

EUGENE CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY



Work Session: Eugene Public Library of the Future

Meeting Date: November 24, 2014
Department: Library, Recreation, and Cultural Services
www.eugene-or.gov/library

Agenda Item Number: B
Staff Contact: Connie Bennett
Contact Telephone Number: 541-682-5363

ISSUE STATEMENT

This is a summary report to the council regarding Eugene's library services: the current status of the Eugene Public Library and what Eugeneans anticipate as their library needs of the future, including an assessment of the challenges and opportunities.

BACKGROUND

In the past 15 years, Eugene has thoughtfully and strategically invested in excellence in library services, to the benefit of the entire community. Inspired by the long-range community vision of library services and facilities crafted by the Mayor's Library Improvement Committee in 1998, the City Council authorized a new main library for Eugene. Funding sources were Urban Renewal funds, sale of excess City property (primarily the old main library), and a \$5 million capital campaign by the Eugene Public Library Foundation. The new Downtown Library has been serving the community since December 26, 2002.

The Mayor's Library Improvement Committee also recommended the need to pursue increased operating funds for the new main library, as well as establishing branch libraries in the Bethel and Sheldon neighborhoods. In 1998, the first of three local option levies was approved by Eugene voters to supplement General Fund support of library services:

- FY99-03 levy, \$0.28/\$1000 of assessed value, 64 percent approval. Funded Sunday hours at the main library, opened two neighborhood branches, supported increased staffing needed for larger main building.
- FY04-07 levy, \$0.50/\$1000 of assessed value, 56 percent approval. Continued services and expanded access (increased open hours) at all three locations. This second levy provided 51 percent of the library's operating budget.
- FY08-11 levy, \$0.23/\$1000 of assessed value, 52 percent approval. This was intended as a transition to full funding by the General Fund. Since FY12, library services have been fully funded by the General Fund, requiring reductions in services.

Reductions to the downtown and branch libraries since FY10 have totaled approximately \$2 million annually, including elimination of 20 FTE and reduction of ongoing funding to maintain the Library's collections. Of significant impact to citizens were the FY13 reduction of Bethel Branch Library hours by more than 50 percent and reduction of Sheldon Branch Library hours by more

than 50 percent. FY15, additional reductions were closure of the Downtown Library on Sunday mornings and shifting support for the Sheldon Branch Library to one-time funding for FY15.

Overview of the Current Eugene Public Library

Currently, the Eugene Public Library's services are highly rated by the local community as well as nationally. Earlier this month, in its 2014 rankings, *Library Journal* named the Eugene Public Library a "Star Library" for the fifth time. The designation, based on FY12 data, means the Eugene Public Library has been within the top three percent of public libraries nationwide for excellence in cost-effective delivery of key library services for six years (FY07-12).

With the reductions experienced since FY10, the Eugene Public Library faces significant challenges in finding ways to continue to provide the services which are most highly valued by the community. Most library use numbers are down. In FY14, the Eugene Public Library served over 3,000 visitors daily and processed nearly three million check-outs. The Library provided more than 1,800 programs, ranging from storytimes to classes to entertainment with approximately 55,000 community members of all ages attending these free events. Monthly, the Library's three locations provided over 75,000 wireless sessions and 18,000 Internet computer user sessions. The Library's collections continue to deteriorate, with long waits especially for such high demand items as current DVDs and best sellers. The numbers for check-outs and visits have flattened with the shortened hours at all locations; in addition, Internet computer sessions are down by more than half at each of the neighborhood branches due to the 60 hours of reduced access. Wireless sessions and circulation of e-books, however, are both increasing dramatically at all locations.

Through strategic partnerships, the increased use of volunteers, grants, and reallocating existing resources, the Library has been able to focus on critical services:

- "Storytime To Go" early literacy outreach to preschool and daycare facilities
- "Dolly Parton's Imagination Library" providing a book to keep each month to children under five, with funding by the Eugene Public Library Foundation
- Increased homebound delivery and new deposit collection locations for seniors
- "Lucky Day" providing increased access to new popular materials

In addition, in response to community needs, resources have been shifted toward providing more digital services, such as public Internet computers, wireless, and computer literacy classes at all three locations, as well as the 24/7 "virtual branch" which offers premium research tools and downloadable digital material, such as e-books, e-magazines, video, and music. The Library also offers 24/7 reference assistance through "Ask a Librarian" chat.

A vision for the Eugene Public Library of the Future

In October 2014, the Library engaged the community in a visioning process about the "Eugene Public Library of the Future" (Attachment A). Participants, representing diverse demographics and viewpoints within the community, reached a consensus that "Eugene Public Library has been and will continue to be a center of our community, a community that values learning and opportunity for all of its residents."

Community members recognized local library services as "being aligned with and in service of the values central to Eugene residents: learning, open-mindedness, fairness, diversity, making

informed decisions, inclusiveness, and more.” Participants in these conversations identified the following service priorities as the most critical to the Eugene of the future:

- Create young readers: early literacy
- Connect to the online world: public internet access
- Satisfy curiosity: lifelong learning
- Stimulate imagination: reading, viewing, and listening for pleasure
- Visit a comfortable place: physical and virtual spaces

Results of this local process align well with national trends and a parallel national conversation, “Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries” (Attachment B). It’s not surprising; the digital era has produced remarkable changes and challenges in everyday life – for the individual as well as for communities, locally as well as globally. Both the local and national conversations reached the same conclusions – with vision and community investment, public libraries are uniquely positioned to provide access, skills, context, and trusted platforms for local residents to adapt as they transition to a new economy in which knowledge and creativity are the drivers of productivity and economic growth.

The Mayor’s Library Improvement Committee planning was done in the late 1990’s, at a time when only 10 percent of the population had Internet access, and few envisioned the impact of the networked and connected information age. Some of the community’s library service needs have endured for the intervening decades – such as providing early literacy skills so Eugene children are prepared to learn as they enter kindergarten, and providing a safe and welcoming public space. However, as the community looks forward towards 2025, community members identified some of the key challenges that Eugene Public Library is not currently doing well:

- Space: space is not currently adequate for services for teens or for public programs; in addition, the community has requested a Makerspace program to develop new skills, which needs more space and space that can be arranged more flexibly
- Branches: with only two branches, there are many underserved Eugene neighborhoods; there are exciting possibilities for partnerships with other organizations to make library services more accessible to residents in all areas, which perhaps could build on the exploration of 20-minute neighborhoods
- Hours: reduced open hours limit convenient access by citizens with varying needs, such as preschoolers, working families, and older adults; reduced hours particularly curtails access to the Internet and wi-fi by those most in need; neighborhood branch operations are currently more costly per hour as staff and volunteers struggle to meet community needs
- Technology: within budget limitations, it is challenging to provide information in all formats, such as e-books and other digital content; the Library is challenged to provide affordable, universal broadband delivery; there is also more need to provide training in digital literacy skills, particularly for older adults

While the Eugene Public Library has creatively used community partnerships, volunteers, and grants to extend General Fund support, staff are falling short of providing the library services the community needs to compete and thrive in the globally networked world, now and into the future. The new knowledge economy and the associated creation economy is a setting in which the successful individual will be an “entrepreneurial learner” in order to navigate, create and innovate in this new environment. As Eugene considers funding library services into the future, there is an opportunity to address the identified challenges in a way that aligns resources with these future service needs.

Triple Bottom Line Assessment

Social Equity Access to library services has a documented positive impact on social mobility and economic prosperity, supporting literacy development, information, and cultural opportunities for all ages and socio-economic levels, as well as digital inclusion through access to technology. More than half of Eugene children currently enter kindergarten without the early literacy skills for success; several library programs and services address this directly. The most effective route to increased individual economic prosperity is through education; public libraries provide the resources needed for individuals seeking to change and improve their lives. Among the transformative social changes are new information and learning environments in which knowledge is no longer stable over many years and skills become quickly obsolete.

Environmental Health The community’s investment into a library collection that is borrowed, used, and reused is a model of environmental sustainable practice. The efficient courier distribution system via library branches reduces community use of fossil fuels. A robust “virtual branch” providing digital services, neighborhood branch libraries, and deposit collections housed by partner agencies, all provide increased access to library services with minimal impact on community use of fossil fuels.

Economic Prosperity The Downtown Library is one of the drivers of economic prosperity in the downtown core, bringing an average of 2,800 people downtown daily. Library resources and programs assist community members in finding jobs, developing successful local businesses, and learning new skills.

RELATED CITY POLICIES

Eugene Public Library plays a vital role in achieving a number of the City Council’s goals, particularly contributing to:

- A Safe Community where all people are safe, valued, and welcome, including a greater sense of safety (especially downtown).
- Sustainable Development, including support for small and local business and providing the means for economic and social equity.
- Accessible and Thriving Culture and Recreation, accessible to all incomes and serving as an economic engine leading to greater vitality and success for the whole community.

COUNCIL OPTIONS

1. Do nothing at this time; accept the level of service currently provided.
2. Request that the City Manager bring back funding options for City Council consideration to sustainably operate the Library of the Future.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager recommends that the council request the City Manager to develop funding options for City Council FY16 consideration to invest in the Eugene Public Library of the Future and to sustainably operate the services.

SUGGESTED MOTION

Move to request the City Manager to develop funding options for City Council FY16 consideration to invest in the Eugene Public Library of the Future and to sustainably operate the services.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Library of the Future Summary Report
- B. Aspen Institute "Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries" Executive Summary

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Staff Contact: Connie Bennett
Telephone: 541-682-5363
Staff E-Mail: connie.j.bennett@ci.eugene.or.us