

Multnomah County Library District 2022-23 Hearing Minutes

Wednesday, June 1, 2022

10:30 a.m.

Multnomah Building 501

SE Hawthorne Blvd.

Portland, Oregon

Present:

TSCC:

Chair Harmony Quiroz, Commissioner Margo Norton, Commissioner James Ofsink, Commissioner Mark Wubbold, Commissioner Matt Donahue, Executive Director Allegra Willhite, and Budget Analyst Tunie Betschart

Absent: None

Multnomah County:

Multnomah County Board of Commissioners: Chair Deborah Kafoury, Commissioner Sharon Meieran, Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson, Commissioner Susheela Jayapal, and Commissioner Lori Stegmann

Staff: Library Director Vailey Oehlke

Chair Harmony Quiroz opened the public hearing and skipped introductions because the Multnomah County hearing preceded this hearing with the same attendees except for Vailey Oehlke, who introduced herself.

She asked Vailey Oehlke to briefly comment on the Library District's Approved Budget. Ms. Oehlke recommended moving to public comment and the questions.

Chair Quiroz asked if anyone had signed up to give public comment. Executive Director Willhite reported that no citizens signed up to speak at this hearing, and no written comments were received, so Chair Quiroz began the TSCC questions.

TSCC questions:

Commissioner Ofsink asked the following questions:

The budget includes a commitment to equity and identifies goals for further work in this area. What is working well so far? What goals do you anticipate will further evolve or be recalibrated?

County Commissioner Susheela Jayapal answered, saying Multnomah County Library is working to create a system that equitably nurtures, empowers, and lifts staff, patrons, and the community. The library has made significant progress in staffing. Here are some examples:

- One-fourth of budgeted positions have knowledge, skills, and abilities related to language or culture.

- Managers of color represent about one-third of library managers.
- The represented staff of color also account for about one-third of regular represented positions.

Staff in the organization are increasingly employing equity tools to determine the impact of adding or removing programs and services to ensure equity is at the forefront. The library recently created a community engagement team to seek out and amplify the voices of historically marginalized communities as it shapes programs and services.

Commissioner Donahue asked the following questions:

We've heard in the news about security concerns from library staff. What is the library planning to do about these concerns? What strategies are you working on to preserve a welcoming library that is safe for patrons and employees?

Library Director Vailey Oehlke said this had been a concern for some time. Over the years, the district has invested more resources to ensure the safety and security of patrons and staff.

The library has increased the number of safety and security staff supporting public locations through budget modifications in the fiscal year 2022, including five positions to replace the services previously provided by the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office at Central Library and three more in other parts of the system. The library's proposal for the fiscal year 2023 includes additional resources for contracted crisis intervention staffing at Central Library to be used for:

- Increasing security staffing
- Hiring a security manager that will coordinate with a new County security manager position
- Increasing crisis worker hours at Central Library
- Improving facilities, including cameras in every public library location
- Adding new training position dedicated to safety and security to help support staff training with de-escalation, active shooter scenarios, and other safety needs

Commissioner Ofsink asked this follow-up question:

How do you tie enhanced security to the equity efforts that you discussed earlier?

Ms. Oehlke said maintaining the focus on equity is a significant priority for the district. Examples of the efforts to incorporate equity into the security enhancements include:

- Assessing whether uniforms for contract security are necessary and how to make sure welcoming spaces are created
- Making investments in training for staff to help them effectively deescalate situations and to stay focused on the behavior of a patron
- Strengthening and building relationships with patrons to maintain a welcoming environment where patrons can be successful

Commissioner Norton asked these questions:

Pre-pandemic, the library system had been increasing its services targeted to houseless populations. With the reopening of library services, what does this service array look like today? What additional efforts is the library making in FY 2022-23?

County Commissioner Lori Stegmann said work with the houseless population has continued

throughout the pandemic. Some services have changed to address emerging needs. The youth librarian position has been modified and is now a teen librarian position focusing on serving LGBTQ+ teens experiencing houselessness.

The Mobile & Partner Libraries team continues distributing new and retired library books to shelters. The library also reallocated one FTE Library Assistant position to support the Central Library's work with the houseless community. The library community engagement team will also fill a vacant program specialist position to focus on engagement with individuals experiencing homelessness and organizations serving homeless populations.

Chair Quiroz asked the following questions:

As patrons return to libraries after the closures during the pandemic, how are things different? What long-term changes or opportunities have arisen from the pandemic challenges?

Commissioner Sharon Meieran responded by saying there is a greater need to connect patrons with resources and other professionals that can help at a single service point, rather than simply sharing information and resources. The pandemic is not over, and the library is experiencing staffing shortages due to staff being out with COVID or taking care of family members exposed to the virus.

Long-term opportunities include connecting with the Multnomah County Health Department's Behavioral Health Unit to ensure more seamless services.

The library anticipates continuing some virtual programming in the long term. While the library is excited to return to in-person programming, virtual programming will continue as long as patrons demand this service.

Ms. Oehlke added one of the things the library staff learned during the pandemic was how quickly they could pivot.

The district used ARPA funding for a tech-mobile which they will be using where buildings are closing and to provide community services.

Commissioner Wubbold asked the following questions:

Library services have evolved considerably over the last decade and during the pandemic. Planning conversations about new library buildings have focused on ensuring flexibility to adapt to benefits that continue to evolve. How is flexibility reflected in the design of the spaces?

Chair Kafoury said they had learned even more about the benefits of flexible spaces, and project teams are using that knowledge to design new buildings. That includes areas that can be quickly and easily reconfigured for different needs, with fewer fixtures bolted to the floor. The library will use bond funds to purchase flexible furniture and fittings, storage, and service points that can easily be moved and adjusted as activities in those spaces change

The district can also use technology to do things differently, plan for future upgrades, serve people away from fixed stations, help them navigate with digital signage, and more.

Commissioner Ofsink asked the following questions:

Capital bond community engagement efforts have been organized around values of equity, transparency, justice, accessibility, information, and flexibility. We just asked you about how the value of flexibility is reflected in the design process. Can you give us some additional examples of how these values are reflected in decision-making for the capital projects?

Ms. Vailey Oehlke said the district is prioritizing time for deeper community engagement in every project to ensure that the needs and desires of the community, especially historically marginalized communities, help inform these spaces as much as possible.

Through the Library Capital Bond Projects, the bond team has an opportunity to support the library's pillars and priorities of safety, inclusivity, and health by installing multi- and single-stall all-user restrooms. All-user restrooms, particularly single-stall options, can better accommodate people who use mobility aids like wheelchairs and those who need privacy for cultural reasons or while preparing for religious prayer. Feedback from the community for Holgate and Midland led to an increased number of single-stall all-user restrooms for these above-mentioned cultural reasons, highlighting a flexible and equitable response in the decision-making for these bond projects. The single and multi-stall restrooms also provide better accessibility for those with a caregiver of a different gender. Additionally, all-user restrooms offer a safer and more welcoming space for transgender and non-binary people. These restrooms can reduce harassment and abuse and increase safety.

The library is prioritizing community rooms and spaces as part of these bond projects, particularly for Holgate and Midland as well as Albina and North Portland. Additionally, recognizing that access to these spaces is currently limited to when the library is open, the buildings are also planning on after-hour access for certain community rooms and areas. The library district has heard strong interest from the community in connecting these new spaces to the outdoors and is looking at how the district's open space is invitingly surrounding each building.

Commissioner Norton asked the following questions:

We are delighted to see progress on what is now called the Preface project, the Operations Center, ready for construction this summer. And planning and designs on the four Chapter 1 projects are well underway. At the TSCC bond hearing before the November 2020 election, future costs were a lively topic: how would the library react to a changing cost environment. What have you experienced in this first project? What is your cost update for the full slate of projects, and how are you mitigating any cost changes?

Ms. Oehlke recognized the Program Management Office, saying they have been instrumental in monitoring the budget and ensuring the projects proceed as planned.

The Operations Center remains on budget and on schedule, as are most of the bond projects. The overall budget for all projects has increased by \$5.65 million to \$393 million as bond reserve dollars were committed to Albina and North Portland's projects to address seismic concerns and program alignment.

Funds in the Bond Premium Reserve are set aside for unexpected and unforeseen conditions, unusually high inflation rates, project budget gaps, unpredictable market conditions, and more. To use these Reserve funds, the project leaders must work with executives, the Chief Financial Officer, Chair of the Board of County Commissioners, and provide notice to the Board of County Commissioners at a board briefing.

Although there may be possible risks, including supply chain and inflation issues, that could impact the projects, the bond project team continues to evaluate and monitor these concerns while staying on schedule and on budget.

If escalating prices require changes to the initial design, how will you communicate this to a community with high expectations developed through the outreach process that kicked off the projects?

Ms. Oehlke said with the bond projects' robust community engagement efforts occurring throughout the life of each project, the bond team is committed to ensuring transparency at every step.

If escalating prices require changes to the initial design, the bond team will include this information and the reason behind the changes in the continuous planned engagement efforts so that district can provide updates to community members for each project. This includes emails to community organizations, website updates for a broader public audience, and reports and updates in public meetings.

Commissioner Donahue asked the following questions:

We see that the capital reserve fund has a substantial balance - we're curious what plans are for these dollars in the long term? What projects are you planning?

Ms. Oehlke said the library district capital fund had accrued additional resources recently due to pandemic underspending. That, coupled with expected changes to urban renewal areas over the next several years, has led to considerable forecasted growth in the capital fund.

The primary role of the money in this fund is to support the long-term health of the library district when the structural deficit eventually creates a negative operating balance. The district plans to use some funds for public benefit by spending on support for a limited number of capital project efforts to enhance the existing bond-funded projects or those starting in the not-too-distant future. This will allow the district to maximize those investments and continue to evolve library services to meet the needs of the community.

Projects in fiscal 2023 will include:

- Renovations to the front of Central Library to create a public terrace space
- Support for library spaces during bond transitions, including temporary services to the community during building closures
- A project to support offsite storage of infrequently used collections

Chair Quiroz thanked the County Commissioners and staff for the responses to the questions and contributions to the hearing. Then she closed the hearing and opened a regular meeting of the Tax Supervising and Conservation Commission to certify the County Library's 2022-23 Approved budget. She asked if the TSCC commissioners had any questions or comments to make concerning the budget. There were none.

Chair Quiroz asked Executive Director Allegra Willhite to give staff recommendations for the certification letter.

Ms. Willhite said staff found the budget estimates reasonable for the purposes stated and the budget to comply with Local Budget Law. She said staff have no recommendations or objections to the fiscal year 22-23 Approved Budget.

Chair Quiroz called for a motion.

Commissioner Wubbold moved to certify Multnomah County's Approved Budget with no recommendations or objections as recommended by staff. Commissioner Donahue seconded the motion, which passed with a unanimous vote of the commissioners.

There being no other business, Chair Quiroz closed the meeting.