COMMUNITY REPORT

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TURNING OUTWARD

DATA COMPILED BY
THE MILLBROOK LIBRARY
Throughout 2021, a team of Millbrook Library staff and board members hosted a total of eight community conversations to learn about people’s aspirations and concerns for Millbrook.

Our goal was to gather information to help form our next long-term strategic plan. We listened to over 50 community members and learned a great deal about what kind of community people want to live in. Over the course of the conversations, there were a number of recurring themes. We want to share the information we gathered in hopes that you find it helpful and relevant.
COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS

What do people want Millbrook to be?

Inclusive & Diverse
People want Millbrook to be more inclusive and diverse. They would like to see more cultural and artistic vibrancy and more events that celebrate the community. One person said that we are “striving for equity amongst affluence.” People want to hear diverse thoughts and ideas from all members of the community and have lots of community space where people can meet on equal footing.

Affordable
People also want Millbrook to be more affordable. Residents want to attract more young families, and there is a wish to provide employment and fair wages for everyone in Millbrook.

Supportive of Business
Residents in Millbrook want to support their local businesses. People wish for more diversity in types of affordable businesses, as well as more stores where locals can afford to spend money. Community members want to see “a robust local economy” that includes some type of nightlife and more experiential activities to spur the local economy in addition to retail businesses.

A Place of Belonging
People want to feel a sense of belonging and community. Millbrook should be a place where everyone is known, where people say hello to one another, and everyone feels ownership of the community. Residents want to keep folks in Millbrook long-term and find a balance between feeling quaint and attracting and keeping the younger generation in the area. They also want all ages to feel supported by community members and organizations.

Willing to Adapt
People want to see responsible development and maintain the rural character of the community; however, they also think that our community needs to be willing to embrace change. They feel that decision-making processes need to be more transparent and that we “might consider changes that make Millbrook a ‘destination’ location to improve the vibrancy of the village.”
COMMUNITY CONCERNS

During our conversations, we identified key themes in response to questions about the issues surrounding Millbrook. We heard many of these themes come up repeatedly.

Affordability

Affordability was one of the main concerns of Millbrook residents. One participant said that the response to the Millbrook Diner’s free meals during COVID was “a wake-up call that people couldn’t afford meals in Millbrook.”

There was also concern about rental prices for both homes and businesses with another participant saying that “People think they can get the same rent as the East Hamptons.”

People are concerned because there are no major employment bases in Millbrook, and they see that the “community has lost a lot of its young talent because it’s not affordable here.”

It was also brought up that there is a high need for affordable housing, specifically retirement housing that doesn’t involve senior care. However, there is a feeling that “no one wants affordable housing by their house.”

Local Businesses

During our conversations, the topic of local businesses came up often. People want to support their local businesses, and one person said they feel “personally responsible” when a business closes.

However, many residents said that between inconvenient business hours and high prices, they cannot afford to shop at local businesses as much as they would like to.

There is a need for more businesses “where people can shop during the week” and that “cater to people that live here”. One person said that most businesses in Millbrook “don’t cater to the “everyman”, and another said there is a lack of “places average people can shop.”

Another community member commented that “economic division is an issue in Millbrook, and the stores reflect this division.” People also recognize that it “seems hard to attract small businesses” and used the example of the former Aurelia building sitting empty. One person said that “other towns are more encouraging to new businesses.” There is a concern that people “go to other places to seek what’s missing here.”
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Sense of Community

Another main theme that came up in every conversation was the lack of a sense of community. One community member said that the “community feels atrophied” and another one said that “people aren’t feeling connected to the community right now.”

Many people also recognized a decline in the number of people volunteering for community events and organizations. One person said that “very few people are doing a lot of the work”, and others noted that “people want change but don’t want to step up” and that “it’s always easier to not do something.” There is also concern about the “revitalization of town events post-pandemic.”

Some said that they are concerned there is “no nightlife or people around after dark – everything closes and it’s not unfriendly but not friendly.” The residents of the Fountains said they “feel isolated from the rest of the community.”

Overall, the main idea seemed to be that “fewer people are volunteering and joining auxiliary groups, so there is less community engagement.” While this can be partly attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic, people still advocated for the need to reconnect with each other and build the community back in our “new normal.”

Communication Needs

Another theme that came up in almost every conversation was the need for better communication. Currently, there is no local news outlet separate from an official government body and there is a critical need for a central spot for information.

Diversity & Development

In every conversation we had, people said they wanted to see more diversity in Millbrook. One person said that “we’re not identifying ways to support those for whom English is not their first language,” and another said there is a “lack of class diversity as well as racial diversity.”

People also had a lot to say about diversity in development. One person said that the “perception is that certain families control everything and if they don’t like an idea it won’t happen” and another said that “there is a resistance to trying new things.”

Still others expressed concern about the community’s reliance on local wealthy donors for community projects with one person saying that it’s “not a sustainable system in the long-term if donors or their children leave the area.”

There is a sense that people are nervous about Millbrook changing, with one person saying that “people from the city want city amenities.” People want to “maintain the rural character of the community” that they love and choose to live here for and one person said they want “Millbrook to remain ‘pure and beautiful’ in regards to ecological wellness.” However, there is an acknowledgment that some development is necessary to keep moving forward.
WHAT CAN BE DONE?

People are invested in Millbrook and want to see positive changes.

Many people we spoke to said that even though they have concerns, they truly love living in Millbrook. There are always things to work on though, and luckily there is a long list of people that participants said they trust to take action.

People trust local government like the Town and Village officials to take action but acknowledge that they need public input. People trust organizations like the Millbrook Fire Department, the Town of Washington Recreation Department, and the Millbrook Library, as well as our local churches. They also trust community organizations like the Millbrook Arts Group and the Millbrook Business Association. Other organizations mentioned were the Millbrook Tribute Gardens and the Thorne Building Committee.

One person said they trust “the power of community voices” and when determining what actions people could take to address the concerns they talked about, one person said that Millbrook needs “more community processes where we work harder to engage a large group of stakeholders to figure out where we want to go.” Another suggested that “local institutions band together to initiate a long-term strategic plan.” A suggestion that came up a few times was the creation of “a physical newspaper or newsletter that would be automatically delivered to residents.”
WHAT WILL THE LIBRARY DO?

The library is ready to help address community challenges.

Our New Mission:
The Millbrook Library empowers our community to be resilient, informed, and equitable through leadership and collaboration, free and open access to ideas and information, and educational, enjoyable programs and services in a welcoming, inclusive environment.

The Millbrook Library has developed a new three-year plan based on your community input that you can find on our website. We plan to focus on strengthening our community by supporting local organizations and businesses through partnerships and programs, as well as providing and promoting volunteer opportunities. We will celebrate diversity and the library will be a place where everyone is welcome.

The Millbrook Library will be a model for sustainability and resilience through actions and education. We will also improve our financial position to ensure that we are capable of providing programs and services that respond to the needs of the community and maintain a collection that provides the community with reliable, authenticated sources of information that are diverse and inclusive. We will continue to preserve local history resources that have been entrusted to our care.

Thank you to everyone who participated in these conversations and shared their feedback with us. The information you provided was invaluable and has helped us create a new action plan that ensures we are addressing community needs. This report is not the end, and we want to keep the conversation going. If you have any feedback on this report or other ideas you want to share, our doors are open.

Please contact Courtney Tsahalis at director@millbrooklibrary.org or 845-677-3611 x 3 if you’d like to discuss the report or have an idea for a partnership.

We feel very fortunate to work in and serve a community as wonderful as Millbrook and are committed to helping the community address and resolve challenges as well as work towards a bright future.