

MEMORANDUM
Placer County Library
County of Placer

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors
FROM: Mary George, Director of Library Services
DATE: April 7, 2015
SUBJECT: Library Strategic Plan Update and Budget Challenges

ACTION REQUESTED

Receive an update on the Library Department strategic plan and budget challenges.

BACKGROUND

The Placer County Library system includes eleven facilities in communities from Granite Bay in south Placer to the shores of north Lake Tahoe. Originally, each of the eleven libraries was meant to serve a single community, functioning as the town library of its particular locale. Over the years through modernization and efficiencies, these separate libraries have been brought together into a more interconnected system.

This interconnected system is currently in fiscal crisis:

- The Library relies upon dedicated property tax as its chief source of funding. Unfortunately, since the onset of the Great Recession in 2008, the Library has operated in a budgetary deficit situation and is on the verge of depleting its Library Reserves in FY 2015-2016.
- Due to the loss of revenues, the Library has fallen behind in its ability to offer a viable library infrastructure to its customers including plentiful popular materials in a variety of formats, adequately trained staff, inviting facilities, and convenient hours of operation. The library is also hindered in its ability to bring on new technologies including popular e-resources and increased broadband due to the lack of revenue.
- Library staff has done its best to maintain services while reducing costs. Unfortunately property tax revenues and General Fund support remain far too lean for the resources and services needed to adequately serve Placer County residents in a modern library world.
- Operating a static budget since 2008 has repressed the modernization of the Library at a time when libraries remain important community spaces for gathering, learning, innovation, and personal growth.

- While the County is seeing a moderate increase in property tax, the funding for the Library system is not projected to return at a rate which will reverse the erosion to its infrastructure.

The Library's Strategic Plan, approved by your Board on December 10, 2013, offers some insight into how to evaluate and distribute resources while moving toward a viable, modern, and sustainable library future.

Three initiatives are highlighted in the Plan, providing a roadmap for future service:

- Reverse the Erosion in Library Services by recognizing that, like many County departments, the Library was hit hard by the recession. As the economy improves the Library must reinvest in its facilities, library materials, staffing, and programming in order to meet the expectations of knowledgeable library customers. To remain viable, the Library must move beyond the interconnected system of small town libraries to become a fully interdependent network that shares and concentrates its resources and services where customers are using them.
- Modernize Operations to Improve Efficiency and Expand Services by anticipating the needs of Library users, reducing the unit cost of routine customer transactions, improving the Library's website content, providing access while making self-service easy, fun, and preferred by customers with up to date wireless technology and equipment.
- Achieve Fiscal Sustainability and Build Capacity for the Future by analyzing all potential funding streams, establishing and maintaining prudent reserves, and developing budgets that can support efforts to reverse erosion and modernizing library operations.

Library Administration continues to pursue opportunities to support these initiatives. To this end, staff has recommended the reduction of hours in the Auburn, Loomis, and Rocklin Libraries and the potential closure and decommission of the Meadow Vista and Loomis Libraries. While very difficult and upsetting to each library community, a restructuring of the interconnected system remains the most economical and viable option for the overall health of the system moving forward. Concentrated resources will allow the library to expand operations at the libraries where patron use is the highest, while also improving the outlying branches that serve rural and isolated communities.

Although branch closures are an option to consider in restructuring and improving library services, they are not a means to achieve fiscal sustainability. The Library will still require increased financial support to remain a viable system into the future. Professional staff must be added to manage the library collection, deliver computer and literacy training to customers, plan and present programming for adults and children, and investigate the most efficient and innovative ways to build library services throughout Placer County. Technology will have to be appropriately expanded and refreshed adding popular devices and resources in concert with community interest and demand. Facilities will need to be updated and improved to offer warm and inviting space for patrons to meet, gather, learn, and grow.

While it is crucial to allow effected communities to collaborate on possible solutions to the Library's fiscal crisis, delaying the restructure of library services will have additional impacts on reliable library service delivery and fiscal health. Concentrating library services, including potential closures, continues to be the best option for improved services and long-term sustainability. Library Administration continues to work cooperatively with the County Executive Office and your Board to determine the best options for saving the library system. Regardless of how the library modernizes its operations, it is imperative that the Library see increased revenues to remain an important county service.

