

Seattle Public Library

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Budget Summary (\$ in 000s)

	2020 Adopted	2021 Proposed	% Change
Appropriations by BSL/Program			
Operating			
Administrative/Support Service	\$12,017	\$11,838	(1.5%)
Chief Librarian's Office	\$516,178	\$493,615	(4.4%)
Human Resources	\$2,338	\$2,112	(9.7%)
Institutional and Strategic Advancement	\$1,587	\$1,494	(5.9%)
Library Programs and Services	\$65,006	\$61,738	(5%)
Operating Subtotal	\$81,464	\$77,675	(4.7%)
Capital			
Capital	\$4,768	\$9,237	94%
Capital Subtotal	\$4,768	\$9,237	94%
Total Appropriations¹	\$86,232	\$86,912	1%
Total FTEs²	NA	NA	NA
Revenues			
Library Fund	\$59,768	\$55,194	(7.7%)
Library Trust & Memorial Fund	\$0	\$0	0%
2012 Library Levy	0	\$138	n/a
2019 Library Levy	\$25,886	\$31,180	20%
REET I Capital Fund	\$578	\$400	(31%)
Total Revenues	\$86,232	\$86,912	1%

¹ Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

² The Library Board retains control over FTEs, rather than City Council.

I. Background

The Seattle Public Library (SPL) provides library services through the Central Library, 26 library branches, and a mobile services division. It is governed by a five-member Board of Trustees that controls how to expend SPL's allocated funds by adopting an annual operations plan after the Council passes the budget each year. Any change in allocations for a specific purpose is subject to Board approval.

In 2019 Seattle voters passed a \$219.1 million levy, renewing the previous 2012 levy to maintain and expand library services. In the 2020 Adopted Budget, General Fund resources supported 68 percent of the SPL budget, while the 2019 Library Levy supported 30 percent, and other Library-generated revenues supported two percent.

The Council made a series of changes to SPL's budget during 2020. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all SPL branches closed in March 2020, with select branches reopening for curbside pick-up and return services, resuming some limited mobile services, and providing public restroom access for people experiencing homelessness. Changes to the 2020 Budget in CB 119825 reduced SPL appropriations by \$2.9 million (\$2.8 million cut in General Fund and \$100,000 of Real Estate Excise Tax (REET). 2019 levy funds of \$1.6 million offset the General Fund cut from the 2020 Adopted Budget by realizing some operational savings and delaying the following until 2021: hours expansion, programming for children, hiring a community resource specialist for youth, and conducting the Library of the Future study. SPL offset the remaining funding gap by saving \$758,000 through holding positions vacant and reducing other operating expenses, as well as by reprogramming \$500,000 from the Library Foundation.

The 2021 Proposed Budget would further reduce the General Fund support to SPL by \$5.8 million, including the following reductions:

- \$3.1 million for hours, operations, and staffing support;
- \$1.4 million for physical and digital collections and related staffing support; and
- \$1.36 million in administrative support, maintenance, technology, related personnel and training.

The 2021 Proposed Budget would also reduce REET support by \$360,000. Technical, baseline, and revenue adjustments account for the remaining budget changes. The 2021 Proposed Budget would result in General Fund support of 63 percent of SPL's budget, while the 2019 levy would support 36 percent, and Library-generated revenues would support the remaining one percent.

II. Issue Identification

1. Cut in Operating Hours and Using Levy Funds to Offset Impacts to Operating Hours

The 2021 Proposed Budget would cut \$3.1 million in General Fund support, requiring a contraction of library operating hours throughout the system without using levy funds to offset the reduction.

During 2019, SPL operated 1,377 service hours per week. Starting January 2020, SPL operated 1,403 hours per week, opening one additional hour on Sundays at all branches. Pre-COVID, the Central Library was open seven days a week (for a total of 62 hours), and open until 8 pm Monday through Thursday. Each branch library operated between 40 and 61 hours per week, with most open seven days a week. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, SPL had anticipated using funding from the 2019 Library Levy to expand hours beginning in June 2020; SPL planned to add an additional morning or afternoon/evening hour to each branch location Monday through Thursday, add 14 additional hours per week to three branches, and add Friday hours to four other branches, for a total of 1,581 open hours per week. When the pandemic hit and branches closed, SPL addressed revenue shortfalls in the 2020 Rebalanced Budget by delaying its plan for expanding hours until January 2021, shifting to virtual services and digital programs.

The 2021 Proposed Budget assumes SPL will not be allowed to reopen fully until July 2021 due to public health guidelines. A cut of \$3.1 million in General Fund support for library operating hours would decrease core operating hours when SPL does fully reopen to six days per week and at 44 hours per week, a change from double to single shifts. To mitigate the impacts of the General Fund cut, the 2021 Proposed Budget also proposes shifting \$1.36 million out of \$1.6 million in 2019 levy funds originally planned to support expanded hours, children's programming, and youth support. Using the 2019 levy funds would delay hiring the community resource specialist for youth and play and learn programming until July 2021 and defer expansion in hours until 2022. The remaining difference in levy funds would support a program manager hired in 2020 to work with Seattle Public Schools to support K-5 learning. The Library Board has approved using \$1.36 million to partially restore open hours and staff estimate that SPL could restore branch hours to pre-COVID levels and operate the Central Library 60 hours per week.¹

Cutting the number of planned open hours at SPL could have a variety of impacts. Even if the 2021 Proposed Budget would make cuts to funding, COVID-19 could impact services SPL could provide. SPL has indicated that more hours have been the highest priority for residents and that public library usage has typically increased during past economic recessions. SPL provides diverse services and programming to the Seattle community, and decreasing the number of hours patrons can be in the physical locations consequently decreases the access patrons have to technology, information, and programs. This includes access to services and programs such as meeting spaces, after-school programming, youth and teen outreach, educational support and homework help, story times, small business resources, free computer and internet, cultural and literary programs, and community partnerships. In addition, the cuts to hours would create barriers to already underserved populations. SPL provides indoor space and hygiene access for those experiencing homelessness and public computers and wi-fi for internet access to help bridge the digital divide.

Options:

- A. Add \$3.1 million to restore the full amount of General Fund support proposed for reduction to allow the Central Library and all of the 26 branches to operate at 2020 pre-COVID closing levels upon reopening without redeployment of levy funds.
- B. Add some lesser amount of the \$3.1 million that would be cut in the 2021 Proposed Budget.
- C. No Action.

2. Cuts to the Physical and Digital Collections and personnel

The 2021 Proposed Budget would cut \$1.4 million in General Fund from SPL's physical and digital collections and circulation budget. Following is a breakdown of this amount:

- \$277,000 currently supports the digital collection, which includes access to databases, e-periodicals, e-books, e-audiobooks, and streaming media. This is a 6 percent

¹ See Attachment A for change in total weekly hours since 2006.

reduction to the \$4.3 million digital collections budget (\$1.2 million of which is General Fund). SPL proposes to offset the cut for streaming media by using \$138,000 in accumulated 2012 levy fund balance.

- \$531,000 that currently supports the physical materials collection, including CDs, DVDs, print, audio, and serial collections. This is a 15 percent cut to the \$3.5 million physical collections budget (\$2.7 million of which is General Fund).
- \$588,000 currently supports personnel working with physical materials circulation – with fewer physical materials, fewer personnel would be needed to support it. This is a seven percent reduction to the \$8.7 million circulation budget (\$7.8 million of which is General Fund).

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for digital materials and rising costs of e-materials prompted increased support to the digital collection in the 2019 levy. Information from SPL states that between 2015 and 2019, digital circulation went up by 112 percent, with digital comprising 19 percent of circulation in 2015 and increasing to 38 percent of total circulation in 2019. The increase in demand, combined with the high cost of e-materials required levy support for SPL to keep up its supply. With the closure of physical locations and public health implications for shared physical materials, the COVID-19 pandemic increased demand for digital materials even more. With these cuts, wait times for e-materials will increase, while selection and availability will decrease.

With regard to the physical collection, though the general trend is a decrease in physical circulation (related to the increase in digital demand described above), different types of physical materials have different rates of decline in circulation. In addition, before COVID-19, SPL did see some increase in use of print and physical materials. Information from SPL indicates that overall, demand for physical materials has declined 17 percent between 2015 and 2019. However, CDs and DVDs have seen a heavier decline than physical books, especially children's books (which are in constant demand). As mentioned above, public health concerns for shared materials, especially those used at physical locations (like newspapers and magazines) has decreased demand for physical materials and increased demand for digital materials. SPL proposes to cut declining physical materials by 40 percent and for other materials by 15 percent. Though SPL was already planning to shift support from declining physical materials to digital materials before the 2021 Budget was proposed, cuts would likely impact the quality, depth, and breadth of the physical collection. In addition, cuts to the physical collection would have disproportionate impacts on patrons without technology or digital access and low- or fixed-income patrons who rely on the library for access to the physical collection.

As a result of a decrease in physical materials, the 2021 Proposed Budget would also cut the funding for positions that currently support circulation throughout the system. The decrease in personnel is relative to the amount of physical materials cut and does not account for any increased need in staff support stemming from additional handling needed due to the public health concerns of COVID-19. In addition, the cut positions include some of the more diverse

classifications, particularly the Student Assistants and Pages, for whom these entry level positions can lead to advancement.

Options:

- A. Add \$139,000 to prevent cuts to digital circulation (see item III-2 below).
- B. Add up to \$1.1 million to prevent cuts to the physical collection and supporting personnel.
- C. Add up to \$588,000 to allow SPL to retain staff needed for management of the physical collection under pandemic conditions.
- D. No Action.

III. Budget Actions/SLIs Proposed by Councilmembers as of October 8, 2020

- 1. Add funding for pick-up service at all branches (Councilmember Lewis)** – This proposal would add funds to support a one-day a week partial shift at the Central Library and all 26 branches to operate limited curbside pick-up service until the end of the Mayor’s COVID-19 emergency order. The Central Library and six branches (Ballard, Broadview, Douglass-Truth, High Point, Lake City, Rainier Beach) offer limited curbside pickup three days a week from 12 to 6 pm.
- 2. Add \$139,000 to support the digital collection (Councilmember Morales)** – This proposal would restore the General Fund support proposed for reduction to support databases, e-periodicals, e-books, and e-audiobooks. The added funding would allow SPL to help address the increase in utilization of the digital collection since physical locations closed.
- 3. Add \$531,000 to support the physical collection (Councilmember Morales)** – This proposal would restore the full amount of General Fund support proposed for reduction to support the physical materials including CDs and DVDs, print, audio, and serial collections to provide access to populations unable to access the digital collection and for people with disabilities when digital materials present barriers or are not the preferred format.
- 4. Add \$5.8 million to maintain Library operations (Councilmember Sawant)** – This proposal would restore the full amount of General Fund support proposed for reduction by increasing the tax rate of the big business payroll tax. It would consequently obviate the need for a shift in levy resources to maintain operations at pre-COVID levels.

Attachments:

- A. Total Weekly Hours Since 2006

Attachment A: Total Weekly Hours since 2006

Funding stage	Pre-recession	Recession, pre-levy	2012 levy	2012 levy	2019 Levy	2021 Proposed
Time period	2006-2009	2010-2012	2013-2015	2016-2019	Plan for June 2020, deferred to January 2021	Deferral till July 2021
Central Library	62	62	62	62	66	60
Ballard	55	60	60	60	65	61
Beacon Hill	55	60	60	60	65	61
Broadview	55	60	60	60	65	61
Capitol Hill	55	60	60	60	65	61
Columbia	55	35	60	60	65	61
Delridge	50	35	39	39	51	40
Douglass-Truth	55	60	60	60	65	61
Fremont	50	35	39	39	44	40
Green Lake	55	35	39	39	51	40
Greenwood	55	60	60	60	65	61
High Point	50	35	39	46	65	47
International District/Chinatown	50	35	39	46	65	47
Lake City	55	60	60	60	65	61
Madrona-Sally Goldmark	50	35	39	39	44	40
Magnolia	50	35	39	39	44	40
Montlake	50	35	39	39	44	40
NewHolly	50	35	39	39	51	40
Northeast	55	60	60	60	65	61
Northgate	55	35	60	60	65	61
Queen Anne	50	35	39	39	44	40
Rainier Beach	55	60	60	60	65	61
Southwest	55	60	60	60	65	61
South Park	55	35	39	46	65	47
University	50	35	39	46	51	47
Wallingford	50	35	39	39	51	40
West Seattle	55	60	60	60	65	61
Total Service Hours/week	1,437	1,247	1,349	1,377	1,581	1,401

Green fill indicates hours added in the time period. Red fill indicates hours decreased for the time period.