



# Agenda Report

November 22, 2021

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** City Manager  
**SUBJECT:** Status Report on the Pasadena Central Library and discussion of plan for Seismic Upgrades

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

The following report is for information only. No City Council action is requested at this time.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Central Library is an important City institution that delivers on equity to City residents. The Central Library has been home to a wide variety of programs and services for almost 100 years. Annually, 30,000-40,000 community members attend storytimes, author visits, cultural events, Art Night, recitals, plays, and many other programs. In the year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic closure, the Pasadena Central Library hosted 232 group events and 876 community and organization meetings.

The City has demonstrated continuously its commitment to ensure Pasadena children and youth have the resources they need to succeed in school as evidenced by the fact that close to nine-in-ten residents surveyed agree that Pasadena's libraries play a critical role in educating our community's children and youth. The same number see the Central Library as a community asset, a major part of the city's history, and an important architectural building.

After a long closure of the City's Public Libraries due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many residents looked forward to the reopening of the Central Library and its nine branches. This past April, the first library to re-open was the Central Library. Unfortunately, this was short lived as a structural assessment of the building, discovered that the structure was not safe in the event of an earthquake.

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, City officials were forced to close the Central Library until seismic retrofit and restoration can be completed to meet life safety requirements. The

structural assessment revealed that most of the building consists of unreinforced masonry that leaves the building vulnerable to seismic activity.

This report outlines in broad terms the plan to maintain library services, the approach to seismic retrofit of the building and the means of financing the project.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Influenced by a nationwide "City Beautiful" movement, Pasadenans first considered building a civic center as early as 1902. In 1922, the Chicago firm of Bennett, Parsons, and Frost was hired to devise a plan for Pasadena. In June of 1923, voters approved a bond for \$3.5 million to fund the construction of the Civic Center consisting of the Central Library, City Hall, and Civic Auditorium.

Ten California architectural firms were invited to submit drawings for all three buildings and were advised to use the architectural styles of the Renaissance or later periods as found in Mediterranean countries. In 1924, the design for the Library submitted by the firm of Myron Hunt and H.C. Chambers placed first. The beautiful entry, patio, grand facade, and good opportunities for expansion were key factors in the decision.

Construction of the Pasadena Central Library began on May 19, 1925. This is why the year 1925 is carved in Roman numerals over the front entrance of the building after "Public Library of the City of Pasadena." It was dedicated on Lincoln's birthday, February 12, 1927.

Central Library underwent a massive, historically sensitive restoration and renovation between 1984 and 1990. The Pasadena Public Library Foundation paid for all interior restoration. The Foundation was formed in 1983 as a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation and to date has raised over \$3 million in individual, foundation, and corporate gifts specifically earmarked for architectural renovation and preservation of Central Library.

In October of 1990 the Pasadena Central Library was given the National Preservation Award by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Since its opening, the Central Library has served as a hub of civic activity and remains as vital a community resource as ever. Today the Central Library serves as a destination for those who need access to computers, Wi-Fi, or high-speed internet, as well as a variety of productivity software for job searching, research, or personal use. Central Library has housed the iLab for the last two years – an innovative space that provides the community with access to maker equipment like 3-D printers, Carvey machines, sewing machines, and more.

The Central Library is the home of the Office of the Young Child – a City-wide systems-change initiative to bring all resources and activities for children up to five years of age and their families together. And importantly, the Central Library serves as the repository of Pasadena’s local history archives, providing valuable historical documents, newspapers, photos, and research.

The operations of the Library and Information Services Department are funded primarily by the General Fund and supplemented by a voter approved parcel tax.

Sources	Fiscal Year 2022 \$
General Fund	12,603,000
Library Special Tax	2,843,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,446,000</b>

The parcel tax was first initiated for a period of five years in June 1993, when Pasadena voters agreed to tax themselves in order to prevent service reductions to City libraries due to then current economic conditions. The parcel tax has since been renewed twice, for 10 years and then for 15 years, in 1997 and 2007 respectively, each time with tremendous levels of support (1993 – 79.9%, 1997 – 84% and 2007 – 80.4%).

The current parcel tax has a sunset date of February 2023. With that in mind, and with the Central Library approaching its centennial birthday, staff engaged the firm of KPFF to perform an assessment of the building’s condition and its various systems, with the thought that as part of a possible extension of the parcel tax, voters might consider supporting additional funding to rehabilitate the nearly 100 year old structure. It was during this building assessment that it was revealed that most of the building is comprised of unreinforced masonry (URM) bearing walls that support reinforced concrete floors and beams.

URM buildings have been widely recognized as a hazard to life safety due to their potential to collapse during an earthquake. Additionally, the results of the evaluation provided to the City indicate that the Central Library does not meet the Structural Performance Objectives recommended by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE 41-17). Therefore, given the present state of knowledge, the building is unsafe to occupy and was closed in May.

While the City has nine branch libraries, the Central Library is home to almost 300,000 items in its collection. As such, it is not possible to relocate all these materials to the branches. Consequently, staff has been pursuing options for the continued operation of Library programs and the relocation of the collection, including use of a modular building in the Central Library parking lot that currently serves as a materials handling location to ensure new materials are making their way into the system and circulating.

Current thinking also includes the use of the City-owned Rose Palace on Raymond Avenue to store a large amount of the collection, where it would be accessible to Library staff to retrieve and deliver to the branches as needed, and the lease of vacant Jefferson School from the Pasadena Unified School District, which appears as a separate agenda item on tonight's Council agenda.

Concurrent with plans to minimize service impacts for library patrons, staff has been working to develop a plan and cost estimates for the seismic retrofit of the building. In support of these efforts, Assemblymember Chris Holden worked to secure \$4 million in funding, through a grant from the State Library System, to be used towards the design and engineering work.

In the meantime, KPFF has completed a seismic evaluation outlining the retrofit needs of the building's structural system, along with a rough order of magnitude cost estimate of approximately \$111 million for the retrofit and the restoration of the building's systems including mechanical, electrical, plumbing and roofing.

Utilizing the information compiled by KPFF, staff has issued a Request for Proposals in order to select a qualified design team, well-versed in both seismic retrofit and historic preservation, to further refine the analysis, prepare the environmental report, develop options for retrofit and refine budgetary estimates. It is anticipated that this work will take approximately two years. On November 17<sup>th</sup> a pre-proposal conference was held with approximately 100 interested persons in attendance.

Once a design team is selected, staff believes it would be appropriate to assemble a project oversight committee, with representatives from Pasadena Heritage, Caltech, the Library Commission, the local chapter of American Institute of Architects (AIA) and others to review the analysis and make a final recommendation as to the best approach to retrofit the building; similar to the approach taken on the retrofit of City Hall.

While it will take time and additional analysis to determine the specific approach to retrofitting and upgrading the Central Library and its associated costs, it is highly likely that the cost will exceed \$100 million. In order to finance a project of such magnitude, some form of voter approved financing will be necessary. Staff had originally hoped that it might be possible to go to the voters as early as November 2022 with a proposed financing method, either in the form of a General Obligation Bond, or a renewal of the existing parcel tax adjusted upward to cover debt service on the retrofit project.

However, it has become clear that the engineering design work and cost estimates will not be far enough along in time for the November 2022 election. Therefore, staff is suggesting that a more appropriate route would be to ask voters to extend the current parcel tax past its February 2023 deadline, to support the ongoing operations of the Library and Information Services Department, in November 2022 and seek voter

approval for the financing of the seismic retrofit at a later date, most likely the June 2024 primary or November 2024 general election, once greater details of the proposed project are worked out.

In the meantime, staff would continue to pursue grant opportunities through the office of the state library and other sources, to assist with financing the retrofit.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The current parcel tax is estimated to generate \$2.84 million in Fiscal Year 2022. The following is a breakdown of taxes by parcel type:

Single Family	\$40.86
Condominiums	\$40.86
Duplexes & larger	\$26.83/unit
Non-Residential	\$298.99

For contextual purposes the annual debt service for a \$110 million General Obligation Bond at current market rates of 2.45% is estimated at \$5.22 million. An increase of 1.0% in rates would result in an annual debt service amount of \$5.95 million. Therefore, the estimated cost to support the renovation financing will likely be at least two times that of the amount currently generated by the parcel tax to support operations.

Respectfully submitted,



Steve Mermell  
City Manager