

Directors Report – March 21st, 2019

Follow up items

- FY20 Budget submitted
- BOS approve budget, Warrant Committee scheduled for April 5th

Building and Grounds

- Roof damaged during windy day
- New Air Compressor now on sight, awaiting installation by Town Staff
- Air Conditioner for mezzanine to be replaced, working on timeline now
- Pneumatics being evaluated as building is running hotter than it should be
- Parking lot to be repaired
- Review of spreadsheet

Monthly Successes

- 3 year anniversary of Belmont Story Project, with over 2000 plays – Big announcement coming
- Sean and Colleen – A Celtic Folk Duo
- Kwan Kew Lai (today)
- Nonfiction Collection being refreshed to create room for more seating
- Movie Magic Early Release Date
- More collaborations with Youth Coordinator under way

General Update

- Open Public Forum very successful, have heard lots of positive feedback
- Meet and great request denied
- Working with Elaine / Kathy on plan for current Coordinator of Technical Services Role.

Incidents

- None.

Current Fiscal Year Data Comparison



Key Performance Indicators

	Current month	Last Year											
		Month comparison	Jan 2019	Dec 2018	Nov 2018	Oct 2018	Sep 2018	Aug 2018	Jul 2018	Jun 2018	May 2018	Apr 2018	Mar 2018
Circulation - Total	44,136	43,064	47,681	42,932	35,075	45,017	41,314	48,937	46,597	46,686	44,909	46,207	50,524
Circulation - Adult (books/magazines)	9,430	9,514	10,620	9,713	9,079	9,771	9,078	10,944	10,567	10,393	9,840	9,261	10,531
Circulation - YA print (books/magazines)	1,442	1,509	1,515	1,504	1,408	1,547	1,641	2,744	2,566	2,359	1,667	1,743	1,819
Circulation - Children's print (books/magazines)	18,344	17,806	18,949	15,778	11,030	19,752	17,220	19,350	18,669	18,816	18,904	20,318	21,292
Circulation - Adult Audio Visual	7,621	7,996	8,817	8,803	7,436	7,061	6,951	8,287	7,571	8,096	7,974	8,238	9,597
Circulation - YA Audio Visual	44	55	47	68	43	35	41	73	57	60	59	54	53
Circulation - Children's Audio Visual	1,861	2,118	2,061	1,886	1,048	2,106	1,758	2,375	2,189	2,333	2,278	2,327	2,607
Circulation - downloads & streams (eBooks/eAudiobooks)	5,081	3,769	5,335	4,887	4,776	4,370	4,298	4,962	4,690	4,315	3,906	3,930	4,304
Reference Questions	2,056	2,924	2,218	2,109	2,955	2,980	2,616	3,733	3,486	3,131	3,296	3,048	3,313
Programs Offered (total)	61	71	77	55	60	71	51	51	53	45	80	72	79
Adult Programs	21	29	21	20	25	27	18	20	19	20	22	27	28
YA Programs	11	9	13	7	8	10	7	10	11	12	12	9	12
Children's Programs	29	33	43	28	27	34	26	21	23	13	46	36	39
Programs Attendance (total)	1,507	1,924	1,740	1,242	1,075	1,706	1,212	1,116	1,490	900	1,689	1,735	2,276
Adult Programs Attendance	273	533	198	158	285	492	156	260	102	149	207	270	546
YA Programs Attendance	121	69	108	55	52	92	58	71	149	234	105	75	103
Children's Programs Attendance	1,113	1,322	1,434	1,029	738	1,122	998	785	1,239	517	1,377	1,390	1,627
Meeting Room Use	75	89	97	72	69	80	63	57	60	61	96	90	103
Museum Pass Use	203	179	205	188	177	154	179	274	263	243	201	256	229
Use of Library Computers	1,241	1,647	1,536	1,454	1,359	1,607	1,346	1,543	1,278	1,486	1,547	1,918	2,066
Active Volunteers	6	13	4	5	13	13	13	13	5	8	12	12	11
Volunteer hours worked	46.50	142.00	44.50	21.25	154.00	182.50	146.00	112.00	101.00	121.00	158.50	160.00	155.25



Current Fiscal Year Data Comparison

Key Performance Indicators

	FY18	FY17	FY16	FY15	FY14
	Total Annual	Total Annual	Total Annual	Total Annual	Total Annual
Circulation - Total	548,782	562,579	557,469	536,824	555,696
Circulation - Adult (books/magazines)	118,589	121,002	124,061	120,027	128,476
Circulation - YA print (books/magazines)	23,095	23,424	21,516	20,486	22,456
Circulation - Children's print (books/magazines)	225,480	233,689	226,867	219,182	220,719
Circulation - Adult Audio Visual	102,538	108,748	110,921	106,847	119,738
Circulation - YA Audio Visual	733	870	894	1,029	1,229
Circulation - Children's Audio Visual	28,360	33,572	36,809	43,901	48,062
Circulation - downloads (eBooks/eAudiobooks)	46,351	38,552	34,639	24,441	15,491
Reference Questions	39,004	36,646	37,526	34,883	37,988
Programs Offered (total)	681	645	566	495	443
Adult Programs	246	156	139	101	53
YA Programs	107	117	91	55	75
Children's Programs	328	372	336	339	315
Programs Attendance (total)	17,700	19,186	16,620	14,012	14,327
Adult Programs Attendance	3,721	3,061	2,517	940	1,278
YA Programs Attendance	1,181	1,900	1,213	799	1,276
Children's Programs Attendance	12,798	14,225	12,890	12,273	11,773
Meeting Room Use	878	855	781	695	675
Museum Pass Use	2,477	2,525	2,592	2,473	2,567
Use of Library Computers	20,473	21,116	22,343	21,019	24,399
Active Volunteers	145	500	244		
Volunteer hours worked	1503.75	2,580.00	1,265.30		

Patron Traffic

Month: February 2019Main
EntranceChildrens
RoomAssembly
RoomDaily
Total

1	436	561	155	1,152
2				
3	1,089	1,358	346	2,793
4	275	303	75	653
5	666	668	237	1,571
6	587	660	275	1,522
7	695	790	365	1,850
8	613	647	270	1,530
9	435	490	229	1,154
10	618	806	386	1,810
11	347	359	75	781
12	628	655	231	1,514
13	365	426	208	999
14	536	681	312	1,529
15	708	817	411	1,936
16				
17	1,178	1,436	440	3,054
18	Presidents'	Day	Closed	
19	343	357	142	842
20	663	780	215	1,658
21	486	687	234	1,407
22	548	680	381	1,609
23	383	523	145	1,051
24	691	763	258	1,712
25	253	449	90	792
26	595	615	294	1,504
27	569	665	257	1,491
28	545	708	284	1,537

Closed/4pm

Monthly total

37,451

	ORIG./ADJ. APPROPRIATIONS.	TRANSFER	ADJUSTED BUDGET	SPENT MARCH	SPENT JULY - MAR	BALANCE	PROJECTED 9 MONTHS	% EXP
LIBRARY PUBLIC SERVICE								
16121								
511000	WAGES, FULL TIME		743,142.00	59,906.48	552,386.46	190,755.54	557,356.50	74.3%
511100	WAGES, PART TIME		227,497.00	15,528.24	147,634.84	79,862.16	170,622.75	64.9%
513000	OVERTIME		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	#DIV/0!
514105	EYEGGLASS REIMBURSEMENT		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	#DIV/0!
514800	LONGEVITY		6,939.00	0.00	4,548.21	2,390.79	5,204.25	65.5%
517000	HEALTH INSURANCE		111,090.00	0.00	111,090.00	0.00	83,317.50	100.0%
517200	WORKERS COMPENSATION		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	#DIV/0!
517800	MEDICARE		14,055.00	0.00	14,055.00	0.00	10,541.25	100.0%
517900	LIFE INSURANCE		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	#DIV/0!
16122								
530000	PROFESSIONAL SERVICES		1,976.00	0.00	870.64	1,105.36	1,482.00	44.1%
534100	TELEPHONE		9,053.00	368.94	3,440.59	5,612.41	6,789.75	38.0%
552900	BOOKS/PER/FILM/CD/REC		344,758.00	13,310.59	221,723.65	123,034.35	258,568.50	64.3%
573000	DUES		1,020.00	0.00	145.00	875.00	765.00	14.2%
	TOTAL LIB PUBLIC SERV		1,459,530.00	89,114.25	1,055,894.39	403,635.61	1,094,647.50	72.3%
LIBRARY TECHNICAL SERVICES								
16131								
511000	SALARIES, FULL TIME		171,919.00	13,256.96	125,636.39	46,282.61	128,939.25	73.1%
511100	SALARIES, PART TIME		12,520.00	960.32	8,862.91	3,657.09	9,390.00	70.8%
514800	LONGEVITY		2,725.00	0.00	2,212.50	512.50	2,043.75	81.2%
517000	HEALTH INSURANCE		36,390.00	0.00	36,390.00	0.00	27,292.50	100.0%
517200	WORKERS COMPENSATION		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	#DIV/0!
517800	MEDICARE		2,616.00	0.00	2,616.00	0.00	1,962.00	100.0%
16132								
530600	COMPUTER SERVICE		74,021.00	361.48	67,921.63	6,099.37	55,515.75	91.8%
542200	PROCESSING SUPPLIES		12,740.00	757.57	9,986.89	2,753.11	9,555.00	78.4%
573000	DUES		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	#DIV/0!
	TOTAL LIBRARY TECHNICAL S		312,931.00	15,336.33	253,626.32	59,304.68	234,698.25	81.05%
LIBRARY CAPITAL								
16133								
587100	CAPITAL COMPUTER		12,500.00	0.00	1,481.00	11,019.00	9,375.00	11.85%
	TOTAL LIBRARY DEPT.		2,304,483.00	0.00	1,631,703.65	672,779.35	1,728,362.25	70.81%

BELMONT PUBLIC LIBRARY EXPENDITURES										19-Mar-19 10:52 AM
MARCH 2019										
	ORIG./ADJ. APPROPRITS.	TRANSFER	ADJUSTED BUDGET	SPENT MARCH	SPENT JULY - MAR	BALANCE	PROJECTED 9 MONTHS	% EXP		
LIBRARY ADMINISTRATION										
16111										
511000	SALARIES, FULL TIME	172,905.00	172,905.00	13,458.09	127,694.18	45,210.82	129,678.75	73.9%		
514800	LONGEVITY	875.00	875.00	0.00	875.00	0.00	666.25	100.0%		
517000	HEALTH INSURANCE	6,715.00	6,715.00	0.00	6,715.00	0.00	5,036.25	100.0%		
517800	MEDICARE	2,473.00	2,473.00	0.00	2,473.00	0.00	1,854.75	100.0%		
16112										
524500	MAINTENANCE OFFICE EQUIP	8,207.00	8,207.00	0.00	6,432.86	1,774.14	6,155.25	78.4%		
530001	MEDICAL REPORTS & BILLS	390.00	390.00	0.00	470.00	(80.00)	292.50	120.5%		
531700	EMPLOYEE TRAINING	500.00	500.00	0.00	115.00	385.00	375.00	23.0%		
531900	ADVERTISING & PUBLIC RELA	500.00	500.00	0.00	237.73	262.27	375.00	47.5%		
534500	POSTAGE	2,800.00	2,800.00	35.70	1,000.70	1,799.30	2,100.00	35.7%		
534700	PRINTING	1,575.00	1,575.00	0.00	391.22	1,183.78	1,181.25	24.8%		
542100	OFFICE SUPPLIES	975.00	975.00	0.00	617.21	357.79	731.25	63.3%		
571000	IN-STATE TRAVEL	500.00	500.00	150.35	243.43	256.57	375.00	48.7%		
573000	DUES & MEMBERSHIP	610.00	610.00	0.00	213.00	397.00	457.50	34.9%		
TOTAL LIBRARY ADMIN		199,025.00	199,025.00	13,644.14	147,478.33	51,546.67	149,268.75	74.1%		
LIBRARY PLANT OPERATIONS										
16141										
511000	SALARIES, FULL TIME	57,825.00	57,825.00	4,448.08	42,256.76	15,568.24	43,368.75	73.1%		
511100	SALARIES, PART TIME	9,124.00	9,124.00	912.40	6,386.80	2,737.20	6,843.00	70.0%		
513000	OVERTIME	10,352.00	10,352.00	778.41	8,165.74	2,186.26	7,764.00	79.1%		
514100	SPECIALTY PAY/STIPEND	260.00	260.00	20.00	190.00	70.00	195.00	73.1%		
514800	LONGEVITY	850.00	850.00	0.00	850.00	0.00	637.50	100.0%		
517000	HEALTH INSURANCE	6,715.00	6,715.00	0.00	6,715.00	0.00	5,036.25	100.0%		
517200	WORKERS COMPENSATION	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	#DIV/0!		
517800	MEDICARE	1,149.00	1,149.00	0.00	1,149.00	0.00	861.75	100.0%		
519900	UNIFORM	820.00	820.00	0.00	820.00	0.00	615.00	100.0%		
16142										
522800	GAS	21,948.00	21,948.00	2,174.78	9,932.76	12,015.24	16,461.00	45.3%		
522900	ELECTRICITY	44,998.00	44,998.00	2,120.20	21,756.55	23,241.45	33,748.50	48.4%		
523100	WATER	5,512.00	5,512.00	0.00	3,168.07	2,343.93	4,134.00	57.5%		
523400	ENERGY CONSERVATION	8,690.00	8,690.00	0.00	0.00	8,690.00	6,517.50	0.0%		
524300	MAINTENANCE BUILDING	121,360.00	121,360.00	10,163.30	63,360.84	57,999.16	91,020.00	52.2%		
524306	R&M HVAC CONTRACT SERVIC	17,366.00	17,366.00	0.00	4,809.76	12,556.24	13,024.50	27.7%		
545000	CUSTODIAL SUPPLIES	13,130.00	13,130.00	549.36	3,625.39	9,504.61	9,847.50	27.6%		
548900	GASOLINE	398.00	398.00	0.00	16.94	381.06	298.50	4.3%		
TOTAL LIBRARY PLANT OPER		320,497.00	320,497.00	21,166.53	173,223.61	147,273.39	240,372.75	54.0%		

3/21/2019				Work Orders Currently in Process		
Ticket Number	Date of Creation	Days Open	Date Closed	Issue	Description	Status
#22024	3/10/2017	741		Cement slab	A cement slab has fallen off of the front of the building below the front fencing under the windows near the bushes. It's costly to replace, but is only ascertics.	No Update.
#29333	5/15/2018	310		Air Compressor	Air Compressor has reached the end of it's life (54 years) and is in need of replacement.	Unit not on site to be installed (3/19/19)
#30363	7/26/2018	238		East Wing Entrance Not Level	Landing is not level with doorway, trip hazard	DPW has responded that they are unable to assist with this request. Facilities Director has commented that he hopes to assist with this need when similar work is done in other buildings.
#30527	8/14/2018	219		Boiler Room Pipes need insulation	Pipes need insulation for protection	This work is needed, but it's not a true priority. After an evaluation I was told it would be good to do it, but nothing bad is going to happen to these pipes if they go without insulation for a period of time, even if it's a year or two.
#31506	9/12/2018	190		Air Conditioner components frozen in blocks of ice	Unit had large ice blockage and running water behind it could be heard, was running into the ceiling and dripping into public spaces below (reference room)	Working on plan for replacement with Steve Dorrance. Funds are short and the unit will cost 30K. Working collaboratively to utilize any available funds in Library budget (3/19/19)
#35153	2/13/2019	36		Hot water	Hot water not working as effectively as needed	No update
#35370	3/11/2019	20		Roof Damaged	A wind storm blew some stripping off of a roof joint.	The stripping has been removed, and will be replaced.
#35373	3/11/2019	20		Toilet Replacement Needed	Upstairs restroom being updated with a new fixture.	Work has been completed.
#35505	3/11/2019	10		Handicap Paddle	Once again the Handicap Paddle is malfunctioning	A new electrical switch has been ordered (3/19/19)
				Other Facilities Projects		
				Capital Projects		
	7/1/2016	579	FY17	Library Envelope Upgrade	New insulation, lights, and ceiling to be installed for energy efficiency in East and West Wings of Main Floor.	Project Complete
	7/1/2017	572	FY18	Gutter replacement	Replacement of Gutters - Front only	Gutter Replacement Complete - Front only, additional sides being considered for a FY20 Capital Project.
	7/1/2017	628	FY18	Light replacement	New Facilities Director is evaluating old agreement and plans to adjust. Project targeted for summer	Project now in process (1 day a week by Town Electrician, no cost for labor)
	7/1/2017	628	FY18	Quiet study room	New Facilities Director is evaluating old agreement and plans to adjust. Project targeted for summer	Facilities Director looking for a new vendor, as the funds appropriated are not enough to accomplish the project with the company that had been aquired to do the work.
	7/1/2017	530	FY18	Parking lot work	Curbs have been replaced	DPW has replaced broken curbing (11/15/19). They will look to crack seal fill in the spring
	7/1/2018	263	FY19	Automatic Door Locks	Installing of timed door locks on public entrances.	Installation complete, server room setup complete. Software training scheduled for 1/24/19

3/21/19

January

- Budget Review Begins with Town Admin Team
- Annual Report writing continues

February

- Budget Review Continues with additional committees
- Preparation for Town Meeting

March

- Budget Review Continues with additional committees
- Preparation for Town Meeting (check due dates for warrant articles / updates)
- ITAC Rep Check In

April

- Annual Election (Two Trustees each year)
- Annual Trustees meeting – Vote new officers

May

- Selectmen Liaison Check In
- Annual Town Meeting (Warrants)
 - Update from Library if needed

June

- Annual Town Meeting (Financials)
- Friends Annual meeting
- ITAC Rep Check In

July

- Minuteman Contract – Sign and Submit

August

- Community Preservation
- Meet Belmont
- ARIS Report due to MBLC

September

- ARIS Report due to MBLC
- Budget Considerations begin
- ITAC Rep Check In

October

- Trust Fund Review
- Holiday hours review for upcoming year

3/21/19

- Friends annual book sale review
- Financial Report due to MBLC
- Capital Budget Due (new as of 2019)

November

- Special Town meeting
- Holiday hours review for upcoming year
- Budget Narrative work in progress
- Friends annual book sale review

December

- Budget Narrative work in progress
- Annual Report writing begins
- ITAC Rep Check In

3/21/19

Proposed dates for Trustees Meetings in 2019

All Thursdays at 7:00pm

June 27th

July 25th

August 22nd

September 26th

October 24th

November 21st

December 19th

UNATTENDED CHILD POLICY

The Trustees and staff of the Belmont Public Library strive to make the library a welcoming environment and take pride in creating a friendly, respectful atmosphere for all visitors and staff. The Jane Gray Dustan Children's Room provides a special opportunity for children to explore their interests, complete assignments, and develop a love of reading.

The Belmont Public Library is a public space intended for use by Belmont residents as well as residents from surrounding towns, and the safety of children on library premises is a serious concern of the library staff. However, the responsibility for the safety and behavior of children on library premises rests with the parent or childcare provider and not with library staff. In an effort to ensure the safety and well-being of children, ensure use of the Children's Room is consistent with its mission, and maintain an atmosphere of constructive library use, the following guidelines apply to children under 14 at the library.

- Children under the age of 10 must be accompanied at all times by a parent or adult caregiver. An exception may be made for children attending library programs, with the parent's and library's permission.
- Children age 10 and older may use the library without an adult in attendance, provided the child is able to use the library independently and without supervision. Children 10-13 years old should not be left alone for more than two hours.
- The parent/caregiver is responsible for ensuring appropriate behavior of their children in the library. Disruptive behavior, including shouting, running, and climbing on furniture are not allowed.
- Children are subject to the same Behavior Policy as adult patrons, and disruptive visitors of any age will be asked to leave the library after appropriate warning.
- Children left unaccompanied at the library must be able to contact a parent or caregiver in case of emergency.
- Unaccompanied children should know who is picking them up and when. A parent or caregiver should pick up unaccompanied children at least 15 minutes prior to the library's scheduled closing time. If a child under age 10 is alone at closing, library staff will attempt to contact a parent or caregiver. If staff cannot reach a parent or caregiver on the first attempt, the Belmont Police will be contacted to assume responsibility for the child.
- The library cannot assume responsibility for the behavior or safety of children of any age left unattended at the Library. Staff members are unable to watch children for parents or caregivers and cannot be responsible for an unattended child in case of a medical emergency.
- Parents or caregivers are responsible for supervising the materials their child is allowed to borrow or use in the library and should make their rules clear to their own child.
- The library does not monitor library materials children choose, nor does it limit children's access to any materials available in the library.

Approved March 16, 2017

Suggested additional language on reverse

3/21/19

Proposed Additional Language Below:

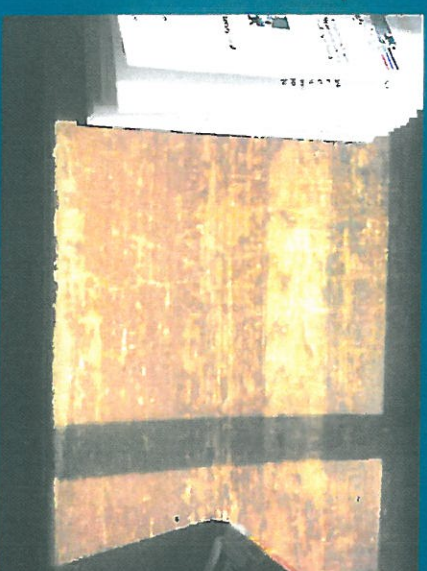
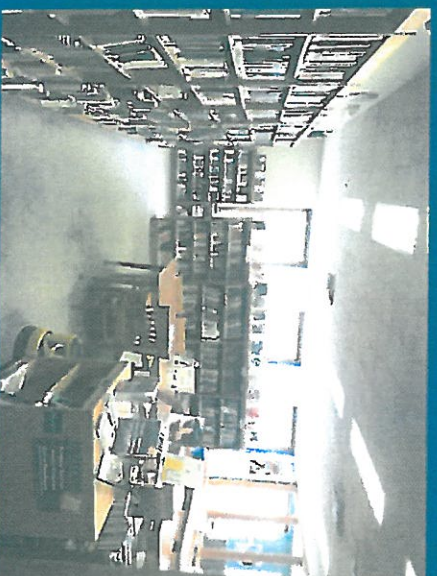
Unattended Adults in Children / Teen Areas

Adults may visit the Teen Room / Programs or the Children's Room / Programs only when accompanied by children or teens using those departments or retrieving materials for research or check out. Unaccompanied adults who are retrieving materials for research or check out may review the materials briefly in the Children's / Teen spaces but may be asked to relocate to the adult areas of the library if they are not in the company of children. This request reflects the library's concern for the safety of children and minors using the Library.



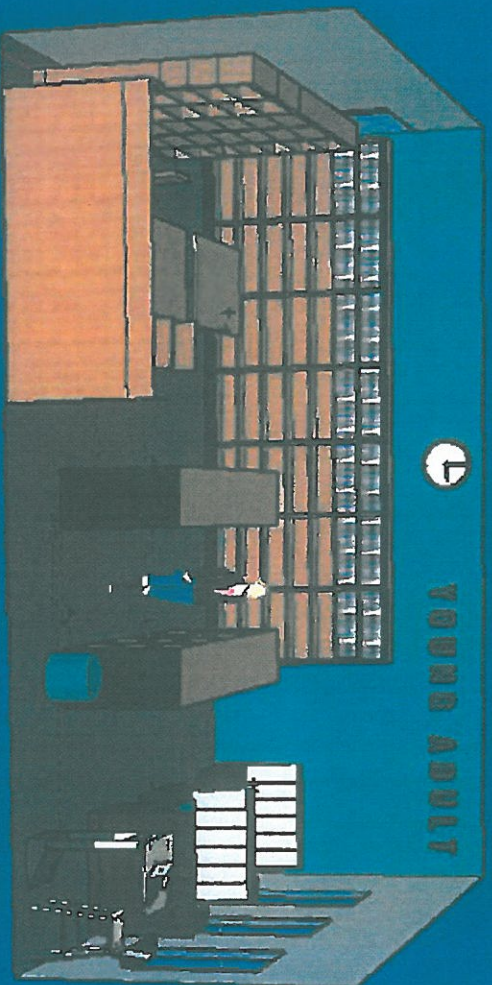
Teen Room Update

Why does the Teen Room need a refresh?



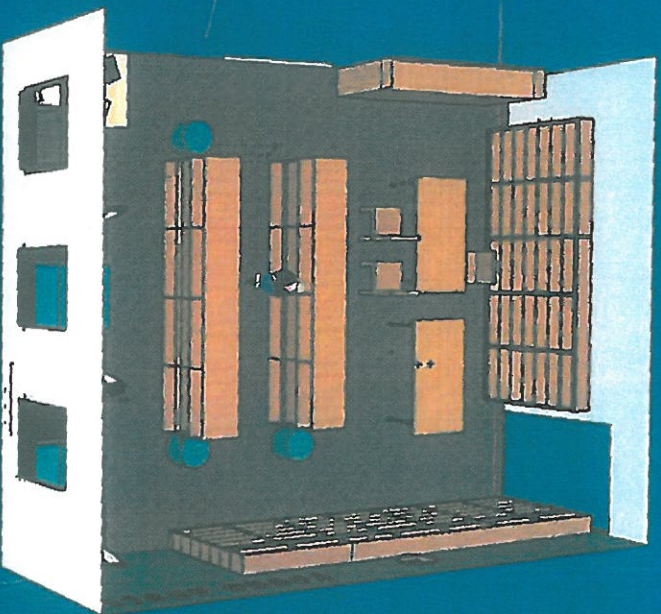
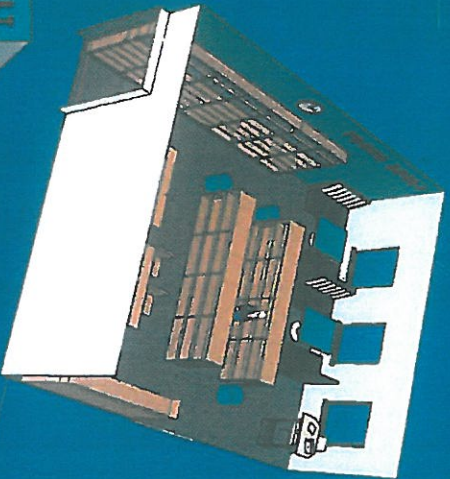
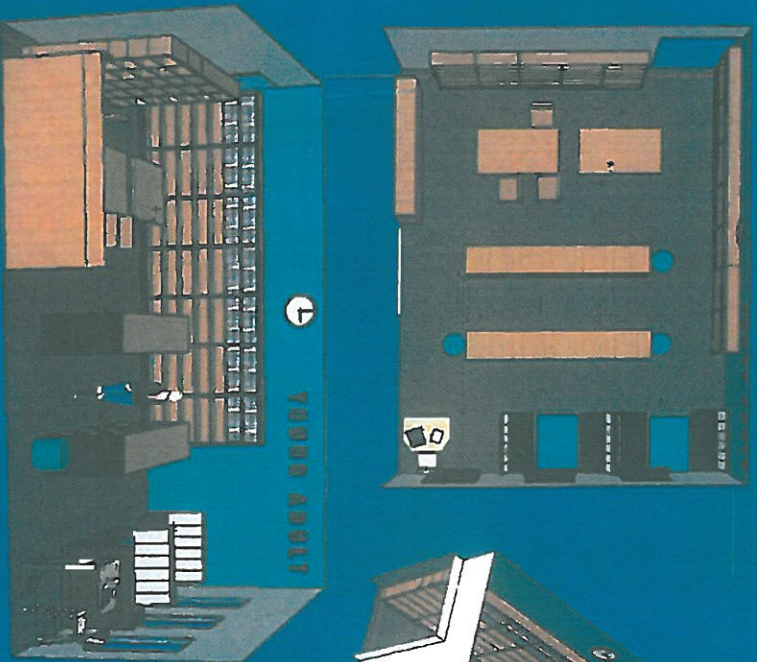
- Last major public seating area to have not received one
- High traffic area used by teens after school; carpet and other fixtures very worn
- Current configuration does not fully take advantage of space
- Dated appearance does not appeal to teens and tells them they are not a priority

Proposed Changes



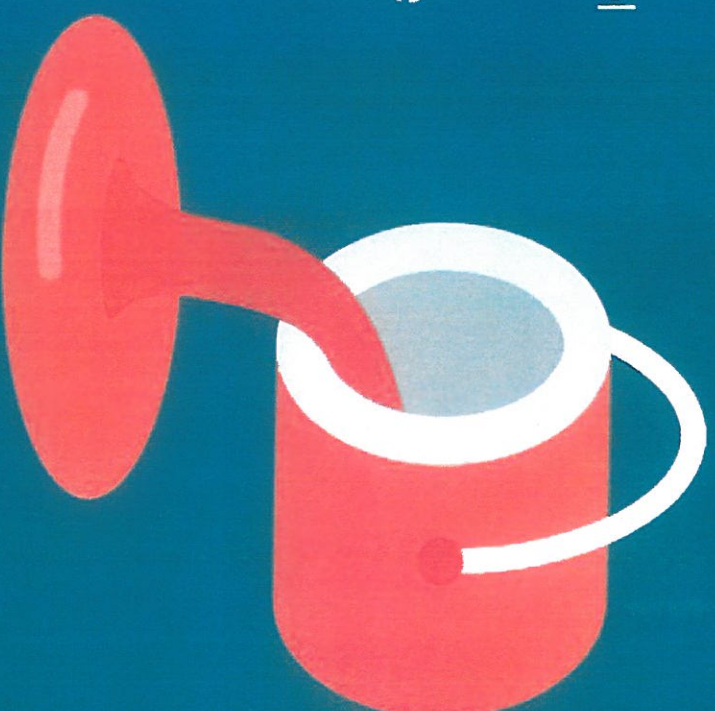
- New paint and carpet
- Replace current graphic novel shelf with two shorter shelves
- Add booth seating and individual seating
- Alter current tables
- Close off one door to provide additional space for a mobile service desk

Proposed Changes



New Paint and Carpeting

- Would provide dramatic impact on the feel of the space with a small amount of change
- Would bring the teen room in line with the rest of the library in terms of appearance
- Sends message to teens: we care about you and your space too!



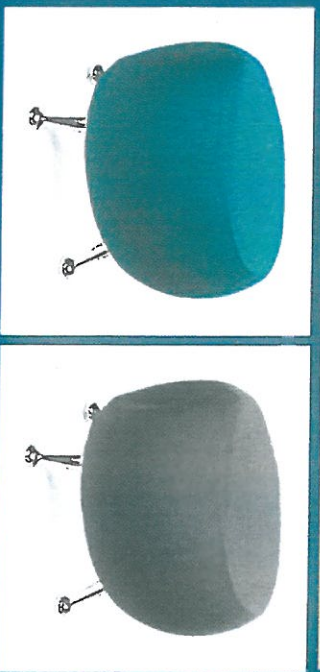
Graphic Novel Shelf Replacement



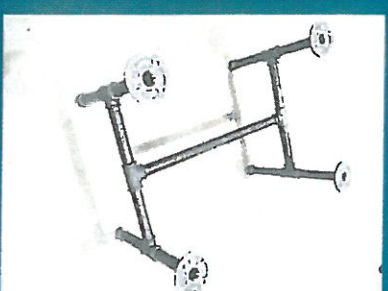
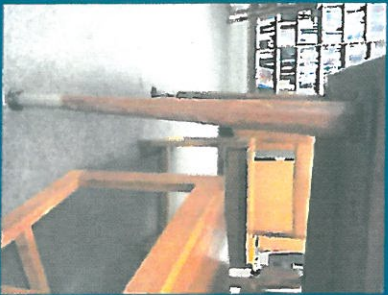
- Current shelf was formerly used for LPs, and is too deep to house books well
- Shorter shelves increase line of sight, making all materials easier to find and making the room feel bigger
- Using two shelves will allow us to consolidate comics, manga, and books on CD
- Top of shelves would provide additional display space
- Current shelf blocks natural lighting

Booth and Individual Seating

- Creates discrete seating areas so that different groups of teens can comfortably coexist in the space
- Encourages group work and individual reading
- More comfortable than heavy wooden chairs currently featured in the space
- Seating would be near windows, making better use of that room design element



Metal Pipe legs for existing tables



- Provide durable, modern look without paying full furniture replacement cost
- Allow for addition of caster wheels to increase the modularity of the space
- Can also be combined with a paint coating for the tops of the tables to turn them into dry erase boards for group work, fulfilling teen patron requests

Spot Black Paint

- Ties shelves and window sills to furniture visually
- Creates a more modern look at lower cost than full replacement
- Allows for high contrast shelf labelling, making the labels more accessible and legible from far away
- If chalkboard paint used, allows for changeable, cafe-style signage to add fun character to teen space

Before:



After:



Closing off east entrance

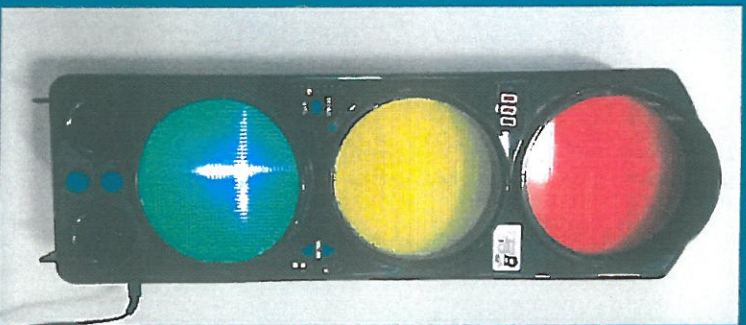


- Currently teen room has 3 entrances; the eastern entrance is not commonly used and if filled, could provide several additional feet
- Space could be filled seating, allowing a mobile workstation to be added to the opposite wall so a staff member could be present in the teen room in the afterschool hours
- Addition of workstation would increase direct contact with teens, building stronger relationships and allowing for in-room circulation of games and other student-focused items

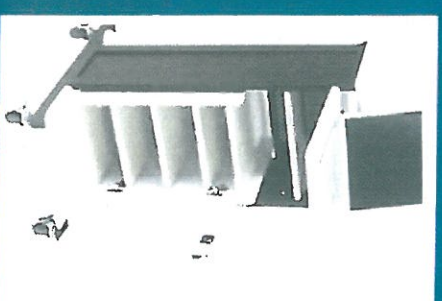
Other potential additions:

Yacker Tracker
noise monitor

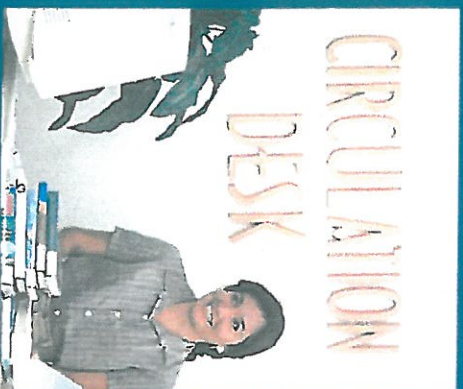
(pictured in Randolph public
library's teen room)



Replacement chairs



Raised letter sign above
shelves reading "Young
Adult"



Lockable mobile
staff workstation

Estimated Costs:

- Carpeting: \$5627
- Paint: \$300
- New graphic novel shelves: \$5896
- Booth seating: \$4000
- Individual seating: \$540
- Metal pipe legs for 3 tables: \$600
- Yacker Tracker: \$101
- 3-dimensional lettering: \$260
- Mobile workstation: \$400
- Replacement seating: \$1000
- Closing up the east entrance: \$650
- Total so far: \$19,374

Commentary: Why California libraries are ditching fines on overdue materials

- Anne Stuhldreher
- Mar 12, 2019 Updated 21 hrs ago

Bill Colb has had just about every possible job in the San Francisco Public Library system.

He has worked in customer service, managed branches and circulation, and is now the library's digital strategist. Throughout these jobs, his most dreaded task remained the same: haggling with book borrowers over 10 cents a day fines for overdue materials.

"Collecting fines is the single greatest point of friction between library staff and patrons," he told the San Francisco Public Library Commission last month.

The commission voted that night to make San Francisco the latest library system to go fine-free. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors needs to vote on the library's recommendations, but Mayor London Breed has already voiced her support.

Four California libraries—San Mateo, Contra Costa, Berkeley and San Diego—have gone fine-free in the past two years, making California the leader in the fine-free movement.

It's not the unpleasantness of prodding late returners to pay up that's spurring California libraries to ditch overdue fines. Libraries are taking a hard look at overdue fines and concluding that they do more harm than good.

Overdue fines accumulate and block access for low-income residents, the people who need libraries the most. And fines don't work that well to prod people to return books. Better ways exist that don't block access for people who need it.

In San Francisco, my office, The Financial Justice Project, worked with library staff to examine overdue fines. We found that approximately 5 percent of all library cardholders have their cards blocked because of overdue fines.

Library borrowers regardless of income miss return deadlines at similar rates. About one-third of borrowers owe overdue fines or fees at any time.

However, lower income people have a harder time paying fines for overdue items. In the Bayview branch, which serves a lower-income area, 11 percent of people have their cards blocked. That's three times as high as at branches in many high-income areas.

Library branches serving areas with larger numbers of African Americans and people without college degrees also had higher debt levels and more blocked accounts from overdue fines.

Simply put, charging overdue fines works against the library's mission of free and equal access to information.

No library that eliminated overdue fines has experienced increases in late returns, longer hold times, or gaps in collections, according to our interviews with librarians across the country.

In fact, some libraries saw their late-return rates drop following fine elimination.

"It's the best thing we ever did," said David Seleb, executive director of the Oak Park Public Library system in Illinois.

Several librarians said that the very existence of fines discourages people from using libraries. Patrons refuse to check out books for fear of fines. Most librarians in cities that went fine-free said their circulation increased after fines were eliminated.

These libraries found that there are better ways to spur people to return their materials, and that's what San Francisco plans to do. San Francisco will send earlier and more frequent reminders by text and email when books are due. If other people are not "in line" waiting for your book, it will be automatically renewed. And people will still need to replace or pay for books that are not returned.

Fines also aren't a significant source of revenue for libraries. In San Francisco, they bring in about \$300,000 a year, a tiny fraction of the library's \$138 million budget.

"Books are knowledge," said one gentleman who testified to the San Francisco library commission. Should we really cut off people's access to knowledge if they cannot pay \$10 in fines?

Upper-income people can usually pay fines in a snap. But if you're living paycheck to paycheck and cannot pay up, consequences can snowball, growing the intended "punishment" to unintended extremes. Fines will always be part of government. But they're a tool that policy makers should reach for carefully, not reflexively. Just ask a librarian.

Anne Stuhldreher directs The Financial Justice Project in the San Francisco Treasurer's Office, and is also a fellow at the Aspen Institute's Financial Security Program. She wrote this commentary for CALmatters, a public interest journalism venture committed to explaining how California's Capitol works and why it matters.