

MEASURE 26-211 – Library Bonds

Ballot Title:

Bonds to Expand, Renovate, Construct Library Branches, Facilities; Increase Safety

Question:

Shall Multnomah County expand, modernize, rebuild, acquire land for library facilities; issue \$387,000,000 in general obligation bonds, with oversight, audits? If the bonds are approved, they will be payable from taxes on property or property ownership that are not subject to the limits of sections 11 and 11b, Article XI of the Oregon Constitution.

Financial Impact:

The measure authorizes \$387,000,000 in general obligation bonds. It is estimated the average cost will be \$0.61 per \$1,000 of assessed value over the term of the bond or \$122 per year for property assessed at \$200,000. Bonds would mature not more than nine years from issuance and may be issued in multiple series.

Note: assessed value (AV) is the value used to calculate property tax. It is shown on the property tax statement. It is NOT the same as real market value (RMV), which is the market price of the home.

Probable Results of a Yes Vote:

A “Yes” vote would allow the County to raise \$387,000,000 to build a new flagship library in East County, and expand and update existing library facilities across the County.

Probable Results of a No Vote:

The County would have no additional funding to build, enlarge or update library facilities. Taxes for property owners would not increase due to this measure.

Background:

According to the Multnomah County Library Bond Proposal Executive Summary, Multnomah County libraries are the fourth busiest in the nation. They serve vital community needs. In addition to books, libraries provide access to computers, job training, literacy classes, educational programs, and a variety of other services. They also provide public meeting rooms and quiet places to read, study, work, and learn. Since 2013, County residents have funded a dedicated library district that pays for services (currently funded at \$1.22 per \$1,000 in assessed property value). This measure focuses on capital improvements, not operations.

Due to space constraints and outdated facilities, Multnomah County libraries are often unable to meet public demands. By way of comparison, all 19 County libraries, plus its library office and storage space, would fit into Seattle’s downtown library. The Bond Proposal Executive Summary notes that patrons are regularly turned away from training opportunities and educational programs, and denied public meeting rooms due to lack of availability. Residents of East Portland and East County are especially underserved since only five of nineteen libraries are located east of I-205.

Summary of Measure:

If approved, the bond measure would:

- Enlarge and update seven branch libraries, including Albina, with space for library administration (\$44 million), Belmont (\$28 million), Holgate (\$43 million), Midland (\$32 million), North Portland (\$12 million), Northwest (\$12 million), and St. Johns (\$10 million);
- Build a flagship library (\$125 million) in East County, a part of the County that is underserved;
- Add gigabit speed internet to all libraries (\$1.6 million);
- Create a central materials handling and distribution center to increase efficiency and cost effectiveness;
- Pay for furnishings, equipment, site improvements, land acquisition, and bond issuance costs.

If approved, an independent bond oversight committee and annual audits will help ensure funds are used appropriately.

Supporters Say:

- Multnomah County libraries are among the busiest in the nation, but the physical structures are cramped and crowded, with far less square footage per capita than many peer libraries.
- Building a flagship library in East County will increase library capacity in areas of the County that are home to nearly 40% of the County's population but have only 20% of its library space
- Multnomah County library facilities are aging and need updating. If approved, the measure would increase efficiency and reduce handling costs by converting to an automated materials handling system; connect all libraries to gigabit speed internet service; increase accessibility of buildings, services and technology for people with disabilities; improve seismic readiness; and provide other important upgrades.

Opponents Say:

- If voters do not approve the bond, the District's current bond tax rate would not increase.
- The wide availability of information and books on the internet makes the traditional library less useful in today's world.
- The library should be investing funds in adding additional online materials and services rather than renovating and adding physical buildings.