

Sustainable Libraries Initiative- Halfway There!

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As fall approaches, I always find myself ready for the changes the season brings. Kids head back to school to renew their friendships and grow a little more, the weather becomes a gentler friend to those of us lucky enough to stay here on Cape Cod, and the traffic begins to abate. The Eldredge Public Library is continuing to transform as well, shifting to meet the ever-changing needs of our community throughout the year as it always has, and yet not quite the way it used to adapt.

The Sustainable Libraries Initiative has been a guiding force in many of the recent changes at EPL, and while some of these alterations are not ones you might notice as a patron, there are many that are. You've probably noticed the increase in indoor plants, the BPA and BPS free receipt paper, and the elimination of patron due date slips. The bike safety display has been visited by families and riders that are pleased to see their safety taken seriously. Many patrons have enjoyed repairing their broken items at the fixit clinic, and even our summer reading prizes have become more sustainable through the increase of both books and gift certificates to local businesses as rewards. The staff now uses reusable kitchen supplies instead of relying on disposable items, plastic water bottles have been reduced, and reusable bags are becoming the norm at the circulation desk.

What you might not see, however, is the way this certificate program has changed the mindset of how the library operates. By engaging in the Sustainable Libraries Initiative, the staff and trustees of the library have had to look at how everything is done through the lens of environmentally friendly practices, equity for patrons, and long-term economic feasibility. In the beginning, the focus was on administrative responsibilities such as creating a sustainability policy, a purchasing policy, and creating an impact statement that is included in job descriptions. We audited energy, water, and fuel consumption, and we even completed a very unglamorous waste audit in order to set benchmarks. What we found has been a catalyst for change in the best ways.

As a result of this exploration, staff are more conscious and make a greater effort to turn off lights in areas that are not in use and put computers to sleep or turn them off entirely to reduce energy use. The emergency stairwell lights were recently switched over to LED in an ongoing effort to convert all lights in the library to LED. The purchase of energy-rated equipment is thoughtful and deliberate. Cloud computing reduces the number of printed documents the staff uses. EPL's "welcome packet," which consisted of many pieces of paper, is now available online, accessible on the website and through a QR code to new patrons. The number of recycling bins has increased throughout the library, encouraging patrons and staff to recycle paper, plastic, and glass. EPL is even

recycling the coffee pods used by the staff! There is a new system in place to recycle electronics and other equipment, like batteries, keyboards, tablets, computers, hard drives, toner, and cables. We have initiated an ongoing effort to reduce the number of junk mail and duplicate mailings that the library receives in order to save paper. Think about how much extra paper bogs you down, especially those of you who have to bring it to the transfer station each week. These are sensible, sustainable moves that would benefit us all, not just the library.

Ensuring that patrons are well served is another important component of the Sustainable Libraries Initiative, and the EPL is again working hard to ensure this is done with our community in mind. This fall's literacy focus will be on civic literacy, which also aligns with the library's strategic plan. Additionally, we will be interviewing community leaders and opening conversations to identify community aspirations with both for-profit and our non-profit partners, to see where we fit in and how we can better support our community. Ensuring that our mission, programs, and services are inclusive and diverse will help us to meet the needs and aspirations of all of our community members.

Economic feasibility is the third component of the Sustainable Library Initiative, and this has kept EPL grounded and focused on the mission. Some ideas were easy wins, such as supporting our staff in their education, health, and wellness. Helping the people who make this all work to be the best version of themselves benefits everyone. Eliminating bottled water usage in the staff office by installing an under-sink filter system will provide staff with better quality water and cut down on plastic. Not everything we have hoped to do has been achievable, however. Recycled copy paper costs almost twice as much as standard paper, making it an out-of-reach option. Adding a modern bottle filling station in place of our water bubbler is also cost-prohibitive in our beautiful older building. While this may change in the future, it does not meet our current criteria.

Balancing sustainability and equity with economic feasibility is a continual work in progress requiring a change in mindset. However, disrupting the business-as-usual way of thinking has given the library an opportunity to explore new ideas, hear new voices, and share its discoveries in the community. Staff and board members are finding their voice in an existing passion, and those on our SLI committee are looking at the library through a new lens. I know that the rebuilding that I've needed to do on my own home has definitely been influenced, and I am not only happy to be living with a lighter footprint on the planet, but with reduced energy costs and less heading to the landfill every week. The shifts that began at the library are making their way out into the larger community.

There is more to do, and we know now that there will always be more to do. We are about halfway through the certificate program. We eagerly await the landscape upgrade coming soon to incorporate some of the outdoor sustainability measures, programs, and

changes we have planned. Fall is an excellent time for change, and so is winter, spring, and summer. What changes will you make? If you need ideas, stop by the Eldredge Public Library.