

Asking the Right Questions

The Forest History Society was in the midst of a strategic planning effort to guide its future when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Thanks to collaboration among the FHS staff, past and current leaders, along with valuable inputs by FHS members and others, we have been able to continue this work remotely during 2020.

The Society's most recent strategic plan was ten years old, and back in 2010, acquiring more or new space was the top priority. If you'd ever seen the old building, that was self-evident. In 2014, the Board of Directors approved the "Building on History" campaign; in January 2019, we moved into our new \$7.1 million headquarters.

The new building presents new opportunities and challenges, and all the while, technological changes and the societal needs for libraries and archives are evolving. To properly plan, we would need to harness the intellectual and communal capital of our current leaders, staff, and members, as well as benefit from the perspective of outside experts.

Accordingly, we convened experts in archives, libraries, and digital history from nonprofits, public libraries, and four major universities to examine the Forest History Society as a specialty library. They learned about FHS and its history, toured the new headquarters, met the staff, and made recommendations for the future. When the pandemic hit, our consultant, Association Options, Inc., helped us pivot to an online approach. Throughout, the Society's leaders

continued asking questions that pushed us to consider things we didn't know that we didn't know.

We held focus group interviews, and board member Matthew Booker helped compile the results of a dynamic interaction. Brooke Andrade, Library Director for the National Humanities Center, remarked, "I truly enjoyed spending the day with you, your staff, and my fellow panel participants. It was inspiring. Your building is gorgeous, and your staff is beyond impressive. I am blown away by how much work can get done by a handful of smart, hard-working people. I look forward to coming out to an FHS event in the future."

A report on inclusivity, prepared under the leadership of FHS board members Michelle Steen-Adams and Doug MacCleery, was a special focus of the strategic planning discussions. Its recommendations, the result of a two-year board effort with input from members and staff, affirmed the Society's commitment to "documenting the diversity of peoples' relationships and experiences with forests through time, and encouraging all individuals and groups to share their stories and perspectives." Future efforts will build on the Society's strong record of featuring the stories of underrepresented social groups in our scholarly journal *Environmental History*, *Forest History Today* magazine, online resources like the blog *Peeling Back the Bark*, and archival collections.

The first draft of the new strategic plan has identified five primary goals. Led by board members Doug Decker and Dan Christensen, the Strategic Planning Team has named



five committees, consisting of board members and FHS staff, to review each goal and identify strategies, tactics, and performance measures by the end of March 2021. After review and reconciliation by the Strategic Planning Team, the new strategic plan should be ready for approval at the April 2021 board meeting.

In advance of this successful output, I want to thank all the FHS members, staff, directors, and outside partners who have participated in the process. You have played a meaningful role in the future direction of the Forest History Society. Your work is an example of great potential that comes when like-minded people deeply connect around a shared sense of purpose and values, ultimately choosing to co-create the future of their organization.

Although 2020 has been challenging, I'm proud of what we have accomplished and am eager to embrace the future. I'll mention just two of our upcoming highlights: in 2021 we'll celebrate our 75th anniversary by hosting a lecture series, and we'll observe the second National Day of Giving for Forest History on June 12. Here's to a bright future for all!