



The Seattle Public Library

Memorandum

Date: April 15, 2024

To: Mayor Bruce Harrell
Councilmember Maritza Rivera, Chair, Seattle City Council Libraries, Education and Neighborhoods Committee

From: Tom Fay, Executive Director and Chief Librarian
Jan Oscherwitz, Library Levy Administrator

Subject: **2023 Library Levy Report Submittal**

By April 15 of each year, The Seattle Public Library is required by ordinance to submit an annual levy report to the Mayor and the City Council. This report details the Library's progress in using levy proceeds to restore, maintain and improve core Library services during the prior year. The Library Board of Trustees approved the 2023 Library Levy Report at its March 28, 2024 meeting. The [report](#) is available to the public on the Library's website.

In its 2019 proposal to voters, the Library laid out a clear framework for how levy proceeds would be used to maintain and enhance Library services in the areas of Hours and Access, Collections, Technology and Online Services, Children's Programming, and Maintenance. In 2023, the Library continued to experience staffing, operational and environmental challenges that were unforeseeable when the levy was proposed in 2019. While these challenges disrupted some of our day-to-day operations, we also made progress on delivery and planning toward key levy promises in service to the people of Seattle. Some highlights include:

Hours and Access: We promised to keep libraries open when patrons need them

The Library significantly expanded hours and service levels in the spring of 2023. Despite operational challenges related to construction, heat and staffing, our 27 libraries were open 70,000+ hours systemwide in 2023, compared to 61,000+ hours in 2022 and 68,000+ hours in 2019. With this expansion, Library locations were scheduled to be open 133 more hours per week than in 2019, (excluding the Green Lake branch which was closed for seismic renovation). In 2023, we resumed many in-person programs that revitalized our spaces with educational, cultural and community programming. We offered 36 author events at the Central

Library – including celebrating the 25th anniversary of Seattle Reads -- and restarted story times at our branches. Our Social Services Team, formed in 2022, continued to serve our patrons with the highest needs, providing over 900 referrals and support to patrons for housing, food, clothing, mental health, employment and other needs. They also launched a “Coffee and Conversations” program and a teen drop-in program at the Central Library. These informal gatherings bring patrons in need of social services together with Library staff on a weekly basis and often result in social service referrals as well as much-needed connection.

Our levy-funded change of eliminating overdue fines continues to have an impact. In January 2020, we eliminated overdue fines, restoring Library access to 18,000 patrons who had their accounts previously suspended due to fines. With this change, the Library reduced the number of suspended accounts by half. Since then, the materials return rate stayed the same and we have even seen a slight decrease in the number of items that are never returned.

Collections: We promised a robust collection of books and materials

We improved the Library’s collection by adding 113,000+ digital copies and 211,000+ physical items with the support of levy funds and other resources. Our acquisitions included 18,000+ copies of books from our highly popular no-holds, no-wait Peak Picks collection, which celebrated its sixth year in 2023. In 2023, the Library also completed its two-year diversity audit of its collections. More than 500 titles and 2,300 copies were added that amplify marginalized and underrepresented voices and perspectives for all audiences across print and digital formats. In 2023, 15% more people checked out digital books and 9% more people checked out physical materials compared to 2022.

Technology and Access: We promised to improve computer and online services

Our levy-funded hot spot program continues to provide internet access through our general collection and through targeted outreach with key community organizations. In 2023, the 850 hot spots in our general collection were checked out over 6,500 times, and we worked with 16 community organizations to make 372 loans of the 250 hot spots in our outreach collection to provide more stable internet access to communities disproportionately impacted by the digital divide. These include loans of shared hotspots at 12 Tiny House villages, a service the Library provided since 2018, as well as hot spots to tent cities and other temporary shelters. Along with lending hotspots from the outreach collection, Library staff also provided regular outreach visits to connect with people and share information about Library resources.

Children’s Programming: We promised to add more programming for children ages 0-5.

By the end of the year, we offered in-person weekly Play and Learn programs at seven different branches in support of programming for children ages 0-5. In 2023, new Play and Learn groups were established at Delridge and NewHolly branches and sessions were offered in Amharic as well as English at the Columbia Branch. Annual attendance at Play and Learn offered in Library branches exceeded 4,600.

Maintenance: We promised to maintain buildings for the next generation

To improve our buildings for the next generation, we began construction of a seismic [retrofit](#) project at the historic Green Lake Branch, the first of three levy-funded retrofits of historic branches. The LEED-certified Green Lake project also includes accessibility improvements and an electric HVAC system with air conditioning, which will allow the branch to remain open and provide shelter and relief for the community on hot days, and two new ev charging spaces. We also installed new AC systems at the Southwest and Northeast branches.

Ten Year Strategic Plan

Beyond fulfilling promises in the core levy investment areas, in 2023, we launched a levy-funded Strategic Planning process. The strategic planning process was informed by the Strategic Foresight process completed in 2022, which invited community partners, staff and other key library stakeholders to envision the likely future impacts and potential scenarios facing the Library over the next 10 years. This plan will help guide the Library through the final years of the 2019 levy and help lay a framework for potential future levy renewals.

We are proud of what we accomplished with levy funding in 2023, providing the Seattle community with access to library facilities, materials and services at some of the highest rates in our history. We look forward to sharing details about our Library levy accomplishments and welcome any questions about our progress.

- cc: Honorable Members of the Seattle City Council
- Ben Noble, Central Staff Director
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- Eric McConaghy, Central Staff Analyst
- Paddy Wigren, Central Staff Executive Assistant
- Greg Wong, Deputy Mayor
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- Laura Gentry, SPL Communications Director
- Amy Lawson, SPL Chief Librarian’s Office Executive Assistant

2023 Annual
The Seattle Public Library
LEVY REPORT



Play and Learn group at South Park Library

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Expanding services and navigating transitions

Levy background

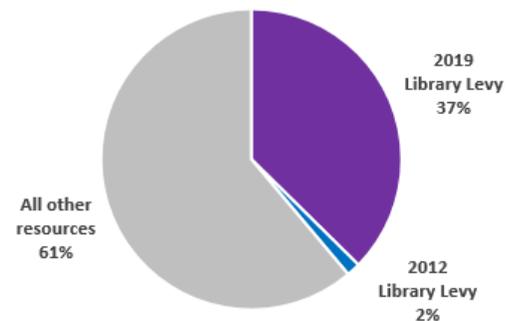
In August 2019, Seattle voters overwhelmingly approved (76%) a seven-year, \$219.1 million property tax levy to maintain and enhance Library services from 2020 through 2026, renewing a seven-year \$122.6 million levy that expired at the end of 2019.

In 2023, the 2019 Levy accounts for \$49.5 million (37%) of the Library's total revised budget of \$132 million. The 2012 Levy provides \$2 million (2%). Other sources including the City's general fund, state and federal grants, private funds and Library fund balance account for the remainder. The Library spent \$107 million (81% of its revised budget) in 2023, including \$30 million of 2019 Levy funds and \$1.6 million of 2012 Levy funds. Most of the levy budget underspend was related to multiyear projects in the Library's Capital Improvement Program and those funds carry over into 2024.

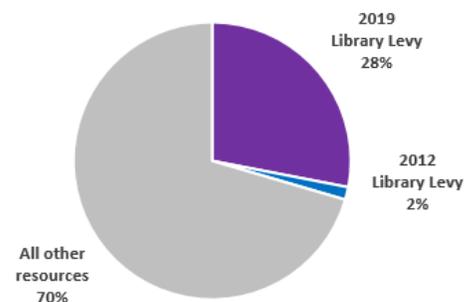
As part of its proposal to voters, **the Library laid out a clear framework for how 2019 Levy proceeds would be used to maintain services that had been funded by the 2012 Levy and provide additional services and programs over the seven-year levy period.** This report, which covers levy activities and spending for 2023 with an emphasis on Q4, continues the series of quarterly levy updates the Library has provided for the Board of Trustees and the public since 2013.

Beyond renewing 2012 Levy commitments, the 2019 Levy provides support for additional Library hours; elimination of overdue fines; improved collections and technology; safer, cleaner buildings; specialized programming and services for children; and development of a plan for the future of Library service.

2023 Library Revised Budget (\$132M)



2023 Library Spending (\$107M)



2023 highlights: expanded hours and services; more challenges

In 2023, the Library fulfilled many levy promises while continuing to respond to unanticipated challenges in keeping our facilities safe and open. In 2023, we significantly increased hours and service levels to access our resources in person, while continuing to offer a robust portfolio of online resources.

As you'll read in this report, we have continued to adapt to our new operating environment to meet the needs of Seattle residents in the levy investment areas of Hours and Access, Collections, Technology and Online Services, Children's Programming and Maintenance.

Planning for the future of the Library

In 2023, the Library made significant progress on developing a strategic plan to guide the Library over the next 10 years, which was one of the Chief Librarian's key priorities for the year. Using levy funds, we contracted with Territory, a consulting firm specializing in strategic plans, and Práctica Consulting, a firm tasked with performing qualitative analysis to reduce Library, facilitator and employee bias from the feedback we received. The Library engaged internal and external stakeholders to help guide our efforts to realize the hub future we had identified in our Foresight process. After extensive stakeholder engagement in the spring and an all-day retreat for the Strategic Planning Core Team in the summer, the Library held an employee town hall in September to update employees on the Strategic Planning Process, report back on the results of a staff survey and solicit feedback on the emerging plan.

In October, we conducted a follow-up survey for staff on the direction of the strategic plan. The 200 responses we received from this survey provided valuable insight on strategic plans of themes of equity, community belonging, enrichment, empowerment and staff retention.

In late October, we launched a public survey on the strategic plan, which was translated into 16 languages, and received 1,700+ responses. In November, the Board of Trustees updated The Seattle Public Library Foundation and The Friends of the Seattle Public Library board members on the plan, including a preview of the draft values and impacts. By the end of the year, the Library made a [Draft Strategic Framework](#) available to the public. We are working towards finalizing the strategic plan, with final adoption by the Board of Trustees anticipated in 2024.

“When I look at what we’re trying to do with the Strategic Direction, we’re talking about the transformational impact of belonging, and of being a resilient community. ... That is going to create more equitable opportunities for all.”

– Tom Fay, Chief Librarian, in an interview with [The Urbanist](#) about the strategic plan

Opening doors and increasing access

The Hours and Access category of the 2019 Levy supports operating hours in neighborhood branches and the Central Library; providing access to Library programs and services in the community; and outreach and engagement services throughout the city. Many elements of this levy category relate to increasing access to Library services through measures such as eliminating late fees and adding open hours. The revised levy budget in 2023 for the Hours and Access category is \$13.3 million.

In January 2020, we eliminated overdue fines, restoring Library access to 18,000 patrons who had their accounts previously suspended due to fines. With this change, the Library reduced the number of suspended accounts by half. Since then, the materials return rate has stayed the same and we have even seen a slight decrease in the number of items that are never returned. Also in January 2020, the Library started opening our branches one hour earlier on Sundays, the first step in what was intended to be more than 10,000 new Library hours annually systemwide funded by the levy. Then the pandemic began. After several years of COVID closures, restrictions and related staffing challenges, the Library was able to restore open hours to pre-pandemic levels in early 2023. In March and April 2023, we began expanding open hours to fulfill the levy promise. With this expansion, Library locations were scheduled to be open 133 more hours per week than in 2019, upon completion of the seismic renovation of Green Lake Branch. (See Table 1.) And although unscheduled closures (more on that below) reduced our actual open hours in 2023, our libraries were open more hours than in any year since 2009.

With our new schedule, we made numerous changes, including the following:

- More hours on Saturdays at 13 branches
- More hours on Sundays at all branches and the Central Library
- Earlier weekday openings at 13 branches
- Monday closures instead of Friday closures at six-day branches
- Earlier closures (6 p.m.) on Mondays at the Central Library and branches open on Mondays
- Changed the mix of branches open for extended schedules to prioritize branches identified as Levy priorities.

Although most branches added hours in 2023, some experienced minor reductions compared to 2019. Library hours have expanded the most at the South Park, Delridge, NewHolly, International District/Chinatown, and High Point branches. The Beacon Hill, Northeast and Rainier Beach branches have seen slight reductions in weekly open hours compared to 2019, but we have installed pickup lockers to provide 24/7 access to physical holds. Pick-up lockers are now in five locations.



Pickup locker at Broadview Branch

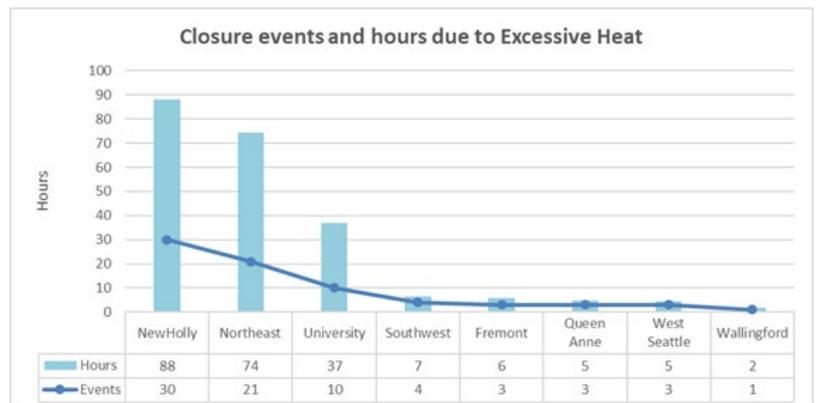
The additional open hours have increased community access to Library collections, information services, computers, programming and public spaces. In November, we began collecting comprehensive data from our new people-counting system that allows us to track entrances and exits at each location by the hour. With additional insights into patron use of the Library, we will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of our new hours and help make adjustments to our schedule. Based on preliminary entrance data, our new hours on Saturday and Sunday mornings are popular at many branches, although evening hours at many locations are not receiving much traffic unless programming occurs that drives patron attendance.

Post-COVID Operating Challenges Continue

As in 2022, we did experience some unplanned closures because of excessive heat, insufficient staffing and other issues, but overall, our libraries were open for 98% of our scheduled hours in 2023, for a total of over 70,000 hours. This compares to 61,000+ actual open hours in 2022 and 68,000+ hours in 2019, our pre-pandemic baseline.

Excessive heat in buildings without air conditioning was the most common reason for an unexpected closure. From June to mid-September, we adjusted weekday schedules at several branches that lacked air conditioning (Fremont, NewHolly, Northeast and Southwest branches) to take advantage of the cooler morning hours and to reduce closures in the afternoons and evenings.

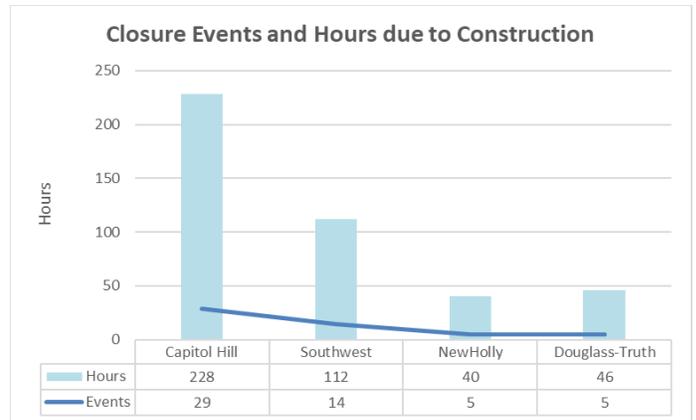
This seasonal adjustment resulted in fewer unplanned closures due to extreme heat than in the summer of 2022. However, a rule change in July by the State Department of Labor and Industries, which set the acceptable maximum for sustained indoor room temperature at 80 degrees for locations without air conditioning, contributed to unscheduled branch closures. (The Library’s past practice was to close branches when indoor air temperature reached



85 degrees.) The Library’s eight branches without air conditioning had to close 75 times in 2023 because of excessive indoor temperatures.

We will be in a better position next summer. In the fall of 2023, we replaced or added air conditioning at the Capitol Hill, Northeast and Southwest branches; a new HVAC system was also added at the NewHolly Branch by the Seattle Housing Authority, which operates the space that houses the library. By next summer, including the addition of air conditioning at the Green Lake Branch as part of its seismic retrofit, 22 of the Library’s 27 locations will have air conditioning, and we should experience fewer heat-related closures, as well as reducing our overall carbon footprint.

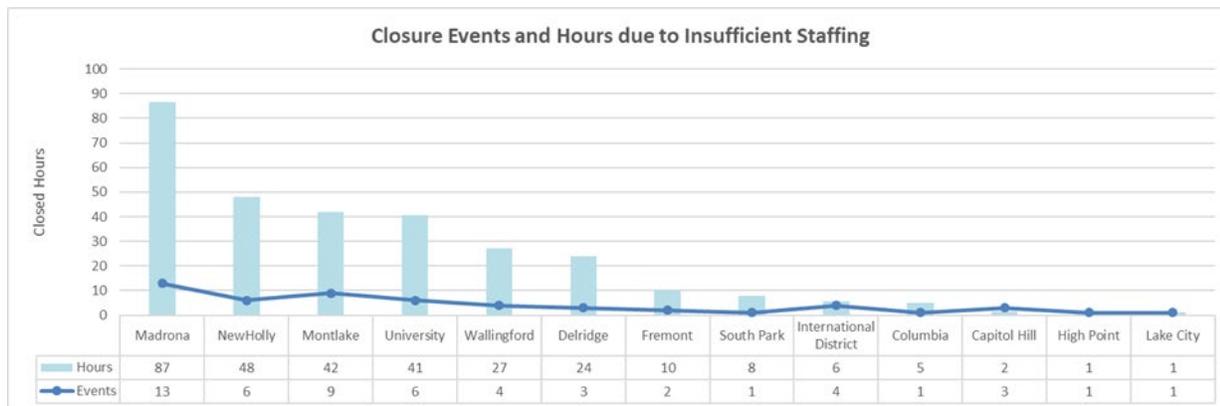
The second most common reason for branch closures was related to construction work. In addition to the year-long closure at the Green Lake Branch for the seismic retrofit project and a projected six-week planned closure at the Northeast Branch to install a new HVAC system (which are both excluded from the chart because they were scheduled), the Library also had to close the Capitol Hill, Douglass-Truth, NewHolly and Southwest branches temporarily to accommodate necessary construction.



Between April and the end of the year, the Capitol Hill Branch closed for a total of 29 days for a roof replacement and installation of a new electric HVAC system that is more efficient and reliable while reducing our carbon footprint. The Douglass-Truth Branch was closed for five days for repair of a broken sewer pipe, which required major excavation at the branch. The NewHolly Branch was closed for five days for installation of a new HVAC system. The planned Northeast Branch closure for the installation of a new electric HVAC system was extended (11 extra days in 2023 and 70 more days overall) because of electrification issues discovered and remedied by Seattle City Light. The Southwest Branch was closed for 14 days for the installation of a new electric HVAC system.

Staffing issues also contributed to the occurrence of unplanned closures, exacerbated by a surge in leave usage and modifications to minimum staffing levels at various Library locations. Before the pandemic, several branches operated with a minimum staffing requirement of three staff members, as outlined in our Collective Bargaining Agreement. However, because of a post-pandemic increase in volatile patron incidents, we re-evaluated safety measures for staff and patrons and revised how branch locations are staffed, including new minimum staffing level targets and a requirement for a minimum of two lead-eligible staff members for all open hours.

In 2023, we closed branches 54 times due to insufficient staffing for a total of 300 hours. Many were preemptive closures, which provided patrons advance notice. While closures related to insufficient staffing occurred at branches throughout the system, they were most frequent at the Madrona-Sally Goldmark, NewHolly, Montlake and University branches.



Other factors also led to unscheduled closures and delayed openings. These included security issues in and around our buildings and facilities issues such as gas leaks, power outages, and pest control issues. Together, these factors caused 51 closure events for a total of 169 lost hours.

The frequency and severity of security incidents in and around our buildings has not leveled off. Rules of Conduct violations resulted in nearly 600 exclusions over the course of the year and resulted in early closures and lockdowns at several branches. To mitigate the impact of the security challenges, the Library has added more security officers over the last five years. The levy now funds eight of the 21 security positions; four more than were funded in the 2012 levy. This has helped the Library more effectively respond to safety issues and to better weather normal levels of staff turnover. In 2024, the Library intends to upgrade and install security cameras at branches with a high number of security incidents and expand our security vehicle fleet to improve effectiveness of our security operations.

Our security team conducted nearly 5,000 branch patrols in 2023, including early morning patrols at high-incident branches to ensure our buildings were clean and safe before opening. This approach has proven successful and continues in 2024.

Reducing barriers to Library services

Beyond expanding Library hours, the levy supports improving access to Library services for everyone, especially those who face barriers to using Library resources. As discussed in the previous section, a key element of our 2019 levy included the elimination of overdue fines for Library materials, which had disproportionate impacts on lower-income communities.

In addition to eliminating late fees, we continue to refine our borrowing policies to improve equitable access. In 2023, we expanded the age range of our Foundation-funded Fresh Start program, which offers one-time waivers of lost material fees for young adults. Fresh Start was previously available to patrons ages 12-19 and has been expanded to serve patrons up to age 26, which aligns this program with other Youth and Family Learning programs. We have also made it easier for any patron to request a waiver for lost-item fees [online](#).



Calling patrons by the name they want to be called makes our Library more welcoming and inclusive. In 2023, we updated our [Library card application](#) to make it clear that patrons are welcome to sign up for a Library card using their preferred first name. We also updated our web page and provided flyers in Library branches with information about changing your name on your Library account.

As Library hours have expanded post pandemic, overall Library use has also increased, but there are still disparities. Evaluation of use data since 2020 shows that Library patrons living in the highest equity priority neighborhoods (as defined by the City's [Office of Planning and Community Development](#)) have been slower to resume borrowing Library materials than residents in the rest of the city. In 2023, we conducted empathy interviews with more than a dozen patrons from parts of the city that fell into the two highest equity priority quintiles. While reasons for no longer borrowing physical Library materials varied, many lapsed patrons told us that during the pandemic, they got out of the habit of going to the Library. In 2024, we intend to dig deeper into our findings from this research and to cross-reference with door-count data to help understand when and where additional hours are most impactful.



Patrons enjoying the Beacon Hill Branch

In-person and virtual programs and services

The Library continues to make strides in bringing back in-person programming. From January to June, we offered about 16 sessions a week of our popular in-person Homework Help program at eight branches. When we resumed the program for the 2023-2024 school year in September, we offered 20 weekly sessions at nine branches. Students get homework support, play academic games, read and work on academic skills. Free snacks are always provided. Ninety percent of Homework Help students reported their parents speak a language other than English at home, and the vast majority of students served by the program are youth of color. More than 1,100 K-12 students visited Homework Help in 2023, supported by more than 180 adult volunteer tutors. Total attendance at Homework Help exceeded 4,400 in 2023.

Last spring, we once again offered in-person Tax Help sessions in partnership with United Way of King County at the Central Library. Tax Help also returned to branch locations, with long-time partner AARP and new partner PMI Savvy offering sessions at 10 branches. Together, 147 Tax Help Sessions were offered between late January and mid-April, and an additional 21 were offered between May and July. Over 3,300 tax returns were filed at Library locations in 2023.

In 2023, the Library relaunched one of our most beloved early learning programs: in-person story time. Once again, children gathered with caregivers and librarians in libraries across the city to listen to stories, sing, move, connect with each other, and experience other benefits of early learning that will serve them throughout their life. Last year, the Library hosted more than 540 story times, with attendance of 18,000. We also held nearly 220 levy funded Play and Learn sessions, with total attendance of 4,600. This levy-funded program is described in more detail in the Children's Programming section of this report.

We launched our 104th Summer of Learning program, which invited youth to explore their past, present and future. To complement the program, we created multilingual downloadable materials, available online or at local branches throughout the summer. Summer of Learning participants were once again invited to a free end-of-summer celebration at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture at the end of August.

Over the course of the year, with support from the Seattle Public Library Foundation, the Library hosted 36 author events at the Central Library. Highlights included readings by Bonnie Garmus, author of "Lessons in Chemistry" in January, the celebration of the 25th Anniversary of Seattle Reads, the Library's citywide book group, featuring Julie Otsuka author of "The Swimmers" in May, Abraham Verghese, author of "The Covenant of Water" in June, James McBride author of "The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store" in September and Timothy Egan, author of "A Fever in the Heartland" in November. In the fall, the Library also hosted a three-part series, guest-curated by Frank Abe, about John Okada, the author of the seminal Japanese-American novel, "No-No Boy."



A family celebrating Summer of Learning at the Burke Museum event

Beyond author events, the Library hosted programming that ranged from Ladies Musical Club concerts to entrepreneurial workshops. In October, the Library hosted "A Tale of Two Cities," a business resource open house where small business champions from Minneapolis and Seattle came together in-person and virtually for a unique learning and networking opportunity to discuss building a more inclusive urban economy. When possible, the Library strives to record live events and make them easily discoverable by patrons looking to catch up on past events. In 2023, we combined our podcasts (audio) and YouTube

(video) on our website. We have created pages for [Author Recorded Events](#), [Business Recorded Events](#), [Learning Recorded Events](#), and [Civic Recorded Events](#) and intend to expand offerings in 2024.

We have also been working to improve our ability to offer hybrid options at our programs and events. The Library has deployed 17 hybrid carts throughout the system. These carts include 4K high-definition cameras, 75-inch displays and meeting control touchscreens which allow for hybrid (in person and online) meetings at Library locations. We have tested the functionality of the carts at several staff meetings and used them for an all-staff Town Hall in September, attended by hundreds of staff (including 230+ individual and staff group logins). As we test these carts and learn more, we are preparing to use this technology for public programs at the Central Library and at neighborhood branches. Our goal is to offer accessible hybrid options for our communities going forward.

In-house Social Services team

In 2022, we launched our new Social Services team, which includes a social services librarian, a senior community resource specialist and a community resource specialist, funded by the levy to focus on services for youth up to age 26. By bringing on this team, we shifted from a contract model to an in-house model. This team provides expertise to the Library on social service resources, coordinates with other providers, works closely with our security team to support staff in de-escalation and trauma-informed practices and assists patrons in need of referrals or who are in crisis. The team meets regularly with Library staff throughout the system to share information and engage in problem solving.



Social Services staff boxing emergency supplies for branches

In 2023, the team forged relationships with REACH, the Salvation Army, the Seattle Fire Department's Health One team, the City's HOPE Team, Catholic Community Services and Public Health-Seattle & King County to provide access to services and resources to our patrons and has also initiated contact with 29 other organizations for potential future partnerships. The team provided 934 referrals and support to patrons for housing, food, clothing, mental health, employment and other needs. They also hosted 14 "Coffee and Conversations" at the Central Library. These informal gatherings, attended by more than 400 people, bring patrons in need of social services together with Library staff on a weekly basis. These gatherings make patrons feel welcome at the Library and often result in social service referrals. A similar staff led program occurred weekly at the Ballard Branch.

"I am profoundly grateful to the Coffee and Conversations staff for very cordial, welcoming, very informative, accommodating environment and encouragement."

- Coffee and Conversation participant

Teen librarians and the Social Services team co-host weekly Young Adult Drop-Ins at the Central Library. Drop-ins offer teens and young adults a chance to connect with Library staff to ask questions, get assistance navigating social services and other resources, and engage in creative pursuits like button-making and collage. Teen Feed, a local non-profit partner, provides hot meals for attendees, and we provide snacks, coffee, tea and craft supplies.

Promoting the Library

As we continue to restore services, we have worked to reintroduce Seattle residents to our in-person offerings. In the fall, we launched our 2023 Library Card Sign-Up Month Campaign. Titled “Free To,” the campaign highlights the Library’s free offerings and celebrates the freedom to read and explore ideas free from censorship. For the end-of-year holiday email, we expanded this well-received campaign by creating [videos](#) with five staff members that highlighted their personal experiences at the Library. We hope this campaign will continue to foster and explore diverse viewpoints and further demonstrate the importance of intellectual freedom at the Library.

We have also used our website to highlight and create more awareness around what we have previously called “Special Collections” at the Library. Under the new umbrella term “[Unique Collections](#),” we have designed pages on our website to showcase the unique content in each collection, which range from the African American Collection to the ZAPP Zine Collection. We will continue to add more visual content to the website as we promote these diverse collections throughout 2024.

LEVY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: COLLECTIONS

Building robust collections in print and digital formats

The 2019 Levy commits resources to maintaining and expanding the Library’s collection of physical and digital materials. The levy includes additional funding for e-books, e-audiobooks and streaming services; continuation of Peak Picks; and funds to support the acquisition and digitization of local history items. In 2023, the 2019 Levy provided \$5.9 million in the Collection category, including \$4.6 million for books and materials.

A more inclusive collection

The Library completed its two-year diversity audit of the collection. In 2023, more than 500 titles and 2,300 copies were added that amplify marginalized and underrepresented voices and perspectives for all audiences across print and digital formats. Over the two-year period, more than 1,300 titles and 4,000 copies were added as a result of the audit.

Digital collections reaching more people

An increasing number of Library users continue to access our electronic resources. Over 174,000 patrons downloaded more than 5.4 million digital books (e-books and e-audiobooks) through

OverDrive in 2023, including 1.4 million in Q4 alone. These annual numbers represent a 15% increase in users and items checked out compared to 2022. Use of our streaming services held steady in 2023. We saw a slight increase in the number of patrons using Kanopy, our most popular video streaming service (nearly 17,000 in 2023), and a slight decrease in the number of patrons using hoopla, a service that provides streaming music, movies, TV and comics (just over 13,000 for 2023). E-materials accounted for 7.4 million (55%) of 13.4 million total circulation in 2023.

Our digital books reached youth across the country. In April, using funds provided by The Seattle Public Library Foundation, we launched Books Unbanned in partnership with Brooklyn Public Library, offering teens and young adults across the nation a library card that provides free access to the Library's e-book and e-audiobook collections. The card, available via a simple online form, is intended for youth ages 13 to 26 outside the Library's service area. Intellectual freedom is a core value of The Seattle Public Library. Books Unbanned helps counter the series of increasingly coordinated and effective efforts to remove books from public and school libraries across the nation. Books Unbanned cardholders have access to the OverDrive collection, with a maximum of 10 checkouts at a time. In 2023, over 7,000 young people, representing every U.S. state and territory, signed up for a Books Unbanned card through the Library and nearly 85,000 digital items were checked out.



Banned Books display, Broadview Branch

We purchased nearly 113,000 digital copies during 2023, 3% more than in 2022, creating a selection of new materials of greater depth and breadth. We used levy funds to expand the World Language Collection, acquiring 800 copies of e-books and e-audiobooks for adults and more than 700 copies for children in languages other than English, including an opening day collection of 160 titles in Japanese for patrons of all ages. We now offer e-books and e-audiobooks in 11 other languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Russian, Ukrainian and Vietnamese for adults and children.

We also used levy funds to provide unlimited access to the e-book and e-audiobook versions of "The Swimmers" by Julie Otsuka in advance of the Seattle Reads programs. During this period, this title was checked out over 6,600 times, making it one of the most popular items in our collection in 2023.

The impact of increased demand for digital materials

Increased demand for e-books and e-audiobooks has put significant pressure on the Library budget. Annual checkouts of digital books have almost tripled from 2015 to 2022, as have our costs. The Library has done our best to meet patron demand, but meeting the demand has come

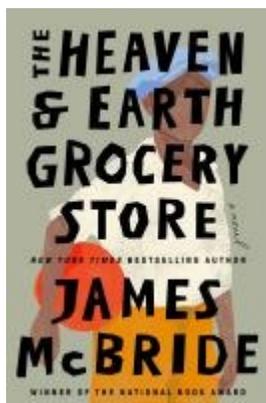
at a cost that has become unsustainable because of the high cost of digital books for libraries.

Holds are the largest single factor in increasing costs for digital books. To maintain reasonable wait times, the Library buys additional copies of a title when it accrues more patron holds. In 2023, 62% of the Library's spending on digital books was because of holds placed on high-demand titles. Library costs for high-demand digital books have nearly tripled since 2015.

To address these challenges, the Library's selection staff are in the process of evaluating a range of ideas for managing our digital book costs so that we can continue providing a broad and diverse selection of digital books and meet patron demand through the end of the year. The selection team actively monitors and adjusts the number of holds that trigger purchases through the year as part of managing costs. We are also reducing the digital holds limit for patrons in 2024.

Building physical collections, adding language, and making holds available 24/7

In Q4, patrons checked out more than 1.4 million physical items (including renewals), bringing the year's total to 6 million, about the same as 2022. More than 124,000 people checked out physical Library materials in 2023, compared to about 113,000 in 2022, an increase of about 9%. We added over 211,000 physical items to our collection using funds from all sources. We added three new pick-up lockers at the Northeast, Beacon Hill and Broadview branches in 2023 with funds from The Seattle Public Library Foundation and American Rescue Plan Funds. These lockers provide access to our physical collection when branches are closed by allowing patrons to pick up materials at any time of day, helping us deliver on our levy promise of more materials when patrons want them.



[Peak Picks](#), the Library's no-holds, no-wait collection of high-interest titles funded by the levy continues to be popular. In 2023 we added 118 Peak Picks titles and over 18,000 copies, including 31 new titles and 5,100 copies in Q4 alone. Fiction highlights include "The Berry Pickers," by Amanda Peters, winner of the 2021 Indigenous Voices Award for Unpublished Prose; "Let Us Descend," Jesmyn Ward's wrenching and beautifully told story of a young enslaved woman on a rice plantation in the Carolinas; and Alice McDermott's "Absolution," an evocative character study of American women in 1963 Saigon. Nonfiction highlights include "How to Say Babylon," Safiya Sinclair's memoir about her journey from a strict Rastafarian upbringing in Jamaica to finding her own voice as a poet in America; "City on Mars," Kelly and Zach Weinersmith's hilarious investigation into space settlement; and "Prequel," Rachel Maddow's page-turning account of public servants and private citizens who thwarted a far-right contingent.

Although Peak Picks checkouts were down slightly in Q4 due the ongoing closure of the Green Lake branch and the unexpected length of the closure of the Northeast branch, Peak Picks circulation was nearly 4% higher in 2023 than in 2022. By the end of 2023, patrons checked out nearly 950,000 Peak Picks, and we are on track to reach one million checkouts in 2024! The most popular Peak Pick during Q4 was the novel “The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store” by James McBride. The most popular Peak Pick for the year was Bonnie Garmus’ “Lessons in Chemistry.”

Top Ten Peak Picks for 2023:

1. “Lessons in Chemistry,” Bonnie Garmus
2. “Foster,” Claire Keegan
3. “A Fever in the Heartland,” Timothy Egan
4. “The Wager,” David Grann
5. “Yellowface,” R.F. Kuang
6. “Hello Beautiful,” Ann Napolitano
7. “Remarkably Bright Creatures,” Shelby Van Pelt
8. “The Guest,” Emma Cline
9. “Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow,” Gabrielle Zevin
10. “Pasta for All Seasons,” Michela Tartaglia

Expanding our local history collections and making them more accessible

In 2023, we moved our digital assets related to our local history collections to a cloud-based solution to add capacity and improve redundancy and retention capabilities. Last year, we added over 800 items to our Seattle Room digital collections highlighting local history. This included the addition of over 200 items to our [Black Culture and History collection](#).with support of a Washington State Digital Heritage grant; new photographs in our [Century 21 Digital Collection](#) highlighting the 1962 World’s Fair; and more images in our [Werner Lenggenhager Photograph Collection](#), which shows views of Seattle and Washington State from the 1950s to the 1980s. We had over 43,000 unique users to the site, an increase of 3,000 people over the previous year. These users visited the site over 54,000 times.

This year we passed an important milestone with the Werner Lenggenhager Collection, completing digitization of over 6,000 images in collection of nearly 30,000 photographs. In the fourth quarter we added images that depicted [homes in the Central District](#) and [various street scenes from the University District](#).

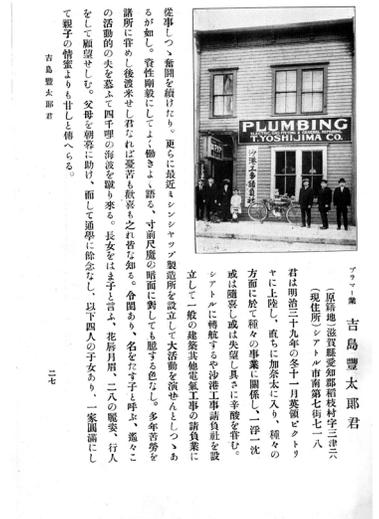
Another highlight from the fourth quarter included the digitization of John Caldwell’s [World War II era drawings](#) to add to our Black Culture and History Collection. Caldwell was a Black serviceman who passed through the city in the 1940s and spent time at Seattle’s segregated Camp George Jordan located on the south side of Spokane St. between First Avenue S. and Second Avenue S. Soldiers at the camp helped with war-time transportation logistics. Caldwell’s drawings, which include portraits of women and celebrities as well as a sketch of the Camp, are especially important because Camp George Jordan is largely absent from the historical record.



Camp George Jordan, John Caldwell ca. 1940s

During 2023, the Library acquired 130 photographs, 20+ photos albums and over 300 photo postcards, documenting life in Seattle and the changing urban landscape from the 19th century to the present day. In addition, two major Seattle book collectors donated important books to the Seattle Collection, including “Rambles Through the Northwest”(1884) and “Reports of the Governor of Washington Territory” for 1884, 1885 and 1886 — the latter inscribed by Governor Watson Squire. Finally, the Library acquired the archives of the Seattle Milk Fund (founded 1907), the Governor Eugene Semple Family Collection, and the annotated menu collections of two local restaurant reviewers through donations.

In 2023, the Library also acquired an extremely scarce biographical directory of Japanese immigrants in and around Seattle published in 1914. The volume includes biographical sketches of more than 100 Japanese immigrants from the Seattle area, most illustrated with halftone portrait photos. As there are no other recorded institutional holdings of this book in the U.S or Japan, this volume is a remarkable addition to the Seattle Collection. This rare item will provide researchers with a wealth of detailed information about the Japanese community in Seattle in the early 20th century.



Japanese Directory, 1914

LEVY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: TECHNOLOGY

Keeping our technology up to date

The 2019 Levy promises around technology include dedicated funding for digital equity offerings; replacing infrastructure for public internet access; replacing outdated technology for acquisition and circulation; and maintaining and upgrading public technologies and the spl.org website. Since the start of the pandemic, our presence online has grown. The levy provided \$2.5 million in budget authority to support technology operating expenses in 2022 and \$5.7 million, including \$2.5 million in carryforward, for the technology capital program.

Digital equity and the Hot Spot circulation program

Internet access is a critical need for everything from job-seeking help to social connection to remote learning. The 2019 Levy is the primary funding source for our [HotSpot program](#), and we have been able to leverage levy funding with additional Foundation and federal funds to offer more hot spots in the community.

Our levy-funded hot spot program continues to provide internet access through our general collection and through targeted outreach with key community organizations. In 2023, the 850 hot spots in our general collection were checked out over 6,500 times, and we worked with 16 community organizations to make 372 loans of the 250 hot spots in our outreach collection to provide more stable internet access to communities disproportionately impacted by the digital divide. These include loans of shared hot spots at 12 tiny house villages, a service we have been providing since 2018, as well as hot spots to tent cities and other temporary shelters. Along with lending hot spots from the outreach collection, Library staff also have provided regular outreach visits to connect with people and share information about Library resources. Last year, we upgraded our devices to the latest model offered by our hot-spot provider. Devices were last upgraded in 2018.

“I can't imagine a more useful service in today's age than access to Wi-Fi. The Library has done an amazing thing granting access to the world for those who are currently without Wi-Fi. Thank you.”

- Patron borrowing general circulation hot spot

At the end of the year, our outreach hot-spot team held community listening sessions with 13 partners who are from and work with Seattle communities most impacted by the digital divide to help improve program design in 2024 and beyond.

Expanding access to computers, scanners and more

In 2023, our technology team continued to modernize and improve the Library's technology. We upgraded 368 public and staff computers that had reached the end of their useful lives. We also replaced 40 printers no longer supported by the manufacturer. In 2023, nearly 39,000 patrons used Library computers almost 340,000 times. This is about 10% more people and sessions compared with 2022. Average session length increased from 55 minutes in 2022 to an hour in 2023.

The Library continued to be a central hub for community printing, with the number of pages printed increasing by 41% from 1.2 million to 1.7 million year over year. We have made it easier for patrons to use cash to use the printers and for our financial staff to audit usage of the machines. In addition, in the 4th quarter, we introduced a new model of printers with fast printing capability. During 2023, our ScanEZ stations, which offer free faxing and scanning as well as translation, became available at all locations and experienced 96% growth in usage from 146,000 to 283,000 pages.

While the use of public-facing Library technology has increased with the expansion of open hours over the last two years, the demand for desktop computers has declined as patrons have shifted to their own devices and Library laptops. In 2023, Library technology staff studied computer usage statistics and determined that the desktop inventory could be reduced by up to 30% without impacting availability of computers to our patrons. By right-sizing the number of desktops, we are able to free up resources to invest in high-demand technology, including additional laptop capacity, ScanEZ stations and upgraded print kiosks. We began removing excess desktops from branches in the fourth quarter and will continue removing them through 2024. We added a total of 14 laptops available to the public at eight branches; the number of laptops at the Columbia,

University and International District/Chinatown branches doubled.

In 2023, we leveraged levy funds with funds available through the E-rate program, a federal program that provides rebates for eligible internet service and hardware expenses. Funded in part through the E-rate program, we made substantial infrastructure upgrades that will help ensure our libraries have dependable internet access. These included new network switches on nine out of 11 floors at the Central Library, with emergency power deployed to nine branches.

The 2019 Levy includes \$4 million to support the replacement of the existing Integrated Library System (ILS) system upgrades. In 2022, the Library worked with a consultant to develop a roadmap for this work, including replacing the discovery layer and make investments in digital asset management. This process included in-depth discovery sessions across all library functions. Due to staffing constraints, the Library deferred the planned Request for Proposal process to solicit responses from the ILS market until 2024.

LEVY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: SUPPORTING CHILDREN

Expanding early learning options for children



Play and Learn group at Lake City Branch

More Play and Learn programs and Restarting In-Person Story Times

The 2019 Levy promised additional support for Library early learning programs for children ages 0 to 5, providing about \$280,000 to support this effort in 2023. A key element of our early learning program is our continued support for the Kaleidoscope Play and Learn program, which offers drop-in neighborhood-based play groups for the Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregiver (FFN)

community. Weekly sessions, which are facilitated by early childhood educators, are available to children between the ages of birth to 5. Parents, caregivers, and children are guided through a variety of developmental activities that promote early learning. The Library has historically partnered with local community-based organizations and agencies to offer these programs by providing meeting room space and access to group supplies. Additionally, our children’s librarians have provided early literacy support, promoted library programs and services and built connections with family, friend and neighbor caregivers. Prior to the pandemic, five Play and Learn programs were offered weekly at Beacon Hill, Broadview, Columbia, Lake City, and Rainier Beach branches.

As part of the 2019 levy, the Library had planned to establish up to six additional weekly sessions, either offering a second session per week at branches that already had programs or at branches that had previously not offered Play and Learn. The plan was to launch the new groups in late 2020. With the closures of library facilities in March 2020, however, all in-person children’s programming went on hiatus, and some levy funding for Play and Learn was re-directed to address other emergent needs, including support for remote learning for children in grades K-5.

We restarted Play and Learn programming in late 2022 at Beacon Hill, Columbia, Lake City and Rainier Beach branches with long-time partners, Chinese Information and Service Center and Denise Louis Education Center. We also partnered with Villa Comunitaria to launch a group at South Park Branch in late 2022 and a second group at Delridge Branch in 2023. Also, in 2023, we worked with East African Community Services to launch a group at NewHolly branch. Overall, we offered 219 Play and Learn sessions at seven Library branches with a total attendance of 4,680. We currently offer programs in Spanish, Chinese, Amharic, Somali and English.

“We are seeing the results of our increased outreach efforts (at Columbia Branch). There are now 5 Amharic speaking families that attend the group.”

–Karen Greene Smith, Kaleidoscope Play and Learn Coordinator Denise Louie Education Center

Each year, BrightSpark, the umbrella organization that administers the Kaleidoscope Play and Learn program, evaluates survey responses from program participants from all Play and Learn programs in King County. As a result of participating in Play and Learn, more than 80% of the 191 Play and Learn parents and caregivers who responded to the 2023 survey said that they are more likely to read, look at books or tell stories with the child in their care and better understand that children develop school readiness skills when they play. Eighty-seven percent reported that they feel more supported as a parent or caregiver in their community.

In April, we brought back in-person story times and other early learning programs for the first time since the pandemic. In developing our early learning programs for 2023, the Library listened to and worked with community groups to develop programs that advance our equity goals, are culturally appropriate, and, when possible, community led. During 2023, we offered 542 story times at 18 branches, the Central Library and in the community. Our offerings included world language story times in Spanish and Arabic and a perennial patron favorite, Fire Fighter Story Time. Total attendance at these programs exceeded 18,000.



Fire Fighter Story Time at Lake City Branch

Beyond in-person offerings, we continued to offer a robust menu of virtual programs through our [Kids' YouTube channel](#), including 179 different videos of story times, Play and Learn programs, Early Learning at Home programs, and children's activities online that are available to the public to enjoy at any time. Overall, our children's videos were viewed over 39,000 times. Our most popular video, first published in 2020, "What Firefighters Wear" garnered over 21,000 of those views.

LEVY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: MAINTENANCE

Protecting our investments

The 2019 Levy promised to maintain Library buildings, preserve funding for major maintenance and add resources to undertake seismic retrofits for the [historic Columbia, Green Lake and University branches](#). The 2019 Levy provided about \$2 million in budget authority in 2022 to support routine maintenance and \$12.9 million to support major maintenance and seismic work.

Routine maintenance: Keeping our facilities clean and safe

Keeping the Library clean, safe and accessible is an important levy priority. The members of janitorial/custodial team and facilities team were busy this past year, completing approximately 7,000 work orders. The janitorial/custodial team completed 4,000 for the year, including 400 work orders in the Q4. In addition to their daily job duties, they conducted deep cleanings of contaminated restrooms and worked on the detection and eradication of bedbugs and other pests

within some of our branches. They also kept the exterior of the Central Library clean by pressure washing the Fourth Avenue, Spring Street and Fifth Avenue plazas at least once every two weeks. They did similar work at the Ballard Branch, continuing to address the impacts of an increase in encampments of the insecurely housed near Library property, which required daily pick-up of garbage and weekly pressure washing of the exterior plaza to keep the Library and the adjacent Neighborhood Service Center presentable and accessible to the public. Other important maintenance work was performed by our vendors, including window washing (including of the nearly 10,000 windows at the Central Library) and the deep cleaning of all hard surface floors and carpets at our locations.



New Automated Materials Handling System at the Maintenance and Operations Center

The facilities team completed over 3,000 works orders for the year, including 800 in the Q4, performing activities that ranged from maintaining the Automated Materials Handling System (AMHS) (which went live in its new location in Q3) to performing safety checks and walkthroughs for the HVAC systems to addressing ongoing issues with the elevators with Eltec, our elevator service provider, and more.

Major maintenance: Preserving libraries for the next generation

The 2019 Levy provided \$7.6 million in 2023 budget authority and \$10.8 million in carryforward authority for major maintenance and seismic upgrades. The 2012 levy provided an additional \$1.3 million in carryforward authority. In Q4, the Library spent nearly \$1.88 million (\$7.2 million for the entire year) of 2019 levy funds on seismic, major maintenance and IT capital work, and over \$718,000 of 2012 levy funds (\$1.4 million for the entire year).

Projects completed during 2023 included: Exterior access improvements and emergency sewer repairs at the Douglass-Truth Branch; roof replacement at the Queen Anne Branch; the interior build-out and installation of the Automated Materials Handling System (AMHS) and exterior painting of the Maintenance and Operations Center; and high-priority ADA restroom access improvements to the Madrona-Sally Goldmark, Capitol Hill, Montlake, Northeast and Rainier Beach branches.

Construction for the Green Lake Branch seismic retrofit project is continuing through early 2024. As of Q4, the University Branch seismic retrofit remained in the permitting phase; the branch is tentatively scheduled to close for construction later in 2024. As mentioned in previous reports, due to scope expansion, material scarcity and significant increases in construction costs, the project may face a shortfall of \$5 to \$6 million.

The Library continues to pursue federal and state funding opportunities to supplement levy funding for both seismic and HVAC/electrification projects. However, applying for, monitoring and reporting on federal and state funding requires substantial staff resources, and often requires technical expertise, all

of which can be beyond current Library staff capacity. Timeliness of funding decisions, especially at the federal level, varies and is dependent upon political factors beyond the Library's control.

Should the Library fail to secure federal and state grants or should the City further reduce the Library's REET allocation, it is likely that there will be insufficient resources to undertake the third seismic project (the Columbia Branch) planned in the 2019 levy.

Progress on other significant projects during Q4 included completion of sewer repairs at the Douglass-Truth branch. HVAC/mechanical systems units were also installed on the Capitol Hill Branch roof, and the final punch list items for the roof itself should be finished in Q1 2024. Finally, electrification upgrades (with the notable addition of air conditioning) were nearly completed for two branches: the Southwest Branch, with system control punch list items to be addressed in Q1 of 2024; and the Northeast branch, which is scheduled to reopen March 2024.

Risks, opportunities and the path ahead:

As you'll read in our 2024 first quarter report, our staff continue to adapt, enhance and launch services and programs to help our community respond to the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. Here's a quick preview:

- Release of the Library's new 10-year Strategic Plan
- The challenges of managing e-book and e-audiobook demand
- Operational changes related to new union contracts
- Analysis of expanded hours

2023 Financials

The 2019 Levy accounted for \$49.5 million (37%) of the Library's total revised 2023 budget of \$132 million. The Library spent \$30 million in funds from the 2019 Levy and \$1.6 million in funds from the 2012 Levy.

Spending tables below show the 2023 Operations Plan Budget plus encumbrances and unspent budget authority from prior years in the revised budget columns. Carryover budget authority of \$16.5 million from the 2019 levy and nearly \$2 million from the 2012 levy were available for spending in 2023. We spent 61% of the 2019 Levy's revised 2023 budget authority and 81% of the 2012 Levy's revised 2023 budget authority.

2019 Levy	2023 Ops Plan	2023 Revised	2023 YTD	% Revised Budget	
	Budget	Budget*	Exp.	Available	Spent
Hours & Access	13,283,000	13,248,402	12,107,668	1,140,734	91%
Collections	5,800,000	5,907,076	5,867,566	39,510	99%
Technology & Online Services	2,563,000	2,408,817	2,242,341	166,476	93%
Children's Programming	301,000	366,308	338,398	27,910	92%
Maintenance	1,832,000	2,152,110	1,777,084	375,026	83%
Administration	300,000	492,916	452,743	40,172	92%
Capital Improvement Program	8,894,000	24,904,429	7,242,545	17,661,884	29%
Total	32,973,000	49,480,059	30,028,348	19,451,712	61%

Includes \$496k in operating carry-forward and \$16M in capital carry-forward budget authority

2012 Levy	2023 Ops Plan	2023 Revised	2023		% Revised Budget
	Budget	Budget*	Expense	Available	Spent
Technology & Online Services	-	258,000	159,068	98,932	62%
Buildings & Facilities Support	-	9,250		9,250	
Capital Improvement Program	-	1,684,622	1,429,744	254,878	85%
Total	-	1,951,872	1,588,812	363,060	81%

Entire 18100 budget consists of carry-forward budget authority

Table 1. Scheduled weekly hours in 2023 compared to 2019 baseline

	2019 Baseline	Jan.-Mar. 2023	Apr. hours expansion	Nov. adjustment for NET closure	When Green Lake Opens
Ballard Branch	60	59	62	62	62
Beacon Hill Branch	60	57	56	56	56
Broadview Branch	60	57	62	62	56
Capitol Hill Branch	60	55	62	62	62
Central Library	62	54	62	62	62
Columbia Branch	60	53	56	56	56
Delridge Branch	39	40	56	56	56
Douglass-Truth Branch	60	55	62	62	62
Fremont Branch	39	40	48	48	48
Green Lake Branch	39	33	CLOSED	CLOSED	56
Greenwood Branch	60	61	62	62	62
High Point Branch	46	47	62	62	62
International District/Chinatown Branch	46	42	62	62	62
Lake City Branch	60	61	62	62	62
Madrona-Sally Goldmark Branch	39	40	48	48	48
Magnolia Branch	39	33	48	48	48
Montlake Branch	39	40	48	48	48
NewHolly Branch	39	33	56	56	56
Northeast Branch	60	57	56	CLOSED	56
Northgate Branch	60	57	56	60	56
Queen Anne Branch	39	35	48	48	48
Rainier Beach Branch	60	59	56	56	56
South Park Branch	46	47	62	62	62
Southwest Branch	60	45	56	56	56
University Branch	46	47	48	48	48
Wallingford Branch	39	40	56	56	48
West Seattle Branch	60	45	56	56	56
Total Weekly Hours	1,377	1,292	1,468	1,416	1,510
Hours as a % of 2019 baseline level		94%	107%	103%	110%