

PASADENA CENTRAL LIBRARY
COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING
COMMITTEE

Recommendations for Central Library
Programming

February 27, 2023

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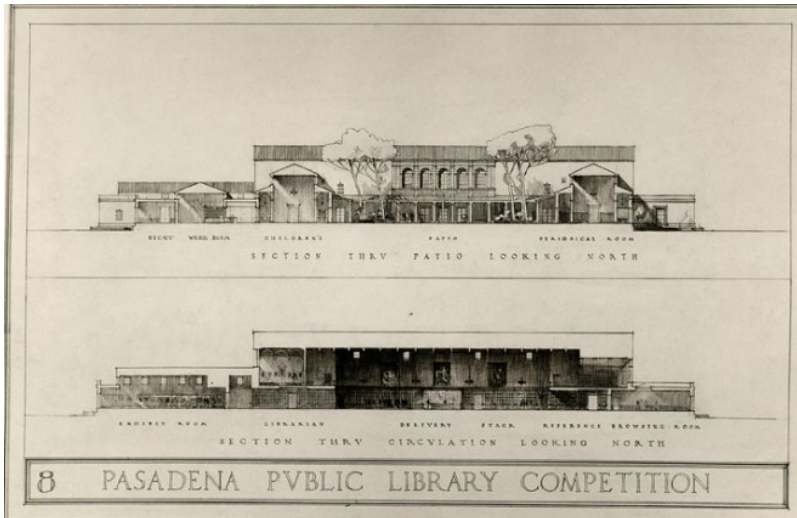


MESSAGE FROM TIM MCDONALD, ACTING DIRECTOR OF LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION SERVICES

I am grateful to the eleven members of the Pasadena Central Library Community Programming Committee who gave so generously of their time, insight, and experience throughout the past four months. During our six meetings we had the opportunity to hear from a cross-section of community leaders who are passionate about the library and its role in building a stronger community. Committee members presented a plethora of ideas that will help guide the design team and library staff as we continue the process of reimagining library programming, services, and spaces. I look forward to continued engagement with committee members as we involve even more community voices over the next several years. I would also like to thank Cindy Cleary who planned and facilitated the meetings and prepared the final report.



BACKGROUND



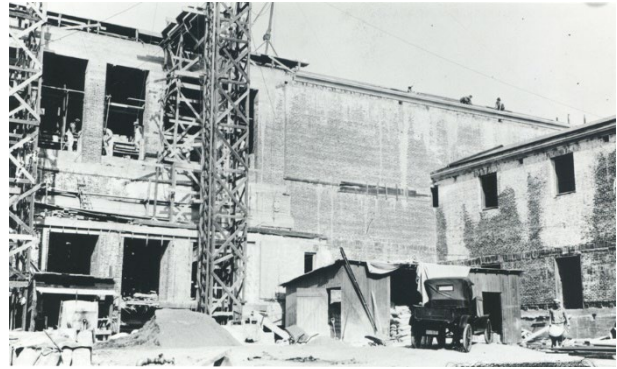
Designed by Myron Hunt in 1924 and opened in 1927, the Pasadena Central Library was the first building completed in Pasadena's historic Civic Center Plan. Central Library was expanded in the mid-1960s to include a children's story room and two reference wings. In the mid-1980s, a new entrance on the north was constructed and two additional floors of book shelving were added. An historically sensitive interior restoration was undertaken in the late 1980s.

Central Library is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The project will adhere to The Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

In May, 2021, the City was forced to close Central Library when a structural assessment revealed that unreinforced masonry construction left the building vulnerable to seismic activity. Additional assessment of the structure, including geotechnical and material testing, has been conducted to determine the most cost-effective way forward. In early 2023, City Council selected a design team, including an historic preservation consultant, to move forward with the environmental and design phase of the seismic retrofit and rehabilitation project.

The library closure provided an opportunity to begin a community driven examination and reimagination of how the treasured Central Library could better serve the community and meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The Pasadena Central Library Community Programming Committee was established with eleven members appointed by then Interim City Manager, Cynthia Kurtz. Six meetings were held over the course of four-months from September to December 2023. The Committee was comprised of representatives from non-profits, former library commissioners, retired librarians, Pasadena Public Works staff, senior Pasadena Library staff, and Tim McDonald, Acting Director of Libraries and Information Services. The meetings were facilitated by Cindy Cleary, retired Director of Glendale's Library, Arts & Culture Department. Ms. Cleary, who is a Pasadena resident, was selected because of her wide-ranging background in library service and experience leading major renovations of the downtown Glendale Central Library and the Brand Library and Art Center. Staff support was provided by Sasha Grimes, Public Information Specialist with the Library's Communications Division.

Since the introduction of the Internet some have questioned the relevance of libraries. However, as time has passed libraries have become even more relied upon as they transformed from passive models of service focused on collections of books and other materials, to playing a much more active role as vibrant community hubs where people come to learn, share ideas, and connect to one another. The Pasadena library system has been at the center of this transformation and now offers a variety of programs never imagined even twenty years ago. While the Pasadena Library will always maintain its core mission, how the library executes that mission will continually evolve. The Committee was charged with reimagining programs and services that will inform the design team regarding space allocation and expand usage of Central Library when it reopens.



CENTRAL LIBRARY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Community use of libraries has evolved since Central Library opened in 1927. Libraries recognize that customer needs and expectations have changed over time and that services and spaces need to be considered in new ways. This is certainly true in Pasadena where not only do residents use the library to support their love of reading and search for knowledge, but also enjoy a wide array of programs and services unimaginable even 20 years ago. The Pasadena Library System is known throughout the region as being on the cutting edge of library service for many years and is a destination for many of these innovative services. Where else but our public library can the general public find free access to computers with high-speed Internet, wi-fi connections, and have the ability to borrow 3-D printers, hotspots, sewing machines, cameras, seeds, etc. Beyond what people can borrow, the library has become an active community gathering place where people can find a road to citizenship, attend a STEAM workshop, access job hunting and resume building tools, learn a new skill through subscription based online resources, and much more. Even the committee members who are long term users of the library's resources left the meetings with a new appreciation for all the library has to offer.



Through the years the Pasadena community has come to rely on the equity of service provided by the Pasadena Central Library and its nine branches. In the year prior to the closure, Central Library welcomed an average of 1,000 daily visitors and hosted 232 group events and 876 community and organization meetings. In recent years an average of 30,000-40,000 community members attended storytimes, author visits, cultural events, recitals, plays and many other programs. What is not easily captured in the numbers is the sometimes life-changing impact the library staff and available resources has on individual lives.

Prior to closing Central Library:

- Averaged 1,000 daily visitors
- Hosted 232 annual group events
- 876 annual community and organization meetings
- Averaged 30,000-40,000 community members attendance at storytimes, author visits, cultural events, recitals, plays and many other programs

To ensure continuation of the services lost at Central Library, staff have focused on finding interim solutions. Central Library staff have been reassigned to work in branches, in a modular trailer located in Central Library's parking lot or in office space across the street. Services at the branches have expanded and continue to provide online access to books and periodicals, computer and Internet access, a wide array of youth and adult programs, and gathering spaces for members of the community to connect. Many of the 300,000 items in Central Library's collection are in the process of being housed at the City-owned Rose Palace where they can be transported to a branch upon request. Once reopened, the Central Library will continue to serve as a destination for traditional and forward-thinking services to accommodate the many needs of Pasadena residents.



PASADENA CENTRAL LIBRARY COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE

The mission of the Pasadena Central Library Community Programming Committee was to recommend how Central Library spaces can be reimagined to draw more people into the building and continue to serve as a primary gathering space for community, artistic, and theatrical events, while remaining the central building in the library system. The intended outcome of the committee's work was to provide a vision for reimagined library programs and services to inform the design team as they plan the retrofit and restoration of Central Library.



Committee Activities:

- Review current services, programs, usage and needs of the patrons and staff.
- Consider current and future trends in library service.
- Review best practices in developing programming priorities and strategies in the context of space planning.
- Recommend next steps and the path forward to enhance program offerings that will expand usage.

Meeting Timeline:

- September 13 - Review committee goals and building project timelines.
- September 27 – Discuss community opportunities and challenges based on the Healthy Communities Framework: What is Pasadena's cultural identity and the opportunities, challenges, and needs from a civic, economic, educational and personal health perspective? How can the Central Library play a role in supporting a healthy community?
- October 11 – Review current library service and needs through the eyes of staff. Envision a library of the future.

- October 25 – Tour Central Library. Tour led by Carlos Baffigo, retired Principal Librarian (Library); Hayden Melbourn, Principal Engineer (Public Works); and Teo Sierra, Senior Project Manager (Public Works).
- November 8 – Follow-up to library tour and discuss space usage. Continue conversation about potential programs and services.
- December 13 – Review program ideas, set priorities and discuss next steps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Over four months the committee members, all passionate library advocates, had stimulating discussions about the library’s positive role in the community, potential programs and services, and space planning.

The first several meetings focused on the challenges and opportunities in Pasadena and how Central Library can play a role in meeting needs within the context of the library’s mission. Using the Healthy Communities Framework developed by California’s Department of Public Health, the conversation centered on Pasadena’s cultural identity and opportunities, challenges and needs from a civic, economic, educational, and personal health perspective. Pasadena’s Department of Housing *2020-2024 Consolidated Plan* and the Public Health Department’s *Greater Pasadena Community Health Improvement Plan* were shared to illustrate already identified economic and health needs. Demographic information was also shared to help inform the conversations. The Committee affirmed that the library contributes to a healthy community by offering a path to knowledge and accurate information, serving as a community connector, and providing service in a welcoming and safe space. The Library also addresses resource disparity through free and equal access; supports the educational system at every age level; bridges the digital divide; and provides a path to other government and community resources. Additionally, the Library, through its services, programs, and the building itself, celebrates the history of Pasadena, the diversity of Pasadena, and Pasadena as a reading community.

The Committee also singled out challenges that should be considered as the process progresses. Many people are unaware or have a misunderstanding of all the library has to offer. People in the most need of library resources may be the least likely to be aware of the benefit or may be hindered by language barriers, lack of time, or competing priorities. Public relations and outreach is key to addressing these challenges and maintaining support of Central Library.

Following a tour of Central Library several concerns were voiced. The formality and size of the building can be intimidating, with branch libraries often perceived as more welcoming. Limitations in parking create barriers to usage. Interior public and staff spaces are disjointed, inefficient, and don’t meet current and future needs. Exterior spaces are underutilized. There was consensus that while

considering these and other challenges, the architectural integrity of the building must be maintained in a way that restores the original grandeur and celebrates the magnificent history of this treasured building, while at the same time meeting the needs of a modern-day library.

Several themes and areas of common ground arose as the weeks progressed. First and foremost, the group stated in one way or another that they don't just want a library; they want the very best library. There is an abundance of civic pride wrapped around Central Library, not only as it is known for its service, but also as an architectural icon. Through the eyes of the Committee the library's core mission is information delivery, child development, learning, and literacy. These principles should be at the forefront of planning as the library reimagines services and considers how to address the challenges and needs of the community within the context of the mission. In considering new programs, or the viability of existing programs, staff are encouraged to avoid duplicating services already available through other Pasadena organizations. However, continuing to build partnerships with organizations that complement the library's mission and encourage connections between community members is essential to broadening the user base.

In discussing programs and services in the context of space planning, flexibility is essential. The library already has a wide array of services that are hidden from view or not fully accommodated by available space. To better serve current and future needs a balance must be achieved between spaces that are dedicated to a singular purpose such as a gallery or study rooms, and spaces that can accommodate multiple functions. As the design process begins, and others are brought into the conversation, staff should be relied upon to identify primary program space needs.

Finally, the need for expanded public relations was an area of discussion with agreement that there are tools that should be utilized to broaden the user base and gain support for funding the project and for the reopening. Suggestions include reaching beyond the Committee for community input on the design of Central Library, conducting a needs assessment to guide a strategic plan, conducting an assessment of community assets, and developing distinct marketing campaigns for each phase of the project up to the reopening of Central Library. Keeping the community engaged through these and other methods will be key in bringing back and building the audience once Central Library reopens. This will require either hiring outside consultants or expanding the Communications Department from its current staff of two.

The following is a cumulative list of ideas generated by the Committee over the course of six meetings. The ideas are not ranked in order of priority, nor do they always reflect the opinion of every committee member. They are offered to staff and the design team as a starting point for conversation as the journey begins of reimagining Central Library. As mentioned earlier, the Committee places their trust in staff to make full programming recommendations that will assist in identifying primary program space needs.

Maintain the Historic Character of the Building

- Restore the original grandeur of the building and celebrate its history.
- Accentuate the library's connection to the Civic Center. Highlight its architectural splendor to attract people from City Hall and the Civic Auditorium.
- Maintain the intent of the Great Hall as a quiet space while at the same time expanding its purpose.
- Capture the nostalgic wonder of the library.
- Retain the fireplace in the children's area.



Design Spaces that Better Meet the Needs of a 21st Century Library and Create Positive User Experiences

- Take advantage of exterior spaces
 - Increase availability of parking.
 - Create indoor-outdoor programming spaces for children. Consider convenient parking areas for strollers.
 - Reimagine the courtyard to accommodate expanded programming and create a more inviting south entry.
- Utilize state of the art technology
 - Provide access to technology throughout the building and on the exterior.
 - Ensure robust wi-fi connections throughout.
 - Study the Great Hall for acoustical improvements.
 - Install a state-of-the-art sound system in the auditorium and other spaces where appropriate.
 - Consider how emerging technologies will impact design.
- Improve wayfinding through design
 - Reimagine the north entrance as an inviting gateway to available spaces and services. Improve site-lines. Consider a welcome desk to help navigate to the Great Hall and available services.
 - Attract more people to enter the building on the south side. By doing so the architecture is more prominent as part of the experience of visiting the library.
 - Be strategic in placement of assisted and self-guided service points.
 - Identify and avoid bottlenecks throughout the building.



- Create a more open floor plan that reduces the sense of compartmentalization.
- Design flexible, multi-purpose spaces and furnishings that recognize that the programs and services of today will evolve over time.
- Build in more flexibility in the auditorium to meet programming and set-up needs.
- Create spaces for confidential and/or quiet conversations between staff and the public.
- Make the distinction between quiet and noisy spaces.
- Enliven the children’s area with brighter colors, more childlike furnishings, and an area for sensory experiences.
- Create a comfortable range for browsing books at least two feet off the ground and at a reasonable height.
- Maintain the serendipity of browsing the book and materials collections.
- Centralize staff areas.



Make Improvements to Accessibility

- Include a family restroom and/or a nursing room.
- Security is important but should not hinder physical or visual accessibility at entrances and throughout building.
- Create safe spaces that are inviting and comfortable for people of all backgrounds and economic levels.

Remain True to the Mission of the Library

- Provide resources to all ages, abilities and walks of life.
- Continue focus on programs and services that are free and support information delivery, learning, child development, and literacy.
- Build on the strength of the library as a place for connection, learning, and nurturing a love of reading.
- Avoid services that move too far away from the library’s mission. Recreation and social services are provided by other organizations. No need to duplicate.
- Be cautious of the kitchen-sink ideology. The library cannot be everything to everyone.



Respond to Community Needs

- Build services that recognize that not everyone is a reader, nor has access to technology.
- Assess needs and develop programs and services that will attract non-library users and the non-readers.
- Identify distinctions between and within cultural groups. Develop programs accordingly.
- Strengthen services to those for whom English is a second language.
- Expand multi-lingual collections. Offer staff who can provide translation services.
- Expand literacy services.
- Consider including a community garden, farmer’s market, or other events that will allow for neighborhood connectedness. Continue café service.
- Increase availability of spaces for public events not sponsored by the library
- Continue partnerships with homeless service organizations to consider what role the library may have in assisting those facing housing or food insecurity.

Reach out to the Community to Further Identify Needs

- Reach beyond the committee to engage the community in the design process.
- Engage and collaborate with community organizations to expand programming capacity, attract new audiences, and ensure that library resources are in the hands of people who need them the most. Avoid redundancy in service.
- Map current and potential community partners and stakeholders to expand outreach.



Consider New and Innovative Ways of Offering Service

- Create new spaces for:
 - Video and studio production.
 - Dedicated study rooms with smart screens.
 - A stand-alone gallery to highlight the current art collection and/or develop partnerships with arts and other organizations to evoke community conversation through art.
 - A classroom for teaching and developing digital skills.
 - One-on-one literacy tutoring.
- Consider concierge services. Look to Apple's Genius Bar concept to provide information about library resources.
- Offset space limitations by considering specialized services or collections better placed at a branch or at the Rose Palace.
- Review services and assess collections that are non-negotiable at Central. Downsize what is obsolete.
- Look at national and international models of service to consider what might work in Pasadena.

Promote all that the Library has to Offer

- Develop marketing plans and related campaigns to attract a wider audience and to reach the non-library user.
- Place some focus on educating the community about how libraries have changed and what they have to offer beyond traditional service.
- Conduct a needs assessment to guide service provision and attract new audiences.
- Offer ongoing tours of the library celebrating the architecture, history, and available services.
- Translate all promotional materials to reflect Pasadena's demographic.

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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