

# Turning Outward Community Conversations

## 2021 Final Report

The Patterson Library held nine Community Conversations in 2021 to better understand residents' hopes and aspirations for the Town of Patterson. The library's Board of Trustees and staff plan to use what we learned from these conversations to make decisions regarding programming and services that will help to make these aspirations a reality for our community members. We plan to work with trusted community partners and will continue to seek feedback from our community to achieve our shared goal of a better Patterson.

### The Kind of Place People Want Patterson to Be

- They want to feel safe—safe from crime and environmental pollutants, and safe to share their viewpoints in a non-judgmental atmosphere. Participants want to live in an area that respects both cultural and political diversity, and is attractive to people of all ages (including teens, young adults, and seniors).
- They want to have opportunities to get to know their neighbors and they want these neighbors to be invested in their community. Many respondents would like to see Putnam Lake and Patterson more connected with shared services.
- They want a community that has places to gather together without traveling to another town and that has a plan for future growth that will keep Patterson moving forward. People reported that they would love to see a revitalized Front Street.
- They want a centralized resource that provides easy access to information about the community and better communication between local organizations.

### Issues Affecting the Community

- Safety
  - Many newer residents are commuters, and these commuters have limited opportunities to mix with other residents—both other new residents and long-time community members. This causes people to remain strangers to one another, which leads to a feeling of being less safe than if they were familiar with more people in their community.
  - Because Patterson is geographically spread out with limited sidewalks and bike trails, there are few places to walk within Patterson and not many opportunities to bump into people and become familiar with who your neighbors are.
  - Putnam Lake participants perceived that there was an increase in crime and noise in their neighborhoods.

- Division
  - There is a perception that there is a lack of diversity and open-mindedness among community members, and that social media resources in the town can sometimes lack balance and promote divisiveness.
  - People commented on the physical disconnect between Patterson and Putnam Lake, with the restrictions on the use of the parks and lake as one example.
- Community Connection
  - Younger participants commented that there were few activities for them that made it appealing to stay in the community after they finished their schooling. They also felt that there were few resources available to address race, gender identity and sexual orientation issues.
  - People without access to computers or the internet, or who are not computer savvy (especially seniors) have trouble finding out what is going on in the community, especially seniors residing in Putnam Lake.
- Front Street
  - Long-time residents miss how Front Street and the surrounding area used to be more bustling. And both new and long-time residents wish there were businesses to draw people into the heart of Patterson.
- Environmental
  - A few participants discussed the beaver damage to the Great Swamp and the need to preserve it for current and future residents to enjoy. These participants were also concerned that solutions to regional environmental issues were being planned without input from Patterson stakeholders.

#### What Can Be Done

- Some participants asked if there could be new ways to share information, but in a more consolidated way, such as:
  - On the town website
  - In printed information mailed to town residents
  - In a town-focused newsletter with community information and a community calendar
- Participants overwhelmingly wanted more opportunities to come together as a community. Some suggestions included:
  - A Community Day with activities for all ages at one of the town parks
  - Events at local churches and the library
  - Programs that connect new residents and also highlight diversity and different perspectives

- Walks that highlight local history and places of significance in Patterson
- Some participants suggested a new comprehensive town plan be created that would address the following:
  - Water and sewer issues
  - Recruitment of new businesses, both in Patterson and Putnam Lake
  - Affordable housing and public transportation options (especially in Putnam Lake)
  - Issues related to the Great Swamp

### What the Patterson Library Can Do

With the passage of our budget referendum in 2021, the Board of Trustees of the Patterson Library is moving forward with actions that can help to address some of the issues raised in our conversations. We have created a Community Outreach team with a staff member dedicated to connecting with community organizations to share information and plan programs for the benefit of the community. Our programming staff is planning programs that will appeal to the diverse community members we have in Patterson and which provide opportunities for residents to meet each other and make connections. They also plan to seek ways to bring programming to Putnam Lake residents. The Board's Expansion Committee will be exploring ways to transform our space to create new ways to gather together in the library. They will also use the information gained from our conversations to create a new long range plan for 2022-2024.