

Contacting Electeds September 2021

Background:

Maintenance issues continue to plague the library. If they are not addressed – especially now that libraries have been reopening – Oakland citizens will have a poor library experience. This in turn will limit our ability to pass a new parcel tax when Measure Q expires.

In addition, we have been reviewing historical library allocations from the general fund (see attached excel spreadsheet) and the allocation for 2021-22 and 2022-23 fiscal years (1.82% and 1.87% respectively) are at almost historic lows, and are about 0.6% than the funding average of 2.4% over the past two decades. This 0.6% represents an underfunding of the library by over \$4.4M annually.

Objective:

By mid-September, every LAC member contacts their council member by email and/or in person with an update on the maintenance situation and a request for clarification on why the library continues to be underfunded, requesting information that can be shared at our Sept 27 LAC meeting.

Suggested email (modify as you wish – it's pretty long!):

Dear CM xxx:

As a member of the Library Advisory Commission (LAC), I'm asking for your help in two areas:

1. Clarifying why the percentage of general fund allocated to the library is at almost historic lows
2. Ensuring that recurring maintenance issues that threaten future library funding are addressed

For perspective, Measure Q expires in 2024 and a new measure will be put on the ballot in 2022. If a new measure does not pass, the library will lose \$17.3M or over a third of its budget and it will be hard to make this up through the general fund alone.

For a new measure to be successful we believe that

- a) residents who are being asked for more tax dollars must believe the library is being fairly funded → this means addressing the continued decline in OPL funding as a % of the general fund.
- b) residents must have a great experience at the library → this means addressing the maintenance issues; and

General Fund Funding of OPL

We very much appreciate that the council has restored OPL to the baseline minimum after having lost revenue through the COVID emergency declaration in the prior cycle, and that we saw a slight increase in the % of the general fund going to OPL in Fiscal Year 2022. We also recognize the great work of OPL in creating operating efficiencies which has helped create a strong fund balance. And we very much understand the myriad of challenges and priorities you face in creating a budget.

At the same time, over the past two decades, the percentage of the General Fund allocated to the library has been declining, and OPL's funding is \$4.8M less in Fiscal Year 2022 than one would expect from historical averages. Taxpayers intended Measures Q and D to supplement general fund funding, not replace it. For perspective,

- From Fiscal Year 2000 through Fiscal Year 2018, on average, the % of general fund funding allocated to OPL was 2.4%.
- In Fiscal Year 2019, the % of general fund funding allocated to OPL dropped below 2% for the first time, and has stayed below 2% - and well below historical averages – ever since

- Proposed funding for Fiscal Year 2022 is 1.82%. This is 0.6% less than the historical average, which translates to \$4.8M for Fiscal Year 2022.
- We cannot expect taxpayers to support a new tax measure unless the library is being adequately supported from the general fund.

At the September 27 LAC meeting, we'd like to discuss how we can better support OPL through the general fund, and the implications for renewing Measure Q.

Maintenance

For context, currently, OPW has 20 FT/ PPT custodian vacancies out of approximately 44 positions. OPL depends on custodial services, and when OPW has vacancies the libraries suffer. The recruitment process was moving forward earlier this year with 120 plus candidates that met the mandatory qualifications. The Dept. of Human Resources has restricted assessors *to outside candidates only* – so testing scheduled for earlier this year was cancelled. This policy of using outside assessors has prolonged the process and held up filling these critical positions.

The Dept. of Human Resources has rescheduled testing for end of August. is unable to find or retain outside assessors, please encourage them to move forward with the scheduled testing using internal assessors. We cannot cancel another testing and go a whole year without filling these positions.

The failure to fill positions forces OPW to use TPT staff to cover the vacancies. The TPT positions hit their maximum allotted hours (990 per year) earlier than planned and then must be laid off. This results in a lack of custodial coverage towards the end of the fiscal year which is what we experienced this year. If not addressed now, the library will be very short on custodial services in Spring/Summer 2022 - just before we go to the ballot for the renewal of Measure Q. This means patrons will have a poor experience just as they are being asked to approve spending more of their money on another ballot measure.

The Department of Human Resources Resources has rescheduled testing for end of August. **Can you please monitor the situation, and confirm with the LAC at our Septmeber 27th meeting that the testing has been completed, and let us know when the vacancies will be filled and how we prevent this situation going forward?**

Thanks for all you are doing to support OPL and our wonderful city of Oakland.

Respectfully,

Xxx

LAC Member

Talking points - Benefits of Library.

We're all grateful to Jamie and Kere and all of the OPL team who have gone above and beyond during the pandemic to help all Oakland residents, especially those that are most vulnerable. Some OPL highlights from the past year:

- **Users:** OPL saw an increase of 12,000 new users since the beginning of the shelter-in-place orders (March 2020).
- **Programming:** Programming since COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders has included virtual book clubs, curb-side 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. On April 19th, 2021, 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.
- **Legal and Tax:** 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.
- **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
- **Public health:** 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.

Talking points - Maintenance Issues.

We know that you care deeply about the people of Oakland – many of whom were struggling before Covid, and many more who are facing severe hardship during COVID. Libraries continue to provide critical services as a trusted community space. Our citizens support our libraries... they passed Ballot measures Q and D, as well as \$15M in dedicated capital funding from Measure KK. In return, they were promised both longer hours, which we've done, and a better library experience, which unfortunately we are falling short on.

Our libraries are not getting basic maintenance resources and we continue to have unmet capital needs. For example,

- Maintenance and custodial – which was especially bad before Covid shut down the buildings – includes things like not getting janitorial service on many days, so garbage cans fill up and smell, bathrooms are dirty and floors are sticky, toilets are broken causing people to relieve themselves outside. There's also a lot of illegal dumping which makes the library spaces unattractive and uninviting.
- Structural - for example no AC in some locations means we can't serve as a community center when there are wildfires; and because of basic electrical problems some of the branches can't even accommodate a fridge for staff lunches.
- When we've been in contact with Oakland Public Works, they say they can't provide sufficient service because (1) they have too many vacant positions in the maintenance, custodial and project delivery departments, and, (2) unlike the police, who have unlimited overtime, Public Works has strict limit on overtime which limits their ability to use the workers they have. Some of this is driven by ongoing challenges with how human resources recruits new staff, compounding this problem.
 - ⇒ As of August 2021, OPW has 20 FT/ PPT custodian vacancies out of approximately 44 positions.
 - ⇒ The recruitment process was moving forward earlier this year with 120 plus candidates that met the mandatory qualifications. The Dept. of Human Resources has restricted assessors *to outside candidates only* – so testing scheduled for earlier this year was cancelled. This policy of using outside assessors has prolonged the process and held up filling these critical positions. If the Dept. of Human Resources is unable to find or retain outside assessors, please encourage them to move forward with the scheduled testing using internal assessors.
 - ⇒ The failure to fill positions forces OPW to use TPT staff to cover the vacancies. The TPT positions hit their maximum allotted hours (990 per year) earlier than planned and then must be laid off. This results in a lack of custodial coverage towards the end of the fiscal year which is what we experienced this year. Less problematic when the libraries were not open, but the failure to fill these positions leaves the library short custodial services, creates a poor experience for patrons, and risks future library ballot funding.

Talking Points - Library Funding

- Library funding comes from three sources:
 - General Purpose Fund (GPF) = Fund 1010: The unrestricted revenue from miscellaneous taxes, fees and service charges
 - Measure Q Fund = Fund 2241: Approved in 2004, the restricted parcel tax revenue from the Library Services Retention and Enhancement Act, levied on real property in Oakland. The revenue may only be used in support of Library Services in Oakland. Measure Q sunsets in 2024
 - Measure D Fund = Fund 2243: Approved in 2018, the restricted parcel tax revenue from the Oakland Public Library Preservation Act, levied on real property in Oakland. The revenue may only be used in support of Library Services in Oakland.
 - These measures require a minimum appropriation from the general fund which can only be reduced by the same % as any non-safety budget cuts that are required in an extreme fiscal emergency. For more detail, see <https://oaklandlibrary.org/sites/default/files/lac/2020-07-27/LAC%20Attachment%20B%20-%20July%2027%2C%202020.pdf>

- Oakland taxpayers have regularly supported libraries – the public is enthusiastic for library measures:
 - Measure O (parcel tax) passed in 1994
 - It was renewed and extended as Measure Q in 2004 (which will sunset in 2024)
 - In 2018 Measure D also passed with a very strong 76%
 - We will need a new ballot measure in 2022 → to be successful, library patrons MUST have a good experience with the library, which means we need to maintain funding

- The percentage of the General Fund allocated to the library has been declining over the past two years. Taxpayers intended Measures Q and D to SUPPLEMENT general fund funding, not replace it.
 - From Fiscal Year 2000 through Fiscal Year 2018, the % of general fund funding allocated to OPL was 2.4%.
 - In Fiscal Year 2019, the % of general fund funding allocated to OPL dropped below 2% for the first time, and has stayed below 2% - and well below historical averages – ever since
 - Proposed funding for Fiscal Year 2022 is 1.82%. This is 0.6% less than the historical average, and is costing OPL over \$4.8M for Fiscal Year 2022.
 - We cannot expect taxpayers to support a new tax measure unless the library is being adequately supported from the general fund.