision-making between the Town and



GPL – ultimately enabling a more seamless and efficient experience for residents. Ensuring that this work is approached collaboratively, with both the Library and Town contributing to its development, will be critical to its success.

From a resourcing perspective, municipal funding remains the foundation of the Library’s operating model (as is the norm across Ontario’s public libraries) and is critical to ensuring equitable access to services for residents, including free programming and open public space. GPL has increased its proportion of revenue from library-generated sources and grants in recent years, including through special programming such as author talks and fundraising events (i.e., the annual GLaM Gala). Despite this diversification, local municipal funding per capita (\$37.74) remains below benchmarked communities according to Feasibility Study findings, reinforcing the importance of sustained municipal investment in supporting current service levels and any future expansion.

Policies and governance practices at GPL are generally well established, with core policies and plans in place and regularly reviewed by the Board. There are, however, opportunities to strengthen the policy framework over time through the potential development of additional policies commonly seen across library systems, such as a community partnerships policy. Such a policy could help formalize how partnerships are initiated, evaluated, and sustained, supporting greater clarity and strategic alignment as the Library’s role in the community continues to evolve. Additionally, through the MOU development process, there is an opportunity to consider where alignment with certain municipal policies may be beneficial (e.g., related to shared facilities).

Space

The current Library facility is widely valued and well-used, supporting a range of functions including collections-based use, programming, and informal gathering. Co-location with the Grimsby Public Art Gallery is seen as a particular strength, contributing to a more integrated cultural experience and encouraging cross-visitation. However, survey results from the Feasibility Study suggest that there is limited cross-pollination between gallery visitors and library use, pointing to continued opportunity to strengthen connections. The Library’s proximity to the FORT Youth Centre and Grimsby Historical Society Archives – as well as its location just off of Main St. E. in the historic downtown – presents additional opportunities to strengthen connections across community assets and enhance GPL’s visibility and role in the downtown experience.

At the same time, the Library’s current facility is operating near its functional limits. Space constraints affect the Library’s ability to provide flexible, bookable areas for meetings, study, and partner programming, and limit its ability to support multiple types of use simultaneously such as quiet zones for reading while programs are taking place. This requires ongoing trade-offs between different uses of the space, which engagement findings indicate has led some users to stop using the Library. These constraints also affect day-to-day operations. For example, some materials are stored off the public floor due to limited space, creating inefficiencies for staff and added friction for patrons when items need to be retrieved. Moreover, staff are required to frequently reconfigure furniture and shared spaces to accommodate different activities, which places additional demands on staff time and limits overall efficiency.



Demand for space is closely tied to the Library's ability to grow and respond to evolving community needs. Through engagements and the Feasibility Study, community members and partners identified a need for more functional and flexible space, including additional programming areas (particularly for children and events), quiet study rooms, meeting spaces, and dedicated areas to visibly display the Library of Things collections. The Feasibility Study also pointed to suggestions to improve accessibility (e.g., universal washrooms) and better utilize underused areas, including outdoor spaces, and the connections between the Library and Grimsby Public Art Gallery.

The Feasibility Study also identified a current shortfall of approximately 12,000 square feet of library space in Grimsby, projected to increase to 15,000 square feet by 2035 and 27,000 square feet by 2045 if unaddressed. This gap reflects both current limitations and anticipated population growth, particularly in growing areas of the community – specifically Grimsby's west end near the anticipated GO Station as well as the downtown core, where the Library is currently situated.

Engagement findings also point to potential opportunities to optimize the existing site. Some participants noted that the current location could accommodate additional expansion over time, including potential use of the garden or patio areas to support larger or more flexible programming space. Others suggested opportunities to reconfigure the existing interior layout, as well as better utilize adjacent or connecting spaces, such as the area between the Library and the Carnegie building. There was also interest in enhancing specific areas within the Library, such as creating more dedicated and inviting space for teens, ideally informed by youth input.

In the near term, there is limited appetite within the Town for major capital expansion, despite a clear need for additional Library space as noted in the Feasibility Study. While expanded Library space should remain a priority in the longer term, there is an opportunity in the interim to explore alternative and incremental approaches to extending the Library's reach. These interim approaches could include greater use of partner and municipal spaces for programming, as well as distributed service models such as holds lockers, return boxes, or kiosk-style access points in locations such as the Peach King Centre, Grimsby-on-the-Lake, the Niagara West YMCA, the future GO station area, and other high-traffic community hubs.

Over the longer term, continued growth will require a more strategic, forward-looking approach to space planning. The Feasibility Study outlines a phased development approach, including near-term expansion of service delivery through alternative models, medium-term expansion of the existing facility (up to approximately 10,000 square feet), and longer-term planning for a second branch, potentially in the west end of Grimsby, where the majority of future growth is expected.

Engagement findings also pointed to more practical considerations related to how the Library is experienced and connected within the broader community, such as the need for more visible and intuitive signage to improve wayfinding and awareness. Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to more intentionally integrate the Library into planning for civic and community infrastructure, including facilities such as the Peach King Centre and other emerging community hubs. Early coordination with the Town on these initiatives could help identify opportunities for alignment, co-location, or shared service delivery, supporting a more coordinated and cost-effective approach to expanding access over time.

Overall, the findings point to a facility that is highly valued and effectively utilized, but increasingly strained. The Library is maximizing its current footprint; however, sustaining service quality and expanding access



over time will require a combination of space optimization, alternative delivery models, and longer-term investment in physical infrastructure.

Key Takeaways (Operations, Governance, and Facility)

Strengths

- Strong internal culture characterized by collaboration, responsiveness, and a high level of commitment across staff, leadership, and partners, enabling effective service delivery with a small team.
- Highly positive reputation among community partners, with the Library seen as approachable, flexible, and easy to work with.
- Staff are deeply connected to the community, with strong day-to-day interaction with patrons contributing to trust, familiarity, and a high-quality user experience.
- Established governance framework and strong working relationships with key Town departments, supported by shared services that contribute to operational efficiency.
- The current facility is well-used and valued, with a welcoming atmosphere and strong integration with the Grimsby Public Art Gallery.

Challenges & Gaps

- Staffing capacity is below benchmark levels, limiting the Library's ability to expand programming, outreach, partnerships, and service delivery in line with growing demand.
- Reliance on informal, relationship-driven approaches to collaboration and coordination, which may be difficult to sustain as the organization grows or becomes more complex.
- A lack of proactive alignment between Library and Town planning processes, leading to challenges in coordination, clarity of roles, and effective resource alignment.
- Municipal funding levels remain below comparable communities, reinforcing constraints on current service levels and future expansion.
- The existing facility is operating at or near capacity, limiting the ability to support multiple uses simultaneously and creating operational inefficiencies (e.g., off-floor storage, frequent space reconfiguration).
- Current space does not fully meet functional needs, including access to quiet study areas, meeting rooms, programming space, and accessible infrastructure.



Opportunities

- Introduce more formalized structures and processes to support collaboration and coordination in the future as the Library grows, while maintaining the Library's strong team culture.
- Strengthen alignment with the Town through improved communication, coordinated infrastructure planning, and formal agreements (e.g., MOU) to clarify roles and expectations.
- Enhance the policy framework (e.g., collections, partnerships) to support consistency and strategic decision-making.
- Explore opportunities to optimize the existing facility through reconfiguration, improved accessibility, and better use of underutilized indoor and outdoor spaces.
- Expand service delivery through alternative and distributed models (e.g., lockers, kiosks, partner spaces) to improve access across the community in the near term.
- Plan for long-term growth in alignment with recommendations in the Feasibility Study, such as through phased investment in physical infrastructure, including expansion of the current facility and consideration of additional service points in growth areas, with a new future branch in the long-term.



4. GPL Tomorrow

This section sets the broad, longer-term direction for the Grimsby Public Library, providing the foundation that informs the Strategic Plan. It begins with the Library’s **vision, mission, and values**, which serve as GPL’s north star, articulating its core purpose, guiding principles, and intended impact within the community.

Building on this foundation, the “**future states**” offer aspirational statements for each functional area, outlining what GPL is working toward over the longer term across the areas described in Section 3: Library Offerings; Community Engagement and Experience; and Operations, Governance, and Space.

Together, the vision, mission, values alongside the future states describe the future GPL is working towards, helping to anchor the Strategic Plan in long-term thinking, and guiding GPL towards its full potential.



4.1. Vision, Mission, Values

Vision

Our aspiration

Integral to a thriving community, we are Grimsby's home for learning, creativity, and connection.

Mission

Our purpose

We bring knowledge, resources, and experiences within reach, helping people navigate and participate in community life.

Values

Our commitments

Community First: We connect people to information and one another. Grounded in the needs and interests of our community, we ensure our offerings reflect the people we serve.

Learning for Life: We support curiosity, creativity, and literacy in all its forms. Across life stages and learning styles, we provide opportunity for people to build knowledge, develop skills, and engage with new ideas.

Everyone Belongs: We create a welcoming, inclusive environment where everyone is reflected and respected. Cultivating a sense of belonging shows up in how we design our offerings, ensuring all people feel comfortable at the library.

Access for All: We create opportunity for all by removing barriers and providing equitable access to knowledge, technology, spaces, and experiences.

Trusted and Open: We ensure the library is a space for open dialogue and the exploration of ideas. We uphold and respect intellectual freedom with integrity and accountability.



4.2. Future States

Library Offerings

- GPL offers a responsive and evolving mix of programs, collections, and services that reflect the needs of a growing and changing community, balancing strong core offerings with emerging areas of demand, and reinforcing the Library as a trusted source of information.
- Collections remain central to the Library's value, complemented by expanded digital access, with materials that are visible, accessible, and reflective of the community's diversity and interests.
- Through investment in technology and expanded offerings, GPL is the go-to destination to explore and experiment with emerging and creative technologies.
- Programs are dynamic, inclusive, and accessible, with expanded reach across age groups and interests, and greater flexibility in timing, format, and delivery.
- GPL plays an active role in the community ecosystem, connecting people to relevant services, learning opportunities, and local resources through strong partnerships.

Community Engagement and Experience

- GPL is recognized and valued as an essential, visible community hub that is deeply embedded in daily life and widely understood as a place for connection, lifelong learning, and support.
- The Library continues to provide a welcoming, low-barrier environment where residents feel comfortable and connected.
- Outreach and partnerships extend the Library's reach, particularly to underrepresented and underserved groups, helping close gaps in awareness and access.
- Communication and engagement approaches are clear and effective, ensuring residents understand what the Library offers and how it can support them.

Operations, Governance, and Space

- GPL operates with a strong, collaborative culture supported by the structures and capacity needed to sustain growth over time, and effective advocacy that reinforces its role and value.
- The Library and the Town are more closely aligned through coordinated planning and shared priorities, with mutual understanding supporting clearer decision-making and long-term investment.
- GPL plans for future growth in its physical footprint and organizational capacity alongside the community, ensuring services remain responsive and accessible as demand increases.



5. How We'll Get There: Strategic Plan

This strategic plan sets out a clear path forward for the Grimsby Public Library over the next five years. Leveraging existing strengths, the plan ensures the Library is equipped to evolve and adapt to a changing community, and works towards bringing its vision, mission, and values to life.

The plan is structured around three strategic priorities:

- **Delivering What Matters**
- **Connecting Our Community**
- **Growing with Grimsby**

Each strategic priority reflects a different dimension of the Library's work – from what it offers and how it connects, to how it can sustain and strengthen its capacity for stronger, more responsive service delivery in the future. These priorities are mutually reinforcing, working together to support a forward-looking approach, ensuring the Library is ready for what's next.

Underneath each strategic priority, the plan provides a series of objectives that define GPL's intended outcomes, underpinned by a set of actions to help achieve them.



Priority 1: Delivering What Matters

This priority builds on successful initiatives and growing momentum so that the Library continues to deliver the high-quality programs, collections, and services residents value while evolving its offerings to reflect changing community needs. It ensures that offerings meet a range of needs across life stages and interests, and are visible and accessible to those who need them.

Objective 1.1 Establish the Library as a go-to-destination for learning, technology, creativity and exploration.

- A. Expand offerings that provide new experiences, skill-building, and engagement in high-demand areas such as creative technologies, technology-based programming, digital literacy, educational workshops, and interactive learning kits and items through the Library of Things. Continue to leverage community input and usage data to regularly review and update these offerings.
- B. Further expand community-led programming that creates opportunity for residents to share knowledge, skills, and lived experiences. Doing so could entail building on successful initiatives such as the Rotary speaker series to exploring new opportunities such as a Human Library or local expert series.
- C. Develop innovative programming that engages people of all ages through interactive, social, and experience-based activities designed to support community connection and respond to community interests.

Objective 1.2 Evolve in-branch services with a focus on accessibility, flexibility, sustainability, and ease of use.

- A. Experiment with more flexible program formats (e.g., drop-in, evening/weekend) that better align with community schedules and a commuter context. Doing so should include regularly assessing how programs are delivered within existing spaces to support a range of uses, participant needs, and sustainable practices where appropriate.
- B. Investigate ways to expand convenience and access, including the possibility of self-checkout kiosks, digital library cards, and other user-focused technologies that meet evolving expectations of urban service and offer greater choice in how users engage with the library. If pursued, self-checkout kiosks would be offered as a complement to, not a replacement for, existing staff-supported service, which remains a core part of the library experience.
- C. Position staff as visible, front-facing points of contact within the library for a more open, approachable, and user-friendly in-branch experience. Doing so could entail reducing physical barriers at the circulation desk (e.g., removing partitions) and increasing staff presence through a more active, roving service model.



Objective 1.3 Enhance visibility, understanding, and use of library offerings.

- A.** Develop a clear and compelling brand and marketing strategy that captures attention and communicates the value and breadth of Library offerings. It should include guidelines for a consistent voice, the development of a recognizable tagline to strengthen identity and visibility, and a creative campaign that may incorporate community (e.g., youth-led content) and opportunities for video-based content and storytelling. The strategy should also consider opportunities to strengthen the Library's digital presence and user experience on its online channels, including the website.
- B.** Integrate creative technologies and the Library of Things into displays, programs, outreach, and in-branch experiences to increase visibility, encourage hands-on exploration, and help users better understand how these offerings can be used. In doing so, consider increasing display space to support the current and future growth of the Library of Things.
- C.** Improve exterior and internal signage and wayfinding at the Library and in downtown Grimsby for a stronger visible presence and improved user navigation.



Priority 2: Connecting Our Community

This priority strengthens the Library's role as a connector by deepening partnerships and linking the community to resources, services, and opportunities. It focuses on formalizing key relationships to expand impact, reaching new and underrepresented audiences, and reinforcing the Library's role as a trusted and welcoming community space within Grimsby.

Objective 2.1 Emphasize the Library's role as a community connector.

- A. Develop a service map or outreach framework that identifies opportunities for potential collaboration and/or referral between the library and service providers in Grimsby. Doing so will aid staff in effectively connecting users to the appropriate community supports.
- B. Continue to host and support partner-delivered programs and services within Library spaces, exploring opportunities to expand and strengthen partnerships as space and capacity allow.
- C. Develop a partnership strategy that strengthens key partnerships (such as with arts and culture, employment support, youth services, community organizations), guiding more intentional and strategic collaboration over time.

Objective 2.2 Improve collaboration with the Town in support of coordinated planning and an integrated response to shared priorities.

- A. Establish a formalized working relationship with the Town (e.g., through an MOU), outlining clear roles, responsibilities, shared technology infrastructure, and common goals.
- B. Coordinate with municipal planning processes where possible, particularly infrastructure and community development planning, to identify where and how the library could be integrated into emerging community spaces and initiatives. Leverage the library's involvement with the Town's leadership (e.g., through collaboration with the extended Corporate Leadership Team) in support of this work.
- C. Establish regular touchpoints with Council outside of the budget cycle in support of ongoing dialogue around the Library's role and impact in the community.

Objective 2.3 Meet people where they are through proactive outreach, community partnerships, and targeted engagement.

- A. Implement a community outreach plan that identifies priority audiences, outreach goals, and opportunities for the Library to engage outside its walls. The plan should support awareness-building, helping introduce new and under-represented audiences to the breadth of library offerings.



- B. Partner with local organizations (e.g., FORT Youth Centre, Chamber of Commerce, community service providers) to design and deliver targeted programs, outreach, and service touchpoints for priority groups such as teens, working adults, newcomers, and the business community. For example, partnerships with youth-serving organizations could help connect teens to creative technologies, hands-on learning opportunities, and other relevant Library offerings.
- C. Continue and expand presence at community events and pop-ups in community spaces outside of the library. These initiatives should continue to involve onsite cardholder registration and promotion of services and resources that are relevant to the audience or setting – including new/growing and under-used offerings.

Objective 2.4 Deepen community support and cultivate philanthropic partnerships.

- A. Identify opportunities to formalize fundraising and donor engagement over time, in alignment with the existing Donations, Gifts, and Sponsorship Policy and building on the success of current fee-based and fundraising initiatives such as the GLaM gala and author talks. In doing so, consider exploring potential models that could increase the library's capacity for fundraising and donor engagement (e.g., community-level fundraising campaign, donors' circle, Board or community-level fundraising committee).
- B. Develop a structured approach to volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition.



Priority 3: Growing with Grimsby

This priority focuses on ensuring the Library has the space, capacity, and systems to keep pace with a growing and changing community. It includes planning for future service models, strengthening staffing, and investing in the systems and infrastructure required to sustain the Library as a high-quality, low barrier community hub over time.

Objective 3.1 Ensure staffing capacity is aligned with current and emerging service demands.

- A. Add staff in priority areas (i.e., outreach and community engagement, partnerships, technology-focused services, and specialized programming) gradually and sustainably over time. As staff complement increases, regularly assess roles to identify any opportunities for restructuring or new hires as library needs evolve.
- B. Provide ongoing training and professional development to support new service areas and evolving community needs. Doing so may include a mix of internally delivered training (potentially extended to Board members as well as staff) and allocating dedicated time for staff to pursue professional topics that can strengthen service delivery and support a culture of innovation.
- C. Partner with the Town to support outreach initiatives, service mapping, partnership development, collaboration, and early identification of emerging community needs.

Objective 3.2 Invest in library spaces and service models that improve the user experience and meet the demands of a growing Grimsby.

- A. Establish alternative service points (such as holds lockers and/or satellite returns) in key community locations to expand access and better serve commuters and residents across the town. Potential locations could include the planned Grimsby GO Station, the Peach King Centre, the YMCA, among other key locations in Grimsby.
- B. Undertake professional space planning to optimize the existing library footprint and determine whether reconfiguration, renovation, or a combination of both is needed to support a wider range of uses in alignment with Feasibility Study recommendations and accessibility needs. This exploration should include adding bookable meeting pods or rooms; creating designated zones to balance multiple simultaneous uses of library space, including a quiet zone; potentially expanding the existing branch to connect with Carnegie library; and creating room for a robust Tech Hub that would increase skill development and experimentation in the community.
- C. Develop a phased roadmap for a future library presence in the Town's west end to align with expected municipal growth. This roadmap should include key steps including site planning, funding considerations including a fundraising strategy, and ensuring that this new development is integrated into the Town's long-term planning and budgeting process.



- D. Make greater use of outdoor spaces, both within current footprint and as part of future space planning, through more active community-oriented programming.

Objective 3.3 Embed organizational practices that support effective service delivery now and in the future.

- A. Proactively develop approaches and policies for managing sensitive or complex public interactions, including clear protocols for incident reporting, debriefing, and follow-up.
- B. Document and standardize key processes and practices (such as communication protocols and service guidelines), helping to maintain consistency and preserve the library's collaborative culture as the organization grows.
- C. Establish and implement Board recruitment, onboarding, and succession planning practices to support continuity and effective governance over time. Recruitment should be supported by identified skills needs (such as advocacy, advancement) and clear transition planning to ensure continuity and passing on institutional knowledge.
- D. Develop an accessibility plan to guide inclusive service delivery and design, incorporating universal design principles across programs, services, and spaces. In doing so, draw on established accessibility frameworks and guidelines such as the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) for collections and accessible materials, and the Rick Hansen Foundation for space accessibility certification requirements. The plan should also identify opportunities to improve the accessibility of shelving, seating, workstations, and other furnishings.
- E. Strengthen relationships with regional libraries, collaborating on shared resources and initiatives such as an integrated Evergreen ILS.

Objective 3.4 Strengthen the Library's advocacy and ability to demonstrate its value within the community.

- A. Implement storytelling approaches in reporting to convey the Library's value and social impact, supported by improved approaches to measuring outcomes. For example, highlight qualitative stories from the community and make use of data from social impact frameworks such as Valuing Libraries Ontario Toolkit (VOLT) in annual reports and marketing materials. As part of this work, identify simple ways for partners, volunteers, community leaders, and other Library champions to help amplify stories, messages, and evidence of the Library's impact.
- B. Develop a coordinated advocacy plan that establishes key messages, priority audiences, and opportunities for the Board, staff, partners, volunteers, and other community champions to consistently communicate the Library's value, impact, and future needs.



6. Implementation Plan

An accompanying Implementation Plan has been provided as a separate document to support ongoing monitoring and tracking. For each action in the plan, it provides:

- **Timeframe:** short-term (years 1–2), medium-term (years 3–4), and long-term (year 5).
- **Resource considerations:** existing budgets vs. new investment.
- **Potential partners:** external organizations who may support delivery.
- **Dependencies:** where certain actions intersect to support or enable one another.

In addition, the following principles should be considered in context of implementing the strategy:

- **Responsive to community growth:** s
- **Phased and realistic:** Actions should be advanced at a pace that aligns with GPL's available resources, space, and staff capacity, with opportunity to scale over time.
- **Community-powered:** Progress should be supported through strong partnerships, recognizing that the Library is part of a broader ecosystem and that community well-being is a shared priority across many organizations in Grimsby.



- **Accountable:** Ongoing monitoring and the development of measures of success will support transparency, enable course correction, and demonstrate impact.
- **Shared ownership:** Implementation of actions should reflect a balance between staff-led and Board-led roles, ensuring clear accountability while leveraging the strengths and functions of both.



7. Appendix



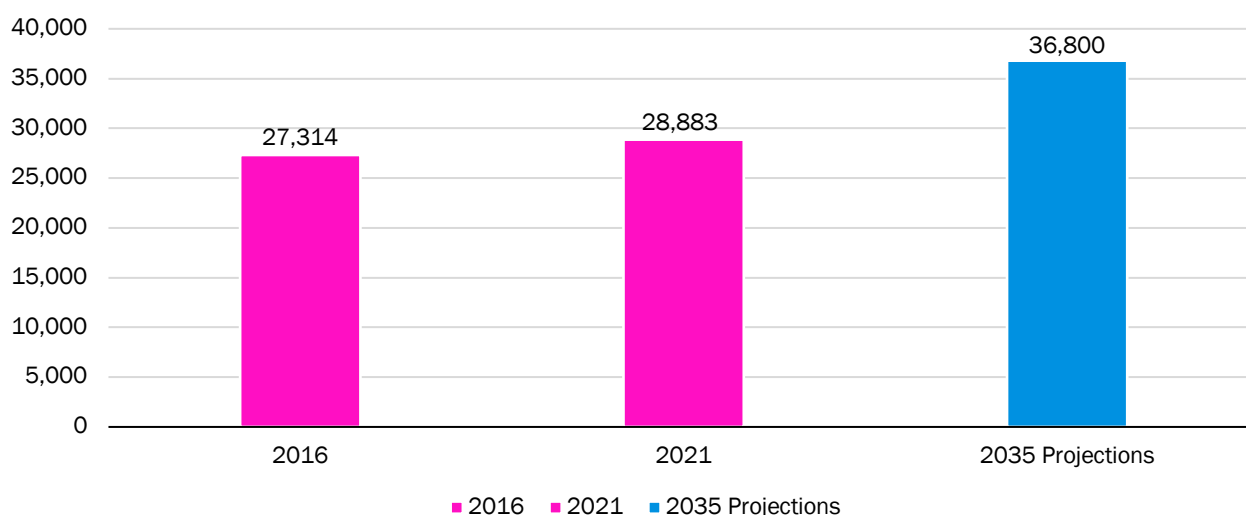
7.1. Community Profile

Population and Net Migration

Population projections: Grimsby's current population is approximately 28,883 according to the Statistics Canada 2021 Census. The population has increased 5.7% since 2016 (27,314 residents) which is above the national average growth rate of 5.2% but similar to the provincial average growth rate of 5.8%.

The Town of Grimsby recently developed an Intensification Strategy in partnership with Hemson Consulting for the Town to assess their capacity to accommodate long-term growth. The work included preparing growth projections which indicate that Grimsby's population is expected to grow by 27% (reaching 36,800 residents) by 2035 using a projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 1.2% between 2021- 2035.

Figure 1 Grimsby's population



Source: Statistics Canada Census Profile 2021

Grimsby is part of the Hamilton Census Metropolitan Area and larger Niagara Region. Population in Grimsby is forecasted to grow further in the near future, being driven by both regional and local factors. Broader regional factors include:

- Migration – Migration has driven much of Grimsby's growth in the last decade, including international immigration, as well as inter- and intra- provincial migration. Research into the Niagara Region drawing on Statistics Canada data has found that net non-permanent residents made the largest contribution to



population growth between 2014 to 2024 (61%), with immigration contributing 19%.^{12,13} Inter- and intra-provincial migration is also being recognized as playing a major role in regional growth, with many people moving to Niagara from other parts of Ontario (42%) alongside arrivals from other provinces.¹⁴ These patterns reflect the broader trend across Southern Ontario, as households and workers continue to move away from the Greater Toronto Area toward smaller regional communities, with Niagara-area towns such as Grimsby experiencing some of the strongest growth.¹⁵

- Growing transit corridor – The anticipated expansion of the Hamilton-Niagara GO transit service in 2025 is emerging as a key pull factor for regional connectivity, improved infrastructure, and transit-oriented growth, making Grimsby and the Niagara Region an increasingly desirable place to live for those seeking both affordability and strong regional connections.¹⁶ Moreover, regional planning policy has positioned Grimsby as a strategic growth node, directing the Town to plan for minimum density targets of 125 people and jobs per hectare particularly for Grimsby West defined as a Major Transit Station Area (MTSA) by 2051.¹⁷ Together, enhanced transit access and clear transit-oriented density expectations are encouraging compact, mixed-use development and growth in Grimsby.
- Housing affordability, availability, and cost – Housing affordability, availability, and cost are major drivers of migration to Grimsby, particularly as households relocate from larger metropolitan areas such as Toronto and Peel in search of more affordable housing options and larger homes.¹⁸ This pressure is reflected in Grimsby's growth planning context: the Town has been directed by the Niagara Region to establish intensification targets, with the Town having the highest Residential Intensification Target for a town in the Niagara Region of 98%, with a minimum of at least 4,500 new units in Grimsby between 2021 and 2051, compared to the regional average target of 60%.¹⁹ This emphasis on compact, higher-density development underscores both strong housing demand and Grimsby's role in accommodating growth within the Niagara Region, particularly as affordability challenges continue to reshape migration patterns across Southern Ontario.

Local city-wide population growth is projected due to several factors. The Town's Intensification Strategy found that the following location areas within Grimsby are poised for the most growth:

- Go Station area – This area is located in Grimsby West and defined as a Major Transit Area (MTSA), containing both a proposed Go Station and Grimsby on the Lake areas. The Grimsby on the Lake waterfront portion of the MTSA is experiencing significant recent development including recently constructed high-density residential towers, alongside ongoing efforts to advance the GO Station

¹² Workforce Collective 2025. <https://workforcecollective.ca/how-niagaras-population-is-changing-and-why-it-matters-for-our-workforce>

¹³ Recent changes to federal immigration policies and targets, including reductions in both permanent and non-permanent resident admissions, may influence future population growth patterns.

¹⁴ Workforce Collective 2025. <https://workforcecollective.ca/how-niagaras-population-is-changing-and-why-it-matters-for-our-workforce>

¹⁵ Workforce Collective 2025. <https://workforcecollective.ca/how-niagaras-population-is-changing-and-why-it-matters-for-our-workforce>

¹⁶ Niagara Region. <https://www.niagararegion.ca/transportation/go-train/grimsby/default.aspx>

¹⁷ Niagara Region Official Plan 2024.

¹⁸ Missing Middle Initiative 2025. The Slow-Motion Exodus: How GTA Outmigration Became Ontario's Defining Trend. <https://www.missingmiddleinitiative.ca/p/the-slow-motion-exodus-how-gta-outmigration>

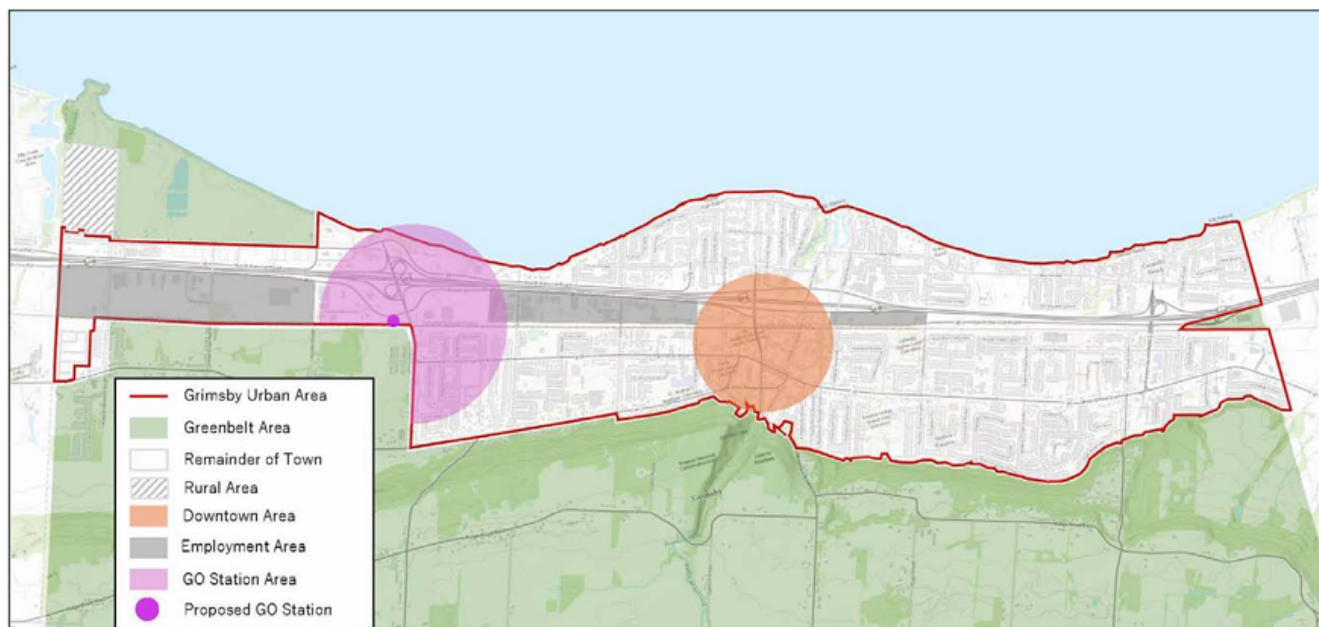
¹⁹ Niagara Region Official Plan 2024.



Lakeshore West GO trains. Together, these factors position the area to anticipate the most significant growth in Grimsby.

- **Downtown area** – The Town of Grimsby's Official Plan has proposed an expanded boundary for the downtown area including part of Livingston Avenue and Main Street bordered by the QEW highway to the north and Green Belt Area to the south. This area includes a wide range of mixed-uses including residential, retail and institutional, as well as building types. Downtown (where Grimsby Public Library Main Branch is situated) will play an important role in accommodating increased residential and employment growth.
- **Employment areas** – This area will accommodate traditional industry growth such as manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, as well as new industry uses, identified within the Town's Official Plan.
- **Other areas** – This area includes all other areas within the Town's urban area, such as Grimsby East, not including the GO Station Area, Downtown Area, and Employment Areas. Similar to the GO Station Area and Downtown Area, it will accommodate residential growth and some employment use.

Figure 2 Defined Development Areas in the Town of Grimsby



Source: Town of Grimsby Intensification Strategy 2025

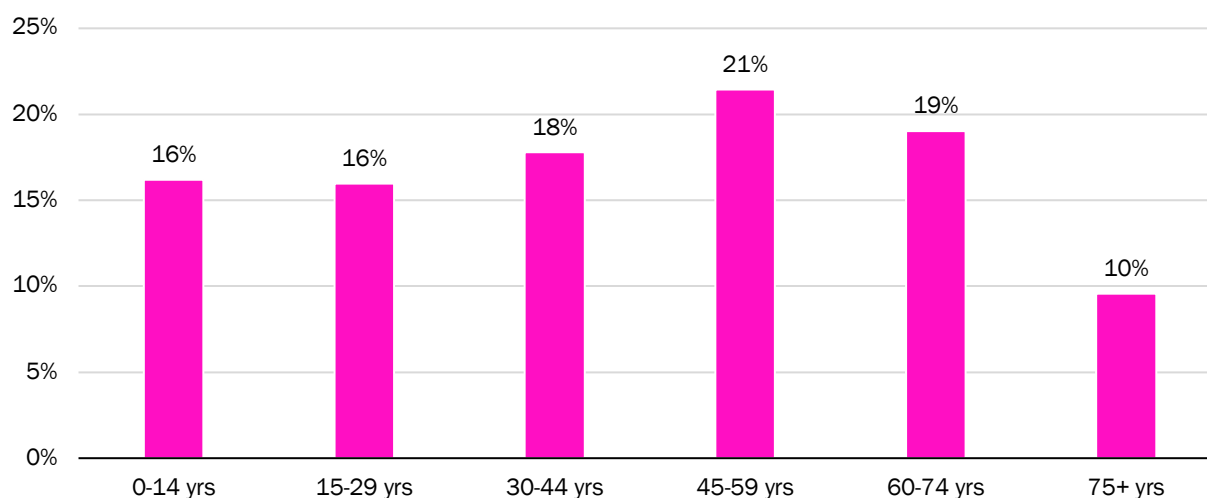
As the population is projected to increase due to various local and regional factors, this growth will continue to place increasing pressure on existing services and infrastructure at the Library, underscoring the need for increased library service levels and expanded capacity to meet future demand. A central finding from the GPL Feasibility Study notes that there is a current shortfall in total library space in the Town of Grimsby of 12,000 square feet (sq. ft.). Unless remedial action is taken (i.e., more space provided) this shortfall is expected to grow to 15,000 sq. ft. by the end of the next decade (2035) and to 27,000 sq. ft. by 2045.



Demographic Profile

Age distribution: The largest cohort of Grimsby's population is aged 45-59 years old (21%), otherwise the overall age distribution appears to be evenly distributed. Grimsby's population is also comparatively younger than the Niagara Regional average, with a median of 44 years compared to the median of 46 years for the Region as a whole.²⁰ Further research conducted on the Niagara Region drawing on other regional-level Statistics Canada data found that young working-age adults are leading the growth to the region (especially those aged 25-44) followed by those aged 65+.²¹ This finding suggests that Grimsby is attracting both residents in their prime working and family-raising years, as well as older adults and retirees, which could signal demand for library services across multiple life stages. As the population continues to grow, the Library will require a balanced and flexible service model that supports children and families, workforce development, lifelong learning, accessibility, and opportunities for social connection among older residents.

Figure 3 Grimsby's population by age



Source: Statistics Canada Census Profile 2021

Household composition: According to Statistics Canada Census data, the average household size in Grimsby is 2.5, sitting on par between the provincial average of 2.6 and national average of 2.4. This finding suggests that Grimsby's household composition reflects a mix of family-oriented and smaller households, positioning the community between provincial and national norms. A slightly smaller average household size than Ontario's may indicate a growing presence of empty nesters, older adults, or couples without children, while remaining larger than the national average suggests that families with children continue to represent a meaningful share of households. This household composition finding is further

²⁰ Town of Grimsby Economic Development – Strategic Action Plan 2022-2025.

²¹ Workforce Collective. <https://workforcecollective.ca/how-niagaras-population-is-changing-and-why-it-matters-for-our-workforce/>



reinforced by the age distribution results noted above, pointing to a diverse population with varying housing and service needs and implying demand for community amenities, such as library spaces and programs, that serve both families and individuals across different life stages.

Ethnic diversity: Grimsby's population remains predominantly of European background, with approximately 9.7% of residents identifying as part of a visible minority. English is the primary language spoken at home (98.5%), followed by French (0.9%) and other non-official languages (0.4%). Between 2016 and 2021, the visible minority population grew by approximately 95%, with the most notable increases among South Asian, Arab, and West Asian populations.²² Population growth is also being shaped by immigration, contributing to a growing number of newcomers in the Grimsby community, as well as populations who bring a range of cultural, linguistic, and lived experiences.

Socio-Economic Profile

Educational attainment: Compared to provincial averages Grimsby has a slightly lower proportion of residents with university-level education, with 33% holding a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 37% across Ontario, and 8% holding a master's degree or higher, compared to 11% across Ontario. The data suggests that Grimsby's educational profile slightly leans more toward secondary and college-level attainment, with fewer residents pursuing or completing university degrees than the provincial average. Moreover, 13.3% of Grimsby's labour force have no educational certificate, diploma or degree. This finding highlights Grimsby as a community with a strong applied-education base, reinforcing the importance of accessible learning, skills development, and workforce-oriented services. This finding further suggests an opportunity for the Library to strengthen its role in supporting practical learning, workforce development, digital literacy, and accessible lifelong learning resources tailored to residents with diverse educational pathways.

Figure 4 Statistics Canada rates for highest certificate, diploma or degree for the population aged 25 years and over in private households - 25% sample data

Education levels	Grimsby Rates	Ontario Provincial Rates
Postsecondary, Certificate, Diploma or Degree	71%	68%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	33%	37%
Masters Degree or Higher	8%	11%
Others Above Bachelors Degree	2%	2%

Sources: Town of Grimsby Community Profile and Statistics Canada Census data

²² Statistics Canada, Counts of visible minority groups, 2016, 2021



Employment levels: Top employment sectors in Grimsby include health care and social assistance (1,940 jobs), retail trade (1,735 jobs), manufacturing (1,525 jobs), educational services (1,330 jobs), and construction (1,230 jobs).²³ Grimsby's employment mix points to sustained demand for library services that support practical learning, workforce development, digital literacy, and flexible access to career-oriented resources for working-age residents across applied and skilled-trades occupations. These needs align closely with the Town of Grimsby's Economic Development Strategic Action Plan (2022–2025), which emphasizes workforce attraction and retention, skills development, and support for local businesses and employers. The Library is well positioned to act as a complementary partner in delivering these objectives by providing accessible learning spaces, information resources, and community programming that support economic participation, workforce resilience, and inclusive growth across Grimsby's key employment sectors.²⁴

Average household income: Grimsby's cost of living is found to be slightly lower than the provincial average but generally comparable to the national average.²⁵ According to Statistics Canada, Grimsby's average household income is \$124,800 compared to the provincial average of \$116,000. This may signal a community with the capacity to support and make use of a broad, high-quality range of library services, while still preserving the Library's role as an equitable access point.

Poverty indicators: According to the 2021 Census, the prevalence of low income based on the Low-Income Measure, After Tax (LIM-AT) is 5.2%. In other words, 5.2% of individuals in Grimsby were living on incomes that were significantly below the national average, after taxes, based on their household size and composition. This finding suggests that while Grimsby is generally a relatively affluent community, a meaningful subset of residents faces economic vulnerability, highlighting an important role for the Library as an accessible support service such as ongoing need for free, low-barrier access to information, technology, and learning opportunities, including digital access, job search and skills-building resources, literacy supports, and inclusive programming. For the Library, this reinforces its function as a critical equity-supporting institution, helping reduce barriers to education, employment, and community participation for residents who may otherwise have limited access to such resources.

²³ Town of Grimsby Community Profile and Statistics Canada 2021 Census

²⁴ Town of Grimsby 2022. Economic Development Strategic Action Plan 2022-2025.

²⁵ Area Vibes. <https://www.areavibes.com/grimsby-on/livability/>



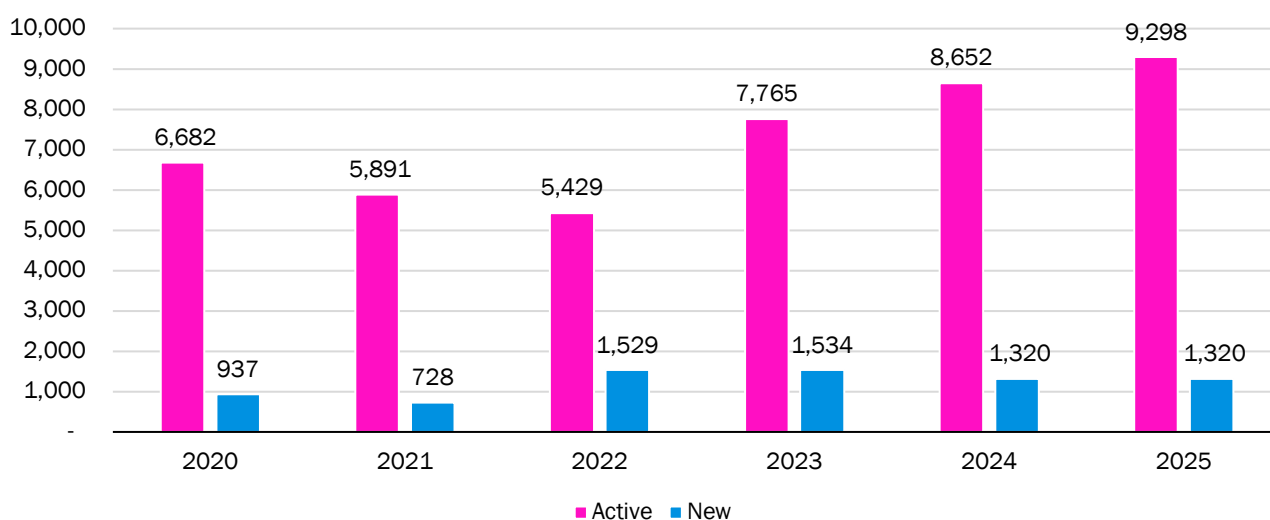
7.2. Library Usage Patterns

GPL has experienced significant changes in usage patterns in response to evolving community needs. The following section examines key metrics such as cardholder use, in-person visits, program attendance, and physical and digital materials usage to identify trends through to 2025. This section is informed by background documents, primarily GPL's annual report figures for 2020 – 2025.

The Library serves 9,298 active cardholders among Grimsby's population of 28,883, representing approximately 32% of the community (about the same as the provincial average of 31%).²⁶ This figure reflects strong engagement, while also highlighting meaningful opportunities to expand reach, particularly among non-cardholders.

Cardholders: After a decline in active cardholders 2020 to 2022 (likely due to pandemic closures and the Library not physically reopening until mid-July 2021),²⁷ cardholder numbers have significantly increased by between 2022 to 2023 (by 43%), followed by 11% from 2023 to 2024, and 7% from 2024 to 2025. The data signals recovery post-pandemic, however, the number of new cardholders has not consistently followed this trend, with the number of new cardholders fluctuating between the period of 2020-2025. While overall library engagement among users has strengthened, the conversion of new cardholders is uneven. This unevenness could be a result of a combination of factors including Grimsby's growing population, reactivation among existing or returning users, and mixed conversion of new cardholders.

Figure 5 Grimsby Public Library cardholders



Source: Grimsby Public Library Annual Reports (2020-2024)

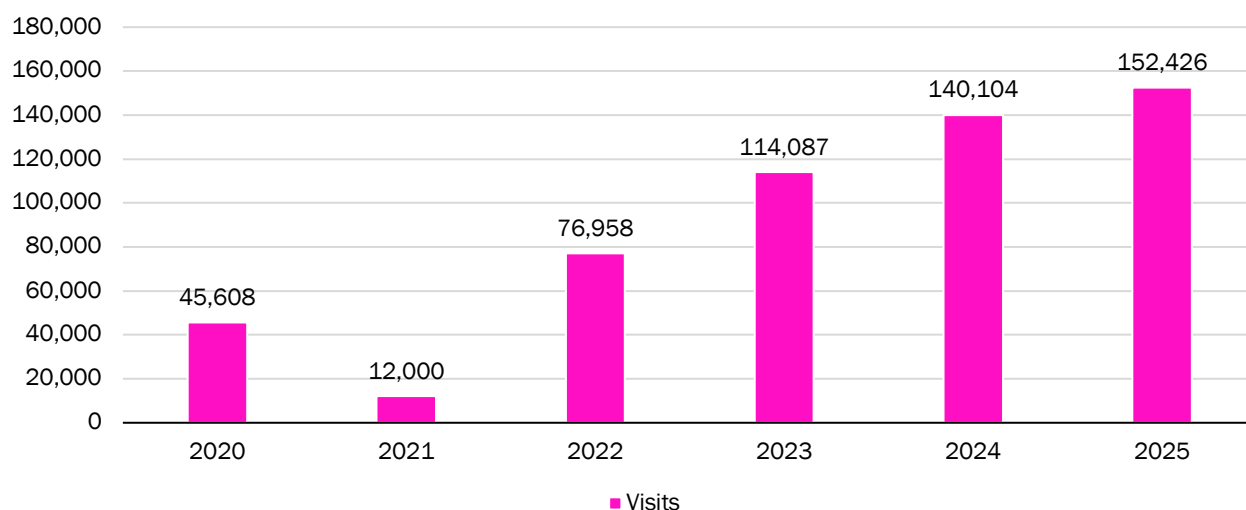
²⁶ 2023 Ontario Public Library Statistics

²⁷ Grimsby Public Library Annual Report 2021



Visits: Visitor numbers have continued to climb post-pandemic. Since 2022, visits have nearly doubled (from 76,958 to 152,426 in 2025). In 2022, the Library expanded in-person offerings, including initiatives such as the Superhero Reading Corner, and hosted a range of author talks with speakers such as Laurie Petrou and Cathrin Bradbury.²⁸ Such in-person programming may have reflected a renewed energy and momentum as the Library continued to recover following its physical reopening mid-2021. Moreover, this rapid growth in visitation in more recent years illustrates the increasing use and demand for the Library in the community. This trend points to increasing pressure on library spaces, staffing, and services such as programming and in-person use continues to grow.

Figure 6 Grimsby Public Library total visits



Source: Grimsby Public Library Annual Reports (2020-2025)

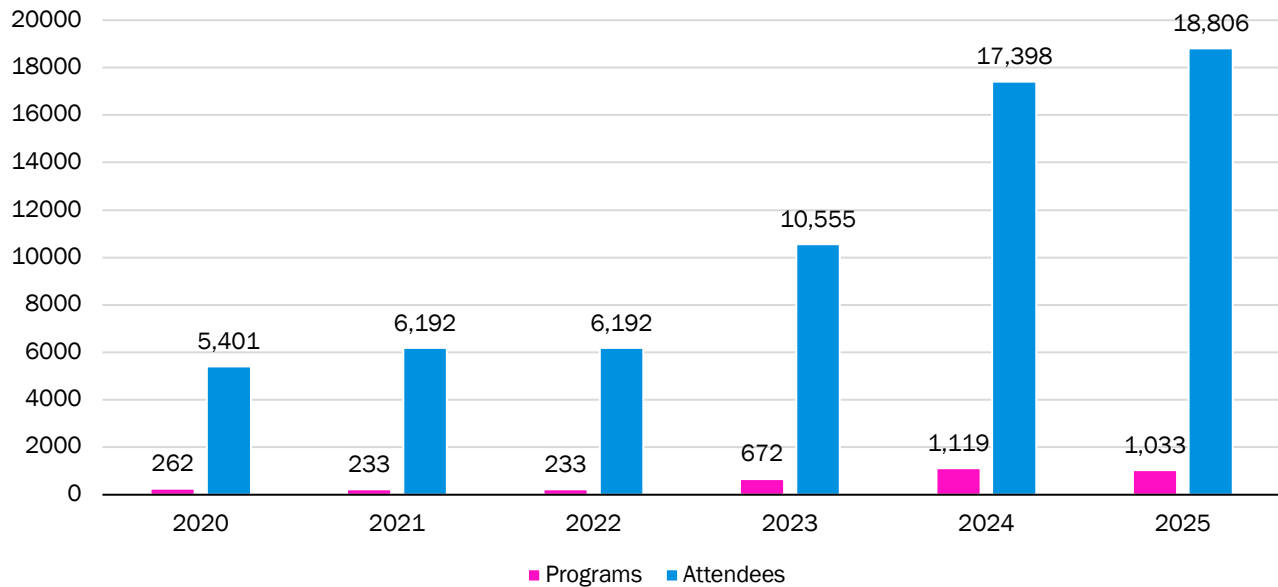
Program attendance: GPL's program attendance data indicates that the Library maintained a relatively consistent level of programming and participation between 2020-2022 with a significant expansion in 2023. Between 2022 to 2025, the number of programs increased by 340% and overall attendance rose by 200%. The expansion in both the number of programs and overall attendance suggests that the Library is responding well to increasing community interest and demand for library programs through expanded programming efforts (i.e., reading programs, a new gardening program Seedy Saturday, and several school group collaborations such as with Central Public School).²⁹ At the same time, the slight decline in the number of programs in 2025 paired with continued growth in attendance suggests that the Library is beginning to refine and optimize its programming approach, with opportunities to further strengthen program mix, scheduling, and promotion to maximize participation and impact as demand continues to grow.

²⁸ Grimsby Public Library Annual Report 2022

²⁹ Grimsby Public Library Annual Report 2023 and 2024



Figure 7 Grimsby Public Library number of programs and program attendees



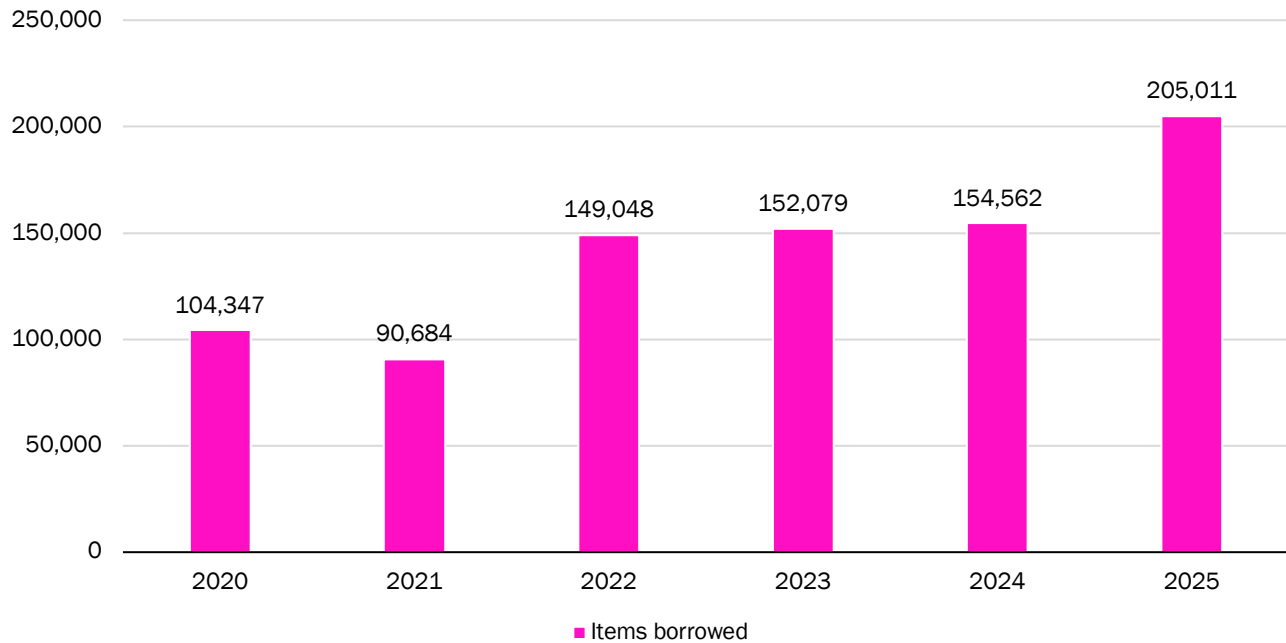
Source: Grimsby Public Library Annual Reports (2020-2025)

Usage of materials in collection: Borrowing has continued to increase steadily since 2022, on average of about 2% a year, followed by 33% between 2024 and 2025. In April 2022, the Library stopped requiring repayment on overdue fines which may have had a significant impact on increased material use.³⁰ Such efforts by the Library to offer more equitable services to all members of the community aligns the Library's operations role as an inclusive public service, improving access to knowledge and learning resources through reducing financial barriers to library use, and supporting more equitable participation across the community. More generally, this finding illustrates how demand for library materials is rising in the community, aligning with other broader increases in library visitation and use described.

³⁰ Grimsby Public Library Annual Report 2022



Figure 8 Grimsby Public Library total items borrowed



Source: Grimsby Public Library Annual Reports (2020-2025)

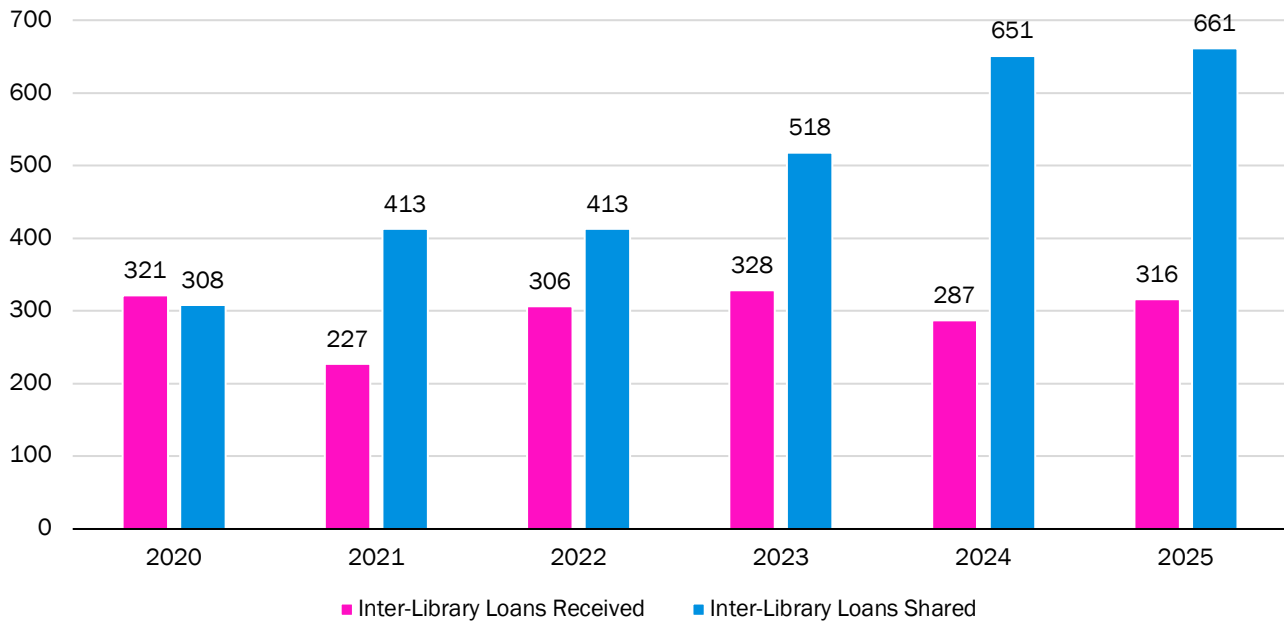
Usage of inter-library loans: When looking at materials used in terms of inter-library loans, the number of inter-library loans at the Library has remained steady. However, the number of inter-library loans shared has continued to increase, with a 26% increase between 2023 to 2024 and sustained levels in 2025. This finding may possibly partially be due to the Library's reciprocal borrowing agreement with St. Catharines Public Library in 2024 where Grimsby's library patrons were able to sign up for a St. Catharines Public Library card and gain access to their physical collection.³¹ However, the finding also suggests that external patrons are accessing GPL materials at higher rates than Grimsby residents are seeking materials from other systems. This finding suggests that GPL's collection is increasingly serving a broader regional audience, positioning the Library as an important contributor within the inter-library loan network.³²

³¹ Grimsby Public Library Annual Report 2024

³² Note: This finding does not include items sent and received through the Libraries in Niagara Cooperative (LiNC) which is described in further detail below).



Figure 9 Grimsby Public Library inter-library loans received and shared



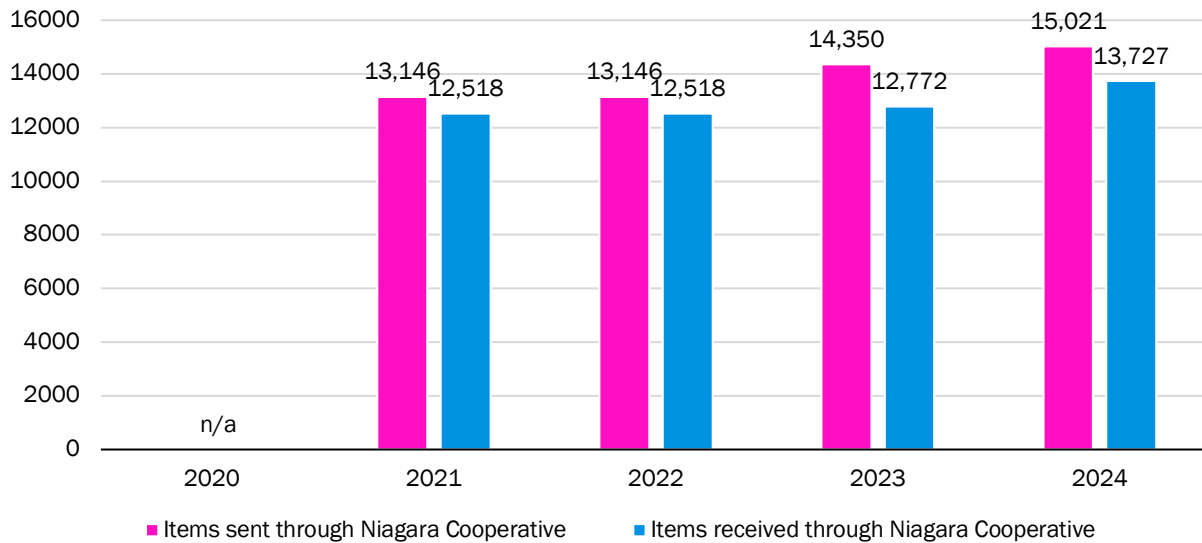
Source: Grimsby Public Library Annual Reports (2020-2025)

In addition, since joining Libraries in Niagara Cooperative (LiNC) in January 2021, GPL has significantly expanded access for its patrons, enabling them to draw from a shared collection of more than 620,000 items.³³ The figure below identifies that items sent and received through LiNC have remained relatively stable, with a modest 14% increase in items sent by GPL in 2024 (a ratio of 0.63 in 2023 to a ratio of 0.44 in 2024). GPL's participation in LiNC has strengthened both local and regional access to materials, enhancing service equity for library patrons through access to a substantially expanded collection. At the same time, it positions GPL as an active and valued contributor within a collaborative regional network pointing to the value of shared cost efficiencies, resource sharing, and collective capacity building occurring in the Library sector.

³³ Grimsby Public Library Annual Report 2021



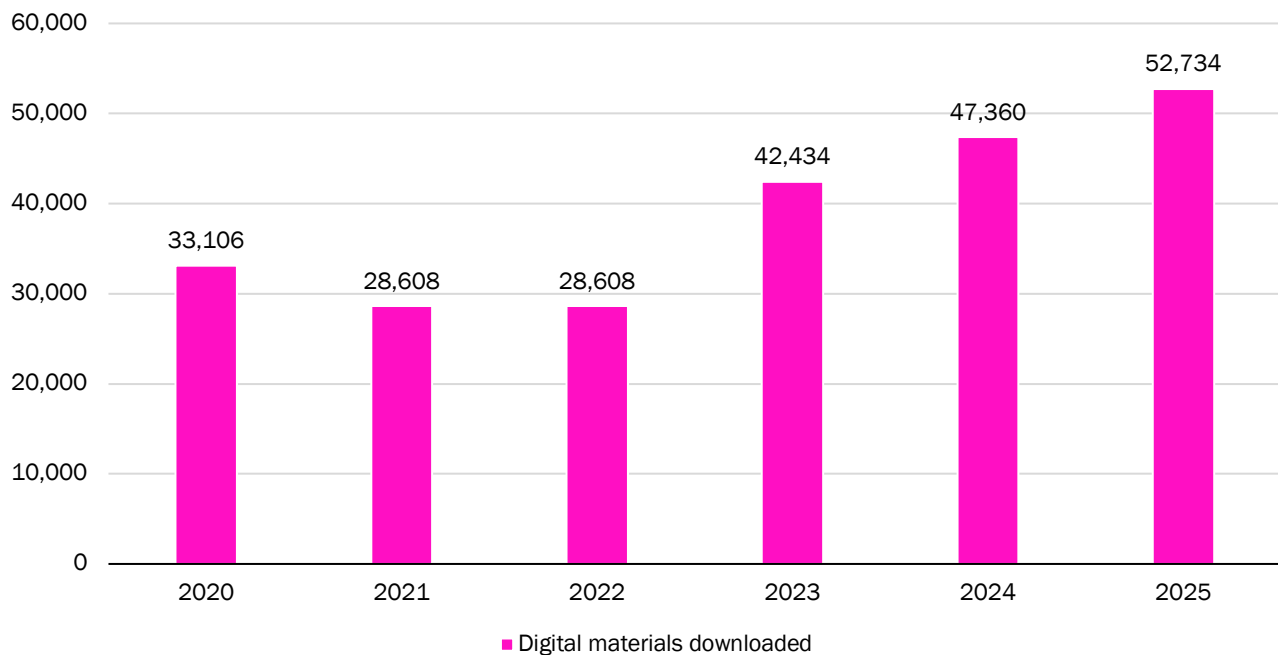
Figure 10 Loans through the Library in Niagara Cooperative



Source: Grimsby Public Library Annual Reports (2020-2024). Note: 2025 data was not available.

Usage of digital resources: The figure below shows a 48% increase in digital material downloads between 2022 and 2023, followed by continued year-over-year growth through 2025. This trend indicates sustained and growing demand for digital resources.

Figure 11 Grimsby Public Library Digital Material Usage



Source: Grimsby Public Library Annual Reports (2020-2025)

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