

Collection Development Policy

The Fitchburg Public Library Collection Development Policy provides a framework for maintaining and growing the collection of materials to support the Library's mission to "provide materials and exceptional service to all people in their quest for information, recreation, research, and life-long learning." The library assembles, preserves, and makes readily available these materials to help meet the needs of its patrons. The collection reflects a wide range of views, expressions, opinions, and interests.

The library primarily serves the residents of Fitchburg regardless of age, race, creed, color, occupation, education level, or financial position. As a library certified under the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) State Aid to Public Libraries, the library participates in resource sharing with all other certified libraries in the cities and towns in Massachusetts. Residents of nearby communities who have relatively easy access to Fitchburg often use the library.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The Freedom to Read Statement of the American Library Association and the Library Bill of Rights are guiding documents to the collection development policy and are endorsed by the Board of Trustees.

ABOUT THE LIBRARY AND ITS COMMUNITY

The large population of the library's service area (over 100,000) includes a full range of socio-economic strata and a variety of living environments from urban to rural. More than forty different ethnic groups are represented in the area. The residents have a wide range of interests and information needs.

THE COLLECTION

To serve the varied population, the library assembles, preserves, and makes readily available a wide-range of literary, cultural, education, informational, and recreational materials to help meet the needs of people of all ages. The collection reflects a wide range of views, expressions, opinions, and interests and includes popular and in demand materials, as well as special formats. The Willis Room collection preserves and documents the history of Fitchburg and North Worcester County and includes some statewide resources.

The variety of formats collected include:

- Print: books, documents, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, and maps.
- Audiovisual Media: videos on DVD and Blu-ray, books on CD and digital audio player, music on compact disc and LPs.
- Electronic Media: databases, software, electronic books, research tools, and downloadable audio books, videos, and music. The library also provides access to the Internet. Selected Internet sites are linked to the library's website.
- Other: art works, multimedia kits, microforms, educational toys, selected audiovisual and other equipment, tools, bicycles, and other miscellaneous items of interest to the community.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR MATERIALS SELECTION

It is the responsibility of the Board of Library Trustees to establish policies for the selection of library materials consistent with state and federal law. The actual selection of materials is delegated to the library's professional staff and based on the criteria cited above. Designated staff are responsible for specific areas of the collection under the direction of the library Director. The responsibility for selection ultimately rests with the library Director within the framework of policies determined by the Board of Trustees of the Fitchburg Public Library.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

General criteria for selecting library materials are listed below. An item need not meet all of the criteria in order to be acceptable.

- public demand, interest or need;
- contemporary significance, popular interest or permanent value;
- authority and accuracy in presentation;
- scarcity of information in the subject area;
- attention of critics, reviewers, and subject specialists;
- inclusion in indices for public libraries;
- merits of a work in relation to the interests and demands of the public;
- prominence, authority and/or competence of author, creator or publisher;
- timeliness of material;
- relation to existing collections;
- statement of challenging, original, or alternative point of view;
- authenticity of historical, regional or social setting;
- price, format, and ease of use;
- accessibility for multiple electronic formats.

The needs of the service area are constantly changing and the process of assessing these needs is continuous. Patrons contribute to this process by recommending materials for purchase. Staff monitor titles that are reserved by the public and subject areas which receive the heaviest use, as well as keep aware of trends, and needs in the community. Materials are not excluded from the collection solely because of frankness of expression or detail.

SELF-PUBLISHED MATERIALS

Self-published books or other materials created by local authors or producers who wish to donate a copy will undergo the same evaluation process as all other library materials.

COLLECTION MAINTENANCE

Professional library staff regularly review items in the collection to ensure that they continue to meet customers' needs. Materials that are worn, obsolete, or unused, old editions, or unnecessarily duplicated items are removed. It is the responsibility of professional staff to assess the need for replacing materials that are damaged, destroyed or lost. Items are not automatically replaced. Decisions are based on need, demand, and budget.

While the same criteria used for selection are considered in removing materials from the collection, lack of use by the public, and outdated information, are prime considerations. Selection and retention criteria may vary for specific areas of the collection and for various types of materials.

ACCESS TO LIBRARY MATERIALS

Because of the diversity of library users, it is almost inevitable that materials selected to serve the needs, interests, or tastes of one group may be of no interest to, be repugnant to, or inappropriate for another segment of the library-using public.

Responsibility for children's reading, listening, or viewing material rest solely with their parents or legal guardians. In particular, the selection of materials for the adult collection is not restricted by the possibility that children or adolescents may obtain materials considered inappropriate by their own parents or legal guardians.

The library will not remove from its collection items that meet its selection criteria. It will, however, review the selection of materials to determine whether existing policies have been followed correctly. In all cases involving free access to and selection of materials, the staff and trustees are guided by the Freedom to Read Statement and the Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association adopted by the Library Board of Trustees.

STORAGE OF THE COLLECTION

The library allows open access to all materials. For convenience of administration, however, materials that would suffer from damage or theft, are little-used, or require special handling, are stored in the closed stacks. Materials are not stored in these areas because they are controversial or offensive to some library patrons.

The library does not characterize library materials by labels or other devices which by intention or effect prejudice the library user against particular items.

REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF MATERIALS

In accordance with the Freedom to Read Statement and the Library Bill of Rights, a wide variety of books and other materials is made available to the public. Requests to remove materials will be considered within the context of the policies set forth in this document. Any Fitchburg resident who wishes to request that a specific item be reconsidered for inclusion in the collection of materials is asked to complete and sign the Request for Reconsideration Form, available at the Information Desk. The form will be forwarded to the librarians who select materials. The librarians will consider the request in a timely fashion, in consultation with the Director. The questioned material will be reviewed, in its entirety, and once a decision has been made regarding the retention or removal of the material, a letter will be sent to the person, explaining the decision. If the person indicates dissatisfaction with the resolution, he/she may appeal to the Library Board of Trustees. At their next board meeting the Board will reconsider the decision based on whether or not the particular item conforms to the Board-approved Collection Development Policy, as outlined in the "Criteria for Selection" above.

REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF A PROGRAM

The library's philosophy of open access to information and ideas extends to library programming. In accordance with the Library Bill of Rights, a wide variety of programs are offered at the library by

the Library and by outside groups. Library sponsorship of a program does not constitute an endorsement of the content of the program or the views expressed by participants, and program topics, speakers, and resources are not excluded from programs because of possible controversy. Programs which are of interest to varied members of the community are scheduled in accordance with our meeting room use policy. Because of the diversity of library users, it is almost inevitable that programs presented to serve the needs or interests of one group may be of no interest to, be repugnant to, or inappropriate for another segment of the library-using public.

Requests to cancel a program will be considered within the context of the Library Bill of Rights. Fitchburg resident who wishes to request that a specific program be reconsidered is asked to complete and sign the Request for Reconsideration Form, available at the Information Desk. The form will be forwarded to the library director. The Director will consider the request in consultation with the chair of the Board of Trustees. The questioned program will be reviewed, in its entirety, and once a decision has been made regarding the retention or cancellation of the program, a letter will be sent to the person, explaining the decision. If the person indicates dissatisfaction with the resolution, he/she may appeal to the Library Board of Trustees. The Board will reconsider the decision based on whether or not the particular item conforms to the Board-approved Library Bill of Rights.

The Freedom to Read Statement

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label "controversial" views, to distribute lists of "objectionable" books or authors, and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to counter threats to safety or national security, as well as to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as individuals devoted to reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary individual, by exercising critical judgment, will select the good and reject the bad. We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to be "protected" against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media, and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy or unwelcome scrutiny by government officials.

Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of accelerated change. And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it the less able to deal with controversy and difference.

Now as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate, in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings.

The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights.

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. *It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox, unpopular, or considered dangerous by the majority.*

Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. *Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated.*

Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. *It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.*

No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. *There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression.*

To some, much of modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

5. *It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept the prejudgment of a label characterizing any expression or its author as subversive or dangerous.*

The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for others. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

6. *It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information.*

It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society individuals are free to determine for themselves what they wish to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive. Further, democratic societies are more safe, free, and creative when the free flow of public information is not restricted by governmental prerogative or self-censorship.

7. *It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one, the answer to a "bad" idea is a good one.*

The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader's purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties, and deserves of all Americans the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

"The Freedom to Read Statement", American Library Association, July 26, 2006.

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/freedomreadstatement> (Accessed December 21, 2017)

Document ID: aaac95d4-2988-0024-6573-10a5ce6b21b2

LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

Although the Articles of the *Library Bill of Rights* are unambiguous statements of basic principles that should govern the service of all libraries, questions do arise concerning application of these principles to specific library practices. See the documents designated by the Intellectual Freedom Committee as Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights.

"Library Bill of Rights", American Library Association, June 30, 2006.
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill> (Accessed December 21, 2017)
Document ID: 669fd6a3-8939-3e54-7577-996a0a3f8952

"Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights", American Library Association, July 30, 2007.
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations> (Accessed March 7, 2022)
Document ID: 066677f2-3938-cbb4-7dba-2edff70d279b

REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION

Please complete this form and return it to a staff member.

Fitchburg Public Library

610 Main Street, Fitchburg, MA

Date: _____

Name _____

Phone # _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Do you represent: yourself or an organization? _____

Name of organization _____

eMail _____

On what type of material or service are you commenting? Book Magazine Library Program Display/Exhibit Music CD Movie Newspaper Audiorecording Internet resource/site Other (describe briefly)

On what item/program/display/exhibit are you commenting?
 If commenting on an item, what is the title and author/performer/producer?
 If commenting on a program/display/exhibit what is the title and the date?

How did this title/event/display/program/exhibit come to your attention?
 (recommended by staff member, review, or a friend; found on library shelf visited library, library calendar announcement, publicity announcement, etc.)

Did you read/listen to/view the entire work, stay for the entire program, view the entire display?
 If not, which selection or part did you read or review?

What is it that you find objectionable? Please be specific: cite pages, excerpts, or scenes whenever possible.

Thank you for your comments. A member of our Administrative Staff will contact you regarding your concerns. Please use the back of this page for further comments if necessary.

Staff use only:
Date received: _____
Staff initials: _____