

# BARIGHT PUBLIC LIBRARY Ralston, NE

# Community Needs Response Plan 2020 – 2023

Approved by Library Board of Trustees September 19, 2019

#### **Library Mission Statement**

The Helen and Hollis Baright Public Library strives to inform, enrich and empower the Ralston community and surrounding area residents by providing current educational, informational, and recreational library services and materials in an accessible and efficient manner that promotes lifelong learning.

#### **Library Vision Statement**

The Baright Public Library will strive to become the community center in Ralston to meet the future educational, informational, and recreational needs of the community.

#### **Executive Summary**

#### The Planning Team, Process, and Plan

The Baright Library Board, the library director, and library employees along with the Mayor, Council and City staff provided leadership for the 2020-2023 plan. Recognizing the importance of the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of strategic planning, the Library Board and Library staff review progress at every board meeting and review the plan annually. After the annual review and analysis by staff members and board members, an annual action plan is developed.

Emerging over the past few years is a new group of business people who are working on the implementation of the City's 2014-2034 Comprehensive Plan. Building on the established needs and subsequent goals within the Comp Plan, city leaders began an in depth planning process for the Hinge Redevelopment project, an essential economic portion of the 20 year plan. Comparing the identified community needs in the City's Comprehensive Plan and Hinge Redevelopment Plan to the Library's 2019 survey about the community provided direction to the library's planning team for 2020-2023.

The library's priorities of community-based library services, technology and programs will continue into 2020, despite being a part of past plans, as they are integral to the library's overall success in providing a better future for Ralston.

#### **Community Profile of Ralston – the Small Town in the Heart of the Metro**

Ralston, a small community of 1.64 square miles surrounded by Omaha on three sides and Sarpy County on the south, is primarily contained between 72nd Street (on the east); 84th Street (on the west); L Street (on the north); and Harrison Street (on the south). Ralston also includes Fair View Heights (bordered by 84th Street, Monroe Street, 90th Street, and Harrison Street), and the Woodbine area (bordered by Harrison Street, Y Street, 90th , and 96th Streets).

Many people believe Ralston's boundaries are larger as they consider the school district and the surrounding businesses to be in Ralston. To add even more to this sense of identity confusion is the fact that the ZIP code 68127 encompasses all of Ralston and parts of Omaha. The Ralston School District includes the City of Ralston plus a portion of Omaha. Four elementary schools (Karen Western, Meadows, Mockingbird, and Blumfield) are in the school district but outside the city limits of Ralston. Within the city limits of Ralston are two public elementary schools (Seymour and Wildewood), one parochial school (St. Gerald's Elementary), one middle school (Ralston Middle School), and one high school (Ralston High School).

The Baright Library's service agreements incorporate the school district and Douglas County. In 1994, through an Inter-local Cooperation Agreement, Douglas County agreed to fund all Douglas County public libraries to make them available to all Douglas County residents. The Douglas County agreement is complemented by the reciprocal agreement and shared ILS between the Baright Library and the Omaha Public Library.

The community has close ties with local churches and their active congregations -- Trinity United Methodist, Messiah Lutheran Church, St. Gerald's Catholic Church, the Ralston United Church of Christ, and the First Church of the Nazarene. Some members of these congregations continue their membership when they move outside of Ralston.

Civic groups include the Ralston Area Chamber of Commerce, the Ralston Optimists, and the volunteer Ralston Archives Museum. The Ralston Senior Center is housed at Ralston House, a senior living apartment building.

Community and economic development are important in Ralston. Ralston, an All-Nebraska City, became a City of the First Class after the 1980 U.S. Census population count. In 2011, Ralston voters approved the construction of an ice arena and event center. The Ralston Arena, a department of the City, opened October 15, 2012, and in 2019 through a contract with the City of Ralston, began management by the company Spectra Venue Management.

The City updated its Comprehensive Plan in 2014, and had a full-time Economic Development Director for one year in 2015. In 2017, the first City Administrator and Finance Director were hired to lead operations at Ralston's City Hall. The Downtown Ralston Business Association, an extension of the Ralston Area Chamber of Commerce, was formed in 2016 to aide in growth and development of the downtown Ralston area.

The annual Fourth of July celebration is an important annual event for residents attracting tens of thousands of visitors each year; hitting its 59<sup>th</sup> year mark in 2019, the celebration is proof of the sense of Ralston tradition and pride. With the suburban feel of the greater Omaha metro area, but the idyllic small town feel, Ralston provides a comfortable, tight-knit community feel for residents.

# **Demographics**

Despite containment from all sides, the city of Ralston has grown from 5,943 residents on the 2010 census to an estimated 7,348 residents in the 2017 census population estimates due to an increase in apartment buildings within city limits. Looking at the age of residents in comparison to other geographic regions in the area, Ralston has a median age of 42.4, while the larger Douglas County area hits 34.4 and the state of Nebraska at 35.0. The community is 82.0% white, 11.3% Hispanic, and 1.3% African American.

Educational attainment:

- Persons 25 years and older with High School Education only: 25.4%
- Persons 25 years and older with 4 Year College Degree or Higher: 24.4%

It was shown through the Census data that the predominant language spoken in Ralston homes is English; 13% reported another language was spoken in the home by persons over the age of 5.

Also according to 2017 estimates, the median household income was \$55,837, slightly lower than the \$58,640 of Douglas County. Homeownership is 58.0%, and 30.1% of the 3,292 housing units are multi-unit structures. Of the occupied housing units in Ralston, 65.2 percent of them have 2 or more persons per household.

The chart below shows that Ralston has fewer people under age 25, and more over age 65 than its surrounding communities and the state. Increasing the number of 15 to 25 year-olds is a goal of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Age Cohort	Ralston	Papillion	La Vista	Omaha	Nebraska
Under 5	5.3%	5.5%	6.7%	7.3%	6.9%
5 to 9	4.7%	7.5%	7.9%	7.0%	7.0%
10 to 14	6.8%	6.9%	7.3%	6.8%	6.9%
15 to 19	5.0%	6.0%	6.2%	6.8%	6.8%
20 to 24	6.1%	6.8%	4.4%	7.2%	7.2%
25 to 34	19.5%	14.6%	17.8%	16.0%	13.4%
35 to 44	9.7%	12.9%	14.6%	12.5%	12.1%
45 to 54	12.7%	13.9%	13.9%	12.4%	12.4%
55 to 59	6.7%	7.1%	5.9%	6.3%	6.6%
60 to 64	6.3%	6.0%	4.7%	5.6%	6.0%
65 to 74	9.0%	7.2%	7.4%	7.1%	8.1%
75 to 84	5.7%	3.9%	3.0%	3.5%	4.5%
85 +	2.5%	1.8%	0.4%	1.7%	2.2%

# **Planning Process**

In 2014, the City of Ralston completed a twenty- year Comprehensive Plan after holding several town hall and key informant meetings. Library trustees, staff, and Foundation members participated in the meetings. Some meetings were held in the library's meeting room. The Plan is online at

# http://www.hdrpi.com/ralstonsmartplan/

The Comprehensive Plan identified the top 3 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the Community:

# **Top 3 Strengths:**

Arena Sense of Community Accessibility and Major Corridors

#### **Top 3 Weaknesses**

Downtown Housing Market Private Investment

#### **Top 3 Opportunities**

72nd & Main/Arena/Country Club Road Redevelopment of Downtown and housing areas with incentives Youth Leadership

# **Top 3 Threats**

Aging Housing Business Leaving/Eroding Tax base Arena – being a large investment risk

Throughout all of the focus groups, the comprehensive plan writers from JEO noted how close the community was as they discussed the strengths.

"Strengths: It quickly became clear how tight-knit the Ralston community is with its friendly, small town feel. Ralston's community pride is built through multiple options to attend community events. The success of Ralston's Public school system is due to continued involvement of parents, alumni, and the community. There was excitement that the Ralston Arena, Hotel, and Menards will generate additional jobs for its residents, especially younger generations. There was a request that redevelopment should focus on walkability and create community areas. The Arena and Downtown has the potential for large scale business development."

The Library is open seven days a week and is open late until 9:00 pm Monday through Thursday. The Library provides Wi-Fi and partners with the school and other organizations to provide book clubs, free lunches from the Food Bank for the Heartland in the summer, and several adult programs utilizing local businesses as presenters.

The downtown area was noted in the Weaknesses.

"Weaknesses: Ralston needs more restaurants and dining establishments downtown while solving its current parking problem. Both the city and police department will need additional office and storage space with additional development. The City could have better partnerships with utilities. Ralston needs more gathering spaces like the Library which utilize Wi-Fi. The downtown is a ghost town at night."

Being a block off the main downtown area, the Library shares its parking lot with city offices and businesses. Meeting room and collection area space are limited. The building, including the original HVAC, roof, and parking lot, have all hit the twenty year mark this past July 2019. (http://www.hdrpi.com/ralstonsmartplan/assets/documents/RalstonCompPlan Implement.pdf)

Then in August 2018, the City of Ralston hired the Omaha-based engineering and planning firm, HDR, to develop a master plan for the "Hinge" redevelopment area. This is a 30-acre site extending along Main Street, from 72nd Street to downtown Ralston. Following a series of public participation meetings, the redevelopment area was extended to include all of downtown Ralston.

The master plan (see page 20) created was the result of eight months of effort involving extensive citizen participation, planning, market analysis and site engineering. The concept includes mixed-use (commercial on the first floor with residential above) buildings, a variety of residential development types including apartments and townhomes, open spaces for passive recreation and outdoor entertainment, fountains or other water features, an extension of Burlington Street to 72nd Street and new pedestrian connections to create a friendly environment for people to explore on foot.

City leaders are using the plan and associated research to inform and attract area developers to Ralston's potential as the next frontier for urban redevelopment in the Omaha metro.

During the planning process and community meetings for the Hinge project, several strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were also observed that were extremely similar to the SWOT analyses of Ralston described by the community in the Comprehensive plan from four years ealier:

- <u>Strengths</u>: sense of community, unique downtown, active churches, central location, lots of traffic on adjacent streets
- <u>Weaknesses</u>: lack of brand awareness for the business area, lack of retail stores, limited entrances and visibility into Ralston, negative reputation in the media relating to the Ralston Arena, limited tax base

- <u>Opportunities</u>: Ability to create a new brand, Ralston has a downtown area, entertainment district possibilities, mixed-use building potential (including more apartments/parking), could generate additional tax revenue, new residents
- <u>Threats</u>: competition of other recently redeveloped areas in the Omaha metro, ability to sell or transform current land or businesses, cost, negative stigma of Ralston Arena debt

The City's Comprehensive Plan provided rich data and several community goals. In 2019 as the library approached its next phase of planning, it was decided to build on the City's Plan as well as the latest updates to the Hinge planning process, and to avoid duplicating them. The Board worked with the Library Director and staff on a survey to ask the public more about their thoughts on the community, the Hinge project, and the role of the library for the future.

During the months of June and July 2019, the library's survey was distributed via paper within the library. It was also distributed in a digital format via Google form that was on the library's website. Several outlets were used to distribute the digital survey including the school, city, library and other local organizations via their subsequent online & social media presence. Personal social media accounts were also utilized to promote the survey. A Hy-Vee gift card donated by the Library Foundation was used as incentive to promote participation in the survey, with a random winner drawn at the conclusion of the survey in July. Overall, there were 56 of the 100 returned in-house paper responses and 314 submitted online surveys. A library science practicum student compiled the data.

To get a feel of the community's feelings about Ralston, the survey asked participants to describe the quality of life in Ralston. Several prominent descriptive terms bubbled to the top that showed an overall positive vibe: safe, stable, stagnant, friendly, diverse, comfortable, community, small town feeling, connected, involved, and quiet.

Despite the overwhelming positive feelings about the community itself, participants did have some concerns when asked, "What would you say is the most important issue facing Ralston today?" The top few responses included concern for Ralston Arena funding, increases in taxing, the condition of the streets, and the lack of stores/businesses and greenspace in the downtown Ralston area.

An overwhelming 76% percent of respondents to the survey had not heard of the Hinge Redevelopment project. After a short description of the project was provided in the survey, respondents were then asked what they would most like to see develop from this economic plan. There was a mix of positive and negative responses from this question, as is the norm with most public surveys. Most wanted to see more retail, restaurants, a grocery store, and to see a unique area that still retained the sense of community that most residents feel about Ralston. Quite a few responses included a hesitancy from community members in that this would change the feel of Ralston too much or that it would be costly to residents in the long run. Survey takers were also asked what they would most like to see in the future for the library in terms of its role within the community. Many stated that they would like the library to continue what it has done in the past: be a meeting space for people to gather, a place for people to educate themselves, and a hub of knowledge for what is going on in the community. A few of the surveyed would like to see the library continue to provide more online based content in the future.

In the past, the Baright Public Library Board of Trustees used a Community Planning Day twice in the past decade. In both January 2006 and in April 2013, library consultant Pat Wagner facilitated community-wide workshops. The ideas from those community workshops formed the basis for the Library's strategic plans. The Board approved a six-year plan in 2013 for 2014-2020. This year, starting afresh, the board will approve the three year Community Needs Response Plan that will last from 2020-2023. The Board and library staff review the plan every year and prepare an action plan for the next year. The current year is posted on the library website at <u>www.ralstonlibrary.org</u>

# **Community Needs**

#### **Community Need One**

Lower income levels and public concern for rising tax levels within Ralston. According to statistics from the Census' American Community Survey, the median income per household is about \$3,000 less than the median income for the rest of Douglas County households. Looking at our population ages, as well as what staff have observed from incoming library users, Ralston contains a lot of young families and seniors. A large percentage of the housing on the north portion of Ralston contains small, affordable homes. Between these observations and statistics, it is clear that quite a few of the Ralston residents live on fixed incomes.

- The library has provided a meal service for children during the summer months in conjunction with the Foodbank for the Heartland and the Salvation Army for the past several years that sees high usage. Staff will continue this partnership to support the children living in the area, as well as investigate a meal service to supply the retired or senior residents of the community that the current food truck meal service doesn't serve. Staff will investigate partnerships and potential grants to start a food service for the senior age cohort for the upcoming summer.
  - a. The library director and administrative assistant will lead the investigation into a meal service for older adults. Success will be dependent on the amount of attendees that regularly use the meal service and if the service works within the already preset library budget.
- 2. Area libraries participate in sense screening storytimes, in which children are tested for hearing and language. Families who may not be able to afford medical screenings will be invited to participate in free screenings from local medical professionals. The library will partner with health organizations who make health care accessible for all. Staff intend to begin sense screening storytimes in the next six months, and hope to host them biannually depending on need and participation.
  - a. The youth services/assistant director will take the lead on organizing and finding the right partners for this program. Success will be achieved if at least three families attend the initial screening and the program is a low cost event for the library.
- 3. There are several ideas relating to fines that staff would like to investigate during the next year, which at that time we would propose to institute changes that would have the most positive for the community and the library. One change would include removing fines for all children patrons, who are of age 18 or younger. Another possible change was initiating free

fax charges for patrons who are sending faxes to state agencies. The last possible alteration would be to host 'Food for Fines' programs on a regular basis, biannually. All three potential changes will need further investigation into the impact on library income, patron privacy, and patron responsibility for items.

a. The library director, computer support librarian, and administrative assistant will take the lead on this project. Significant impact will be determined by the library director's discretion, with input from the library board and city's financial director.

#### **Community Need Two**

Identified as one of the highest percentage populations of residents over the age of 65, more programs need to be developed to enhance their sense of community and support. This has been a goal in the past, and some headway has been made including several successful services: a regular evening book club, technology sessions for all ages, and annually scheduled programs with AARP and VAS (Volunteers Assisting Seniors). The need for partnerships and connections with groups that are already serving this population set needs to be the main focus over the next year.

- By January 2020, the director and administrative assistant will plan to meet with the leadership at the Ralston Senior Center to develop presentations about library services and to explore collaborations for the future. The Senior Center occupies part of Ralston House, an independently managed apartment complex for seniors living independently. Some examples of outreach at the Senior Center could include technology one-on-one assistance, providing a rotating selection of books hosted at the Center, or presenting storytimes for residents and participants at the Center.
  - a. Success will first be determined by meeting with their leadership, and then determining which programs will be successful and desired by their organization.
- 2. Due to the limited mobility of some of the population and shortage of available transportation to the library, library staff will provide and promote a group of resources available as homebound services.
  - a. Staff will have created a listing of resources to share in six months' time, which could also be used in future communications with the local Senior Center.
- 3. The director, administrative assistant, and a few other support staff will investigate a Lifetime Arts program, or other possible grants for creative outlet type of programs for seniors. In two months, staff will have several opportunities to apply to initiate over the next year. Staff are hoping to provide additional social and creative outlets for seniors, as the popular Lunch &

Learn program is very successful already with this population. Depending on funding, the intent is to host a series of art events on a regular quarterly schedule.

a. Successful initiation of the program will be finding sufficient funding for supplies and eventually maintaining a regular attendance for the events over the next two years' time.

# **Community Need Three**

The strength of a local economy is important to the quality of life, and the majority of survey respondents identified the need for more retail businesses, green space, and other Hinge Project recognized needs. Along with community partners, the library will promote Ralston as a place to live and do business. The most successful program from the past planning was Out and About storytimes, in which the Youth Services Librarian contacts local businesses and invites families to attend a storytime within their business location.

- Assisting with promotion of both new and old businesses in Ralston will be an important role for the library to fill. The library hopes to help be inviting to new businesses that may be moving into new Hinge or Downtown retail spaces by assisting with supporting their goals and increasing their visibility with the public. Library staff will highlight these businesses through a section of the library e-newsletter and in-house display cases on a monthly schedule.
  - a. The library director, assistant director, administrative assistant, and computer support librarian will collectively work on promotional pieces for the newsletter and display cases through direct marketing during Ralston Chamber events and other community event opportunities. Success for this objective would be having a regularly scheduled new business or organization in both the newsletter and display cases by March 2020.
- 2. Promote the meeting room to more entrepreneurs by providing scalable conference technology. Over the past three years, the library has purchased a conference phone and projector. Due to high usage already, there is a need for additional projectors for public and library presentation use. Also, the library has need of proper carts to transport projectors to different meeting locations within the library. The library laptop is also several years old and could be updated at a later date after the projectors. Library staff will market the room and equipment once available to local organizations and businesses.
  - a. The computer support librarian and director will work together to identify the best technology to fit the library's needs, as well as identify funding for these purchases. Funding sources will be identified in early 2020, with a purchase hopefully taking

place in September or October 2020. Increased usage by two additional business groups in 2021 would be successful use the meeting space, new technology and funds.

#### Evaluation of the 2020 - 2023 Plan

The library director reports on strategic plan activities at every Library Board meeting, so review and discussion of the plan is ongoing. The Board and staff reviews the plan annually each fall and then prepares an annual action plan that is given to the City Council.

The library staff, the trustees, and other key players will evaluate the plan annually and adjust target objectives as warranted.

Many of the objectives will be initiated in 2020, as some of the community needs can be addressed quickly, such as the sensory screening storytimes. However, some of the goals and objectives will take time to research fully and put into action, or they may take recruitment of additional players and organizations to implement. Sustaining the programs and determining how long to continue repeating them will be points of discussion for our planners and community as well.

In late 2022 and early 2023, the next planning team will decide how to use the library's successes and failures, the progress on the City's 2014-2034 Comp Plan, and other community milestones in the next planning process.

# **Planning Teams**

The library's Plan has been developed through the endeavors of the following:

Library Board: Lana Tribbie (President), Melanie Bloom, Marci Carroll, Deb Woster, Tamara Aldrich

Library Staff: Bailey Halbur, Justine Ridder, Katie Adams, Mary Matuszewski, Laurel Marshall, Sadie Westfall, Melissa Young, Kenneth Turner, Ashley Wemhoff

HDR consulting firm worked with community members, local businesses, and several other key players directly to acquire input:

# City Staff

Mayor Don Groesser David Forrest – City Administrator Rosemare Russell – City Clerk Tim Bohling – Finance Director Heather Gamon – Administrative Assistant Dan Freshman – Director of Public Works Marc Leonardo – Chief of Police Bailey Halbur – Director of Library

Planning Committee: Amy Roeder, Don Groesser, Jerry Krause, Michael Sanchez, Dave Forrest, Tim Bohling, Tom Kjar, Bill Haas, Rich Onken, Mark Norman, Megan Skiles, Mark Klinker, Debi Martines, Deniz Bodkin, Kelsey Ostendorf, Dan Freshman

JEO Consulting Group worked with the following Comprehensive Plan Participants:

City Staff:

Mayor Don Groesser Dolores Costanzo – City Clerk/Treasurer Becky Schendt – Deputy Clerk Ginger Boone – Deputy Treasurer Jamie Kramer – Administrative Assistant Dan Freshman – Director of Public Works Ronald Murtaugh – Chief of Police and Ralston Arena Francine Canfield – Director of Library

Planning Committee: Jason Frink, Don Groesser, Tom Kjar, Mark Klinker, Jerry Krause, Scott Lacey, Tara Lea, Scott Nigro, Rich Onken, Walt Peffer, Amy Roeder, Michael Sanchez, Dan Walsh

# **Baright Public Library Survey 2019**

The library is interested in finding out more about Ralston's community needs. This survey will take 5-10 minutes to complete. Thank you for your time!

If you have questions about this survey or the library, please call 402-331-7636 or email the director at <u>bhalbur@cityofralston.com</u>.

Please check <u>one</u> answer for each of the following:

1. Do you have a library card?

Г		No
	Yes	No

2. The Library is currently open 62 hours a week.

Monday – Thursday: 10:00 am to 9:00 pm Friday – Saturday: 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

Sunday: 1:00 to 5:00 pm

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know/Not applicable
I can easily use the library during these hours.					
I need to use the library on December 24.					
I need to use the library on December 31 after 4:00 pm.					
I access the library from home.					
Nighttime library hours could be shortened during the winter months (Example: Dec – Feb at 8:00pm)					

Comments about library hours:

3. How do you prefer to be notified of public meetings or events? (Check all that apply.):

Mail

Newspaper

Library Website

		Email		Facebook		Signs
		Other:				
4.	What s	ervices or aspects from	the libra	ry do you value the mos	t? (Checl	k all that apply.)
		Children events		eBooks, eAudiobooks		Computers/Printing
		Fax, Copier		ESL Courses		Adult events
		DVD/Video material		Online courses		Meeting spaces
		Teen events		Books		Wi-fi, Hotpsots
		Other:				

- 5. Use three words to describe the quality of life in Ralston. (Examples: safe, diverse, stagnant, connected, isolated, supportive, involved, stable, communicative, friendly, expensive, etc.)
- 6. What would you say is the most important issue facing Ralston today?
- 7. What is the future role of the library in the community?

The City of Ralston has worked through several phases of planning to come up with a master plan for the Hinge Redevelopment Project with HDR, a local engineering and consulting firm. This plan encompasses a 30-acre site extending along Main Street, from 72nd Street to downtown Ralston. City leaders are using the plan and associated research to inform and attract area developers to Ralston's potential as the next frontier for urban redevelopment in the Omaha metro.

8. Had you heard of the Hinge Redevelopment Project prior to this survey?

No

Yes

9. What would you like to see develop from this major project?

Please tell us about yourself so that we may better serve you. Please check <u>one</u> answer for each of the following.

10. How o	old are you?				
	under 12		12-18		
	19-24		25-34		
	35-44		45-54		
	55-64		65 – 7	/4	
	75 or more		Declin	ne to answer	
11. To wh	iich gender do you most	identify	?		
	Male		Femal	le	
	Decline to answer				
12. What	is the highest level of ec	lucation	you hav	e completed?	
	Some high school			High school graduate or GED	
	Some college			College degree	
	Master's degree or high	gher		Decline to answer	
13. What	is your preferred langua	age?			
	English			Spanish	
	French			Decline to answer	
	Other—please specify	/:			_
14. What	is your source of income	?			
	Part-time employmen	t		Full-time employme	ent
	In-home business/self	- employ	yed	Retired	
	Other/Seasonal/Stude	ent/		Decline to answer	

Thank you for participating in this survey! We are giving away one \$25 Hy-Vee gift card to a participant of this survey. Please provide your information below to be entered in the drawing.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



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