



LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20210426-5b: Support for Austin Public Library Proposed Budget for FY22

Date: April 26, 2021

Subject: Support for Austin Public Library Proposed Budget for FY22

Motioned By: Commissioner Hanna

Seconded By: Chair Dabbert

Recommendation

Support for Austin Public Library Proposed Budget for FY22

Description of Recommendation to Council

Requesting that the Austin City Council approve the proposed Austin Public Library budget of \$60,190,266 for FY2022, an increase of 2.25% or \$1,321,890 from FY21, including an increase to the materials budget by 3.5% or \$206,368.

Rationale:

“Libraries are a cornerstone of democracy—where information is free and equally available to everyone. People tend to take that for granted, and they don’t realize what is at stake when that is put at risk.”

— **Carla Hayden, 14th Librarian of Congress**

During an unprecedented year, including COVID-19 pandemic related shutdowns and a city-wide weeklong freeze, APL continued to serve the citizens of Austin by providing online access to digital materials and by providing access to conventional format books and materials by providing curbside service at 11 of its 20 branches. APL also continues to provide innovative programming. In the past year, April 2020 – March 2021, APL hosted 1325 virtual programs with 37,430 attendees. 2020’s APL Virtual Summer Reading Program saw a 39% increase in APL Summer Reading site views with nearly 10,000 individual views between June – August.

Recently, in an effort to address the ongoing digital divide, the APL coordinated a widespread device loan program in partnership with community organizations and area school districts. Through individual donations, funding from commissions and boards, the CARES Act and operational funds, APL loaned laptops and hotspots to the Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA), Foundation Communities, South Asian’s International Volunteer Association of Austin (SAIVA), and City Departments to support families, individuals, and especially older adults who are isolated and lack access to online information and resources. This effort was driven by a clear need observed in the community, further amplified by COVID-19. In addition, APL staff recently made 209 calls to customers over the age of 65 who haven’t visited the library since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. APL wanted to let customers

know that the library is open for curbside and answer questions about connecting to the virtual collection.

APL also continues to provide staff development training to support the ability of all employees to provide a welcoming, equitable, and safe environment for customers using curbside and remote services. APL's Organizational Development Office is linking staff with online training opportunities. Examples include: *Coping with Change, Leading a Resilient Team, COVID: How to Deal with Problem Behaviors Related to COVID-19, Equal Access for Every Ability; Rethinking Summer Learning to Reverse the COVID-19 Slide; Connecting Communities with Teleservices.*

The APL proposed budget includes an additional 5 FTE Security positions. These additional positions are considered vital for the safety of library patrons and for safeguarding the taxpayers' investment in library facilities.

The proposed budget includes a 3.5% increase in the budget for materials, including digital materials, subscriptions and databases. These increases are necessary to keep up with inflation, the increasing cost of materials, and Austin's population growth.

APL Director Roosevelt Weeks, who was recently elected to the executive board of The Texas Library Association as Representative-at-Large for Public Libraries, recognizes that libraries face many challenges, including "navigating in a post COVID-19 environment, racial and social unrest, and changing perception of libraries." He notes that the "library can play an important role in making sure all voices are heard and programs/services are provided in an equitable fashion. We can do this when we work together as one."

The challenges faced by the City of Austin in the coming years mirror the challenges faced by the library. With 12 branches slated for reopening to the public for limited capacity in-person Express Services beginning on Monday, May 10, APL will continue to be a vital community partner in the City's effort to support its citizens in this challenging time.

Vote

For: Chair Dabbert, Vice Chair Self, Commissioners Aguilar, Dwyer, Hanna, Infante, Rosenthal, and Trieu

Against: none

Abstain:

Absent: Commissioner Ramos

Attest: 