

Library Advisory Board Minutes: December 12, 2023For Multnomah County Library Advisory Board

The Multnomah County Library Advisory Board (LAB) met virtually on Tuesday, December 12, 2023. The meeting began at 5:03 pm.

Board members present were: Danielle Pacifico-Cogan, David Jarvis, Domiè Newton, Gabie Mbenza-Ngoma, Hazel Burke, Jade Chan, Kate Fleming, Kelsey Fong, Kristi Ketchum, Mabel Reed, Madison Riethman, Megan Parrott, and Nikia Kae Solbjor.

Cassie Duprey, Clare Wilkinson, Lizzie Martinez, and Taryn Sauer were unavailable.

Staff members present were: Annie Lewis, deputy director, Dave Ratliff, integrated services director; Katie Shifley, finance and facilities manager; Jen Studebaker, community services director; Jon Worona, director of innovation and technology; Kirby McCurtis, location services director; Maddelyn High, management analyst; Sonja Ervin, equity and inclusion manager; and Vailey Oehlke, director of libraries.

Commissioner Lori Stegmann, District 4, Multnomah County; and Jeff Renfro, county economist, were also in attendance.

WELCOME & CHECK-IN

Meeting attendees joined the virtual meeting either via video or phone and participated in a warm-up exercise in virtual breakout rooms.

BOARD BUSINESS

Meeting minutes for the November 14, 2023 meeting were approved.

UPDATES FROM LIBRARY LEADERSHIP

Library Director Vailey Oehlke shared recent systemwide updates, including:

- Release of a [library performance audit](#) from the county auditor's office: Oehlke shared appreciation for these recommendations, noting that the library has spent years addressing some of the issues highlighted (like security and staffing models); as the landscape has evolved, so has the library's response. Re-envisioning staffing for new library spaces (post bond) is a big component of the library's recent work. Oehlke encouraged LAB members to read the [audit response letter](#), and thanked Commissioner Stegmann for her understanding of the complicated environment in which MCL and other county departments deliver public services. Commissioner Stegmann noted that the bond, on top of a pandemic, has created big changes and challenges, and she lauded the library's continued commitment to creating a welcoming place that meets community needs.

- Ohelke also summarized a recent meeting room request at Hollywood Library from a membership group. While this group's request met library meeting room reservation requirements, while monitoring social media ahead of the event, there were many concerns voiced about this group (as well as threats of protest and violence). In the interest of safety and in coordination with PPB and county security, the library opted to close the Hollywood Library. The morning of the event, 50-60 protesters showed up to protest the presence of the group. The group opted to not hold their event in the library and to instead hold banners on the sidewalk. This event has resulted in a lot of internal conversation about intellectual freedom and first amendment rights while also serving and protecting those community members who are marginalized. These conversations will continue.

In response to a question about meeting room use, Oehlke shared that meeting room requests and reservations are not published unless an event is a library-sponsored event. However, these records are public records. Oehlke reminded that if you or your group reserve a room at the library, that meeting is open to the public. Oehlke also noted that MCL is in the process of updating meeting room policies, mostly in light of new spaces created as a result of the bond, but also in light of issues related to intellectual freedom and constitutional rights. Integrated Services Director Dave Ratliff added that MCL is not the only library grappling with these issues, noting that MCL is in contact with peers at other library systems, on college campuses, and elsewhere with organizations that serve the public.

BUDGET BASICS TRAINING

Finance & Facilities Manager Katie Shifley (she/her) joined and introduced herself, sharing an agenda for LAB's annual budget basics training ahead of the Community Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC) process. The training began with an icebreaker focused on sharing various perspectives, at different levels, with budgeting (personal, business, and governmental).

Shifley explained that the library's budget is a moral document that lays out what the organization's priorities are. Local government budgets set service levels and match strategic goals to resources, and provide transparency. MCL's budget is guided by its [strategic plan goals](#).

Shifley shared MCL budget milestones (including formation of the District in 2012), and information about the library's unique funding structure (Library District Fund vs. County Library Fund); a comparison of the library's budget over time; and what elements comprise the library's budget. The majority (about two-thirds) of MCL's budget is staffing and benefits; followed by internal services (primarily facilities and IT expenses); materials and supplies (from books to office supplies); and contracted services. Bond proceeds are budgeted in a separate fund overseen by the Bond Program Management Office (PMO).

MCL's budget is structured into two divisions: administration and public services. Within these two divisions are program offers, which is how county departments describe the programs and services they offer. The county budget cycle runs from November (development of base budgets) to June (formal budget adoption).

County Economist Jeff Renfro (he/him) joined to share an overview of the library's financial

forecast, which tells the library what resources it can expect to have in a given year, as well as information about its long-term financial health. Renfro shared that the library district collects property taxes, and this is its primary source of income. The library's financial outlook is dependent on the rate at which property tax revenue grows versus the rate at which personnel and other expenses grow. Renfro shared that Multnomah County can expect a long period of lower property tax income (due to the slowed rate of development, as indicated by permitting). On the expense side, inflation drives library personnel expenses like COLA (cost of living adjustments) and PERS (retirement). Together, these things result in a structural deficit — meaning that, over the long term, personnel costs will grow faster than property tax revenue, although there are a lot of factors that can influence this one way or another in a particular year.

Renfro shared key facts about library revenues and expenses:

- The maximum tax rate MCL can levy is \$1.24 per \$1,000 of assessed property tax value. Right now, MCL levies \$1.22 and receives ~ a million dollars for every cent the levy is raised.
- The tax district was originally envisioned to provide sufficient funding for library operations for 10 years. We're now into the second decade of the District.
- There is a structural operating deficit inherent to the library's funding model: ongoing library expenses will eventually outpace available revenue. Costs for the library's budgeted positions (wages, insurance, retirement) have outpaced typical revenue growth in recent years. Financial practices and policies are geared toward delaying this deficit.
- Recently, MCL has experienced underspending due mostly to the pandemic and vacancies related to library buildings being closed for bond upgrades. This trend is expected to slow as vacancies fill leading up to the opening of new/renovated buildings.

Shifley closed by sharing the framework for this year's budget development, which has been shared with managers. Parameters for this year include:

- Budgeting for ongoing costs of upgraded facilities and technology as a result of the bond
- Holding off on major new FTE changes, pending the library's ongoing Future Staffing Initiatives planning and evaluation work; and holding materials and services budgets flat to adjust for rising technology and facilities costs in out years
- Making limited, strategic investments to address items in the 2023–2025 Strategic Plan
- Identifying support needed for library locations and services coming online during FY 25 (Holgate, Midland, North Portland, and Albina libraries) and the first full year of the new Library Operations Center

Oehlked and others thanked Shifley and Renfro for making this information fun and accessible.

ACTION ITEMS + CLOSING

LAB liaison Maddelyn High asked folks to be on the lookout for meeting polls for LAB's first committee meetings in 2024. The meeting adjourned at 6:14 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Maddelyn High, director's assistant
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