

**Proposal for Community Engagement Working Group formation
Library Commission Meeting, 8/22/22**

JC Dwyer, District 8 Commissioner

At our June 18th planning retreat, Commissioners expressed an interest in forming a working group to make recommendations concerning the future role of Austin Public Library and the Austin Library Commission in strengthening community engagement around library issues, and city issues broadly.

This interest is in alignment with City Council's Strategic Direction 2023 outcome "A Government That Works for All," particularly Indicator Category E, "Stakeholder Engagement and Participation."

As proposed here, this working group would primarily discuss the following three charges and report back to the Commission with recommendations and if relevant, a plan for future action.

1. Examine ways in which APL can enhance its role as "social infrastructure," better leveraging its equity-focused mission, accessible physical spaces and strong community brand in otherwise divisive times to:
 - a. Build Austin's community & shared values;
 - b. Strengthen engagement in basic civic processes (such as elections);
 - c. Convene productive community conversations around issues of public interest;
 - d. Serve as an ongoing conduit of public opinion for City departments and decision-makers; and
 - e. Expand its partnerships with community-focused organizations.
2. Examine ways in which the Library Commission could better encourage and transmit community input on issues under its purview, serving as ambassadors for public sentiment and potentially documenting its successes as a model for other City commissions & departments. Specific ideas to discuss might include:
 - a. Conducting community input sessions on specific library issues, or conducting outreach on these issues through existing community meetings / groups;
 - b. Reinstating a version of Commissioner open houses / "office hours" at their home branch libraries;
 - c. Defining a process for identifying cross-commission priorities, as well as coordinating and building reciprocal relationships with other commissions; and
 - d. Increasing the role of public comment at our normally scheduled commission meetings.
3. Make specific recommendations to apply the group's findings in 1 & 2 to the annual City budget-making process, with a goal of increasing community input and support for APL's FY24 budget needs.
 - a. Recommend processes for gathering the input of community members and other City commissions, then converting that energy into coordinated advocacy in support of any resulting budget requests in alignment with the annual budget calendar.
 - b. Investigate any opportunities to strengthen the Commission's relationship with the Library Foundation and its donors to facilitate grassroots support for APL budget requests.
 - c. Identify processes by which Commission might serve as an ongoing conduit for public reaction throughout the budget process, including to Council amendments.