

LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20260323-3

Date: 03/23/2026

Subject: Support for Austin Public Library FY27 Budget

Recommendation

Support for Austin Public Library's proposed budget for FY2027 with continued and sufficient funding to ensure equity across all branches and support service enhancements. This includes an increase to the books and materials budget, sustained security and law enforcement presence, sustained funding for technology initiatives such as hotspot lending, and one-time funds for site analysis and feasibility studies to meet the goals of the Council-approved Strategic Plan.

Description of Recommendation to Council

Requesting the Austin City Council to approve the proposed Austin Public Library budget for FY2027. The Library Commission also supports a one-time \$200,000 increase to the books and materials budget, sustained funding for library security staff and the law enforcement partnership with Travis County, and \$350,000 in one-time funding for feasibility studies related to upcoming library facilities projects. Furthermore, we recommend sufficient FY27 funding to ensure equitable digital access across all 21 library branches by expanding the hotspot lending program, modernizing infrastructure and service standards, and investing in comprehensive technology training for both library staff and the diverse Austin community.

Rationale:

The Austin Public Library Comprehensive Library Strategic and Facilities Plan, adopted by the City Council in March 2023, remains the roadmap for meeting the needs of our growing city. To implement this plan and maintain high-quality service, the Library requires stable, ongoing investment. Data from 2025 highlights the massive scale of community reliance on these services: APL welcomed 3 million visitors and gained 100,000 new cardholders, bringing the monthly average to 356,000 active cardholders. This growth is supported by a dedicated community, including an average of 169 volunteers each month.

While physical circulation remains strong at 3.73 million items, digital circulation has now surpassed it at 4 million items. The rising costs of e-book licenses, inflation, and the growth of the Austin population have strained the collection. The Library

Commission has heard from the public regarding complaints about hold time and material availability. The robust use of the Austin Public Library, as indicated by the statistics above, necessitates an increase in funding to support the same level of service patrons have come to expect and the growing digital needs of the Austin community. Therefore, we support a one-time \$200,000 increase to the books and materials budget, in addition to an annual percentage increase in line with previous years.

The need for facility investment is equally pressing. To execute the Council-approved strategic plan, APL needs \$350,000 in one-time funds for a feasibility study on upcoming branch expansions. The library anticipates the need for ongoing funding to support personnel, contractual services, and commodities required to operate the reopened John Henry Faulk Building. Similar operational support will also be necessary for the proposed Colony Park Storefront Library to ensure the facility can meet community service expectations upon opening. Sustained personnel support is also critical to meet the growing demand for public and community rentals of event spaces at the Central Library and John Henry Faulk Building.

Additionally, the complexity of patron needs has grown. Library staff are often the first point of contact for residents in crisis; additional and sustained support would enable the department to expand and sustain efforts to connect customers with the services they need. These vital library staff deserve a safe working environment, and this year the library has been the site of assaults and other violent incidents. The partnership with Travis County law enforcement and the on-site security staff was effective in handling these incidents, and the continued funding for these personnel is essential to maintaining the safety of patrons, staff, and the millions who enter the library.

Finally, the Library Commission aligns with the Technology Commission in prioritizing digital equity. In 2025, APL recorded 478,000 total Wi-Fi sessions and 11,000 hotspot and laptop circulations. With the termination of the federal Affordable Connectivity Program, APL is the primary "on-ramp" for the digital world. Funding must be sufficient to ensure that technology resources and staff training are standardized across all 21 branches so that a resident's neighborhood does not dictate the quality of their digital access.

While the Library Commission supports all funding requested by library staff in the FY 2027 budget, the Library Commission is especially interested in increased funding for the following:

- **Materials Budget:** One-time funding increase of \$200,000 for the books and materials budget, on top of an annual percentage increase in line with previous years.

- Public Safety: Continued funding for the Travis County law enforcement partnership pilot.
- Facility Planning: \$350,000 in one-time funds for feasibility studies for new and expanded facilities.
- Digital Equity: Sustained funding for the 11,000+ technology circulations and 478,000 Wi-Fi sessions, as well as support for technology infrastructure and staff training.
- Operational Support: Ongoing funding for personnel and services at the reopened John Henry Faulk Building and proposed Colony Park Storefront.