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## Boston City Council Committee on Ways and Means

*Dockets #0588-0596 FY21 Budget  
Boston Public Library/Boston Centers for Youth and Families  
Working Session: Tuesday, April 28, 2020, 11:00 a.m.  
Hearing: Thursday, May 7, 2020, 2:00 p.m.*

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The following is a collection of questions that were asked by the Committee regarding the FY21 budgets for the Boston Public Library and Boston Centers for Youth and Families at the Working Session on Tuesday, April 28, 2020 at 11:00 a.m.

Recording here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT8G6cS3-pg&t=1s>

The Administration is requested to respond to all questions in one of three ways:

1. Verbally at the hearing on Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, at 2PM.
2. For factual questions, through written responses supplied prior to May 7<sup>th</sup>, including budget book page numbers or other references where appropriate.
3. By deferring to a specific scheduled departmental budget hearing.

Please annotate and return this information request before May 7<sup>th</sup>, indicating how each question will be answered.

### **Boston Public Library Budget Questions**

#### **Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- Concerned about the BPL, especially the Central Branch, as a critical resource for many researchers, especially those without access to a university system.
  - We have many great resources for casual readers on the BPL website; how are we thinking about making BPL research resources more readily available online?

*Staff are available through email and phone calls to assist with research and navigating BPL resources. We worked with several of our online vendors to provide access to remote resources that people previously had to go into the building to access. These include Ancestry Library, Newspaper Archive, and several business resources. Staff have created online guides for people of all ages to help introduce and promote the public to our many online resources as well as connect them to resources from other institutions and organizations.*

- If BPL has to stay closed for a prolonged period, can the time be used to digitize more material such as books, manuscripts, and rare books collections?



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*Many staff are required for the safe handling and security of collections during the digitization process, so that service might not be able to come back in early phases of reopening. However, the staff that deal with those collections are working on many projects to make the collections more readily available. We are continuing to process images that were scanned before the library closed and upload them to Digitalcommonwealth.org. Staff are also transcribing catalog cards and accessions records for unique manuscripts and collections of manuscripts that were not previously available in the BPL's online catalog. Working from scans of catalog cards and lists, staff have been entering data for thousands of manuscripts into online forms, which are then quality-controlled, automatically reformatted, and imported into our online catalogs.*

- Any updates on possible future renovation of the third floor of the Central Library?

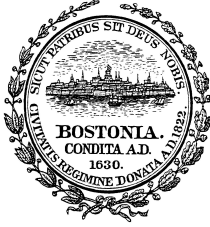
*BPL & the Public Facilities Department recently held architect interviews to select the architect to lead the master planning process.*

- How are we thinking about the role that our libraries play in the life of a community and how to modify and handle that over the summer and fall ahead?
  - Can you talk about the ongoing work of the Community Learning Team in this period?

*Branch Librarians are staying in touch with neighborhoods groups and clubs on Facebook, reaching out to Senior homes to connect with regular users, and trying to remain present in community conversations.*

*Our new Community Learning Team focuses on Basic Adult Education for our most vulnerable communities including the un- and under-employed, immigrants, Seniors, those who don't speak English as their primary language, those facing the digital divide, those facing housing insecurity, and more. We have pivoted many of our services online, including ESL conversation circles, literacy classes, citizenship classes, resume and cover letter workshops, technology assistance, with more to come.*

- You mention that your literacy classes and ESL Conversation Circles are continuing electronically – can you speak more about that?



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*Yes, our Literacy Team in Community Learning immediately started reaching out to literacy students when we closed to share resources with them, and do individual consultations with them. Then they quickly set up online literacy classes, which they have expanded. They are also working with their volunteers to start bringing conversation circles online. There is a need for more volunteers as they are having trouble keeping up with the demand.*

- It seems like there may not be a way for ‘Tech Goes Home’ to go online, since participants don’t yet have a machine – is there a creative solution on that, like giving the Chromebooks at the beginning?

*In fact, that is exactly what we are doing. We have been working with Tech Goes Home on a program where the Chromebook AND a hotspot will be sent to participants first, then the participants will commit to the course. We are starting with three Tech Goes Home courses: one to complete the ongoing class that was happening in Fields Corner, another brand new one, and a third that focuses specifically on small business owners.*

- Can you speak more about the virtual visits in partnership with the Snowden – any opportunity to roll these out across more BPS schools?

*Teen Central is working with the alternative school, McKinley Middle School. They are "visiting" them virtually twice a month and sending them a recording of book talks of 18 books. At the end of each visit they do a tutorial of the Sora app (through BPL and BPS) and a tutorial of OverDrive to assist them in downloading and utilizing the books that were discussed. And that’s a great idea.*

*Teen Central tried to reach out to Snowden to get this going there, but was unable to. We will definitely work with our Youth Services Librarians to see if we can look into this again.*



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- In the period ahead, greater equity in access to city contracts will be even more important than before; what is BPL doing on the procurement front to diversify its contractors?

*First, City list of contracts does not represent all Library Spending. The Library spends under a different business unit, TRBPL*

1. *We will continue to attend city diversity fairs*
2. *We will continue to cross check our vendors against State list of Minority and Women Certified businesses. Between FY19 and through last week, on the Trustee side we have identified several business that we routinely do business with that are certified with the state, these total approximately \$450k and include the following*

- *Bautiste Masory – minority business - \$60,000*
- *Electronic Security Control System – women owned - \$110,000*
- *City Scape – women owned \$50,000*
- *United elevator (also on city side) \$220,000*

*We will contact these vendors and encourage them to apply for City certification*

3. *We will reference the State and city certified list to identify vendors when bidding contracts*
4. *We will survey current vendors to ascertain whether they may qualify and encourage them to apply*

- Can you speak to the e-book market, and what the BPL is doing in partnership with other large library systems to try to affordably acquire more e-books?

*Ebooks, and online resources in general, have seen an increase of demand in the recent months, with April checkouts up 37% over April of 2019. We have also seen a dramatic increase in the number of holds on ebooks and audiobooks. Holds were up 94% in April from the same time last year. The BPL has worked with several vendors to provide access to additional content for free or reduced cost to the library, including Tumblebooks and Hoopla. We have shifted much of our collections budget from print materials to online collections to support the increase in demand. We are also creating book lists and recommendations for ebooks and audiobooks that do not have a waitlist to help people find collections available right away.*



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- Overtime was far higher than appropriated for FY20 – why? Is FY21 number realistic?

*Much of the Library's overtime was related to staff shortages. The resulting salary savings in the 51001 line has been used to offset overtime costs. Overtime is reduced when we are fully staffed for floater librarians and custodial staff.*

- Can you speak to the overall work of the LACA department, and what the BPL can do to become even more of a trusted multilingual resource?

*We took advantage of the translation services to translate our appropriate use policy and our library cards applications into multiple languages. We also have two Spanish language speaking members of the Community Learning team who have been very helpful translating online documents during this quarantine. We also try to hire staff with additional language skill based on neighborhood.*

- What are the possibilities around more creative Spanish-language programming at the Parker Hill library?

*We have some access to multi-lingual and diverse programming. We will work to make sure Parker Hill takes advantage of those resources.*

- Just checking in again on the maintenance status of the elevator at the Parker Hill library.

*The elevator is currently functioning properly. It is inspected annually and receives regular preventative maintenance. We may request funding for replacement in an upcoming budget cycle.*

- Can you provide an update on the West End Library project, including the community engagement process for the funded facility study. .
  - In addition to needed library facilities, does RFP include assessment of possible outdoor programmable space, possible kitchen and food bank facilities, community center space, and the massing potential to support affordable housing?
  - Is there a spot for the Friends' group on the advisory committee? What about BHCA and WECA?



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*This is in the designer selection process and current plan is for community outreach for the community meetings to take in the fall. Study will include exploring a housing component.*

### **Councilor Liz Breadon asked:**

*Carried over from Capital Working Session:*

- Any updates on the Faneuil Library Branch renovation – is the financial commitment to do that still there despite the economic situation?

*This is currently in design, there has been no slow down due to Covid-19. We are scheduled to begin construction at the end of 2020. At this time, we have no information that would lead us to believe our capital plan has changed.*

### **Councilor Michael Flaherty asked:**

- As we reopen, what programs are the libraries going to be able to offer?

*The Library intends to start allowing pick-up of holds, then very slowly resume operations over the coming weeks as public health guidelines permit. We don't expect to be offering in-person programs for quite a while, but will continue to provide programming online, from author talks and concerts to storytimes and literacy classes.*

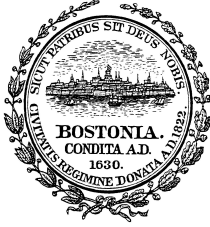
- What will be the hours of operation?

*To be determined*

- As an extension of the Housing with Public Assets program, what potential future capital plan can we envision for our libraries that increase our affordable housing opportunities, increase our creative partnerships with local small businesses, and increase local parking opportunities for business districts or residents in densely populated neighborhoods as well?

*We are exploring housing options in upcoming Egleston, West End and Codman studies.*

### **Councilor Frank Baker asked:**



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- Update on the Adam Corner Library.
  - Can you discuss what the timeline will look like once we get back to start up construction?

*With construction shutdown, reopening is now estimated in 2021. PFD is working on safe construction requirements for all City sites. Once construction is restarted, we will work with PFD and contractor to update construction timeline.*

- Update on the Uphams Corner Library.

*An update to the previous programming study was completed in early 2020. We are working with our City colleagues to finalize an RFP for the development of multiple sites in Uphams including for housing and a new branch library.*

- Update on the Fields Corner Library.

*The proposed FY21 budget has funds to begin design. We explored housing above a branch library during the programming study that was completed early in 2020. Through the study it was determined that due to the small size of the site, the most successful project would be a standalone library.*

- Where are we re: the discussion on mixed-use libraries, such as the West End Library, which was identified as a possible site?

*This will be part of the upcoming programming study.*

### **Councilor Kim Janey, President asked:**

- Can you provide a breakdown of expected staffing levels at the Dudley Branch Library, including the number of librarians versus custodians?

#### ***Librarians (5)***

*Knight, Allen F. Branch Librarian at Brighton Branch covering a vacancy P4*

*Harris, Philecia Children's Librarian at Mattapan P2*

*Eneh, Akunna Outreach Librarian at Codman Square P2*

*Toropov, Stephen Teen Librarian at Grove Hall P1*

*Vacant, Special Programs Librarian P3*



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### ***Library Assistants (4)***

*Wiggins, Tracy D. BLA 6 Circulation Supervisor covering at Parker Hill*

*VACANT BLA 3 (Shakera was promoted to Welcome Services in April)*

*Slater, Timythia BLA 3 at Hyde Park*

*Mitchell, Jebbeh F. BLA 3 at Fields Corner*

### ***Custodians (1)***

*Custodian Anthony Debnam at West Roxbury*

### **Councilor Annissa Essaibi-George asked:**

- Over the last couple of years libraries have supported effort around helping individuals who are homeless, have mental health issues, and have substance abuse problems. There was a working group that convened and put together a resource guide that incorporated efforts to connect visitors to the library with social workers at the library.
  - What work is happening around the Central Library's social work support and how has that work in the Central Library supported other branch libraries in this effort?

*To be addressed verbally*

- How is the relationship with Pine Street Inn? Are there plans to expand that as well?

*To be addressed verbally*

- How successful is the program working for people who access the resources of the library for housing search?

*To be addressed verbally*

- Is this program continuing?

*To be addressed verbally*

- Can you speak about the de-escalation training for librarians?





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### To be addressed verbally

- The Central Library provides small business with development support.
  - Could you see some of that work happening in the Central Library transferred to our branch libraries to help small businesses with economic development support in this crisis?

*Yes, our staff in the Kirstein Business Library & Innovation Center work closely with our Community Learning to provide workforce preparedness and development, and small business support at the Central Library and in the neighborhoods. The Tech Goes Home program mentioned above is one example of that.*

- How are we thinking about altering the bones of our library system such that we could have kept them open longer in a crisis like this, given how much they're a hub for essential resources that people need in times of crisis?

### To be addressed verbally

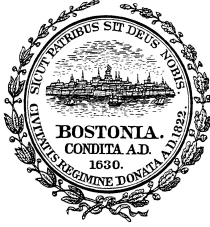
#### Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:

- The number of participants in the Early Literacy program has declined by nearly 50 percent – why is that?

*The Children's Library at Central provides the bulk of programming for early literacy. Over the course of last summer into the fall, the Children's Library had three vacancies, one due to maternity leave, the other two, including our Early Literacy Librarian, due to promotions. The Children's Library is so busy, we had to suspend programming for several months in order to just provide the most basic services in the space.*

- How can we adapt programs for at home use like the BPL's Libby App which creates access to eBooks or audio books?
- What is BPL's plan to expand the Libby App?

*The Libby app is a product of our ebook and audiobook vendor, OverDrive. The content we license through OverDrive is available in*



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*Libby. Since March 15, we have added over 13,000 ebooks and audiobooks available in Libby, including a substantial amount of children's and teen material. We also provide ebooks through Hoopla and audiobooks through RB Digital.*

- Update on the Hyde Park Branch Library, including its future plans.

*Project is currently out to bid, we hope to have a GC onboard by June and would like construction to start shortly after, based upon safety requirements. We are still working on how we reopen our branches in a safe manner and how that might impact having construction while the branch is open. We estimate 4-6 months of construction time.*

- Are there plans for libraries to have vending machines for books?

*We are exploring options.*

- In light of COVID-10, what are the plans to change and to provide more online services for youth?

*Virtual Summer Reading; Virtual Homework Help, Online Storytimes and other programs, Youth Services Telephone Assistance, Using chat and other communication apps for foster community, Future Readers Club (1,000 Books Before Kindergarten)*

- What is BPL doing to increase representation of M/WBE in their contract process?

*See response to Councilor Bok's question (pages 3-4)*

### **Councilor Ed Flynn asked:**

- The City recently invested money into the South End Branch Library.
  - What type of services and outreach program is the library planning?

*To be addressed verbally*

- Villa Victoria residents would like to see library access in different languages.



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*Working through St. Stephen's Youth program, Villa Victoria will receive books from our "Books from Boston" program tomorrow.*

- The South Boston Library is one of the oldest library branches and requires a lot of work. I would like to see more services dedicated to children in the area.

*Just filled the vacant Children's Librarian position.*

- Update on the Chinatown Library.
  - What services can we continue to have for our seniors and also for people with disabilities, including services in Spanish, and for people who speak other languages at the Central Library?

*Never Too Late programming gone virtually; Books for Boston; Expanding our multi-lingual programming*

### **Councilor Lydia Edwards asked:**

- Please provide an update on the North End library.

*We would look to start the study in 2022.*

### **Councilor Julia Mejia asked:**

- The FY21 BPL budget recommends that the library maintain positions with a second language requirement, reviewed on a role or neighborhood basis. Can you explain how you're determining which are the second languages you'd like to offer staff capacity in in different places?

*We use City Data to look at the most commonly spoken language by neighborhood, and also look at the language capacity already in the staff of a branch, and we try to find qualified candidates who speak the language needed*

- The budget narrative mentions a hiring challenge re: IT positions, given local competition; is there a possibility for apprentices or a training program, to open up a pipeline for those positions?

**To be addressed verbally**