

Better Libraries for Palo Alto

FAQs, October 2007, Palo Alto Library Foundation

What's our library system like now?

- ▶ We have five libraries in Palo Alto
- ▶ The library system owns 271,000 books, DVDs, and other materials
- ▶ We checked out 1.4 million books, DVDs, and other materials last year
- ▶ 862,000 people visited our libraries last year, more than 2,000 per day
- ▶ 35,604 Palo Alto residents have library cards

What are the proposed improvements for each library?

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|-----------------|---|---|
| Children's | √ | Renovated and expanded with City and private funds (September 2007) |
| College Terrace | √ | Major infrastructure upgrade will be funded by City (2008) |
| Downtown | □ | Proposed interior expansion and renovation <i>if bond measure passes</i> |
| Main | □ | Proposed addition of program and group work space <i>if bond measure passes</i> |
| Mitchell Park | □ | Proposed new building <i>if bond measure passes</i> |

What are the benefits of a new Mitchell Park library, an expanded Main library, and an upgraded Downtown library?

- Room for 70,000 more books and DVDs, which would be housed at Mitchell Park and available to everyone in Palo Alto
- Room for people to sit comfortably, work together, and browse the shelves
- Room for programs such as author lectures, book club discussions, literacy tutoring and other group events
- Improved lighting, heating, and cooling systems

What work has already been done on this proposal?

First, the Library Advisory Commission, which is appointed by the City Council, worked for two years on the plan to improve Palo Alto's library system. The centerpiece of their recommendation is to build a new library at Mitchell Park and to upgrade all of the libraries' facilities. Their detailed, 160-page plan can be found at <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civica/filebank/blobdload.asp?BlobID=7367>. The City Council voted unanimously on December 11th, 2006 to implement the LAC's recommendations.

Second, the City Auditor completed an audit of the library operations in July, 2007. The Auditor's primary finding was that "Palo Alto libraries are in poor condition" and the recommendation was that significant facility problems "including overcrowding, poor lighting, and inadequate meeting space" should be addressed. The 71-page report can be found at <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civica/filebank/blobdload.asp?BlobID=8015>. The Auditor found minimal operating efficiencies to recommend, which indicates that the library is using city resources well.

Third, the City hired an architectural firm to develop preliminary plans and cost estimates for Mitchell Park, Main, and Downtown libraries. When this work is completed at the end of 2007, the Council will have the information it needs to place a construction bond on the ballot.

What's the next step in the process?

In 2008, the City Council will vote on placing a construction bond on the ballot for June or November. This measure will require two-thirds voter approval to pass.

Why do we need a new building for Mitchell Park library?

Mitchell Park library was built in 1958. It serves over 1,000 people per day in less than 9,500 square feet of space and has the highest circulation in our five branch library system. According to an independent consultant, it is one-third the size it should be and has about half the number of books recommended for the population it serves.

Can't we just expand the existing Mitchell Park library?

This option was carefully considered. It would cost approximately \$25 million to push the current one-story building out onto the parking area. The gain in square footage would not be sufficient to meet current standards for the population that Mitchell Park already serves, let alone the increases expected over the next twenty years. Also, the expansion option would not resolve the traffic safety problem created by the offset intersection on Middlefield Road.

What does the plan for Mitchell Park look like?

The new Mitchell Park library and community center will be built on the south parking lot area. The parking lot will then be on the north part of the space, where the current library and some of the parking is located now. Go to www.palf.org and click on "Projects" for pictures of the plan.

How was this particular plan selected?

The architects presented many design options to the Library Advisory Commission (LAC) in 2006. The LAC made a recommendation to the City Council, which accepted it. The LAC selected the most reasonable option for our community, taking into consideration cost/benefit ratios, current and future needs for library, the layout of the site, and construction costs.

How big will the new building at Mitchell Park be?

The plan is for a 36,000 square foot Mitchell Park library that will provide space to accommodate the current and projected needs of south Palo Alto and a 15,000 square foot community center. It includes a multi-purpose room that can accommodate large groups (up to 300 people) and can be used by both the library and the community center.

How will the traffic flow be improved?

The plan calls for the automobile traffic to enter off Middlefield, directly across from Mayview, eliminating the dangerous and confusing offset intersection where vehicles now enter from Middlefield. The plan also eliminates the need for children to cross roads when going from the park and schools to the library/community center. Additional bike racks will be available and the city's shuttle service will continue to serve the Mitchell Park area.

Tell me more about the community center.

The community center is currently a separate building. It was built in 1967 and serves as a center for recreation classes and activities and is available for meetings and party rentals. It has an outdated kitchen, non-air-conditioned spaces, and unattractive facilities and restrooms. The new community center will have a 300-person room that can accommodate author lectures, dances, weddings, elementary school auctions, and many other events.

Will there be underground parking?

No.

Will the tennis courts or dedicated park land be affected?

No.

What library services will be provided for residents while the new Mitchell Park library is being built?

It is possible that the current Mitchell Park library could remain open during initial construction of the new building. At some point, the old library would need to be demolished and a temporary location would be established.

When would the new Mitchell Park library and community center open?

2012 is a reasonable estimate. This assumes passage of the bond in 2008, one year to complete the architectural designs, time for bidding on the project, and then two years of construction.

What is the proposal for Main?

The architectural consultants have suggested building a program room at Main that would provide a 100-person space for author lectures, storytimes for children, and other group events. In addition, the north and south overhangs would be converted into four group study spaces that would be available for teens studying after school, book club discussions, and other small groups whose work should be acoustically separated from the main building. Go to www.palf.org and click on "Projects" to see an aerial view of the plan.

What is the proposal for Downtown?

Because the new Mitchell Park building will include the technical services group that processes new books and DVDs, Downtown will have more space available to the public. The Downtown plan includes reconfiguring the interior and an electrical and lighting upgrade. Go to www.palf.org and click on "Projects" to see an aerial view of the plan.

How much will it cost?

A rough estimate is \$60 million to renovate Downtown, build a small addition to Main, and build a new, larger Mitchell Park library and community center. We have remodeled our schools and our parks and now it is time for our library facilities and services to be brought up to the same standard. When the architectural plans are further along late in 2007, the City will be better able to estimate the cost of construction.

How will this be paid for?

It is likely that a combination of a construction bond, financed by residents over a period of years, private funds, and City funds will be used to construct the building. The City Council intends to place a bond for libraries on the ballot in June or November of 2008.

Why can't the City pay for this without a bond?

The City of Palo Alto spends about \$10 million each year to improve and maintain our entire infrastructure: libraries, roads, sidewalks, parks, etc. At that rate, it would take six years of zero funding for all of our other maintenance needs to pay for the library buildings.

How will the City pay for the additional costs associated with a new building?

Additional costs will include furniture and books to fill the new library, plus staffing and utilities for ongoing use. Private donations will be solicited for furniture and books. In moving forward with this program over the past two years, the City Council has committed to fund continuing library operations out of the general fund. Additional staffing is expected to be minimal and the utility costs will be minimized by building to LEED silver rating standards, making our new library and community center an environmentally friendly building.

Further questions

Why doesn't Palo Alto have just one library?

Palo Alto's five branch library system is part of its history, well-established, and in keeping with the idea of neighborhood services. While there was some discussion a few years ago about centralizing the library, that option was rejected by the majority of the community and by the City Council.

Will smaller branches eventually be closed if we build a new Mitchell Park library?

No. After several years of community-wide discussions, the City Council has confirmed its policy to maintain Palo Alto's branch system. Children's Library has just been upgraded and College Terrace Library is scheduled for renovations in 2008. The anticipated bond measure will address the needs at Main, Mitchell Park, and Downtown.

How do Mitchell Park and Main compare now?

Mitchell Park has higher circulation and more visitors than Main. Much of the new housing in Palo Alto is located near Mitchell Park and will increase use of this undersized library. Over 50 percent of Mitchell Park's circulation is children's materials and the space allotted to children is a small fraction of the building. Library best practices suggest that collections be sufficient to provide 4 volumes per capita and that space be enough to provide between 0.7 and 0.9 feet per capita. As you can see, we are doing very well against those benchmarks at Main, but Mitchell Park is far below the norm on both measures.

	Population served	Books and materials	Square feet	Volumes per capita	Square feet/capita
Mitchell Park	30,155	79,165	9,478	2.6	.31
Main	22,565	121,000	21,313	5.4	.94

Source: Group 4 consultants report, 12/4/2006

How does the situation at Mitchell Park affect library users?

Many residents of Palo Alto hold and use library cards from our neighboring communities because they provide more books, space, and light to read and learn. New residents of Palo Alto are often disappointed to see the level of service provided at Mitchell Park, which compares unfavorably to both their prior libraries and the City's schools, parks and recreation programs, and other services. Many patrons choose to place books on hold online because the chances of the book being available when they visit the library are low. We have waiting lists for many mainstream books, such as Jane Austen, the Boxcar Children, and travel guides to popular destinations.

But when I go to the library it isn't crowded.

One thousand people per day use Mitchell Park library. Peak times at Mitchell Park are on Friday mornings for storytime, weekday afternoons when children are out of school, and on the weekends.

What kinds of library services do other communities have?

Story hours, author lectures, small group classes, computer workshops, literacy tutoring, and other activities can take place in designated spaces that insulate the noise from the rest of the library patrons. These activities are crucial for learning and cannot be offered now at our two primary libraries.

Why aren't Palo Alto libraries part of the county system?

Just as Palo Alto owns its own utilities in order to control decisions about service and rates, Palo Alto has chosen to fund and manage its own libraries. If Palo Alto were to turn over our libraries to the county, it is unlikely that the county would fund all of the existing branches or maintain the high number of hours currently available to residents.

Where will the library administrators be located?

The library director and a staff of two intend to remain at Downtown. The assistant library director would move from Main to Mitchell Park. Also, the Technical Services group would move from Downtown to the new Mitchell Park building in order to better match their processing work with the busiest library in the system.

How do the school and city libraries work together?

The city has a half-time staffer who works on outreach to the schools to provide information about library services to students and teachers. This work has focused on providing library cards to students who don't have them, sharing with teachers the databases that are available online to anyone with a library card, and coordinating information about research projects.

With the advent of the Internet, do we still need libraries?

Our library usage has increased over the time period that the Internet has become a part of daily life. In fact, our circulation of 1.4 million items in fiscal 2007 was 45 percent greater than our circulation in 2001. Libraries will always be needed as places for children to learn to read, the community to gather to learn, and for those without extra resources to be able to participate in the communication and information revolutions.

How is this different from Measure D, which was on the ballot in 2002?

	<u>2008 plan</u>	<u>Measure D in 2002</u>
Libraries included	Main, Mitchell, Downtown	Mitchell, Children's
Size of Mitchell Park library	36,000 square feet	54,000 square feet
Affects tennis courts	No	Yes
Underground parking	No	Yes

Measure D came close to passing with 61.5 percent of residents voting in favor, but 66.67 percent approval is required to pass a construction bond. The City has listened to the concerns of the community and carefully considered them in proposing the new plan.

Will there be a senior opt-out provision like there is for some school measures?

No. It is not legal to offer an opt-out provision to senior citizens when using a general obligation bond.

What happens if we don't build a new Mitchell Park library?

Regularly scheduled maintenance such as replacing the inadequate forced air system will trigger the need to comply with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which requires wider aisles and larger restrooms. This will reduce the number of books and other materials in Mitchell Park library by at least 10 percent. This is not an acceptable outcome in the most crowded library in the system.

What are the different library organizations in Palo Alto?

The Friends of the Palo Alto Library was founded in 1938 and its mission is to support Palo Alto's libraries and its users. FoPAL runs successful book sales every month and uses those funds to pay for popular programs at the library such as the children's summer reading program and the special guests who speak at the library, as well as collections.

www.friendsofpaloalto.lib.org

The Palo Alto Library Foundation was formed in 2002 specifically to raise money for capital campaigns. PALF has worked to secure private donations from the community to rebuild Children's Library and to fill it with new furniture and bookshelves. www.palf.org

The Library Advisory Commission is a seven-member group appointed by the City Council to advise the city on library policy issues.

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/library/about/commission.html>