

Introduction

In addition to providing citizen oversight of Measure Q and Measure D funding, the City of Oakland's Library Advisory Commission (LAC) is dedicated to supporting the Oakland Public Library's (OPL) active and vital role as an integral part of Oakland through advocating for and publicizing the programs, outreach and activities of its 18 locations. Serving as an open liaison between the Library Administration, the Mayor and City Council, and the citizens of Oakland, the LAC both supports existing library programs and, as required by Ordinance No. 8064 C.M.S which established the Library Advisory Commission in 1969, "integrate[s] the activities of the commission with the City's overall goals and objectives."

In 2018, the Library Advisory Commission created a Strategic Plan which clarified its goals and its ongoing committee structure. This year, we significantly revised it to align with new challenges and opportunities facing the Commission and OPL as our city continues to evolve. The two standing committees are a Sustainability Committee (dedicated to overseeing the timing and strategy of ballot measures and other funding structures, maintaining oversight of the OPL Library budget and leading efforts in the LAC communication with elected officials) and an Outreach Committee (whose focus is to lead relationship-building with other advocacy groups, manage public messaging (including social media and public events) and educate the public at large about OPL services and programs.) Together, while adding additional ad hoc committees as needed, the LAC works towards these strategic goals:

GOAL 1: Establish long-term financial sustainability for Oakland Public Library.

GOAL 2: Increase public awareness of Oakland Public Library's financial situation, need for a new Main Library, programs and services.

GOAL 3: Plan and advocate for expansion of the library system and services.

GOAL 4: Maintain LAC infrastructure to sustain a robust commission.

This report will discuss how the Commission has fulfilled its roles before and during the COVID-19 outbreak of 2020. Even though we were forced to conduct our business virtually after the shelter-in-place orders halted in-person meetings, our 2020 accomplishments show we were undeterred in our mission to meet and exceed expectations. In group and individual capacities as Commissioners, we continued to support, represent, and raise awareness of the needs of Oakland's branch libraries, library system and neighborhoods in our continuing advocacy.

Long-Term Financial Stability

As set out in our authorizing ordinance, the LAC continues to be focused on the sustainable and responsible expenditure of taxpayer dollars. While there were some positive developments in this area, we also identified some areas where future assistance from the City Council would be greatly appreciated.

We were pleased to review the City Auditor's most recent audit of Measure Q and Measure D expenditures in early 2021 and are glad that the audit shows that all special tax funds are being spent exactly as intended by the voters. Fiscal oversight remains a key priority of the LAC and we have scheduled more frequent interim financial reports from OPL staff to closely monitor future library expenditures. While we appreciate the thoroughness of the City Auditor's most recent audit, we are concerned that multiple years' worth of annual audits are grouped together. This could create a mistaken public impression that the mandated oversight by the City Auditor did not take place and could delay corrective action in the event of a problem being identified. While the OPL is a very low risk city department, we encourage the City Council to ensure the City Auditor's office has the resources to conduct more regular audits.

The longer-term financial sustainability of the OPL remains a second key priority for the LAC. One of the City Auditor's findings in her most recent audit was that Measure D and Measure Q were both necessary for adequate library service delivery. We look forward to working with the City Council to renew Measure Q in the 2022 election cycle, as this measure is approaching its sunset date. We also look forward to working with the City Council to support the Build America's Libraries Act, a federal bill that proposes spending \$5 Billion on building and modernizing public libraries. The legislation would include a particular focus on serving disadvantaged communities, which we hope would make Oakland competitive for these funds. One remaining area of concern on the part of the LAC is the funding provided to the Public Works Department for the purpose of maintaining OPL facilities. While we have been grateful for their department leadership's willingness to discuss the OPL maintenance backlog, we have consistently noticed a shortage of custodial staff and a delay in upkeep. We believe this is related to a shortage of staff and resources in the Public Works Department, and we encourage the City Council to take appropriate action to remedy these financial challenges. The LAC is concerned that the uneven quality of library maintenance has a significant negative impact on the client experience and saps public confidence in OPL.

City-Wide Advocacy and Vision

Our ongoing recruitment of diverse members has resulted in a Commission with a remarkable range of life experiences, representing 6 out of 7 Council Districts in Oakland. In light of a recent vacancy, we are reaching out to Councilmember Taylor's office to gain District 6 representation on the Commission. More broadly, we have happily managed to maintain a mix of race, age, gender, orientation and personal experience that reflects the diversity of Oakland. To bolster our ongoing desire for diverse representation and ensure that branch libraries without the support of a branch Friends group have equitable advocacy, our current group of Commissioners has opted to monitor individual branches, in addition to working on system-wide goals.

This year, the Commission continued work we began in 2016 to advocate for the need for a new or expanded Main Library as part of the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan. In addition to attending community meetings, the Commission submitted a detailed comment letter to City

staff to explicitly address how the Main Library aligns with most of the strategic areas in the plan. We are particularly concerned that there is no set-aside of resources to support the increased burden on library facilities due to tens of thousands of new downtown residents envisioned in the plan. In regards to the feasibility studies for the new or expanded Main Library and Hoover/Durant, we solicited updates and provided feedback to the OPL project manager and other key City personnel involved overseeing both projects. Finally, the Commission advocated that a surplus piece of OUSD property, a former Child Development Center, be used as the new permanent home of the Piedmont branch. We crafted and submitted a letter of support on behalf of this concept to the OUSD board. OUSD is currently conducting an RFP regarding a library use at the site and we are hopeful that they will decide to move forward with a joint-use agreement that would allow their building to be the home to the branch. This surplus property is immediately adjacent to the trailer that serves as the temporary Piedmont branch library. We are hopeful that funding for a full feasibility study on this potential facility will be included in this year's city budget.

Civic Engagement

Despite the challenges associated with the pandemic, the LAC has continued to make communication and civic engagement a priority in its work. In our ongoing branch-specific advocacy, Commissioners engage with Oakland's communities in discussions about library services and needs. From our annual OPL Advocates Holiday Mixer for library supporters each December, to our presence at in-person and online library events from movie screenings to author events, festivals to poetry competitions, we represent the city and its libraries. By training advocates to support the library, we hope to create a pool of civically engaged representatives who will promote the Library in a diversity of ways.

Due to the pandemic, we shifted the Library's annual mixer to a virtual public event. We were grateful to have 65 people participate in the event, including Councilmember Kalb and Mayor Schaaf. We have already begun planning for the 2021 mixer and look forward to inviting the full City Council to attend. The mixer was held in partnership with the Friends of the Oakland Public Library, an organization our Commissioners speak with on a monthly basis to keep each other informed of our work. To better maintain connections with the full spectrum of library supporters and stakeholders, the LAC is currently working on a relationship mapping project.

Some OPL highlights from the past year

- OPL saw an increase of 12,000 new users since the beginning of the shelter-in-place orders (March 2020).
- Programming since COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders has included virtual book clubs, curbside pick-up (over 332,000 items checked out), and expanded digital offerings (over 753,000 checkouts online). The OPL Youtube channel has featured multilingual storytimes for ages 0-5 as well as "how to" videos ranging from how to make a mask to how to search for early readers. A virtual edition of "lawyers in the library" provided free legal help to Oaklanders and the OPL partnered with AARP to provide virtual tax preparation assistance.

- In the realm of education, OPL staff coordinated the donation of 500 Wi-Fi Hotspots to support OUSD schools; enabled use of WiFi outside library locations (over 12,290 uses to date); launched Tutor.com, a free on-line tutoring program; and created educational resources with the school kids to provide kids and families help while learning from home
- In the public health domain, as Disaster Service Workers, staff coordinated COVID testing in East and West Oakland; phone-banked for senior citizens, signing them up for the Great Plates Delivered program; and managed food and produce distribution in 4 locations, providing over 100,000 meals.
- On April 19th, OPL debuted its OPL Express program, allowing limited indoor service at a select number of branches, further allowing the public to (re)build deeper relationships with some of their neighborhood branches.

In summary, the City of Oakland's Library Advisory Commission was able to realize many of its goals this year. We oversaw the financials regarding Measures Q and D, advocated for Oakland Public Library, and worked with City elected officials, City Administration and the public to help the Oakland Public Library fulfill its mission -to empower people of all ages to discover new worlds, meet their neighbors and develop into their very best selves.