

Multnomah County Library District Budget Hearing Questions
FY 2023 Library District Budget
For June 1, 2022 Budget Hearing

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

Response: Commissioner Jayapal (District 2)

- 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 designations related to language or culture.
 - Managers of color represent about one-third of library managers.
 - 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 that will seek out and amplify the voices of historically marginalized communities as it shapes programs and services.

2. 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?

Response: Library Director Vailey Oehlke

This has been a concern for some time - these challenges are not unique to the library - and over the years we have invested more resources to ensure the safety and security of our patrons and staff.

The library has increased the number of safety and security staff supporting public locations through budget modifications in FY 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 FY 2023 includes additional resources for contracted crisis intervention staffing at Central Library.

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

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

Maintaining our focus on equity is a major priority for us as we think through all the complexities around safety and security. Examples of our efforts to incorporate equity into our security enhancements include:

- Assessing whether we need uniforms for our contract security, and how we can make sure we are creating welcoming spaces.
- Making investments in training for our 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.

3. 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?

Response: Commissioner Stegmann (District 4)

- 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 with a focus on serving LGBTQ+ teens experiencing houselessness.
- We also reallocated one 1.0 FTE Library Assistant position to support our Central Library's work with the houseless community.
- The Mobile & Partner Libraries team continues to distribute new and retired library books to shelters.
- The library community engagement team will also fill a vacant program specialist position to focus on engagement with individuals experiencing houselessness and organizations that serve houseless populations.

4. As patrons return to libraries after the closures during the pandemic, how are things different? What are long-term changes or opportunities that have grown out of the pandemic challenges?

Response: Commissioner Meieran (District 1)

- 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.
- Additionally, 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 that have been 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 be continued as long as there is patron demand for this service.

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

Response: Chair Kafoury

- We've learned even more about the benefits of flexible spaces and project teams are using that knowledge in the design of new buildings.
- That includes spaces that can be quickly and easily reconfigured for different needs (with fewer fixtures bolted to the floor).
- We 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.
- 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 - within the day, week, month or the more long term.

6. 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?

Response: Library Director Vailey Oehlke

- We are prioritizing time for deeper community engagement in every project in order 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, for instance, 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.
- Both the single and multi-stall restrooms also provide better accessibility for those who have a caregiver of a different gender. Additionally, all-user restrooms provide 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 spaces.
- We have heard a strong interest from the community in connecting these new spaces to the outdoors and are looking at how we landscape open space surrounding each building in an inviting way.

7. 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 prior to 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?

Response: Library Director Vailey Oehlke

- 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, unanticipated market conditions and more. In order 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 which could impact the projects, the bond project team continues to evaluate and monitor these concerns while staying on schedule and on budget.

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

- With the bond projects' robust community engagement efforts occurring throughout the life of each project, the bond team is committed to centering the community's voice and needs for this work in addition to ensuring transparency at every step.
- If escalating prices require changes to initial design, the bond team will include this information (and reason behind the changes) in the continuous planned engagement efforts so that we can provide updates to community members we are speaking to for each project. This includes emails to community organizations and members we have met with, website updates for a broader public audience and report outs and updates in public meetings.

8. 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?

Response: Library Director Vailey Oehlke

- The library district capital fund has 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 a large 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 is planning to use some funds for public benefit by spending on support for a limited number of capital project efforts to enhance the bond-funded projects that are underway or 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 FY 2023 will include: renovations to the front of Central to create a public terrace space, support for library spaces during bond transitions including temporary services to the community during building closures, and a project to support offsite storage of infrequently used collections.

9. We are hearing about staffing issues across many industries. Is your organization being impacted? Are you having any challenges with recruitment and retention? If so, how are you addressing these challenges? What's working well?

Response: Commissioner Vega Pederson (District 3)

- The library hasn't experienced significant retention issues, but MCL has experienced difficulties filling bilingual and cultural competency positions, particularly librarian positions. Past recruitments saw higher numbers of more qualified applicants for these positions prior to the pandemic. For example, in the past few months, the library has had to open a bilingual Spanish librarian recruitment multiple times due to the small number of qualified applicants received for the position.

They are addressing these recruitment challenges by conducting national recruitments; posting the job announcements on various national library job specific websites; posting job opportunities on MCL's social media pages; and having recruiters attend library-specific conferences to promote job opportunities.

The library has also created librarian trainee opportunities, which allows current employees and candidates who are attending library school the opportunity to be hired into a librarian trainee position, while they are working on receiving their master's degree in library information science. Once they receive their degree and complete our training

program that we design for them, they are officially hired into a librarian position. The librarian trainee program has worked well for the organization.

- *Follow up question:* Did the reclassification of clerks to library assistants make a difference?

The library has not started the process of reclassifying clerks to library assistants; they hope to start this process in the next few months.

The library believes that restructuring these positions into a newly proposed position that combines the duties of the clerk and library assistant positions will allow more flexibility in scheduling staff in library locations because there will be more staff who can perform a wider range of work tasks. It will also provide staff with greater variety in terms of their work.