

Berkeley Public Library Facilities Master Plan Patron and Staff Input Summary

February 6, 2008

Since 1893 the Berkeley Public Library (BPL) has had a proud tradition of serving the cultural, informational, educational, and recreational needs of its community. The Library serves as an important focal point of civic and social life by providing space for meetings, hosting cultural events, and sponsoring literacy and other community outreach programs.

BPL Facilities Master Plan feedback from both library patrons and staff indicates a well supported and beloved public service and much utilized facilities; however, there is a growing need for more space not only for larger collections of new materials and more computers to meet public demand but also for library programs and quiet study space.

Analysis of library usage patterns reveals that many of the BPL patrons are very mobile in their use patterns, patronizing more than one library branch to utilize services, and indicates a pattern in the areas most frequented during their branch visits, including public service desks, computers, new materials, children's, and seating and/or programming space.

The existing branches are not able to meet adequately the current demand for library services in the neighborhoods they serve because

- The existing libraries are too small and crowded to be able to adequately serve the patrons in their neighborhoods. When patrons browse the stacks, they find the aisles are too tight and corners too hard to navigate and notice that many of the shelves are so crowded that materials must be placed too low or too high to be easily accessed.
- The existing branches were not designed to support the kinds of services and programs that current libraries provide, for example, space for library programming and adequate data and electrical infrastructure needed for public access and personal computers. There are long waits to use existing computers and safety concerns with personal laptop cords being stretched across floor space to electrical outlets. At peak times, finding a chair to sit and read may be a challenge, and the chairs that are available will likely be near to an active children's section or a lively group of teenagers meeting after school.
- Crowded work spaces encroach on public floor space and inefficient service desks limit the ability of library staff to effectively deliver the highest quality service to library patrons. Staff and patrons compete for use of the same space, leading to excessive noise from not only staff but also on-going programs and/or after school congregation.

The functionality of the branches is compromised further because of outstanding maintenance needs as well as significant issues relating to the Americans with Disabilities Act, energy efficiency standards, and other building code requirements that need to be addressed in the branches.

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The surveys and visual polling done at each branch provide a functional analysis of how patrons and staff use the library and how well the existing branches operate, noting problems that interfere with library services and programs such as poor layout, acoustics, lighting, seating, computers, and crowded poor-functioning service desks. Current BPL branch functional needs include:

- Adequate space for staff to be able to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently and not encroach on public use space. Currently materials delivery and handling are done in public use space and at some branches personnel issues have to be conducted off site in order to provide necessary privacy.
- Adequate space for the Tool Lending Library to efficiently provide service in an improved environment, effectively display, store and repair tools, and to be able to provide “how-to” programs.
- Adequate space for materials and equipment storage is mandatory. At some branches storage is limited or almost non-existent and materials have to be stored in public meeting rooms and janitorial closets, additionally, book carts are kept in front of public restroom entrances and in walkways.
- Adequate space for Library programming, group study, and literacy tutoring is needed to reduce the noise level in common public use spaces and to allow for full access to all library collections and spaces which at some branches are blocked when hosting programs.
- Adequate space for common and compatible use to allow for comfortable seating and quiet reading/studying areas, inviting and uncluttered lobby spaces, ADA compliant and well-functioning service desks, art and community information display space, and appropriate height shelving.
- Adequate space for more public access computers for general public use as well as information literacy instruction. Currently branch computers are blocking aisles, are located next to public restroom facilities, and are in general use public areas which does not provide for maximum viewing privacy.
- Adequate space for public and staff restrooms. At some branches public restrooms are located inappropriately next to browsing collections and staff share public restroom facilities. All branch restrooms need repairs, to be brought up to code, made ADA compliant, and have proper ventilation systems.

The functional problems and space needs found at the BPL branches negatively affect both staff and patrons as the functional limitations of these facilities do not adequately support current Library services and are prohibitive in allowing for new services, programs and materials. The demand for and expectation of library services will only continue to grow and in order to continue *to support independent learning, personal growth, and the individual's need for information* new and improved facilities are needed.