

Library Advisory Commission Annual Report to the Oakland City Council Life Enrichment Committee, 2023

Executive Summary

The past couple of years have been exciting for both the Oakland Public Library (OPL) and the Library Advisory Commission (LAC). In FY 21-22 (the most recent available) 923,751 library patrons borrowed 1,289,555 physical items and almost 500,000 virtual items. Over 127,000 attendees were educated, engaged, and amazed by over 4,500 digital and in person programs. The LAC was in turn closely engaged with fiscal oversight of the Measure C and D ballot measures and with exciting efforts to add or replace library facilities at the Main Library, Piedmont Avenue branch library, Hoover Durant, and San Antonio Park.

Despite these many successes and exciting opportunities, the LAC also noted significant concern over the financial future of the OPL. The City of Oakland's General Fund contribution to the OPL is not indexed for inflation, which represents a serious threat to the long term ability of this General Fund contribution to meet its current obligations without burdening the two parcel taxes. As the parcel taxes are themselves indexed for inflation, the City Council should amend the City's Consolidated Fiscal Policy to mandate indexing Maintenance of Effort contributions to inflation moving forward. This is the last piece in the puzzle to put the OPL on a long-term sustainable fiscal path and would represent an important decision to keep with the voters of Oakland who were adamant that the library parcel taxes not indirectly subsidize other portions of the City budget.

Introduction

The City of Oakland's Library Advisory Commission (LAC) provides citizen oversight of Measure C (formerly Measure Q) and Measure D funding. The LAC is also 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. The two standing committees of the LAC are a Sustainability Committee (dedicated to overseeing the effective delivery of library services, maintenance, and inter-departmental issues) and an Outreach Committee (whose focus is to lead relationship-building with other advocacy groups, electeds, and to 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 during the COVID-19 outbreak and how OPL operations have adapted to meet the needs of Oaklanders during these difficult times. 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.

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 work with the City Auditor to ensure her office has the capacity to audit Measure C and D annually.** In her most recent visit to the LAC, the City Auditor reported that she expected to begin work on her next audit of these ballot measures in fall 2023.

The longer-term financial sustainability of the OPL remains a second key priority for the LAC. The passage of Measure C by a resounding 82.3% of the Oakland voters in June 2022 extends Measure Q's parcel tax for an additional 30 years. This will provide a durable source of funding for library operations and, combined with Measure D, is intended to finally provide the OPL system with a measure of long-term financial stability.

However, while the parcel taxes that voters pay are indexed to inflation, the General Fund's "Maintenance of Effort" contribution to library operations is not indexed to inflation. This creates a risk that the Maintenance of Effort will lose ground to inflation over time and that the parcel taxes that support libraries will struggle to deliver on the expanded services and hours that the voters were promised when they approved the parcel taxes. This fear is not speculative- over the past 20 years, OPL Maintenance of Effort funding has not kept up with inflation, and the overall portion of the General Fund dedicated to the OPL has declined. **Only by amending the City's Consolidated Fiscal Policy to guarantee inflation adjustments to the Maintenance of Effort**

can the City Council keep faith with the overwhelming majority of voters who repeatedly backed library funding.

Another, albeit lesser, 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. We have been grateful for their department leadership's willingness to discuss OPL maintenance issues, and we continue to closely monitor this issue. We believe this is related to a shortage of staff and resources in the Public Works Department, and **we ask that the City Council provide adequate funding to the Public Works Department for them to fully staff library maintenance.** 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. Oakland residents deserve a library system that has working bathrooms at every location, is free from pest control problems, and that is cleaned on a regular basis.

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 Reid's office to gain District 7 representation on the Commission. More broadly, we have happily managed to maintain a mix of race, age, gender, sexual 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.

In addition to our ongoing work supporting the needs of branches across the City, the LAC is closely tracking four major branch-related projects. The Main Library and Hoover Durant feasibility studies are ongoing to identify solutions to rebuild or rehabilitate the Main Library and build a new location for the Hoover Durant library. The LAC has been concerned about delays in identifying project managers to support this project but are pleased that community engagement is ongoing. It has also been a productive year for efforts to establish a permanent Piedmont Avenue branch library adjacent to the Piedmont Avenue Elementary School at a former Child Development Center. Negotiations between the City and the Oakland Unified School District are ongoing for that location. Finally, the LAC was pleased to receive a visit from the advocates interested in including a new branch library at the revamped San Antonio Park. **Both Hoover Durant and San Antonio would make worthy additions to the OPL's offerings, but additional operating funding would be required to staff these additional branches.**

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 to our presence at in-person and online library events, 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.

As the pandemic begins to abate, the LAC was delighted to return to an in-person mixer in May 2023 at the Main Library. 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.

Some OPL highlights from the past year

In addition to its Main library, 16 neighborhood branches and African American Museum & Library at Oakland (AAMLO), the Oakland Public Library is expanding its effort to engage people in the community by making resources available online. The library provides free public access to technology - computers, high-speed Wi-Fi, hotspots, and laptops - to help bridge the digital divide. Facilities, programs and services for **FY 21-22** include:

- 1 main library and 16 neighborhood branches
- Second Start Adult Literacy Program
- Tool Lending Library
- African-American Museum and Library at Oakland
- 923,751 visits to Oakland Public Libraries (35,488 visits in FY20-21, low due to Covid)
- 2.2 million items in collection (no significant change from FY20-21)
- 2.5 million physical items checked out (1.3 million in FY20-21, low due to Covid)
- 490,869 e-materials checked out (1.16 million in FY20-21, high due to Covid)
- 4,549 live and virtual programs held (398 programs held in FY20-21, low due to Covid)
- 127,934 attendees to live and virtual programs (33,010 attendees to programs in FY20-21, low due to Covid)
- 168,467 uses of public internet computers (8,696 uses of in-house computers in FY20-21, low due to Covid)
- 1,194,657 virtual visits to the library website (1.4 million in FY20-21, high due to Covid)

Number of patrons who visited Oakland Public Library in fiscal year 21-22		Total
		923,751
<i>Library Location</i>	<i>Zip Code</i>	<i>Sub total</i>
AAMLO	94612	5,600
81 st Avenue Branch	94621	45,744
Asian Branch	94607	116,849
Brookfield Branch	94603	20,979

<i>Chavez Branch</i>	<i>94601</i>	<i>34,040</i>
<i>Dimond Branch</i>	<i>94602</i>	<i>68,624</i>
<i>Eastmont Branch</i>	<i>94605</i>	<i>42,028</i>
<i>Elmhurst Branch</i>	<i>94621</i>	<i>20,401</i>
<i>Golden Gate Branch</i>	<i>94608</i>	<i>24,706</i>
<i>Lakeview Branch</i>	<i>94610</i>	<i>34,400</i>
<i>Martin Luther King, Jr. Branch</i>	<i>94621</i>	<i>58,307</i>
<i>Melrose Branch</i>	<i>94601</i>	<i>17,200</i>
<i>Montclair Branch</i>	<i>94611</i>	<i>75,334</i>
<i>Piedmont Branch</i>	<i>94611</i>	<i>63,600</i>
<i>Rockridge Branch</i>	<i>94618</i>	<i>105,200</i>
<i>Temescal and Tool Lending</i>	<i>94609</i>	<i>58,195</i>
<i>West Oakland Branch</i>	<i>94607</i>	<i>8,430**</i>
<i>Main Library</i>	<i>94612</i>	<i>124,114</i>

(**likely a data collection error, too low based on circulation and past visitation statistics)

Number of physical items borrowed in fiscal year 21-22		Total
		1,289,555
<i>Library Location</i>	<i>Zip Code</i>	<i>Sub total</i>
<i>AAMLO</i>	<i>94612</i>	<i>886</i>
<i>81st Avenue Branch</i>	<i>94621</i>	<i>40,420</i>
<i>Asian Branch</i>	<i>94607</i>	<i>55,514</i>
<i>Brookfield Branch</i>	<i>94603</i>	<i>9,777</i>
<i>Chavez Branch</i>	<i>94601</i>	<i>44,214</i>
<i>Dimond Branch</i>	<i>94602</i>	<i>220,632</i>
<i>Eastmont Branch</i>	<i>94605</i>	<i>4,332</i>

<i>Elmhurst Branch</i>	<i>94621</i>	<i>4,969</i>
<i>Golden Gate Branch</i>	<i>94608</i>	<i>43,776</i>
<i>Lakeview Branch</i>	<i>94610</i>	<i>72,313</i>
<i>Martin Luther King, Jr. Branch</i>	<i>94621</i>	<i>14,678</i>
<i>Melrose Branch</i>	<i>94601</i>	<i>16,091</i>
<i>Montclair Branch</i>	<i>94611</i>	<i>117,027</i>
<i>Piedmont Branch</i>	<i>94611</i>	<i>45,866</i>
<i>Rockridge Branch</i>	<i>94618</i>	<i>253,193</i>
<i>Temescal and Tool Lending</i>	<i>94609</i>	<i>45,321</i>
<i>West Oakland Branch</i>	<i>94607</i>	<i>35,038</i>
<i>Main Library</i>	<i>94612</i>	<i>191,139</i>

Conclusion

The City of Oakland's Library Advisory Commission was able to realize many of its goals this year. We oversaw the financials regarding Measures C 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.