



Boston City Council Committee on Ways and Means

Dockets #0524-0531 FY22 Budget

Boston Public Library

Working Session: Thursday, May 6, 2021, 10:00 a.m.

Hearing: Thursday, May 20, 2021, 2:00 p.m.

Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair

Contracted Services has a recommended increase of \$438,061 in FY22, compared to the FY21 appropriation. Can you tell us why and what this increase represents?

- The total contracted services are \$3,018,649. What types of services are performed, and could any be brought in-house?

\$158,000 represents the cost increase for the security contract

\$250,000 represents reopening programming or related costs

\$30,000 is available for the purposes of the new Equity and Diversity Coordinator.

- Contracted services is \$3m –

529	Security	1,738,673
	critical repair	300,000
	BTU Homework Help	25,000
	Read Boston	315,000
	Boston Saves	100,000
	Misc HR	6,100
	AFSMCE Contin Ed	20,000
	PSA Tuition	30,000
	Comm Printing/ Other	36,000
	IT Costs - network, server, misc	67,876
	Pine Street	100,000
	Reopening Programming	250,000
	Equity Coordinator	30,000
		3,018,649

- Please provide more details on the Early Literacy Program including the demographics of its participants, its outcomes, and what collaboration (if any) there is on literacy efforts with BPS.

Much of what the children's library staff does is focused toward early literacy initiatives, including Baby Dance programs, Baby lapsits story times, and lots of Kindergarten prep. For the last year+ we launched a major initiative called The Future Readers Club (<https://www.bpl.org/future-readers-club/>), targeting children and their caregivers and encouraging them to read 1,000 books before kindergarten. It's an educational campaign for caregivers. We hold special Future Readers Club storytimes, that have a far higher



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attendance than most regular storytimes. There is a special app that allows interested caregivers to keep track of the books they read. We partner with Read Boston, The Basics, Countdown to Kindergarten, BPS Focus on Children, Boston Children's Museum and WGBH on this initiative which is funded by the BPL Fund.

We also partner extensively with Countdown to Kindergarten through the summer months preparing kids to enter kindergarten.

We don't currently collect demographic information of participants.

- Regarding research services personnel, there was a decrease, from \$1,859,936 in FY21 to \$1,811,903 in FY22. Please detail what this reduction represents and how the decision was made.

There was no reduction in personnel. There are a number of reasons behind this small decrease, among them:

The Library often submits personnel reorganizations. In these instances, new positions are created, others are inactivated. In one instance, a BLA4 that was part of a earlier reorganization was inadvertently not inactivated. The previous incumbent was moved to a new position 3 years ago

In at least two instances, long term employees at top step left, vacant positions are then budgeted at first step. There is a significant difference between these steps

Two positions were listed on the 100 fund that should be charged to 200.

- What are the plans to support archival work? How can we utilize archival work in exhibits and in the BPS curriculum? How do library archivists work with community archivists to undertake projects that will preserve and catalog the diverse history of Boston? How are these resources made available for research, for schools, for exhibits, etc. Especially with the capital project on rare books and the overall revamping of the library's physical research facilities, I would love to hear what BPL's hopes and ambitions are on this front.

In fall 2020, BPL hired a Lead Archivist who is charged with building a new Archives Department at the library. The department stewards BPL's archival collections through preservation, arrangement, and description – actions that are essential for preserving the stories archives hold and making these stories “free to all” and available for study and interpretation. Staff are building a strong foundation and creating the infrastructure to support long-term preservation and access for existing and future collections. This work helps the library recognize how existing collections can be better accessed and used by our community, whether in the classroom, in exhibits, or through programming partnerships with community organizations.



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This foundational work prepares BPL to become more engaged in the kind of work that is already underway through the partnership with the Boston Research Center (BRC), a digital community history and archives lab based at Northeastern University Library. The scope of current community history projects that BPL staff is engaged with through BRC initiatives ranges from gathering oral histories in the South End, to supporting the crafting of East Boston memoirs, to the development of a bilingual database of Chinatown historical collections, to the creation of circulating oral history backpacks. Each of these digital history projects will result in enhanced public access to collections. And each of these projects speaks to the central mission of the BPL's community history initiative: to support Boston residents in the telling of their own stories, with a focus on centering the voices of historically marginalized communities. All of the digital history projects currently underway have been designed in partnership with community members, with an eye toward developing projects that meet community need, are accessible, replicable, and sustainable. As such, the majority of this work centers around stories of community activism, social justice, and resilience.

A high priority of the new Archives Department is preservation and description of existing collections. The department is making collection descriptions publicly available through an updated user-oriented online catalog which will launch at the beginning of the summer. This search platform will provide easier access to existing archival inventories and links to digitized collections in Digital Commonwealth. It is keyword searchable and will make it much easier for researchers, students, teachers, and staff to get a clear picture of BPL archival holdings. This catalog will also make it easier to use collections in the new Special Collections Reading Room being built through the Rare Books renovation project. Archival collections will be accessible right alongside rare books, manuscripts, and artwork.

- The BPL Capital budget went down from \$29,045,000 (FY21 Estimated) to \$20,977,918 (Total Projected FY22). It seems like there should be more spending in FY22 than FY21, given the construction freeze in the early pandemic. Please explain the reason for the decrease.
- *[This question already answered on May 11]* I've been attending planning meetings, so I know the process is underway, but what roughly is the timeline for the West End Library? Given that this is an enormously utilized branch that serves many communities, we want to make sure its well taken care of and has an aggressive timeline for completion.
- Are there plans to make our library facilities net zero carbon emissions? I believe new libraries will fall under the city's new rules for net zero carbon, but want to confirm.



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- Are there plans to address any capital needs at the Parker Hill Branch? For example, I know there was an ongoing elevator issue last year.
- Please provide an update on the Central Branch - Rare Books project, and how these collections will be more accessible to the public and better cared for at its conclusion.

The newly renovated Rare Books Department will transform the library's ability to provide in-person public services for the library's vast holdings of rare, distinctive, and culturally significant materials. The updated lobby and reading room are designed as open, more approachable spaces that meet modern research needs while assuring safe, secure handling of special collections. For the first time, we will have a separate, on-site classroom facility to better support teaching and primary-source instruction with special collections materials, while a renovated lobby provides enhanced options for accessible public display and exhibition of collections. All public spaces were consciously designed to balance the needs of students, researchers, general visitors, and curious life-long learners.

In addition to supporting new and better public services, every aspect of this renovation project was planned with the long-term care and preservation of physical collections in mind. New specialized shelving, climate control, lighting, and state-of-the-art systems for security and fire suppression have been added. Concurrently with the ongoing renovation work, Rare Books Dept. staff have spent the past four years inventorying and cataloging our collections, while making as much information about all of our holdings as possible available online -- in many cases, for the first time.

- Any progress on thinking through a revamp of the third floor of the McKim building?
- It looks like the research collections preservation and storage plan (\$200,000 total) is still to be scheduled. Is there a reason for the delay? How can we get this plan underway & what is the plan? Is \$200,000 sufficient to preserve the resources we have?

We issued an RFP for this project a few months ago and just selected a vendor to award the bid. The Trustees voted on it at their 5/18 meeting. The project was unfortunately delayed for about a year due to the pandemic, but we are very excited to kick it off this summer. The \$200,000 is just to fund this initial project to assess the existing conditions and the amount of space needed to hold our research and special collections. We have many challenges with our current collection storage conditions and the final report will give us the critical information we need to develop next steps for our long term collection storage strategy.



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- Please explain the increased “contracted services” investments in Equity and Outreach Programming and Reopening with Expanded Services
The Equity and Outreach funding will provide support to the new position. We are currently drafting that position description
Reopening represents expanded year one programming.
- From the budget materials: “Relative to the FY21 Appropriation, budgeted external funds are down \$300,000 and FTEs are level. We expect changes.”
 - Does this mean that they expect to receive more external funds? Or do you expect an impact on FTEs?
The Library external funds are based on an estimate done in December. While this is always the case, this year COVID made an estimate more difficult. For example, we were unaware what, if any, impact this would have on state funding. In FY21, we estimated Library for the Commonwealth Funding at \$2.7m, a slight increase over FY20. Final FY21 funding was over \$3.1m. We reduced the estimate for Trust fund spending based upon FY20 actual spending of \$1.3m. There are approximately 200 trusts, most of which restricted to certain purposes. As we reopen in FY22, actuals may be higher based upon additional programming or other specialty spending. Trust fund balances not spent in any given year remain available in subsequent years. There is no anticipated impact for FTEs.
- Do you expect the \$125,000 in revenue relief in this proposed budget, in the place of late fees, to become permanent?
We would rely on OBM to answer questions concerning funding sources for the city budget. However, late fees were not kept by the library, they were directed to the City’s General Fund.
- Regarding Tech Goes Home and related services, as we transition back to physical libraries opening, what is the plan for keeping the expanded technological capacities we’ve developed?
We are currently working on a plan for in-person computer training. Virtual Tech Goes Home was very challenging, but we managed to meet all of our goals during the pandemic, serving over 150 Tech Goes Home students, many older adults, who received a Chromebook and hotspot for free. We also began a number of early literacy focused Tech Goes Home workshops using tablets.
We will continue to circulate out Connectivity Kits (Chromebooks and Hotspots) and are working with the City’s Office of New Urban Mechanics to create outdoor spaces that take advantage of our boosted wifi capabilities outside of our branches.



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- Also, all patrons are eager to know when libraries will be reopening to the public. Where is the latest thinking on reopening branches? *[Please provide more detail on the latest announcement.]*

Councilor Ed Flynn asked:

- The Chinatown Branch Library is a top priority for me and for the Chinatown community. The FY22 budget allocates \$5M and the status in the budget book is “study underway”. Please provide an update on the timeline for this project. Where are some of the sites being looked at for the permanent branch?
- There seems to be funding for a library study at the South End Library. What are the next steps in improving this library? What will the community process look like for the study?
- The South Boston library is one of the oldest branches in the City. What are the short- and long-term plans for this branch? I would ultimately like to see a new library built.

Councilor Julia Mejia asked:

- Can you explain how hours of operation are determined for each branch? Some branches, such as the Roxbury Branch, are closed on Saturdays, and given that these are some of the only free spaces available to our community, how can we utilize these branches to be more intentional about creating a space for our community to just be?

The hours of operation in the branches are currently reduced due to the pandemic. We are bringing back one evening in each branch as we begin to reopen in June. During the pandemic, vacancies were left unfilled due to the uncertain public health situation. As staffing and public health guidelines permit, we will hopefully be bringing Saturday hours back as soon as we can.

Councilor Michael Flaherty asked:

- Libraries are hubs of activity in our neighborhoods, especially for helping kids learn, and so we need to continue to invest in programming. What is BPL doing to partner with BPS to address lost learning during the pandemic?

We are mobilizing programming focused on Youth Engagement throughout the system outdoors this summer, taking advantage of the outdoor spaces at many of our branches. Our Homework Assistance Program went virtual this past year, and we had steady, if lower,



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attendance. We are looking forward to restarting our in-person Homework Assistance Program, hopefully in the fall at all of our branches.

We are also working with BPS to get every BPS student a library card. This is a program that we hope to continue with each incoming class of kindergartner's each year.

- We've been advocating for a Chinatown Branch Library for many years and it's very exciting to see this move forward. Please provide an update about the construction of the new Chinatown Branch?

Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:

- How much of an impact will the elimination of fines for overdue materials have on BPL's revenue? - **None, the funds go to the General Fund.**
- Why is BPL's capital budget decreasing by 27%? Is this because of the completion of projects last year or for some other reason?
- Why does BPL have a 2.5% decrease in Research Services (under Personnel Services)? **See above, response to Councilor Bok**

Councilor Liz Breadon asked:

- Purchasing for branch library collection – can local branch librarians have some control over purchasing? We have a very diverse city and each neighborhood is culturally very different. Local librarians should be able to purchase books for their collection – they know their population. Can we make this less centralized?
Librarians at all branches have several avenues to purchase materials for their collections. They have a dedicated funding stream that they can use to purchase anything they need to meet local interest and demand. Additionally, they have several opportunities throughout the year to order titles from special topic carts and they have multiple opportunities to suggest items for the entire BPL collection to the benefit of all using the library. The system we have put in place allows staff across the system to contribute to the collection in various ways, capitalizing on their individual knowledge and expertise, and streamlining procedures to get material to the public faster.
- When will work on the Faneuil Branch Library begin? The library closed in November and there is no sign of any work being done 6 months later.