



Community Center Investment Program | **CASE STUDY**



Frost Free Library - Marlborough, New Hampshire

Reimagining a Library as a Community Hub

Donated by Rufus Frost I in 1867, the Frost Free Library is a gathering place for the Marlborough community. From lending materials and hosting children’s reading programs to providing spaces for social clubs, the library has long been a vibrant hub for people of all ages. Through a transformative renovation project supported by CDFA, the library has evolved into a multipurpose community center providing access to social services, modern meeting spaces, and enhanced programming for Marlborough’s 2,100 residents.



From Historic Space to Multi-Functional Community Resource

The historic building faced several barriers to serving the community. Despite a 1960s addition, the library’s granite structure made it loud for meetings and reading programs. The space also lacked modern heating and cooling systems, which wasn’t good for book conditioning or patron comfort.

The renovation added a new multipurpose meeting space with ADA-compliant bathrooms, a kitchenette, upgraded technology, and flexible fixtures to accommodate various activities. New HVAC systems improved air quality, moisture control, and comfort, as well as energy efficiency. The parking lot was also updated with new pavement and additional parking spaces.



“It’s more comfortable for staff and patrons, and the building itself will require fewer resources for maintenance over the next several years.”

Expanding Programming and Access to Social Services

The new flexible space expanded the library’s ability to support community events, social services, and vulnerable residents. Groups like Southwest Community Services will now have a welcoming space to assist residents with their programs, providing a vital community resource within walking distance. This eliminates the need for residents to travel to Keene—a significant barrier for those without access to a car or reliable transportation.

Community groups, town boards, and social service organizations are already planning to utilize the space. The meeting area will be available during off-hours for local Scout troops, recovery centers, and others, and it will also serve as a venue for private gatherings like birthday parties or baby showers. Additionally, the town's historical archives, previously confined to a small closet, can now be displayed and easily accessed by the public.

Smith hopes that the renovated Frost Free Library can be used by generations of families and help reduce isolation, increase community engagement, and support local artisans and educators.

"Small towns like Marlborough can't have a separate library, community center, and civic center," she said. "This project allows us to utilize a space that we already have and provide assistance that goes beyond finding a book."



CDFA's Strategic Funding Revitalized a Town Icon

The vision for Frost Free Library began with a needs assessment in 2017, followed by a successful fundraising campaign. However, delays and rising construction costs following the COVID-19 pandemic put the project on hold. With a \$915,000 forgivable loan from CDFA's Community Center Investment Program and \$685,000 in private donations, the library was ultimately able to bring its transformation to life.



"CDFA allowed us to finish what we started in 2017 and do it right," noted Smith. "Funding like this doesn't often come to small municipalities, and it has been phenomenal to take on this project at zero cost to the taxpayers," she added.



Although the library's first application for funding was unsuccessful, CDFA's technical assistance program helped reframe their proposal and secure the grant in the second round. Smith also praised CDFA's positivity during the project's implementation. "They seemed just as thrilled about the project as we are, and really wanted us to succeed," she said.

This transformation shows how small-town investments can create big impacts. The Frost Free Library is now a vibrant community hub that honors Marlborough's history while building its future. As Smith highlighted, "We're adapting to a new way of being present in the community—one that brings people together and creates a space where everyone belongs."

Key Learnings:

Looking into community needs leads to growth and transformation

Multi-purpose facilities can help small communities bridge resource gaps

Balancing modernization with historic preservation creates meaningful spaces