

GLF President Gerald Kimber White in Conversation with Goodnow Library Director Amy Stimac November 12, 2025

GKW: Amy, thank you so much for joining me for this conversation. You're new in your role at the Goodnow Library but you're no stranger! While most of us may already be familiar with you, I think we would all like to hear more about your background and how we came to be lucky enough to call you our new Library Director.

AS: Thank you so much. I'm excited to be here with you. I grew up surrounded by books. My mother worked in the art and design side of book publishing and my father was an avid genealogist in his free time. I grew up in Columbus, Ohio and would go to the big, beautiful main branch library each week with my mother. They had a climbing structure tree that you could climb in the children's room and I just adored it. I would pick out a book and go up in the tree to read. In my mind it was gigantic but I recently saw a picture of it and it was rather small. Then on the weekends, my father would often take me to other area libraries to conduct his genealogical research and I would help him.

What cemented my love for libraries was when I was seven years old, and I successfully guessed the exact number of jelly beans in the jar at the library. I remember my mom handing me the phone because I had a phone call from the library. It was very exciting and is still the only thing I ever won!

I came out to this area to attend Wellesley College and got a job at the campus library. And during the summers I worked in a variety of libraries and archives. Through my undergraduate years, for two summers when I was back in Columbus, I worked at the archives for the State of Ohio. Then I got an internship at the JFK Library in Boston, which was an amazing experience. So initially, I was a history major and I thought I would become an archivist. I went to Simmons and pursued my Master's in Library Science, but throughout a variety of experience, I realized I really enjoyed the public-facing side of librarianship and working in the archives.

So, after graduating I worked first as an academic librarian at Pine Manor College. After that, I moved into public libraries and worked at the Marlboro Public Library down the road here, and I worked at the Acton Memorial Library. In 2012, when I came to the Goodnow, I had young children and I was really interested in children's services and children's literature, so I made a switch into children's, and I've been here up until now! A lot of you know me as Ms. Amy, the children's librarian. I will always absolutely love children's services, but I have a lot of other experience that is helping inform me in this new role as library director.

GKW: The Goodnow Library has made a lot of improvements over the past decade in terms of services, programming, etc., becoming far more than just a repository for books. As you begin your tenure as Library Director, what is your vision for what the Goodnow Library can be for Sudbury and the surrounding communities?

AS: My primary vision is for Goodnow to become a vibrant community hub for all ages. In many ways, we are already doing this, but I'd like to be more intentional about it. Some of you may have heard the term "third space" before, but in case it's new, "third spaces" are community gathering places outside of home and work or school. The term was coined in the early 1990's, the concept of third spaces was popularized by Harvard professor Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone*. Third spaces are generally free or low-cost spaces, like libraries, local cafes, clubs, and bowling alleys where people can gather and make new acquaintances. Putnam has devoted his life to researching the concept of social capital and

has found that third spaces have been declining since the 1960's, leading to a drop in a sense of American community, and with this drop comes detrimental effects on physical and civic health.

Libraries are one of the last truly free third spaces where there is no expectation to spend any money, everyone is welcome and can engage with each other. Our country is also experiencing an epidemic of loneliness and the library needs to play a role in combating loneliness by fostering community connections, providing opportunities for social interaction, and being a welcoming space for all. I would like to expand programming for adults and establish strong partnerships with organizations around Sudbury.

I loved watching first-hand as people met and grew friendships in the Children's Department, and I want to build these relationships throughout the entire Goodnow community.

I'd like to see the library have an even greater involvement and presence outside of the building in the wider community. Our core patrons know us and love us but there are so many people in Sudbury who don't know us and the amazing resource that we are. I want to focus on getting the word out about our services and programming. Creating an internal working group to work on our communication strategies is another goal I have. And I think that partnering with other town departments and groups is a great way to do that; senior center, schools, etc.

GKW: So, you're probably still mapping things out, but what are some of your goals for 2026? And I believe you and your team will begin developing the Library's next five-year strategic plan next year?

AS: Yes, in the short term I'm looking at ways to bring that vision of third spaces into reality, looking at ways to create programming and spaces within our library to foster community connection. One of the first things I have been talking about with staff is ways to improve what is currently the new book area, the entrance atrium space. Maybe trying to provide more of a living room-type feel to the space. Something that happened when we started summer reading with the "gaming" theme was we put a puzzle in the Adult Services area and it was just amazing to watch everybody interact with that puzzle and interact with each other as they worked on the puzzle. It's something so simple, but the kind of connections that can be built from something like that is really neat. If we brought the puzzle downstairs and had comfortable furniture, that would be a really cool space!

Back in 2012/2013 along with the Goodnow Library Foundation's help we did a big renovation in the Children's Room. But I don't think I have to tell you that the Children's Room has taken a beating in the last 12 years! If you go over there, you'll see exactly what I mean! So doing a refresh and refurbishing that area will be important. We need some new shelving for our ever expanding and popular picture book collection, along with some new furniture.

We continue to be a place for people to meet to work together, so there is a high demand for collaborative study spaces. Looking for ways we can expand that is on my list. I'd also like to improve our external communications as well. I think we can do some work on that!

In the longer term, we are going to be starting our strategic planning process next fall. We'll start with creating a strategic planning steering committee, and then get down to that work with some focus groups, community surveys and meet with key stakeholders and see what the community is hoping to see from our library.

GKW: The Town Budget covers the lion's share of the Library's financial needs, but that funding still falls short of the scope of services that the community requests and Library strives to support. Can

you please give us a sense of what the Town Budget covers at the Library and the projects and services you wouldn't be able to provide if it weren't for the GLF and its donors?

AS: The town budget covers things like personnel, salaries, and benefits. It covers our Minuteman Library Network fees, which are considerable, but allows us to be part of this fantastic library network. It also covers general supplies, custodial supplies, and books and materials. Materials includes e-materials, e-resources, databases, DVDs, audiobooks – all the ways materials can be purchased. The library also has a few trust funds that we can draw funds from for purchases. A little bit of money comes directly from the state, but if there is anything additional that we are interested in, like new programming or services, we rely on the support of the Goodnow Library Foundation and its donors.

Several major projects would not have been possible without Foundation support, capital projects like the Sara Sherman NOW Lab. Also new furnishings like tables and chairs that we need for patrons to work. Very soon we will unveil our new Smart Lockers – you might have seen them out in front of the library already. These lockers will be accessible 24-7 for people to pick up their materials on their own schedule. The funds for this project are from the Sudbury Foundation through the GLF.

And of course, the Museum Pass Program is funded by the Foundation. And if we want to add something to our Library of Things, GLF support is important for that too. In the past few years, the Foundation has also supported special programming and our very popular ebook collection.

GKW: You mentioned GLF donor support is playing a role in purchasing eBooks, which are rapidly growing in popularity. I was surprised when you told me just how much more complicated and expensive eBooks are for libraries than for those of us with Kindles and a credit card! Can you please share some of what you told me about that process?

AS: The eBook landscape for libraries is quite complicated. As an individual, I can go onto Amazon and buy an eBook title for \$12.99 and I will own that title in perpetuity. But things for libraries are very different. Book publishers have set up licensing models to sell e-content to libraries, and we have to buy a license for each digital book title. Occasionally we are able to buy a license to hold the title in our collection forever, but the majority of licenses make a title available for 12 months, 24 months, or 26 checkouts. In fact, 85% of the eBooks and eAudio that we purchase each year will expire. Additionally, the prices we have to pay are significantly higher. The average cost for an eBook is \$40 and the average cost for an eAudiobook is \$73 and we have to keep renewing these licenses. Our total budget for e-content costs from our town budget is \$77K, which represents 20% of the budget we get from the town excluding salaries. We also draw an additional \$15,000 for e-content from one of our trust funds. And let me tell you, this doesn't come close to meeting the demand for eBooks in Sudbury. Efforts are underway to make digital content more affordable for libraries. Organizations like ReadersFirst and the American Library Association (ALA) are lobbying publishers for fairer terms and lower prices. However, libraries account for less than 2% of digital sales, so our influence remains limited. Legislation that seeks to regulate eBook licenses the same way states regulate other contracts that involve taxpayer money is moving through state legislatures, including in Massachusetts. The GLF made a \$10,000 grant last year that enabled us to meet more of this demand than we otherwise could have. But there is still so much need for eBooks!

GKW: Thank you so much for your time, Amy, and for your leadership of the Goodnow Library!

AS: My pleasure, thank you!