



# The Seattle Public Library

December 8, 2011

To: Councilmember Richard Conlin, Regional Development & Sustainability  
Committee Chair

Via: Beth Goldberg, City Budget Office Director

From: Marcellus Turner, City Librarian  
Marilynne Gardner, Chief Financial and Administrative Officer

Subject: **Potential Library Levy – Library Response to Statement of Legislative Intent**

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## Background

### Seattle Residents Use and Support Libraries

The Seattle Public Library is used broadly and frequently by Seattle residents, and plays an important role in many lives. Currently about 63% of Seattle residents hold Seattle Public Library cards, a proportion that exceeds the national average of 56% for libraries of comparable size. In 1998, Seattle voters approved *Libraries for All*, a \$196.4 million bond measure that funded four new libraries and replaced, expanded or renovated every library in the system. The building program sparked a surge in Library use, with visits increasing 57% between 2000 and 2009, to a high of nearly 7.3 million in 2009. Circulation increased 136% over the same time period. Many residents also rely on over 1,000 public computers and wifi available at the Central Library and all branch libraries.

Nearly 33,000 people voluntarily responded to a 29-question community survey initiated by the Library as part of a 2010 strategic planning process. Among the findings of that non-scientific but very large-sample survey: 39% of respondents said they use a library on average once a week and another 23% visit a library at least once a month. Respondents visit the Library's website even more frequently. They go online to reserve physical materials, check out and download digital materials, consult periodicals, get homework help, learn about more than 400 educational programs each month, and participate in increasingly interactive discussions about books.

The Library commissioned a needs assessment survey in September 2011. In a random sampling of 400 adult telephone respondents, 92% had a favorable opinion of The Seattle Public Library. Looking to the future, 86% agreed that libraries are as essential as they ever were and continue to be important as they serve as incubators for citizenship, central meeting places and physical locations that bring our communities together.

### Budget Cuts Limit Access and Have Long Term Impacts

Since 2009 as the economy worsened and the city's General Fund revenues declined, the Library has implemented significant budget reductions. The Library has taken a responsible approach to cutting its budget, working hard to find ways to minimize impacts to the public. Overall, the number of employees has declined by 7%. Administrative and support staff reductions saved \$1 million. Restructuring staffing at branches and the Central Library helped keep the doors open as much as possible.

Inevitably, however, the Library has had to cut open hours. Library employees have voluntarily agreed to an annual furlough since 2009, which shuts down the system for the week before Labor Day. Branch library open hours have been cut by 13% -- a decrease of 190 hours per week. Fifteen branches operate only 35 hours a week and are closed Friday and Sunday.

The books and materials cut is as significant as the hours reduction. At a time when libraries need to purchase materials in multiple formats to meet the wide-ranging needs of users, the collections budget must be sized appropriately to keep wait periods down and maintain the rich collections that this community of readers has come to expect. Buying power for books and materials, which has never reached targeted levels, declined by 13% after accounting for inflation. In addition, the Library had to implement loan policy changes to manage high demand for books with the reduced collections budget. Patrons have been frustrated with sharply reduced limits on the number of holds that can be placed at any one time and the reduced number of items that can be checked out. Predictably, the reduced open hours, services and collections have had an impact. Overall patron visits declined by 4% in 2010, with the largest impact hitting the five-day branches.

In the same time period, the Library's capital improvement budget has declined over 50% since 2008 to \$820,000 in 2012, and operating budget support for routine maintenance and janitorial services has not been able to keep pace with inflation or the increasing demand from heavily used buildings as they age. The Library is fortunate to have had the opportunity to upgrade its physical inventory between 1999 and 2008 with the *Libraries for All (LFA)* program, but many buildings are at or near the 10-year mark from their LFA refurbishment. The 26 branch libraries and the world-renowned Central Library are some of the most intensively-used public facilities in Seattle. Avoiding deferred maintenance is increasingly a challenge.

### Library Funding Alternatives Were Explored in 2010

The Library's budget is largely funded by the city's General Fund, which makes it particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in City revenues. As part of the 2010 budget process, the Seattle City Council's Regional Development and Sustainability Committee called on the City Librarian to explore potential new sources of ongoing revenue to provide stable and sustainable funding for the Library system. Library, Executive and Council staff scanned peer library systems and examined various options. A municipal library district could potentially eliminate funding competition with other City General Fund departments, but would require state legislation and could have repercussions for the City's taxing authority that are unknown at this time. Annexation to the King County Library System (KCLS) district would similarly require a change in

state law, and is not considered a viable option because KCLS is modeled on large, regional facilities versus Seattle's commitment to a neighborhood libraries service model that is typical of dense urban centers. Another funding model employed in San Francisco and Los Angeles dedicates a portion of existing City revenue to support libraries, without raising taxes. In an era of limited General Fund revenue this approach would have negative implications for other General Fund services and limit the city's budgeting options.

After reviewing the financing options described in the 2010 SLI response, the Regional Development and Sustainability Committee expressed particular interest in using a voter-approved Library levy to support a portion of the Library's budget on an ongoing basis. The City's annual regular levy typically results in a rate that is less than its total statutory authority of \$3.60 per \$1,000 of assessed value. While there may be competing priorities for the City's unused levy capacity, at this time there is capacity to add a Library levy. A Library levy could help to strategically restore open hours, fund a healthy collections budget, support the Library as it sustains and enhances public access to technology, and ensure that Library buildings continue to be well-maintained, safe and welcoming neighborhood resources.

### **Planning for a Potential 2012 Library Levy**

The City Council subsequently approved a second Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) as part of its 2010 budget process, which directed the Library to work with Executive and City Council staff in planning a potential 2012 Library levy. The Library assembled a Library Levy Work Group comprised of staff representatives from the City Council and Executive, key city departments, and the Library's supporting organizations, The Seattle Public Library Foundation and Friends of the Library, to help guide development of the SLI response.

This document responds to specific planning elements requested by the City Council:

## **1. Library Levy Work Plan**

The Levy work plan is described in detail below, and summarized in Attachment 1.

### **Initial Modeling of Sustainable Library Budget**

#### **February – September 2011**

The Library established a work group to examine the Library budget and develop a response to the potential levy SLI, including Library leadership and representatives from The Seattle Public Library Foundation, Friends of the Library, City Council staff and City Budget Office.

The Library Leadership Team and public services managers reviewed historical usage trends, patron feedback and strategic plan priorities. The Library's finance team identified critical ongoing funding gaps.

The Library board of trustees reviewed and discussed initial modeling of a sustainable Library budget.

## **Needs Assessment**

### **October 2011**

A random sample telephone survey of 400 Seattle residents confirmed the results of the non-scientific survey of 33,000 participants conducted in 2010: Seattle residents value library services highly, use them frequently, and want to be sure that the investment they made in Libraries for All is not eroded.

## **Library Staff Input**

### **December 2011**

- Library leadership and board share essential levy components and potential programmatic elements with staff, invite comments and suggestions.

## **Council Special Committee on Library Levy – Review of SLI Response, Funding Challenges and General Approach**

### **December 2011 and February 2012 (Meetings #1 and #2)**

- Presentation of SLI response and overview of Library's funding challenges.
- Presentation and discussion of key components of sustainable Library funding and update on public engagement activities.
- Council considers a resolution jointly introduced by the Council, Mayor and Library Board setting forth the structure and schedule for a collaborative process for developing a potential Library levy.
- Library Board formally endorses joint Council and Mayor Library Levy Resolution.

## **Technical Levy Staff Work Group (Council, Mayor and Library representatives)**

### **December – mid-January**

- Develop recommendations for the Library Board, Mayor and Council regarding the term and structure of a potential Library levy that provides a dedicated funding source to be used in combination with the Library's existing operating and capital (major maintenance) funding sources.
- In developing the recommendations, the Library's heavy reliance on the General Fund and the economic pressures the General Fund is experiencing will be considered.

## **Public Engagement Process (Note: further details are presented later in this memo.)**

### **December 2011 – January 2012**

- Publicly announce essential components and potential programmatic elements for a Library levy that would provide a sustainable Library budget using multiple media and information channels.
- Encourage submission of comments via the Library's website, [www@spl.org](http://www@spl.org)
- Library Board and City Librarian convene three community meetings (south end branch, north end branch and Central Library) to obtain input on potential programmatic elements of each essential levy component.

**Late January – early February**

- Library Board and City Librarian convene a Civic Leaders Workshop to assist the Library in developing a Library levy proposal

**Library Board Final Recommendations for a potential Library Levy****February 2012**

- Library refines possible levy recommendations based on public input.
- Library works collaboratively with Mayor and Council to develop a levy proposal. Library board of trustees formally approves levy recommendations for transmission to Mayor and Council. The recommendations will provide the Library with a dedicated funding source to be used in combination with existing operating and capital funding sources and take into account the comments the board receives from the public and civic leaders.

**Council Special Committee on Library Levy -- Deliberations on Library Levy****March – April 2012 (Meetings #3, 4 and 5 as needed)**

- Library, Mayor and Council staff present recommendations for a potential Library levy at Council Special Committee on Library Levy .
- Council considers the recommendations for a 2012 Library Levy.
- Library, Mayor and Council staff support Council deliberations at additional Special Committee meetings.
- Council determined whether to place a Library levy proposal on the August 7, 2012 ballot
- If an August proposal moves forward, the Council will hold a public hearing in conjunction with the Mayor's office and the Library Board, leading to a Council vote no later than April 23, 2012.

**Public Education on Library Funding and Services****December – August 2012**

- Library provides detailed, unbiased information to support informed analysis of a potential levy assuming an August 7, 2012 ballot measure.

**2. Timeline for Existing and Proposed City Levies**

As part of the Statement of Legislative Intent that was approved by the Regional Development and Sustainability Committee as part of the 2010 budget process, the committee requested that the Library work with the Executive to provide a timeline that displays the annual levy amounts for all existing and proposed levies. This information is provided in Attachment 2. A calendar showing the schedule of known potential City, Seattle Public Schools, and County ballot measures from 2011-2015 is provided as Attachment 3. For information purposes, two views of the city's lift capacity are shown. Attachment 4 shows the amount of capacity in terms of the city's levy rate per \$1000 of assessed value; Attachment 5 shows the unused capacity in terms of potential revenue generation.

### **3. Public Engagement Strategy**

The Library conducted a successful public process in developing the \$196.4 million Libraries for All capital program, and will build from the community's investment in the Library's capital facilities in asking the public to consider sustaining the Library's services, programs and facilities through the funding mechanism of a Library Levy. The public outreach plan, which has been incorporated into the Work Plan discussed above, is as follows:

#### **March 2010 – December 2011**

- The Library solicited extensive public input during the development of its Strategic Plan:
  - 5 community open houses held in libraries across the city
  - Over 32,000 people responded to The Seattle Public Library Community Survey
  - Public forums held on “Technology and Its Impact on the Future of Libraries” and “The User Experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century library”
  - Library convened focus groups with service providers who work with children, teens, older adults, immigrants and refugees and people who are homeless
  - An 18-member Strategic Plan Advisory Committee met throughout the year and contributed significantly to the development of the plan
  - Results of 2010 strategic plan process used to guide prioritization of levy plan elements

#### **December 2011 - January 2012**

- Publicly present essential components and programmatic elements for a Library levy to provide a sustainable Library budget using multiple communication channels. In addition to traditional media outreach, the Library will use:
  - Library website (more than 17,000 visitors per day)
  - Electronic newsletter (over 100,000 patrons subscribed)
- Encourage submission of public comments via the Library website
- Library Board and City Librarian convene three community meetings to obtain public input. The community meetings will be held at a south end branch, north end branch and at the Central Library. The meetings will be publicized using traditional media outreach, as well as the Library website, electronic newsletter, Friends of the Library newsletter (11,000 members) and Library Foundation. The Library will also publicize the community meetings through FaceBook (over 12,000 fans), Twitter (1,500 followers), neighborhood blogs and posters.

#### **Late January/early February 2012**

The Library Board and City Librarian will hold a workshop with key civic leaders using the Library's Strategic Planning Advisory Committee as a foundation for participants. This group will advise the Library Board on the structure and policy framework for a potential Library levy and address any major questions or issues emerging from the public engagement process.

### **February 2012**

Taking into account feedback from Library staff, the public and recommendations from the work session with civic leaders, the Library Board and city librarian will work with the Mayor and Council to shape its recommendations for a proposed levy before submitting its recommendations for a potential levy to the Mayor and City Council.

### **March/April 2012**

Assuming a levy proposal advances on an August election timeline, the City Council would hold a public hearing prior to voting on Library Levy legislation to place a measure on the ballot by no later than April 23.

## **4. Levy Vision and Framework**

In a city where the library is so heavily used, persistent economic challenges have put the vision of Libraries for All at risk. A strong Library system is critical to the economic, educational and cultural vitality of our city. It is where students receive homework assistance, unemployed residents come for job resources and those without access to technology can use computers for free. It's where residents who want to hold a book in their hands and those who want to download reading material find what they need. Our libraries are the anchors of Seattle's neighborhoods.

The Seattle Public Library contributes to a future that values and protects freedom of speech and preserves our democratic society by giving everyone the opportunity to become informed, literate, educated and culturally enriched. It bridges learning and technology gaps across our city.

Library leadership has identified the following four areas for investment that are essential for a sustainable Library system that can enable all Seattle residents to be successful in a rapidly evolving and complex information age:

- A. Keeping libraries open when patrons need them
- B. Providing a robust collection of books and materials
- C. Improving computer and online services
- D. Maintaining buildings for the next generation

### **A. Keeping libraries open when patrons need them**

The days and hours that libraries are open impact patrons who want to access the collection of physical books and materials, use public computers, attend programming such as story times, homework help and computer instruction, utilize public meeting rooms and study rooms, or obtain reference help from Library staff. A top priority would be restoring the week of system-wide closure.

Other potential service restoration or service improvements that could strengthen the Library's service capacity include:

- Restoring Friday and/or Sunday service at 15 of the 26 Library branches now closed on Fridays and Sundays.
- Establishing a consistent service model at neighborhood libraries (the daily schedule at the current 5-day branches does not match the current 7-day branches),
- Restoring in-person reference services to eight branches where such services were cut utilizing senior paraprofessional staff,
- Restoring open hours for the Seattle Room (northwest history) at the Central Library
- Increasing online and telephone reference services and public computer assistance, where there is increasing demand.
- Providing extended morning and evening access at the Central Library and at one branch in each quadrant of the city.
- Possibly opening all facilities 7 days a week.

## **B. Providing a robust collection of books and materials**

The collection is the heart and soul of Library services, as confirmed by the Community Survey undertaken in 2010. Patrons care about being able to place holds on popular items and obtain the books or materials they want quickly, they care about being able to obtain material in their format of preference, and they care about being able to find not only popular material but a wide selection that meets their interests. Acquiring electronic resources is a top priority to address the most rapidly growing area of patron demand.

Potential service improvements include:

- Restoring and enhancing the Library's collections budget. This investment would get popular materials to patrons more quickly and improve the depth and breadth of the collection.
- Strengthen and provide wider access to the Library's collections of unique local history and cultural materials by cataloging and digitizing existing collections.

## **C. Improving computer and online services**

Libraries have evolved to become essential bridges over the technology divide by providing public computers and wifi access, as well as technical support, for people who do not have ready access to these tools that have become necessary for finding jobs, doing schoolwork, contacting public and private agencies and keeping in touch with other people. Libraries for All made an initial investment in public computers and related technology infrastructure, but the operating budget does not include sufficient funding for replacements or upgrades.

Potential service improvements could include:

- Replacement of PCs, public print and copy equipment, traveling computer instruction labs, and technology infrastructure.



- Development of online resources and reference services to ensure that users can easily find, discover and successfully use the growing array of e-resources. Create a ‘virtual library’ on par with what is available in our physical library buildings.
- Improve audio-visual presentation and communication services available at Central Library meeting rooms.
- Provide audio-visual capabilities at heavily used branch meeting rooms for use in expanding the reach of online programs and instruction for the community.
- Create a digital media lab where patrons can experiment with multimedia production.

#### **D. Maintaining buildings for the next generation**

Libraries continue to be among the most intensively-used public facilities in Seattle. The Libraries for All program increased the amount of physical space that the Library maintains by 80 percent to a total of over 600,000 square feet. Daily library maintenance is currently underfunded. There is no operating funding for furniture replacement and deep cleaning. LFA buildings are starting to pass the 10 year mark since construction. Building mechanical systems, roofs and interior finishes all require periodic attention to sustain the improvements that Seattle residents invested in with Libraries for All. Current resources are unable to fund adequate capital or preventive maintenance support to ensure that these community resources last long into the future.

The following items are currently underfunded elements of a routine and preventive maintenance program:

- Regular servicing and repair of building heating, cooling, plumbing and electrical infrastructure to ensure that buildings continue to be comfortable for patrons and energy efficient.
- Maintenance and replacement of materials handling equipment to ensure efficient and timely delivery of reserve materials.
- Timely repair and maintenance of building surfaces and finishes, e.g. counters, tables, walls, etc.
- Landscaping equipment and plant replacement.

The Library’s capital budget currently provides significantly less than \$2 per square foot for annual major maintenance of the Library’s facilities:

- Adequately fund asset management by closing gap between current CIP funding and major maintenance requirements by building age and type (historic/modern/Central).

In addition to the four programmatic elements that are essential components of a potential Library levy, a small amount of levy funding would be allocated to support the work of a levy oversight committee, develop performance standards and accountability for each levy-funded activity, and provide public information and annual reporting to the community on levy outcomes.

**Conclusion**

The Library appreciates the tremendous support that the Council and Mayor have provided over the years. In this very difficult economy, we appreciate this opportunity to work collaboratively with the City Council and the Executive to develop a proposal that can achieve sustainable funding to maintain a vital, healthy library system for the people of Seattle.

**Attachments**

Attachment 1:	Library Levy Work Plan Calendar
Attachment 2:	Levy Lid Lifts – Amounts by Year
Attachment 3:	Schedule of Known City, School District, County Revenue Ballot Measures
Attachment 4:	Lid Lift Capacity in Terms of City's Levy Rate per \$1000 of Assessed Value
Attachment 5:	Lid Lift Capacity in Terms of Potential Revenue Generation

cc: City Budget Office: Hall Walker, Catherine Cornwall, Karl Stickel  
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