

Palo Alto Library Plan Status Report & Recommendations

July 28, 2003

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Executive Summary

The Palo Alto Library compares unfavorably with adjacent communities and with cities similar to Palo Alto in California on a number of key indicators, including staffing, facilities and size and diversity of programs and services. These deficiencies were identified in the New Library Plan (NLP) published in May 2000 by the Library Advisory Commission and were accompanied by a series of recommendations for improvements of Palo Alto's library resources. This document provides a status report on the progress made to date in implementing improvements to the Palo Alto Libraries. In summary, despite the support of the City Council for the recommendations outlined in the NLP, the operating condition of the Palo Alto Libraries has further degraded. The City of Palo Alto is still in need of the improvements in facilities and staffing outlined in the NLP. This document provides an updated set of recommendations from the Library Advisory Commission (LAC) on actions that need to be taken in the short and long term to realize Palo Alto's vision for its Libraries.

Background

The May 2000 New Library Plan (NLP) identified a mission and vision for Palo Alto's libraries that includes the following:

- a resource program embodied in attractive, comfortable and welcoming spaces where residents can gain access to the world's knowledge and culture for learning and enjoyment
- excellent and multifaceted collections of print and multimedia materials
- access to the world of electronic resources
- staff sufficient in number and expertise to achieve these ends.

The NLP outlined a series of recommendations for accomplishing the mission for Palo Alto libraries that covered:

- Programs & Services
- Physical Plant and Capital Improvements
- Personnel Changes

The response of the City Council and staff to the LAC's recommendations was to focus initially on developing facilities that would house the library program described in the NLP. These capital improvements were planned and designed with the intention that funding would be provided by a bond measure approved by Palo Alto residents. The expectation was that Council and staff would then identify a source of funds for operating expenses for the new facilities.

In November 2002, Measure D, a bond measure to fund capital improvements to the Palo Alto Library system, was narrowly defeated. In the wake of the defeat of Measure D the task now facing the Palo Alto City Council and the LAC is to determine ways to accomplish the goals of the NLP mission under tight fiscal conditions and with no currently approved funding for new or extensively expanded facilities that the NLP required.

Status

In this section a review is provided of the status of each of the recommendations made in the NLP. Many of the recommendations for new or expanded programs and services were dependent on the availability of expanded facilities. Since facilities have not been expanded, it has not been possible to implement many of the recommendations for expanded programming and services.

Programs & Services

The NLP recommended the following improvements to programs and services. Many of these recommendations are dependent on the availability of expanded facilities as noted below.

- Increase in the size of the collection by 56%, and expansion of the character and formats represented by the collection with an immediate revised budget request for \$59,000 in new base dollars for books and periodicals.
- Expansion of system-wide hours by 31%;
- Creation of substantially expanded children's programs and collections at the Main/Children's and Mitchell Park sites and expansion of existing children's services in neighborhood libraries;
- Creation of teen programs, spaces and services at the Main and Mitchell Park sites;
- Creation of group study and meeting spaces at the Main and Mitchell Park sites;
- Creation of computer clusters for electronic access at the Main and Mitchell Park sites;
- Expansion of services for persons with disabilities or special needs;
- Creation of a coordinated volunteer program;
- Expansion of school outreach programs;
- Improvements in technical processing resulting in materials becoming available sooner;
- Integration of the program of the Palo Alto Historical Association, including its collections and the services of a Palo Alto Historian;
- Integration of the program and services of the Friends of the Palo Alto Library, including its book sales to the public.

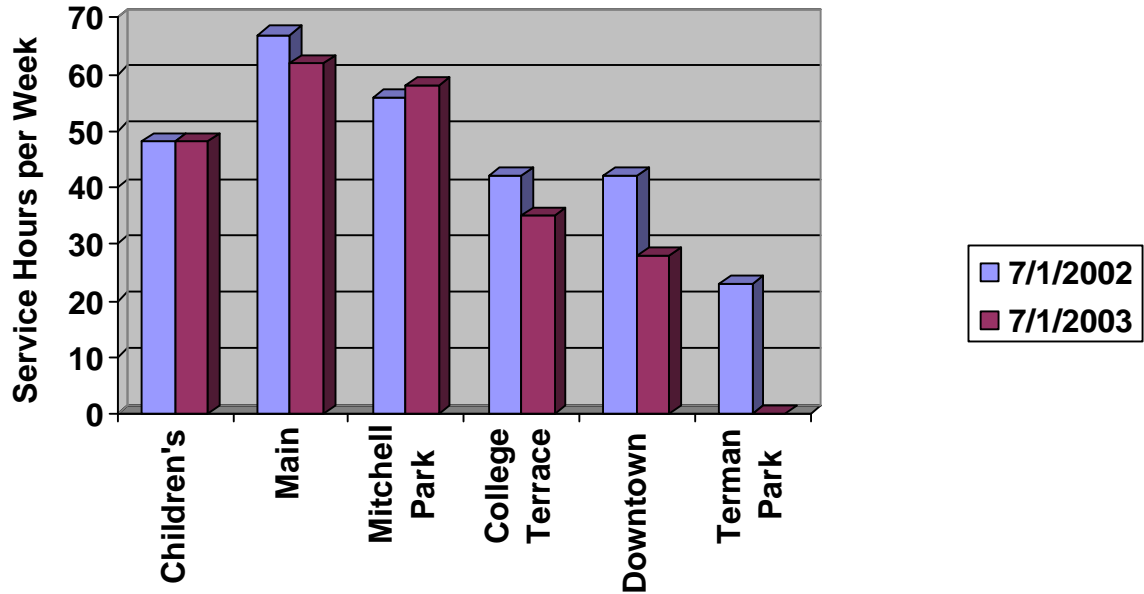
Increase in Size of Collections by 56%

The Libraries did receive a 22% (\$107,000) increase in base dollars for collection purchases which has been used to expand the character and format of the collection. Even though the collection budget has increased the overall collection size has actually decreased by 2% due to increased efforts to discard outdated materials. With the currently approved budget and the limitation of housing the current collection size in the existing facilities it will not be possible to meet the stated goal of increasing the collection size by 56%.

Expansion of System-wide Hours by 31%

The Library hours have shrunk due to a citywide hiring freeze 2002-03. Compared with budget year 2002-03 the new 2003-04 budget has resulted in a 17% decrease in system-wide hours see Figure 1. With the currently approved budget it will not be possible to meet the stated goal of increasing the system-wide hours by 31% since there are insufficient personnel.

Figure 1: Library Service Hours Comparison 7/1/02 - 7/1/03



Creation of Expanded Children’s Programs and Collections

Children’s services have been expanded with a new lapsit program, begun in 2003 for infants at Children’s and Mitchell Park Libraries. The existing children’s programs are over subscribed but without additional facilities and staffing the Palo Alto Library is restricted in expanding its children’s programs.

Creation of Teen Programs, Space and Services

Some progress has been made on the development of Teen Services. A summer reading program for teens was started in 2002. Library and Recreation staff at the Mitchell Park Library and Community Center have collaborated in offering joint programs. The Friends of the Palo Alto Library has funded the hiring of a homework helper to work with the middle school students coming to Mitchell Park after school. Staff at the Mitchell Park and Main libraries have been assigned responsibility for enhancing support for teen programs and service, however, the lack of dedicated spaces for programs and collections limit these efforts. Teen services currently have no space allocation in the Libraries, except for limited collection space.

Creation of Group Study and Meeting Areas

No progress has been made on the creation of group study and meeting areas. If passed, Measure D would have provided for additional square footage for study and meeting areas. With the current Library configuration there are no defined areas for small group study and, with the closing of Terman Park Library, there are no public meeting rooms in any of the branches.

Creation of Computer Clusters

The number of Internet computers for public use has doubled from 15 to 30, and capital funds have

been secured to substantially increase this total. In addition without expansion or reconfiguration of the buildings, there is no space to establish training rooms with computer clusters at either Main or Mitchell Park

Expansion of Services for Persons with Disabilities

New color text enlargers have been purchased for Main and Mitchell Park. New browser software for people with visual impairments is being tested.

Creation of Coordinated Volunteer Program

Volunteer coordination continues to be shared among designated staff at each library who have this responsibility added to their many other job duties. While the Library continues to use volunteers, an active recruitment and training program is not possible until there is sufficient staff to focus in this area. There is no single dedicated volunteer coordinator.

Expansion of School Outreach

Outreach to schools by class visits has been reduced so that staff are available at the libraries to meet increasing service demands.

Improvements in Technical Processing – Improving Material Availability

Due to use of vendor-provided processing of new materials, internal adjustments in cataloging and processing, and cross-training there has been significant improvement in the time it takes to catalog and process new items for circulation – from 58.5% of all items out in 45 days to 91% of all items out within 35 days.

Integration of Palo Alto Historical Association

Staff has been assisting the Palo Alto Historical Association in planning their project to make historic photographs available through the Internet. Some library capital funds have supported this effort.

Integration of Friends of the Library

City staff continues to support the work of the Friends, most notably by acquiring book sale space at Cubberley Community Center to replace the space at Terman Park reclaimed by the school district.

Capital Improvements

The NLP recommended the following physical plant and capital improvements:

- Substantial facilities improvements in the form of new construction or additions to the square footage of the Resource Libraries at the Main and Mitchell Park sites;
- New construction or renovation of a site to maintain a neighborhood library in southwest Palo Alto;
- Renovation of the Downtown Library to reclaim space currently being used by another City Department or relocation to an alternate site in the downtown area;
- Pending architectural review, renovation and possible expansion of the Children's Library;
- Completion of structural repairs at College Terrace and internal reorganization of shelving capacity;
- Upgrade facilities to accommodate evolving technology.

New Construction/Additions to Resource Libraries

No progress has been made in terms of substantial facilities improvements through new construction to the square footage of the Resource Libraries at Main and Mitchell Park sites. Measure D would

have funded construction of a new library building at the Mitchell Park site but was defeated in November 2002, Main Library was **not** included in the measure.

The square footage of the Mitchell Park Library was increased by 1340 ft² in January 2003, when the Parking Violations Office moved out of the building, and space was reclaimed for library usage. This space is being used for quiet study and to house media collections. No additional square footage has been added to Main Library.

In CMR:111:03 dated February 10, 2003, staff recommended that City Council proceed “with critical infrastructure repairs at Children’s Library, Mitchell Park Library and Mitchell Park Community Center to correct structural and accessibility deficiencies to bring those buildings up to current codes.” In addition the following work was also recommended renovation, repair or replacement of electrical, mechanical, plumbing and architectural systems. Also, air conditioning is recommended at each facility.” Funding of these critical infrastructure repairs would be secured from the Infrastructure Reserve. In the 2003-05 proposed City budget, capital funds will be allocated to renovate the Mitchell Park Library and Children’s Library in 2004-05. The City infrastructure plan currently recommends upgrades of existing systems at Main Library in 2007-08.

Renovation and Possible Expansion of Children’s Library

The Library Foundation has been established and efforts are underway by a coalition of the Foundation, Friends of the Library, LAC and City Staff to raise money to meet a challenge grant for a more modest expansion of the Children’s Library than was planned as part of Measure D. The City has allocated infrastructure money to renovate the existing building and will contribute to the cost of the addition of a single-story 1,640 ft² wing if sufficient private funds are secured.

New Construction/Renovation of Southwest Palo Alto Neighborhood Library-

Rather than constructing or renovating a neighborhood library in Southwest Palo Alto, the Terman Park Library was targeted in the current budget for closure as a cost cutting measure – leaving Southwest Palo Alto without a neighborhood library.

Renovation of Downtown Library to reclaim library space or relocate library

There has been no change.

Completion of Structural Repairs at College Terrace and Internal Reorganization

The City’s infrastructure plans currently propose a seismic retrofit, mechanical upgrades, re-roofing, and painting of College Terrace in 2005-06.

Upgrade facilities to accommodate evolving technology

Network cables have been added in all libraries to accommodate more public use computers. Wireless networks have been installed at Main and Mitchell Park libraries for public access to the Internet via personal laptop computers. The Main, Mitchell Park, and Children’s Library were moved onto the City’s fiber ring for improved wide area network access.

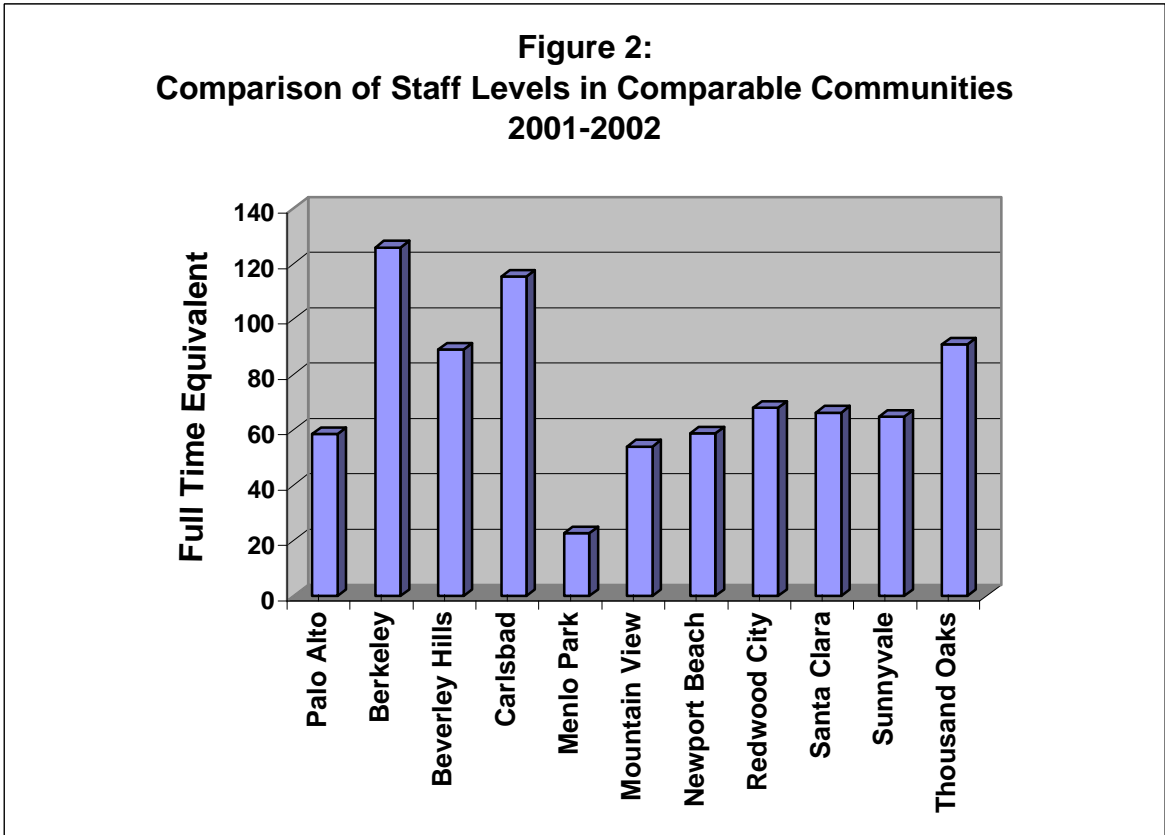
Personnel

The NLP recommended the following required personnel changes to carry out the Library programs and services:

- Immediate remedial actions in staffing to include 8.0 new FTE and an additional 9.0 FTE to be added over the short term to bring the total new FTE to 17.0.

- Additions to regular Library staff over a period of 5 years resulting in a net expansion of up to 35.5 FTE.
- Immediate conversion of 6 FTE from hourly part-time to regular benefited status.
- Reconfiguration of staff, using only paraprofessional staff at the neighborhood libraries.

A detailed Library Staffing Plan was completed January 24, 2002 by Beverly Simmons and Associates. The Simmons report reinforced the recommendations of the NLP, finding that the City of Palo Alto's libraries are significantly understaffed to meet current library service demands and compare unfavorably in terms of staffing to its neighbor city libraries and similar libraries around the state. Figure 2 shows how the Palo Alto Library compares with other nearby or similar libraries in terms of staffing. The average number of full-time equivalent employees (FTE) for the 10 communities is 75.53 while Palo Alto currently has an authorized FTE level of 58.58 employees.



Source: California Library Statistics 2003, California State Library, Library Development Services Bureau [Note: Staffing statistics are reported differently in the California Library Statistics, displaying actual FTE rather than budgeted FTE for hourly.]

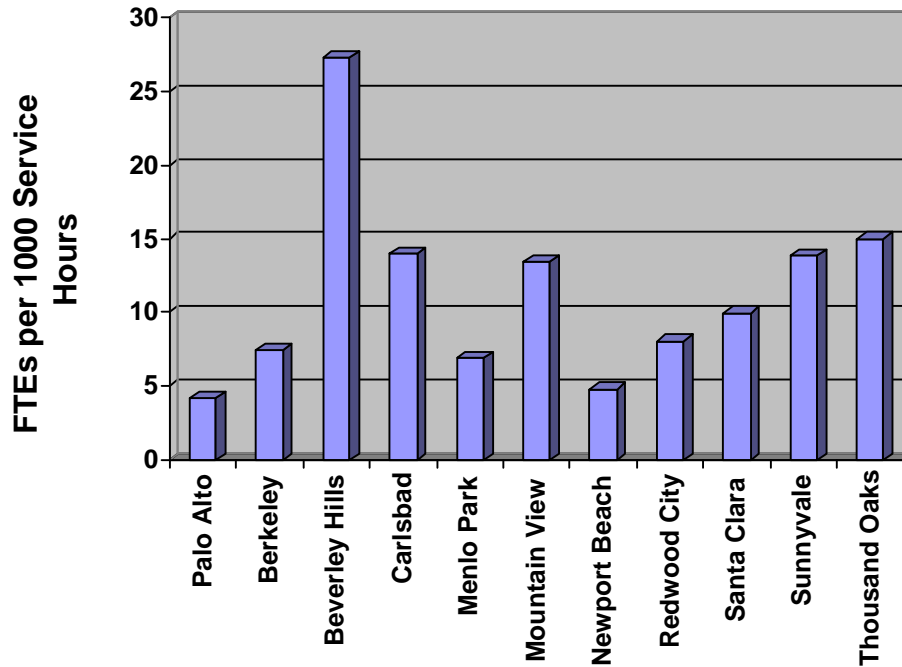
As shown in Table 1, and Figure 3, Palo Alto has the lowest ratio of staffing in terms of FTE to annual hours open, with only 4.2 FTE available per 1000 hours that the libraries are open each year, compared to similar libraries (Table 2). The average number of FTEs available in 10 other communities is 12.1 per 1000 hours.

Table 1: Staff Available to Keep Libraries Open, 2001-02. FTEs per 1000 Hours Libraries are Open Per Year

City	Annual Hours Open	FTE	FTE per 1000 Hours
Palo Alto	13,935	58.58	4.20*
Berkeley	16,822	125.84	7.48
Beverly Hills	3,262	89.00	27.28
Carlsbad	8,268	115.30	13.95
Menlo Park	3,269	22.62	6.92
Mountain View	4,019	54.00	13.44
Newport Beach	12,272	58.68	4.78
Redwood City	8,424	67.91	8.06
Santa Clara	6,657	66.25	9.95
Sunnyvale	4,675	64.76	13.85
Thousand Oaks	6,065	90.90	14.99

Source: California Library Statistics 2003, California State Library, Library Development Services Bureau
 * Hours and FTE have been reduced for 03-04, resulting in 4.82 FTE per 1000 hours effective July 2003.

Figure 3: Comparison of Equivalent Staffing Level Comparable Communities 2001-2002

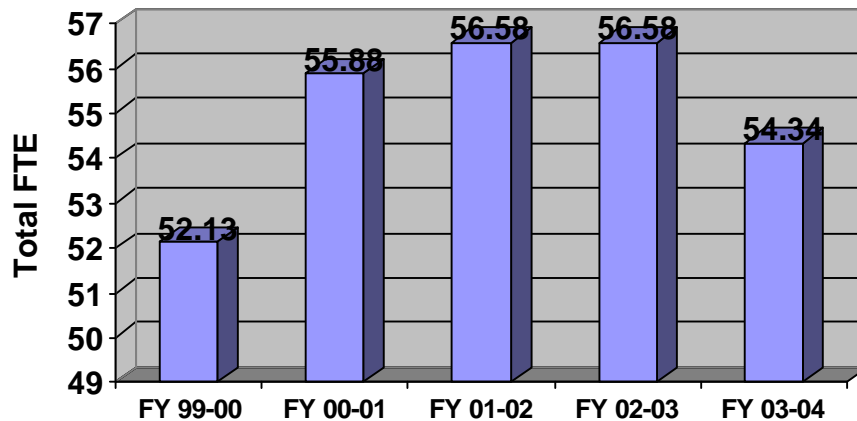


Palo Alto Library staffing remains a critical issue that has not yet been adequately resolved. Overall staffing has decreased for 2003-04 from previous years despite the recommendations of the NLP and the independent Simmons Staffing Report. Even with an emphasis on self-service check-outs and other innovations, staffing at Palo Alto libraries need to be revisited in order to realize Palo Alto's vision for its Library.

Remedial Staffing Actions

The NLP called for remedial staffing actions for the Palo Alto Library. While there was an initial increase of 4 regular FTE staff in the 2000-01 this has been offset by the freeze of 1.0 FTE Librarian position in 2002-03, continuing into the 2003-05 budget, the loss of .75 FTE in technical services staff, and the loss of 1.81 hourly FTE starting in July 2003 resulting from the closure of Terman Park Library and reductions in hours at College Terrace and Downtown libraries. **The net effect on Library staffing has been a decrease in overall staffing hours allocated to the Palo Alto Library for FY 03-04 from previous years as shown in Figure 4.**

Figure 4: City Authorized Staffing Levels



Notes:

- FTE counts reflect budgeted dollars, and not actual working hours
- In 02-03, 2.0 FTE (Librarian and Director) were frozen and unfilled for 10 months
- In 03-04, 1.0 FTE (Librarian) will remain frozen, and another 1.0 FTE (Director) will remain frozen approximately 6 months

Conversion of 6 FTE from hourly part-time to regular benefited status

The equivalent of 1.0 FTE (two 0.5 FTE positions) were converted from hourly to regular, benefited, status.

Reconfiguration of staff, using only paraprofessionals at neighborhood libraries

Some progress has been made in reconfiguring the staff to have only paraprofessionals at neighborhood libraries. Following two vacancies in the Librarian classification at Downtown and College Terrace libraries, the positions were filled with Library Specialists. Staff has proposed upwardly reclassifying these positions to Library Associates in order to take the lead role at these facilities when they are converted to the neighborhood concept in FY 2003-04. It has not been possible to move to the full concept of the Resource Library/Neighborhood Library system as envisioned in the NLP because of the lack of facilities improvements/construction and the lack of appropriate staffing levels.

Implementation of Library Communication Programs

In 2001 the library staff commissioned a review of its communication programs by Library Communication Strategies, an independent consulting group. In their findings it was noted that in Palo Alto, communication

has taken a back seat, not because of lack of understanding or effort on the part of library staff, but simply because they lack the time and skills to do the job. As a result few people outside the library's "family" know about its services, its plight – or understand how much better it could be.

The Library Communication Strategies Report recommended increasing outreach to media and community through new and expanded communication programs such as contributed articles, opinion pieces, newsletters, photo opportunities, development of a speaker's bureau, and expansion of online Library resources. Although the library staff maintains a minimum level of communication from the Libraries, in the form of a monthly press release and publicity flyers (distributed primarily at the libraries), there has been little progress made in implementing the recommendation of the Library Communication Strategies Report due to lack of budget and qualified staff.

Summary

With no growth in operating budget and no approved funding for expanded facilities, there has been very limited progress in implementing the NLP since its publication in May 2000.

The 15 year City record of consistently under-funding the Palo Alto Library continues. As a consequence staffing levels are far below where they should be, resulting in the libraries being open fewer hours than previous years. Palo Alto was dead last in having 4.2 FTEs per 1,000 hours its libraries are open compared with 10 other comparable communities. Despite the fact that Palo Alto's Library circulation is 16% greater than the average of the other 10 libraries, the Palo Alto library budget is 24% lower than the average of the libraries in 10 comparable communities.

The single word that best reflects the condition of the Palo Alto libraries is "neglect" – neglect of facilities, staff and collections. The future of the Palo Alto Library depends entirely on the level that it is funded. For years, our libraries have faced the growing challenge posed by cramped and aging facilities and inadequate funding, they now face the challenge of accommodating new budgetary restrictions.

Recommendations

In light of the current and foreseeable tight fiscal conditions within the City of Palo Alto, and the State of California, it is imperative that the City Council adopt an implementation plan for making improvements to the Library system that will enable the City to harness limited resources to improve the level of programs and services provided by the Libraries. As a community, Libraries were ranked right after emergency services in a recent residents' survey. The status quo is not acceptable when Palo Alto Libraries are already falling below the standards of neighboring communities and other cities similar to Palo Alto.

Included in this section are a series of recommendations provided by the LAC as a roadmap of recommended short, and longer term improvements to the Palo Alto Libraries consistent with the goals and mission of the NLP.

The following time periods are assumed:

- Short Term Improvements – achievable within 2003-2005 budget years
- Longer Term Improvements – achievable 2005+

Recommended Improvements – Short Term

Introduction

The current Library budget will drastically reduce the level of library service in Palo Alto on any measure if the Libraries continue business as usual. In order to meet the 2003-2004 budget and maintain the current libraries the library staff is faced with reducing 47 service hours/week, a 17% reduction in library hours, to a total of 231 hours (see Table 2).

It is essential that the Palo Alto Libraries make some adjustments in how they operate in order to better serve the community. Unless the Council and City Manager are prepared to substantially increase the library budget in the future, the status quo is not a realistic possibility for our libraries. Existing staffing levels cannot support the operation of the current multiple-branch library facilities and programs, much less expanded facilities and programs.

Table 2: Reduced Service Hours Palo Alto Libraries

Library	Hours/Week 7/1/2002	Hours/Week 7/1/2003
Main	67	62
Mitchell	56	58
Children's	48	48
College Terrace	42	35
Downtown	42	28
Terman	23	0
Total	278	231

Recommendation: Maximize Hours & Services at Resource Libraries

In order to improve library services, the LAC recommends reallocation of existing resources to maximize hours and services at the Palo Alto Resource Libraries:

- North Resource Library – Main/Children’s
- South Resource Library – Mitchell

As an initial step the following recommendation is made regarding reallocation of resources:

Step 1:

- Eliminate public services/collections at Downtown Library and move Technical Services from Main to Downtown, to free up additional staff for use at Main/Mitchell and open up program space at Main.

This recommendation is predicated on increased hours and services at the Resource Libraries and retaining the Downtown Library for library purposes. Equally important this recommendation offers the ability to open up program space at Main for new library programs including teen library services, even without facility expansion. In addition this recommendation enables hours and services to be focused at the Resource Libraries while still keeping open College Terrace, the most heavily used neighborhood library.

The available FTE and budget created by Step #1 would address critical staffing shortages by moving staff from Downtown to the Resource Libraries enabling:

- Increased hours at Mitchell Park, Main & Children’s Libraries (Table 3)¹ – reallocation of service hours from Downtown would result in an increase of 10 service hours at the Resource Libraries.
- Improved collections at Resource Libraries – items from the collection at Downtown would be reassigned to Resource Libraries providing additional materials and extra copies of popular items.
- Expanded purchasing of materials at Resource Libraries – Approximately \$30K is spent annually for collections at Downtown and could be reallocated to Resource libraries.
- Additional program space at Main by moving Technical Services to Downtown – resulting in approximately 1400 square feet that could be reallocated to public use space, an increase of about 9% for expanded library programs and services.

Table 3: Reallocated Service Hours Palo Alto Libraries

Library	Hours/Week 7/1/2003	Hours/Week Reallocated
Main	62	64
Mitchell	58	64
Children’s	48	50
College Terrace	35	35
Downtown	28	0
Total	231	213

¹ The elimination of 28 service hours at Downtown enables an increase of 10 public service hours at the Resource Libraries since the Resource Libraries require more staff per hour (approx. 3:1) than the neighborhood libraries.

If further reductions are made to the Palo Alto Libraries operating budget then the following step will need to be taken to preserve a reasonable level of service at the Resource Libraries.

Step 2

- In addition to implementing Step 1 it will be necessary to eliminate public services/collections at College Terrace Library.

This additional step will be needed if the Library operating budget is further reduced necessitating the reduction of the current multi-branch Library system to the three branches constituting the Resource Libraries. This is contrary to the premise of the NLP where neighborhood libraries constituted an integral part of the New Library Plan, providing neighborhood-based reading libraries Downtown, in College Terrace and in the southwest area of Palo Alto.

Recommendation: Improve operational efficiency at Main/Mitchell

The LAC recommends that the Library staff focus on improving operational efficiency at Main and Mitchell. With a growing demand for library services (see Table 4) and no corresponding increase in operating budget, the Palo Alto Libraries must re-engineer their operations to maintain and improve service levels for the community.

Table 4: Library Circulation Compared to Staffing FY99-00 to FY02-03

Fiscal Year	FTE	Circulation
1999-00	52.13	926,128
2000-01	55.88	975,611
2001-02	56.58	1,117,795
2002-03	56.58	1,240,099

Source: FTE counts from City’s adopted budget documents.

Note: In January 2001, the loan period was changed from 4 to 3 weeks

The LAC supports the staff initiative to develop a program focused on meeting customer demand by encouraging self-service by its patrons and improved marketing of library collections. San Jose Public Library is also operating under tight fiscal conditions and has recently implemented a similar program aimed at satisfying the communities’ need for longer hours, better service and programs for children. The Palo Alto program will include elements of the San Jose Public Library program including:

- Focus on self-checkout with the objective of moving from 10% to 85% self checkout. Provide attractive cabinetry and individualized checkout areas to encourage self checkout.
- Convert the libraries to present an “exciting bookstore look” where collections are attractively displayed and signage is important in helping patrons find what they are looking for. The Dewey Decimal system should be augmented by signs highlighting subject area.
- Encourage face-to-face personalized service by freeing librarians from the traditional, bulky, circulation and reference desks, enabling patrons to more easily find help when they need it while still encouraging self-service.
- Reduce backroom processing and materials handling through the installation of newer inventory technology systems.

Currently Main and Mitchell Libraries have a single self-service check out booth. The circulation desk

functions at both libraries should be redesigned to increase self-service and provide a more efficient and welcoming operation.

The circulation desk at Main Library covers a massive area with inefficient use of space. By redesigning the circulation desk area the Library will not only open up more available space for patrons but will also have the opportunity to create a more welcoming entrance.

A redesign of the circulation desk at Mitchell and installation of an updated inventory system offers opportunities for reducing materials handling and backroom processing.

Funding: The re-design of the circulation desk at Main will incur one-time costs for furniture removal and area refurbishment and redesign. Currently infrastructure improvements for Main are not scheduled for design and construction until 2006-2007. Alternative or re-prioritized one-time funding would be needed to advance this initiative.

It is recommended that the circulation desk redesign at Mitchell be incorporated into the infrastructure upgrade design improvements outlined in the CIP PE04012 – Mitchell Park Library and Community Center Improvements for the 2003-2005 budget year. This may require additional funding.

Recommendation: Maximize available floor space at Main Library for additional computer stations

To open up floor space at Main Library the archival and historical collections of the Palo Alto Historical Association currently stored in locked filing cabinets on the main library floor at Main Library should be moved and housed with the existing historical periodical collections currently stored in the Main Library Basement. This will allow Library staff and volunteers from the Palo Alto Historical Association to continue to access the materials in conjunction with other items in the collection while at the same time freeing up floor space for other uses such as additional computer stations or study areas. The installation of compact shelving in the basement will be necessary to free up space to accommodate the cabinets.

Funding: This recommendation will incur one time costs for installing the compact shelving and moving cabinets from the ground floor of the Main Library to the basement.

Recommendation: Rearrange Main Library to develop space for Teen library services and programs

In conjunction with re-allocation of staff to the Resource Libraries and the reallocation of Technical Services from Main to Downtown the LAC recommends that Main Library be rearranged to open up space for new programs, specifically the launch of Teen library services and programs at Main Library.

Funding: This recommendation will incur one time costs for moving staff from Main to Downtown and office refurbishment at Downtown and also one-time costs for space refurbishment at Main to accommodate new services. Currently infrastructure improvements for Main are not scheduled for design and construction until 2006-2007. Alternative or re-prioritized one-time funding would be needed to advance this initiative.

Recommendation: Support private funding goals for Children's Library

Under the public-private partnership approved by the City Council February 10, 2003, the Council gave a private fund-raising effort until December 31, 2003 to raise \$1.2 million for the addition of a 1,600 ft² north wing at Children's Library. The LAC appreciates and endorses this fund raising initiative.

Recommendation: Implement infrastructure improvements at Children's and add North Wing

Under the public-private partnership approved by the City Council February 10,2003, construction is planned (CIP PE04010) for 2004-2005 enabling seismic retrofit, roof replacement and building system upgrades at Children's Library and a 1,600 ft² north wing addition funded through private-public matching funds.

Recommendation: Implement infrastructure improvements at Mitchell Park

Infrastructure improvements are scheduled for construction at Mitchell during 2004-05 under CIP PE04012. The LAC recommends that these improvements should include not only the seismic retrofits and electrical and mechanical system upgrades as already outlined but in addition flooring, painting and room layout improvements to enable delivery of enhanced services and programs and more efficient operations.

Recommended Improvements – Longer Term

Recommendation: Pursue a new Libraries-only bond to fund capital improvements

It is necessary to improve facilities in order to fulfill the mission of the library. The LAC recommends a libraries-only bond measure to pay for building improvements and/or expansions that will result in adequate functional, social and aesthetic space for residents to enjoy a rich set of Library programs and services. Such a measure will support improvements for the Main and Mitchell Park Resource Libraries. It assumes that current efforts to raise private funds for the North Wing expansion of Children's Library will be successful.

The LAC recommends that this new bond measure be different in two key ways from the one proposed in the November 2002 Measure D. This bond measure will be for expansion of Main and Mitchell Library facilities only. In addition the LAC recommends setting a ceiling on capital expenditures at the start, with the goal that construction fit the budget. These recommendations are intended to avoid aspects of the Measure D campaign that proved detrimental to its success i.e. the extension of the Measure D to include an expansion for the Art Center and new construction for the Mitchell Park Community Center increased the total cost significantly; in addition City Council, LAC and city staff discussions leading up to the November ballot focused on building plans that defined an "ideal" library system rather than building plans that met a defined cost constraint.

The recommended new bond measure will be used to fund expansion of Library facilities at both Main and Mitchell Resource Libraries to house expanded programs and services that will bring the standard and scope of service of the Palo Alto Library up to the level enjoyed by similar communities in the Bay Area and California.

The LAC recommends that an initiative begin early in 2004 to develop the list of proposed features for the new Library Bond Measure working in conjunction with staff, the community and architectural and construction advisors.

Examples of Expanded Library Programs and Services

Examples of expanded Library programs and services that the funding effort could provide are listed below.

Main Library

- Provide space for expanded fiction and non-fiction adult library collections;
- Provide more reading room space and space for quiet study;
- Expand program space for adult programming;
- Provide an area where homework assistance is available to students;
- Provide an area for a technology lab for scheduled training and education as well as overflow for individual computer use;
- Provide an area designated for teens, including improved teen collections and space;
- Provide primary public entrance vestibule and lobby to serve the library and the public meeting room, including an area to display local art from galleries, area school, preschools, etc.
- Provide a functional meeting space for library and community use.

The following infrastructure improvements are already planned and scheduled and will not be part of a bond measure:

- Seismic upgrading as necessary; (scheduled for funding through CIP PF07010)
- Upgrading of electrical, plumbing, HVAC systems; (scheduled for funding through CIP PF07010)
- Improvements to technology infrastructure, including wiring throughout the building. (scheduled for funding through CIP PF07010)

Mitchell Park Library

- Expand fiction and non-fiction adult library collections;
- Provide more reading room space and space for quiet study;
- Improve program space for children’s programming, such as story times and puppet shows;
- Provide an area where homework assistance is available to students
- Provide an area designated for teens, including improved teen collections and space;
- Provide a functional meeting space for library and community use.

The following infrastructure improvements are already planned and will not be part of a bond measure:

- Seismic upgrading of existing building as necessary; (scheduled for funding through PE04012)
- Upgrading of electrical, plumbing, HVAC system; (scheduled for funding through PE04012)
- Improvements to technology infrastructure, including wiring throughout the building. (scheduled for funding through PE04012)

Children’s Library

- Review need for further expansion of Children’s Library upon completion of addition of North Wing.

Conclusion

The Palo Alto Library is suffering from a 15-year City record of consistently under-funding its library system to the point where services and collections have been seriously eroded. With no major capital improvements undertaken by the City for the Palo Alto Library in the past 15 years and an under-funded operating budget the Palo Alto Library is falling well below the standards of neighboring communities. This is despite the fact that the Palo Alto community continues to value its libraries highly, most recently ranking in importance libraries right after emergency services. With the communities of Mountain View, San Jose, Berkeley, and Los Altos all opening new expanded library facilities over recent years the City Council needs to take action to raise the level of service offered by the Palo Alto Libraries to the level warranted by this community. The LAC strongly urges the City Council to adopt the recommendations documented here to put in motion short and long term improvements necessary to realize Palo Alto’s vision for its Libraries.