

FOREWORD



Quarterly Issue No. 71

Summer 2006

Library Challenges and Opportunities

Here's something all Palo Alto can agree about: it's extremely hard to come up with a workable plan to improve our libraries. Proposition 13 dictates that a 2/3 majority must approve tax measures for items such as libraries, necessitating broad support from across Palo Alto. Back in 2002, the city attempted to raise \$49.1 million for libraries via Measure D, but it failed when only 61.5% of ballots cast citywide supported it. Worse, although Measure D's centerpiece was a new Mitchell Park Library and Community Center, it didn't attain the 2/3 majority in three of the four precincts directly surrounding the park.

Measure D itself was a reaction to an earlier plan that would have closed branches, but which the City Council rejected. A similar proposal was shelved by the Council in 2004, when it directed its Library Advisory Commission to fashion a new improvement plan - the fifth in the last ten years. The Commission released a draft of that plan in May of this year and gathered feedback at four community meetings. The City Council then reviewed the proposal and gave the Commission further direction.

The problem, of course, is not a paucity of good ideas, but rather determining which will appeal to 2/3 of voters on an expected June 2008 ballot tax measure.

The Council's latest directions specify that the plan should:

- Maintain all current library locations,
- Expand and/or improve access to services and collections and seek technological and other efficiencies, and
- Upgrade Mitchell Park library services from branch library resource levels without downgrading Main Library.

The Council said that the City's general fund should not be expected to fund service level improvements or capital costs. Instead, additional funding will need to come from new taxes.

The Council asked the commission to also:

- Determine methods to reduce library operating costs.
- Determine size requirements for Mitchell Park Library.
- Determine facilities growth requirements (if any) at other libraries.
- Explicitly describe service levels at Main and maintain service for adults, teens and children.
- Maintain collections for 4th and 5th graders at Children's Library.
- Identify strategies and funding for increasing collections.
- Provide more analysis of strategies related to City/School partnerships.
- Prepare preliminary cost models/projections/estimates for capital and staffing needs.
- Develop scaled versions of the recommendations, with costs.
- Outline consequences to the libraries if new funding is not approved.
- Return to the Council with the final report before the end of the year.

To better explain all the issues and challenges, we present the following spectrum of perspectives on the evolving plan. Our thanks to all of the contributors!

Jeff Levinsky, President, jeff@friendspaloaltonlib.org

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)



The centerpiece of the LAC's recommendation is to rebuild Mitchell Park library, which I wholeheartedly support. My children and I use this library frequently and I find its size and condition embarrassing. Our community, with its many resources and highly educated citizens, has recently upgraded our parks and schools. The library is overdue for similar improvements and Mitchell Park is the place to start.

One thousand people per day visit Mitchell Park library, which was built when children played in the streets, few residents spoke a language other than English, DVDs did not exist, and the Internet was not a daily tool for information and communication. So much has changed since 1958, while the building has remained exactly the same – with low ceilings and a partitioned layout. It's cramped and noisy because it has so many people and purposes to accommodate.

I look forward to the LAC's more detailed recommendation in September and the City Council taking action to meet the need for library services. Let's work together to design a plan that will find support among the citizens now and the voters in 2008!

Alison Cormack
Board Member, Palo Alto Library Foundation



We recognize that much work has gone into the Library Advisory Commission's current draft recommendations, but regardless of that work, the result is not supported by the community. Palo Altans' input indicated 87% overall satisfaction with [the Palo Alto City Library], with more than half very satisfied. 56% of Palo Altans surveyed believe Palo Alto City Library meets most of their needs but could use some improvement. Community input suggests that modest improvements and expansions to all facilities might find support. There is, however, no evidence in the survey or the community meetings that aggregating services at one location and/or constructing a large, expensive new building is the improvement that Palo Altans are seeking. The proposed full-service library with downgraded branches has received

little community support and does not demonstrate efficiency improvements. We believe that the Library Advisory Commission can put forth plans that are closer in alignment with community input including: collection and facility improvements at every branch; no aggregation of collections at one location; maximizing public usage of available space at each branch; and demonstrable improvements in efficiency.

From the "Minority Report" to the City Council
Genevieve Gerard and Paula Skokowski
Library Advisory Commission members



In December 2004, the City Council directed the Library Advisory Commission to recommend a strategy for addressing the Palo Alto community's needs for library facilities, collections, and branch services. To inform our thinking, we have conducted a community survey, held a series of town hall meetings, and solicited suggestions from our partners.

We wrote a draft plan that addresses the community's needs in terms of enhanced library services (especially collections and hours), as well as improved library facilities -- the top priority being a bigger, better Mitchell Park Library. The plan calls for strengthening each of the five libraries in the system, and making facilities improvements at each.

We presented the first draft of the plan to the community and the Council at a series of meetings in early May. We received some very valuable feedback, which will be considered as we develop the final draft. The final draft is due to the Council in September. The Council has set a goal of putting one or more Library ballot measures on the June 2008 agenda. If you have questions or comments about the LAC's planning process, please visit the Library's website at cityofpaloalto.org/library, and click on *Library Advisory Commission*.

Sandra Hirsh
Chair, Library Advisory Commission

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)



The Mitchell Park Library and Community Center are both overcrowded and over utilized and are in desperate need of expansion. The previous overambitious library bond failed, yet garnered an overwhelming 61% favorable vote. I would like to see a new Mitchell Park Library and Community

Center building constructed on the site of the current community center and adjacent parking lots and patio. Rather than planning expensive underground parking where there is a high water table, build cheaper surface parking with a combined library and community center built over the parking, and on the ground floor adjacent to the street. After the construction is completed, the existing library can be replaced with an entrance to the center and park aligned with Mayview.

For expanding library services and collections, funding sources include improving efficiencies within city government or, if necessary, increasing the Utility Users Tax that now pays for community facilities rented from school sites (this tax may need to be revised to cure a defect regarding long distance and cellular phone charges).

Finally, there is no need to move central library administration to Mitchell. Rather, put central administration at the Main Library and expand that library as necessary.

Arthur Keller
President, Adobe Meadow Neighborhood Association (Not an officially endorsed position of our association)



My specific concerns about this library plan focus on a lack of recognition of the costs associated with running libraries. Using the 2006-07 city budget estimates, it costs a minimum \$100,000 per employee to operate the 4-branch system. Advances in information technology offers libraries the opportunity to rethink their service delivery model, using broadband to provide better access to information about the library. Specifically, graphically-rich catalog entries for holdings promise to provide a more intuitive

"browsing" experience. Moreover, the use of off-site storage can increase the space available on the library sites for holdings. Innovative Link+ offers to add 5.5M unique volumes to the library's "collections" without requiring any additional space in the existing buildings.

Currently, about 37% of the library's circulation is DVDs, 45% is comprised of children's materials and adult books make barely 20% of the circulation. Non-resident use of our libraries is about 23%. Charging for DVDs could raise a significant amount of money that would help to defray library capital and operational costs in the coming years.

This library plan does not seem to have any sense of how expensive libraries are to build and maintain suggesting expansion that is not linked to any specific need.

Wayne Martin
Co-Leader of the No-on-Measure-D Movement



The City Council's review of the Library Advisory Commission's Draft Plan provided guidance on what to think about next.

The Council ruled out the notion of building a full-service library at Mitchell Park because of the cost at a time of deficits and competing projects (like a police building) and equally important, a lack of community support for such a major undertaking. The opinion survey and the four public meetings in May did not produce evidence of a demand for a large central library. Public sentiment was expressed to enlarge and renovate Mitchell Park in an economical way, but not at the expense of the rest of the system. The Council did not support several LAC recommendations, like reducing Main to a branch, and diminishing Downtown and College Terrace.

The Council was positive about enlarging and renovating Mitchell Park particularly in view of the population increases expected in the area. And they agreed it was important to increase access to collections, which might include joining a

(Continued on page 6)

It's All in the Family...

It's wonderful to see how many "families" volunteer for our Friends' book sales. We couldn't get along without them - and we don't want to try.

The star family team is the **Grote family**. **Dick**, who came first, very capably manages our military history section, checking books on the Internet, establishing separate sections for Civil War, Revolutionary War, etc, etc. It's a popular section. He also brings order to our Miscellaneous, which is sometimes "very miscellaneous." Then daughter **Katie** came in and enthusiastically adopted needlecraft, television and entertainment; these subjects haven't had such TLC in a long time. Recently, Katie's mother, **Barbara**, joined us in the book room to lend a hand. Katie and Dick also play another very valuable role - they cashier at our sales

A number of couples are truly long-time volunteers dating back to the days when we were at Terman. **Georgia and Bob Schwaar** have long done what needs to be done. Currently, Georgia-the-lawyer manages the legal section and the always bulging reference section. Bob handles our Chinese and Japanese section, consults on donated postage stamps and all manner of "fits-no-category"

items. Together they are the angels who take the "absolutely dead" hardbacks to the book recycling center.

We are really fortunate to have **Hershel Smith**, a retired physician, who masterminds the medical section. His wife, **Helen**, oversees humor as well as bringing order to the videos, DVDs, tapes, etc. She also unpacks donations, and both of them cashier at our sales.

Maggie Anderson for years lined up non-profits to pick up left-over, unsold books for use by the non-profits. This means countless phone calls and much follow-through but is key to our finding new homes for left-over books. Maggie's husband **Andy** is the "fix-it guy" who magically repairs anything mechanical. For example, he helps keep our book carts running – an important man doing essential things.

Bob and Marian Dannenberg have helped for years. Bob is a long time cashier and Marian for years - many years - arranged newspaper publicity for our sales. She can be credited with getting dozens and dozens of book sale mentions in the press.

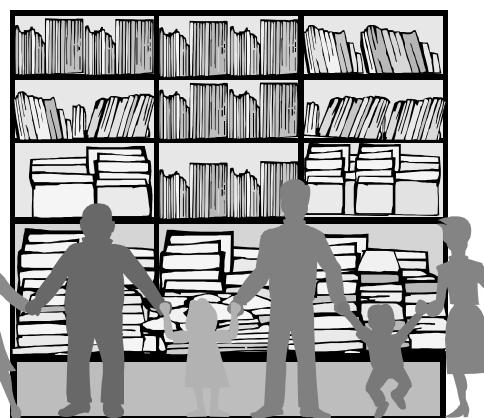
Rose Giamalis oversees our cookbook section; some months she is virtually buried alive. And husband **Peter** often cashiers but also offers legal advice whenever we ask. Very helpful. Very reassuring and he helps us sleep better at night.

Sarah and Tom Clark are regulars in our cashiering crew; in Sarah's case, this is a family affair Her father, John Mitchell, was Secretary of the Friends board for years and years. The Clarks are a faithful team.

Leslie and Dan Armistead cashier regularly and reliably; Leslie is probably our longest serving volunteer, having started with Friends in the 1980s!

Nancy and Fred Olson both help in the children's room Nancy, who was President of Friends in 1990, and Fred spend hours sorting, pricing books and arranging books to make our children's room a special place for youngsters on sale weekends.

Carolyn Spitz has volunteered for years, enthusiastically unpacking and sorting donations. Sometimes son **Ryan** accompanies her. He's a breath of fresh air, and we find all manner of things for Ryan to do.



More It's All in the Family

Shirley and Carl Finfrock are an important team. Shirley is in charge of the work room one day a week, and Carl is the local hero who picks up donations - Palo Alto, of course, but also from Portola Valley, Los Altos Hills, Stanford, Menlo Park, Redwood City and even Oakland. Carl frequently lends a hand on set-up day, toting endless boxes of books from one end of our "campus" to the other. We keep Carl very busy and cannot imagine life without him.

Jim and Martha Schmidt cashier regularly and Martha has recently begun volunteering in our unpacking and sorting operations. It's an on-going job that we can't ignore, even for a short time, lest the avalanche of books smother us.

Tisa and Ed Walker are wonderful help. Tisa helps sort donated books and Ed returns the empty red tubs that the library send us full of books that they have withdrawn from their collections.

Micki Zatz is a VIP on sales day. She directs traffic to the appropriate cashier and just generally keeps order thus assuring that the entire operation runs smoothly. Between sales Micki oversees biography and maintains separate sections for

different fields of interest. Her husband **Les** magically appears on the scene whenever there's a crisis such as when a key person is absent. He just knows what needs attention and steps in.

The Deans are another "team" couple. Jim is a key player who spends countless hours organizing the Bargain Room; wife Marge is a faithful cashier.

Sale day is busy – fortunately – with some 700 customers each sale weekend. You may have noticed that we have a number of cashier, and you're right. 24 good people cashier for a few hours during each sale. They tell us it's fun – interesting people, unbelievable books.

Bill and Bonnie Chandler do a herculean job of organizing the psychology section. There is always a LOT of psych.

Sonica and Arun Thakur is another cashiering team that shows up every month. We certainly could not operate without each and every one of these wonderful cashiers!

We're especially delighted to report that we have an international crew – sort of. **Sisi Kapp**, a Stanford graduate student brightens everyone's day as she unpacks donations each Saturday. Her husband **YJ**, who recently came over from China, translates our Chinese titles and helps out in a variety of other ways – many ways

Edwin El Kareh, originally from Lebanon, a longtime stalwart dating back to Terman days and formerly manager of our Bargain Room, now manages our computer, science and business sections with

Frank McConnell. In case you hadn't noticed these are among our busiest sections with customers standing three deep after we open on Saturdays.

Edwin's wife, nee **Lena Nazarova**, arrived several years ago from Russia where she taught cello at a musical college. Lena managed our music section until their toddler reached the age that this became impractical.

So you can see, our books sales really *are* family affairs. Our volunteers find it a pleasant way to help the community and to meet and work with great people. Thanks all you wonderful people, and to our readers – grab your spouse or kid and become a part of our family team!



(Continued from page 3)

consortium rather than buying large numbers of books, etc. A better collection was the major wish expressed in the opinion survey.

The Council was unmoved by envy of other communities' fine new buildings and wanted our existing branches enhanced and brightened. As Councilmember Kishimoto metaphorically put it, make the branches more like JJ&F than 7-11. I hope the LAC will take these priorities to heart.

Elaine Meyer
President, University South Neighborhood Assn.



City Council has directed the LAC to rework its draft library plan. Several individual council members further asked the LAC to build and demonstrate broad community support for any revised plan. But, given the mistrust that has grown among branch library supporters in the past few years, how can the LAC achieve such broad community support?

I believe that an essential first step is to have the City Auditor perform an audit of the library system. The recent Audit of Street Maintenance revealed a \$28.7 million backlog in street repair! The fact that mismanagement and poor coordination worsened this backlog has been obvious to residents for years, though previously denied by staff.

The Library Director has repeatedly said that Palo Alto has only enough money for two-and-a-half libraries, not five libraries, but the available facts and figures actually dispute that claim. As one council member commented, "The community needs to be persuaded that [no stone has been left unturned to keep costs as low as possible]."

Without an audit, the LAC will find it hard to persuade me that the best solution for our libraries is more taxes, not more efficiency.

Joy Ogawa
20-plus year Palo Alto library user



I'm particularly concerned with the fate of the smaller branches within the library system. It is important that these smaller branches are not scaled back to "reading rooms" and retain sufficient

materials to allow patrons to browse titles in addition to checking out "holds," reading periodicals and using computers. Although an increase in hours is welcome, the addition of 25 hours/week seems extreme - and a puzzling use of limited funds. Rather than staff so many new hours, bring in more books and DVDs.

The LAC draft encourages a branch system that "functions more efficiently and with fewer operational and funding redundancies," yet doesn't specify what redundancies exist, or how much they cost. These should be identified. Construction of an expanded Mitchell Park Library is a large, expensive, multi-year project that overshadows all other aspects of the plan and it is not clear that the community supports it in the form the LAC envisions. Improving collections (weeding and updating) and improving access to materials for a growing population at all the branches is important, as shown by the LAC Community Survey, and any plan for the libraries should emphasize this.

Holly Welstein
College Terrace Library Working Group



We encourage you to contact the Library Advisory Commission and/or the City Council to express your own views.

To communicate with the Library Advisory Commission members, write to:

Library Advisory Commission,
P.O. Box 10250,
Palo Alto, CA 94303

or send an email to:

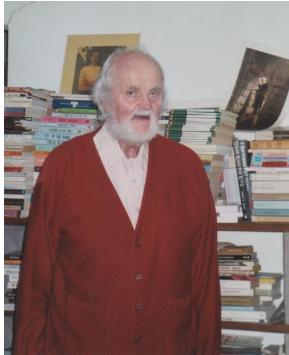
Library.Commission@CityofPaloAlto.org.



The City Council's e-mail address is:
city.council@cityofpaloalto.org

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In Memoriam



Jack Gill
1922—2006

Long, long time dedicated
Book Sale Volunteer
Manager, Poetry Section
A true gentleman & bibliophile

We will miss him enormously, and



Friends of the Palo Alto Library Membership Form

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Web Page: www.friendspaloaltolib.org

Monthly Book Sales: Second Weekend
Cubberley Community Center, 4000 Middlefield Rd.

Saturday

Main Room: 11 am to 4 pm
(Free tickets to reserve place in line available at 8 am)
Children's (Room K6) & Bargain (Room K7): 10 am to 4 pm

Sunday

All rooms: 1 pm to 4 pm

See www.friendspaloaltolib.org for details

Board of Directors Meeting: Second Wednesday

Cubberley Book Sale Room
4000 Middlefield Road 8:30 to 10:30 am

Email: info@friendspaloaltolib.org

Book Discussion Group: Second Thursday

Lucie Stern Community Center Fireside Room
1305 Middlefield Road 7:30 to 9 pm
For information, call Crystal 961-1528 or see
www.fopalbookgroup.homestead.com

Great Books: Second Wednesday

Oak Creek Apartments Club House
1600 Sand Hill Road, Palo Alto. 7:30 to 9:30 pm
For information, call Elsie Taboroff at 493-8629

Library Commission: Fourth Thursday

Council Conference Room, 250 Hamilton Ave. 7 pm
See www.city.palo-alto.ca.us/clerk/schedule.html
to confirm meeting date and time.

Friends of the Palo Alto Library (FOPAL) Board of Directors: Jeff Levinsky, President; Martha Schmidt, Vice-President; Margarita Quihuis, Secretary; Bob Moss, Treasurer and Bob Otnes, Assistant Treasurer; Marty Paddock, Book Sale Manager. Members: Wendy Akers-Ghose, Betsy Allyn, Althea Andersen, Rudy Batties, Gretchen Emmons, Gerry Masteller, Gloria Reade, Jim Schmidt, Barbara Silberling, Steve Staiger, Ellen Wyman, and Tom Wyman. Library Representatives to the Board: Paula Simpson, Library Director. Foreword Staff: Wendy Akers-Ghose; Webmaster: Jeff Levinsky; Circulation: Post Haste Direct