

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026



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## Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>CONTRIBUTORS .....</b>   | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>COMMUNITY PROFILE .....</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>LIBRARY PROFILE .....</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| LIBRARY HISTORY .....   | 6         |
| LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES .....   | 8         |
| FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY.....   | 8         |
| LIBRARY FOUNDATION .....  | 8         |
| <b>PLANNING METHODOLOGY.....</b>  | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES .....</b>  | <b>10</b> |
| MISSION STATEMENT.....  | 10        |
| VISION STATEMENT .....  | 10        |
| VALUES .....  | 10        |
| <b>GOALS, OBJECTIVES, ACTIONS .....</b>   | <b>11</b> |
| <b>GOAL #1: FACILITIES .....</b>  | <b>11</b> |
| OBJECTIVE #1: IMPROVE THE CURRENT LIBRARY BUILDINGS.....  | 11        |
| OBJECTIVE #2: EXAMINE FEASIBILITY OF RENOVATING CURRENT RICHLANDS LIBRARY OR SELECTING A NEW LOCATION ..... | 11        |
| OBJECTIVE #3: UPDATE THE LIBRARIES WITH NEWER, UP-TO-DATE TECHNOLOGY.....                                   | 11        |
| <b>GOAL #2: COMMUNICATION .....</b>   | <b>12</b> |
| OBJECTIVE #1: ENGAGE IN A DIALOGUE WITH COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS. ....  | 12        |
| OBJECTIVE #2: CREATE A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING STRATEGY ACROSS ALL PLATFORMS AND MEDIA.....                 | 12        |
| OBJECTIVE #3: PROVIDE LIBRARY INFORMATION ON THE WEBSITE FOR GREATER TRANSPARENCY.....                      | 12        |
| <b>GOAL #3: OUTREACH.....</b>   | <b>12</b> |
| OBJECTIVE #1: DEVELOP LIBRARY PROGRAMS AND EVENTS OUTSIDE THE PHYSICAL BUILDINGS. ....                      | 13        |
| OBJECTIVE #2: SEEK OUT NEW PARTNERSHIPS AND FOSTER EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS. ....                              | 13        |
| OBJECTIVE #3: EXPLORE WAYS TO REACH OUT TO UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS. ....                                    | 13        |
| <b>GOAL #4: SERVICES .....</b>  | <b>13</b> |
| OBJECTIVE #1: EXPAND AND PROMOTE THE BUSINESS SERVICES THAT THE LIBRARY PROVIDES.....                       | 13        |
| OBJECTIVE #2: DEVELOP YOUTH PROGRAMMING AT ALL PHYSICAL LOCATIONS. ....                                     | 13        |
| OBJECTIVE #3: DEVELOP ADULT PROGRAMMING AT ALL PHYSICAL LOCATIONS.....                                      | 13        |
| OBJECTIVE #4: PROVIDE MORE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR STAFF. ....                           | 14        |
| OBJECTIVE #5: DEVELOP A ROBUST VOLUNTEER PROGRAM. ....  | 14        |
| <b>GOAL #5: COLLECTIONS.....</b>  | <b>14</b> |
| OBJECTIVE #1: INCREASE PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL CIRCULATION. ....   | 14        |
| OBJECTIVE #2: PRESERVE THE MATERIALS IN THE LIBRARY’S VIRGINIA ROOM. ....                                   | 14        |

OBJECTIVE #3: MAINTAIN THE PHYSICAL COLLECTION AT ALL LIBRARIES.....14  
OBJECTIVE #4: EVALUATE CURRENT LIBRARY POLICIES TO IMPROVES ACCESS FOR PATRONS. ....15

**APPROVAL OF THE GOVERNING BOARD .....16**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.....16**

## Contributors

This plan is the result of hard work and dedication of many people involved in the library and the community. Many thanks to all of those individuals who committed hours of their time to making our library better!

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## Community Profile

Tazewell County, established in 1799, is situated in southwestern Virginia, encompassing 520 square miles, and is bordered by Buchanan, Russell, Smyth, and Bland counties in Virginia, and by McDowell and Mercer counties in West Virginia. Tazewell County currently has five incorporated towns: Bluefield, Cedar Bluff, Pocahontas, Richlands, and Tazewell. Along with Mercer County, WV, Tazewell County is part of the Bluefield Micropolitan Statistical Area, as defined by the U.S. Census.

The rural population of 40,595 (U.S. Census Annual Estimates, 2019) has declined by 1.1% since the 2010 Census. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, those under 18 (20.6%) are fewer than the state average (21.8%), while those 65 and older (16.9%) are more numerous than the state average (15.9%). The ethnicity of Tazewell County is far more homogenous than that of the state as a whole with 95.2% white and 2.8% black/African American residents, compared with 67% and 19.4% respectively. Fewer residents represent other ethnic backgrounds: American Indian: .2% (.3% statewide), Asian .6% (6.6% statewide), Hispanic/Latino origin .1% (9.7% statewide).

The county has 14 public schools (5 primary and elementary schools, 5 middle and intermediate schools, 3 high schools, and 1 career & technical school attached to Tazewell High School). According to the Tazewell County Public Schools Strategic Six Year Plan 2017-2023, Tazewell County Public Schools had a school enrollment of 5620 for the 2017-2018 school year. In addition to public schools, the county is home to a community college (Southwest Virginia Community College) and a private four-year liberal arts college (Bluefield College).

Educational attainment is lower than the state average. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, those adults 25 years of age and older who have completed high school or equivalent are 81.7%, compared with 90% statewide, and those with no high school diploma or equivalent are 18.2% compared to 10% statewide. Residents with a bachelor's degree or higher are 14.9%, compared with 39.6% statewide.

According to the 2019 American Community Survey, income is also significantly less than that of the state, with median household income in the last twelve months at \$42,099, compared with \$76,456 statewide. Residents living below the poverty level comprise 17.5%, compared with 9.9% statewide. Similarly, 10.4% seniors above the age of 65 years old are more likely to live below the poverty level, compared to 7.1% statewide. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the economy of Tazewell County with the closure of business and the rise of unemployment similarly seen throughout the United States. Tazewell County had a 6.5% unemployment rate compared to 4.0% statewide over the twelve months.

The local economy has traditionally been based on coal and on agriculture, with recent gradual diversification into healthcare and technology. Tazewell County is home to the world-famous Pocahontas No. 3 seam of bituminous coal, the largest field in the world, which was first mined in Pocahontas in 1882 and which brought rail transportation to the region, along with a booming industry for many years. The coal industry has been the prime industry of the county for the last 100 years. The demand for coal has diminished with natural gas; employment

opportunities have also decreased in the local coal industry with greater mechanization. According to the 2017 Tazewell County Comprehensive Plan, mining still provides the highest annual average weekly wage of any industry in Tazewell County.

Agriculture has dominated the southern part of the county, including Thompson Valley, The Cove, and Burke's Garden, known for its unique geography, alpine microclimate, biological diversity, 100-year export cattle industry, and pastoral beauty. As of 2012, Tazewell County had 584 farms that covered 150,181 acres of land. According to the 2017 Tazewell County Comprehensive Plan, the top five employers in 2013 were Tazewell County School Board, Wal-Mart, Clinch Valley Medical Center, Cumberland Mountain Community Services, and Southwest Virginia Community College.

Two hospitals operate within the county, Carilion Tazewell Community Hospital and Clinch Valley Health. The assisted living and nursing home facilities in Tazewell County are Commonwealth Senior Living in Claypool Hill, Westwood Center in Bluefield, VA, Dogwood Crossing Senior Living in Tazewell, VA, and Heritage Hall in Tazewell, VA. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, 21.8% of Tazewell County residents had a disability (7.5% hearing difficulty; 4.2% vision difficulty; 8.1% cognitive difficulty; 13.3% ambulatory difficulty; 4.6% self-care difficulty; and 10.5% independent living difficulty). The 2018 Tazewell County Community Health Report revealed that top 5 health related issues for the county are:

1. Alcohol and drug use
2. Access to mental / behavior health services
3. Transportation / transit system
4. High uninsured / underinsured population
5. Poverty / low average household income

## Library Profile

### Library History

Organized public library service in Tazewell County is a relatively recent phenomenon. Through the years, women's clubs offered lending library programs, some to members, some to the general community. Notices of new books available for lending appeared in the pages of the *Clinch Valley News* from time to time.

In the early 1960s, as a result of Sputnik, federal funds for education increased significantly and led, through the Library Services Act, to initiation of public library service in previously unserved communities. This provided the impetus for establishing many library systems in Virginia, particularly those serving small and rural populations. The Virginia State Library offered to demonstrate library service in a community for two years, at the end of which time the locality would assume responsibility for continuing it if it was successful.

For many years, Mrs. W. B. Leslie, a teacher and newspaper publisher, had sought to have a public library in Tazewell County. The Demonstration Library program delivered the vehicle for reaching this goal. Mrs. Leslie worked with a number of interested county residents and officials to apply for the Demonstration Library, which was approved. Dorothy M. Fuller of the Virginia State Library guided the library to its opening July 1964. The Town of Tazewell arranged for space in the town hall, built wooden shelving, and furnished utilities. The Library of Virginia selected, bought and cataloged books, organized the collection, trained the staff, provided a bookmobile to reach communities beyond Tazewell and paid all operational costs. Mrs. Edith M. Farley was the first librarian, and she had a staff of four.

Tazewell County assumed operational responsibility for the library at the end of the agreed two-year demonstration. The Board of Supervisors appointed a five-member Board of Trustees, chaired by Mrs. Leslie, and including Lester L. Jones, Cora Lee Philpott, T. G. Shufflebarger, and Mary Sue Sult. They built a permanent library on Main Street, on the site of the old Tazewell High School. Dr. W. F. Wadsworth, Presbyterian minister and community leader, worked with Mrs. Leslie and the Board, Mrs. Irma Gillespie and many other individuals and community groups, and the support of E. R. Kilgore, James Bailey, and Graham Hedrick of the Board of Supervisors, to see this building project through. The library was dedicated 3 December 1967. The architect was J. Coates Carter and the contractor was Fort Chiswell Construction Company. Major funding was provided by federal grants from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Library Services and Construction Act.

Mrs. Farley served as Librarian from 1964 until her retirement in 1976. She was followed by Clare DeCleene, 1976-1977. Laurie Surface Roberts served as the Library Director from 1977 until her retirement in 2012. Lynne Bartlett served as the Library Director from 2012-2019. Erica Hall has been the library director since 2019.

## **Bluefield Branch**

The Bluefield Branch had its beginnings in a program sponsored by the Bluefield Virginia Women's Club. In 1941, the Club created a library operated by volunteers from the Club, including Cora Lee Philpott, an elementary school teacher. The library began in a building on Virginia Avenue across from the town hall. In 1950, the Town of Bluefield provided space for the library in the town hall and, for some time thereafter, operated the library. This library became associated with Tazewell County Public Library by 1967, and by 1980 was a branch operated by the public library. Outgrowing the second story room in the town hall, the Bluefield Branch moved to a new building near Graham Middle School in February 1987 through the particular support of Hudson Huffard, Jr., Eastern District Supervisor. Architect for the new facility was William J. Huber, Echols-Sparger and Associates, and contractor was Swope Construction. Funding came primarily through federal revenue sharing funds in the last year they were distributed. Originally known as the Bluefield Virginia Library, this service became the Eastern District Branch, then the Clear Fork Branch, and now is the Bluefield Branch of Tazewell County Public Library.

## **Richlands Branch**

Beginning in the 1960s, Freya Dalton voluntarily operated a station library in a building she owned on Washington Square in Richlands. She provided many books herself and gathered donations from the community to stock this library. Building on her early work, the Richlands Area Friends of the Library, formed in the early 1980s under the leadership of Dr. John C. Willis, worked ceaselessly to obtain a library in the community. The Friends acquired the Dr. W. R. Williams house on Suffolk Avenue and privately raised the funds to renovate it. Constructed in 1890 for the offices of Clinch Valley Coal and Iron Company, this building later became the residence and hospital of Dr. W. R. Williams. In 1983, the Williams family donated this property, listed on the Virginia Historic Landmarks Register, to the Town of Richlands for use as a library. This facility opened 1 October 1984. Architect for the renovation of this building was Cameron Wolfe, and contractor was Henry Nickels, Inc. It was first known as the Western District Branch, then the Maiden Spring Branch and, now, the Richlands Branch of Tazewell County Public Library.

## **Pocahontas Branch**

The Abbs Valley, Boissevain, and Pocahontas communities banded together in 1987 to open a library in Pocahontas. The Emma Yates Memorial Library (EYML) was located in the former home and shop of Emma Yates, a well-known milliner in the town.

Although historically a private library, the EYML board voted in early 2020 to hand operations over to the county. This process began in June 2020 and is still ongoing as of this writing. TCPL is still in the earliest stages of developing branch services in Pocahontas.



### Library Board of Trustees

The five members of the Tazewell County Board of Supervisors each appoint a representative to the Library Board. These five individuals make up the TCPL Board of Trustees. This is a governing Board, not merely advisory, which means that they are legally responsible for the control and management of the library. These duties are specified in the *Code of Virginia*.

### Friends of the Library

The Friends of the Tazewell County Public Library, founded at the Bluefield branch in 2011 and expanded to all three branches in 2013, serves to inform community members about library services; enhance services and programs through volunteer support, financial support, and in-kind gifts; sponsor programs of special interest; support the development and improvement of the library's resources and services; develop support among legislators and other elected officials; encourage, solicit, and receive gifts and bequests to the library from private citizens, corporations, businesses, and community organizations; and support the freedom to read and freedom of expression as stated in the ALA Bill of Rights.

### Library Foundation

The Tazewell County Public Library Foundation serves to promote, encourage, support, and aid Tazewell County Public Library in its existing and/or future enterprises; to generate gifts, grants, and community support for such purposes; to use the Foundation's funds for such purposes; and to use and administer gifts, grants, bequests, and devices for the benefit of the Tazewell County Public Library. They are led by a Board of Directors, two of which are members of the Library Boards of Trustees. The scope of the Foundation is generally larger than the Friends; whereas Friends tend to support programming and more ephemeral activities, the Foundation is geared more towards capital projects.

## Planning Methodology

Tazewell County Public Library's previous strategic plan ended in June 2020. At this point the TCPL Board of Trustees decided to begin the strategic planning process. Library Director Erica Hall formed a Strategic Planning Committee, made of up Trustees, library staff, and community members. This committee met four times to give input and shape the strategic plan.

The first meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee primarily consisted of brainstorming ideas for the future. The SOAR model (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) was used to guide this discussion. This same SOAR exercise (Appendix A) was repeated with the Library Trustees, the Friends of the Library, and the entire library staff following the meeting.

The committee also finalized a community needs assessment survey (Appendix B) at their first meeting. This survey was distributed via paper, social media, newspaper, and on the library's website. A \$50 gift card drawing was offered as an incentive. Various library stakeholder groups were also encouraged to take the survey. For library patrons in the building, staff passed out postcards with 2 questions a piece on them to encourage as many responses as possible.

A total of 134 people completed the full needs assessment survey between October and January. Their input (Appendix C) helped guide the formation of the library's new mission, vision, and values statements, as well as goals for the future.

The second meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee focused on reworking the library's mission and vision statements. The committee voted to completely start fresh with those statements instead of using the previous ones. They also drafted a list of values that the library has; each member submitted value statements corresponding to those values, to be voted on prior to the next meeting.

The Strategic Planning Committee met for a third time in January to finalize value statements and create overarching goals for the future. The corresponding objectives and actions of those goals were fleshed out via email after the meeting.

The final meeting consisted of a brief discussion of the goals, objectives, and actions, followed by a vote. The committee voted unanimously to submit this final draft to the library Board of Trustees for their approval at the regular February meeting.

## Mission, Vision, and Values

### Mission Statement

To build an engaged community by connecting people with ideas and opportunities

### Vision Statement

To be the heart and hub of our community where all can dream, discover, create, and find support

### Values

**Compassion:** We welcome and care for our community members.

**Preservation:** We preserve community and family histories of Tazewell County and Southwest Virginia through our carefully curated genealogy collection.

**Equitable Access:** We provide all members of our community free and equitable access to information, resources, and opportunities.

**Education & Lifelong Learning:** We empower community members of all ages to succeed by providing them with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed, confident decisions.

**Innovation:** We embrace new ideas and technologies to better serve the changing needs of our community.

**Service & Outreach:** We collaborate with individuals, schools, businesses, non-profit agencies, and community organizations to provide service and outreach to all community members.

**Imagination:** We expand the horizons of community members of all ages by connecting them to new worlds and new ideas, daring to take risks and growing from any missteps.

**Welcoming Spaces:** We welcome all members of our community to safe spaces where they are free to explore and connect.

**Privacy:** We support our patrons' rights to privacy by protecting their confidential information.

## Goals, Objectives, Actions

### Goal #1: Facilities

We will provide an accessible, welcoming, collaborative, and safe space that serves the needs of our community.

#### Objective #1: Improve the current library buildings.

- Meet with the county maintenance department to discuss a plan for library maintenance projects that are not emergencies but need to be addressed in a reasonable time frame.
- Conduct a facilities assessment at all locations to evaluate how existing spaces are being used, gathering input from staff and community members.
- Replace Tazewell carpet.
- Replace Tazewell circulation desk.
- Update the main Tazewell outdoor sign with a more modern and well-lit sign.
- Evaluate wheelchair access to public bathrooms.
- Improve lighting on the Tazewell front porch in order to improve safety for patrons and staff.
- Re-caulk all windows.
- Improve outdoor seating areas to accommodate the needs of patrons.
- Add "LIBRARY" to the front of the Tazewell building.
- Replace Bluefield carpet.
- Build a Little Free Library at Bluefield with a community partner.
- Evaluate whether a study room can be placed inside the Bluefield building.
- Evaluate the technological and physical needs of the Pocahontas building.

#### Objective #2: Examine feasibility of renovating current Richlands library or selecting a new location

- Complete a feasibility study to determine whether to renovate the current building or to select a new site.
- If selecting a new site, complete a site selection study.

#### Objective #3: Update the libraries with newer, up-to-date technology.

- Add security cameras to all locations.
- Develop a technology inventory and create a replacement schedule for technology.
- Replace microfilm reader in the Virginia Room.
- Replace public computers at the Tazewell Library.
- Conduct an assessment of each library's technological needs based on the needs of the surrounding community.

- Evaluate whether there is a need for a makerspace or 3-D printer in the community.

## Goal #2: Communication

We will engage in robust, transparent dialogue with our community.

Objective #1: Engage in a dialogue with community stakeholders.

- Identify specific stakeholders and service providers.
- Convene stakeholder groups to assess their awareness and understanding of library objectives.
- Conduct an annual audit of stakeholders to measure their satisfaction and how our communication materials and tools are meeting our objectives.
- Create a teen advisory committee that meets quarterly.
- Collect stories from people in various stakeholder groups that convey their experiences with TCPL.

Objective #2: Create a comprehensive marketing strategy across all platforms and media.

- Create branding guidelines (fonts, colors, logo, etc.) that will be utilized across all platforms.
- Develop marketing plan to better inform the public of the library's services and collections.
- Distribute marketing material in non-traditional places such as grocery stores, doctor's offices, etc.
- Start an awareness campaign about the library's services and programs.
- Create materials tailored to individual stakeholders to highlight the outreach services the library can offer.
- Invite local press to cover Board meetings.
- Evaluate current social media platforms to determine whether any accounts should be deactivated.
- Create a social media plan to schedule and produce engaging content and traffic across all platforms.
- Train staff to produce video content.

Objective #3: Provide library information on the website for greater transparency.

- Conduct a content inventory of the tcplweb.org site.
- Conduct a User Experience audit of the tcplweb.org site.
- Create a "Get Involved" section along the navigation bar to invite participation with Friends of the Library, Library Foundation, Donations, and Volunteers.
- Maintain transparency as a taxpayer-funded resource by making Board of Trustee agendas, minutes, year-end statistics, and the strategic plan available to the public.

## Goal #3: Outreach

We will encourage and expand community partnerships and involvement.

Objective #1: Develop library programs and events outside the physical buildings.

- Create a Dungeons & Dragons program at Richlands Teen Venture.
- Expand therapy dog program to include seniors, schools, and daycares.
- Develop a county community events calendar.

Objective #2: Seek out new partnerships and foster existing partnerships.

- Create a list of community leaders and agencies for partnership. Contact those leaders to discuss opportunities for collaboration.
- Continue and nurture ongoing partnerships.
- Develop a relationship with local government bodies by attending town council meetings.
- Choose a school liaison for each school in order to better communicate library services.
- Investigate a partnership with Four County Transit to implement a Library Pass for people without reliable transportation to visit the library.

Objective #3: Explore ways to reach out to underserved populations.

- Explore whether the library can check out materials to the county jail and Pocahontas prison.
- Expand senior outreach to more nursing homes, independent living facilities, and homebound seniors.
- Create drop-off collections at various community centers in the county.
- Evaluate the need of a Mail-a-book service to homebound patrons.
- Evaluate locations in the county to build or distribute Little Free Libraries.

#### Goal #4: Services

We will provide opportunities for enrichment, entertainment, and access to technology.

Objective #1: Expand and promote the business services that the library provides.

- Provide notary services at the Bluefield Library.
- Acquire Wi-Fi printing capabilities for all locations.

Objective #2: Develop youth programming at all physical locations.

- Have one ongoing teen program at each location.
- Replace existing “1000 Books Before K” program materials with materials issued by the Library of Virginia.
- Create a tutoring program for elementary and middle school students.
- Evaluate our ability to increase youth programming and programs for special needs children.
- Gather qualitative feedback from programs.
- Return to offering the number of programs and achieving the attendance we had prior to Covid-19.

Objective #3: Develop adult programming at all physical locations.

- Work with Tazewell’s Carilion Clinic to have walk-in health events.
- Research roving exhibits to put on display in the library.

- Schedule speakers/presenters on various topics.
- Have an ongoing book club at each location.
- Develop a summer reading program for adults.
- Provide technology training.
- Begin adult literacy programs.
- Gather qualitative feedback from programs.
- Return the number of programs and attendance to Pre-Covid-19 numbers.

Objective #4: Provide more professional development opportunities for staff.

- Provide CPR & First Aid certification for all staff.
- Train staff in available electronic resources.

Objective #5: Develop a robust volunteer program.

- Recruit new volunteers and support existing volunteers.
- Develop a policy and application process

## Goal #5: Collections

We will maintain and expand a diverse collection that reflects the interests and needs of our community.

Objective #1: Increase physical and digital circulation.

- Return circulation raw numbers to pre-COVID numbers within the first year.
- Increase circulation raw number by 1% each subsequent year.
- Increase digital book, audiobooks, and magazines by 10% by the end of the five-year cycle.
- Increase library card registration to 55% of the Tazewell County population by the end of the five-year cycle.
- Expand the STAR (Students and Teachers Access Resources) program to include all private schools in Tazewell County.
- Investigate and evaluate the need and ability to increase our digital collection.
- Increase use of electronic databases by 10%.

Objective #2: Preserve the materials in the library's Virginia Room.

- Microfilm physical newspapers.
- Complete local high school yearbook collection by filling in gaps.
- Store the Tazewell County Public Library Photography Collection in archival quality boxes.

Objective #3: Maintain the physical collection at all libraries.

- Evaluate and enhance the Pocahontas library collection.
- Conduct an inventory audit of each library.
- Evaluate the need for a Library of Things collection containing items such as puzzles, board games, musical instruments, technical equipment, science equipment, and crafting equipment.

- Establish a weeding process and schedule.

Objective #4: Evaluate current library policies to improve access for patrons.

- Evaluate our policies on holds, number of holds, number of checkouts, and fines to determine if the policies need to be revised.
- Eliminate late fines for children's and youth materials.
- Evaluate whether the library can eliminate late fines for adult materials.



## Approval of the Governing Board

This plan was approved by the Tazewell County Public Library Board of Trustees on April 15, 2021.

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