

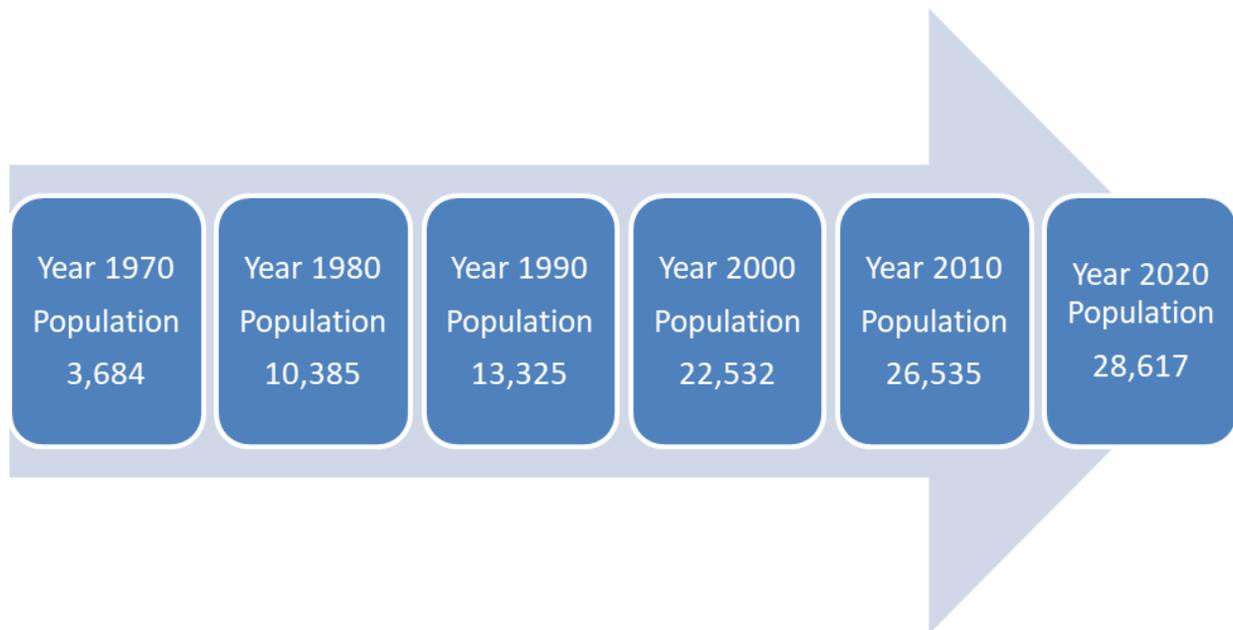
Library & Grant Information

Libraries have been important to society throughout recorded history, in fact our current ability to learn about that history is due in no small part to the existence of libraries. Great civilizations around the world recognized the value of storing, categorizing, accessing, and studying information. From the Library at Alexandria over 2,000 years ago to the Library of Congress, today libraries are still very critical to the knowledge base of any community.

In Stafford Township, we didn't always have a library, many longtime residents might recall the book mobile that arrived in what was then our tiny little town for a few hours. Residents could choose from a limited selection of titles before the book mobile drove away, and if you missed it, you would have to wait until the next visit. The demand was high for a permanent facility and the Stafford branch of the Ocean County Library was finally established in the late 80s in a repurposed Church on Rt 9.

At that time, there were a little over 10,000 residents in Stafford Township. As of the latest Census estimates that number has climbed to over 28,000 residents.

Stafford Township – U.S. Census Data – History



With the growth of the Township, the limitations of the current library were quickly evident as the Library Commission listed the Stafford branch for expansion on the Ocean County Library Facilities Plan back as far as 1993. Many years passed and the Stafford branch was still not addressed. During the Myhre administration, the governing body and I had a unique opportunity to build the new library at a substantially lower cost to Stafford residents in conjunction with the County.

The Township staff worked with the County to draft and submit a grant application for the maximum amount of funding. In November, 2017, New Jersey voters approved a \$125 million public referendum, which authorized the State to issue bonds for the construction, reconstruction, development, extension, improvement and furnishing of New Jersey's public libraries.

This bond allowed the State of New Jersey to issue grants for up to 50% of the construction cost of a library. To put in an application, the Township would need to partner with the County to split the capital cost to build the new library. Once the new library is built all operations and maintenance will be funded by the Ocean County Library System. In addition to the grant that is available, the land is already set aside at the Southern Ocean Service Center. This could function as a new Township hub where so much can be accomplished in a single stop.

The library at the current location is no longer viable to support our population. The population has more than doubled since the library was repurposed in the late 1980s. Stafford has the highest usage per capita of any library in Ocean County. Over 10,000 Stafford residents hold a library card and the library is open to everyone. The Stafford branch is currently the 6th busiest branch in the 8th most populous town.

To give an idea of use of the library, the latest data shows Stafford branch had over 128,000 visitors in an 11,900 sq. ft. building, the 5th busiest branch Jackson had 143,000 in a 30,000 sq. ft facility. The new Stafford branch would be a 19,700 sq. ft. library and in line with the Township's larger population.

What do we get with a new Stafford Library?

- Three times more computers and community meeting spaces for the public.
- The facility will be built with the latest construction methods, technologies, and with energy efficiency in mind.
- Stafford Library is part of the County of Ocean's resiliency plan for hurricanes and other emergencies to provide residents with access to information and services in times of crises and will be built with a full-building, gas-powered generator. As we see now with the COVID-19 pandemic, planning for such crises is appropriate as we plan for the benefit of the residents and future crises.
- Auditorium that can be divided into two smaller rooms.
- Multipurpose room that can be used as computer lab and conference room.
- Individual and small group study rooms.
- Business incubator.
- Intergenerational living room.
- Larger children's department with a story time area, lactation room for nursing mothers, and separate sensory space for children with autism.
- Teen area and a makerspace for STEAM Education.
- New Stafford Library will meet all requirements for barrier-free accessibility.

How does this relate to your taxes?

The Township has a Municipal Tax Levy of \$38,727,089.38. Based off the grant that has been awarded by the State, we will receive half the funding through the grant, again the maximum amount of grant funding for \$4,824,000. The total cost of the library is estimated at \$9,648,000. By splitting the cost of the new library with the County, this would be a \$2,412,000, 20-year bond to the Township. To put that in relation to the rates the Township receives, this would be an annual payment of \$147,510 to pay for the Township's contribution over a twenty-year period.

Having this opportunity, the governing body and I could not pass this opportunity up for the benefit of the Township and our community.

Library use is widespread. According to a 2016 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, about half of all Americans ages 16 and over used a public library in the past year, and two-thirds say that closing their local branch would have a "major impact on their community".

A library is valuable to all who seek knowledge, but particularly the low-income population, our students and our senior citizens. In fact, the library is most often visited by young adults, women, seniors and low-income households.

An educated community is a safe community. This is an investment in our children's future, too much has been taken from this generation in the past few years and as we plan for the future we look for a new day. We look forward to working with the County to make this new library project a great success and a great resource for all in the Township.