



LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20220725-8: Enhanced Library Cards

Date: July 25, 2022

Subject: Establish an Enhanced Library Card program

Motioned By: Commissioner Dwyer

Seconded By: Commissioner Self

Recommendation

Establish an Enhanced Library Card program to be administered by the City of Austin Library Department.

Description of Recommendation to Council

Requesting that Austin City Council directs the City Manager to establish an Enhanced Library Card program to be administered by the City of Austin Library Department.

When developing the Enhanced Library Card program we further recommend consultation with the appropriate community stakeholders to:

- Protect of privacy of individuals who obtain an Enhanced Library Card and prevent fraud and information theft;
- Allow a lengthy validity period for the Enhanced Library Card;
- Provide for training of library staff to administer the program;
- Identify a wide variety of documents that can be accepted when applying for an Enhanced Library Card to provide proof of identity and residence;
- Ensure the recognition of the Enhanced Library Card as a form of identification by all city officials and departments, especially Austin Police Department, Austin Energy and Austin Water; and
- Identify features to make the card attractive to all City of Austin residents, including discounts for entries to museums, and other city amenities.

Rationale:

Lack of government issued identification can negatively impact the quality of life for Austin residents, and often disproportionately affects vulnerable populations within our city.¹ People experiencing homelessness, formerly incarcerated individuals, and undocumented immigrants often do not have the paperwork required to obtain a state issued photo ID. IDs are often required for housing, education, healthcare, banking, and may deter residents from reporting crimes. LGBTQ advocacy organizations have supported municipal-issued identification as a means of providing government-issued identification without gender classifications, as transgender people may not go by the name, resemble the photo, or identify with the gender marker printed on their photo ID.²

Due to the sensitive nature of the personal information required to obtain an Enhanced Library Card, consideration should be taken to ensure that the privacy of our residents is paramount. This would require time for thorough validation and training, as well as safeguards to prevent the targeting of any communities who might benefit from this form of ID. Features to make this Enhanced Library Card attractive to all residents, such as discounts to museums or park passes, might encourage more widespread adoption of this card, and prevent stigmatization for people who might use this card as a form of ID. For successful and effective use of these Enhanced Library Cards, city officials and departments would ideally work together to accept and approve the Enhanced Library Card, and consider reaching out to any local non city stakeholders who ask for photo IDs and ask them to approve this card as a form of ID as well.

Austin Public Library (APL) is a central hub within the City of Austin. It not only provides access to information, technology and creativity for its customers, it often is the place where people go to cool off in the summer, stay warm in the winter, and exercise their right to vote. APL is also well established in the process of issuing library cards, with 441,981 total cards issued as of June 2022.³ Additionally, APL operates in accordance with the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights. Article VII in the Library Bill of Rights states: “All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people’s privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information.”⁴

With this in mind, we believe that APL is the best solution within the City of Austin to implement an “Enhanced Library Card” program. APL already protects the customer's rights to access information and maintain their privacy, and will work to ensure that any data collected via this “Enhanced Library Card” program is kept confidential.

Enhanced Library Card programs have already been successfully adopted in San Antonio, San Marcos, Houston, and will be piloted in Dallas this summer.^{5,6,7,8} One San Antonio resident was able to use their Enhanced Library Card at a routine traffic stop and credits the library card as “Saving them from being deported”.⁹

All Austin residents deserve access to the types of resources that a photo ID provides, and a broadly accepted identification card, such as an Enhanced Library Card, should be explored to meet that need.

Vote

For: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Infante, Commissioners Dwyer, Masters, Rosenthal, and Self

Against: none

Abstain: Commissioner Dabbert

Absent: Commissioner Aguilar

Attest: 

¹ Rahman, T. (2021, December 3). *'What chance do they have?'* Austin mother can't get ID for son experiencing homelessness. KXAN Austin. Retrieved July 23, 2022, from <https://www.kxan.com/news/local/hays/new-enhanced-library-cards-help-people-experiencing-homelessness-obtain-an-id-in-san-marcos/>

² *My Genderless ID Makes Me Feel Safe* | News & Commentary. (2021, February 19). American Civil Liberties Union. Retrieved July 23, 2022, from <https://www.aclu.org/news/lgbtq-rights/my-genderless-id-makes-me-feel-safe>

³ *Library Statistics Dashboard*. (2022). Austin Public Library. Retrieved July 23, 2022, from https://www.countingopinions.com/pireports/view_dashboard.php?pkey=72765f152bf839f6f05993efd5af7b7a

⁴ American Library Association. (2006, June 30). *Library Bill of Rights*. Advocacy, Legislation & Issues. Retrieved July 23, 2022 from <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>

⁵ Yoshimura, M. (n.d.). *LibGuides: Enhanced Library Card: Enhanced Library Card. Guides*. mysapl.org. Retrieved July 24, 2022, from <https://guides.mysapl.org/enhancedlibrarycard>

⁶ *Library Cards* | City of San Marcos, TX. (n.d.). www.sanmarcostx.gov. Retrieved July 24, 2022, from <https://www.sanmarcostx.gov/596/Library-Cards>

⁷ *Enhanced+ Library Card FAQs* | Harris County Public Library. (n.d.). www.hcpl.net. Retrieved July 24, 2022, from <https://www.hcpl.net/page/enhanced-library-card-faqs>

⁸ *No government-issued ID? Can't access city services? A Dallas library card may be in your future*. (2022, March 29). KERA News. <https://www.keranews.org/news/2022-03-29/no-government-issued-id-cant-access-city-services-a-dallas-library-card-may-be-in-your-future>

⁹ Tien, C. (2022, February 22). *"It saved me from being deported": San Antonio's enhanced library card can be used as ID*. San Antonio Express-News. <https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/It-saved-me-from-being-deported-San-16934572.php>