



UPDATE ON MULTNOMAH COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

Leagues of Women Voters of Portland and East Multnomah County
April 2004

The League of Women Voters of East Multnomah County and the League of Women Voters of Portland at their local conventions in May 2002 decided that the wording was outdated in the current position from the Multnomah County Library System Study done in April 1986 and needed to be updated.

The original study came about as efforts were being undertaken to change from the 126 years of private control of the Library by the Library Association of Portland to governance of the system by Multnomah County Board of County Commissioners. This change was voted in and became effective July 1, 1990. There is now a 15 member Board appointed by the Multnomah County Chair for four-year terms. The Board advises both the Library Director and County Commissioners. At the same time of this change, voters approved a 3-year serial levy to support the library system.

Ongoing voter support of library serial levies over the past 14 years has allowed the system to grow, modernize its buildings (including a major restoration of the Central Library) and enter the world of more sophisticated technology. This has not been a period without money problems, however. Measure 5, a property tax limitation measure, was approved by voters in November 1990. This set off a series of library staff cutbacks, reduced hours buildings were open to the public and limited purchases needed to keep the collections up to date.

Even with these reductions circulation of materials has grown each year with FY 1999/00 showing a 27.6% increase over the previous year. Two new branches were added to the system in 2001 bringing the total outlets to 17.

The public loves its libraries with 65% of Multnomah County residents having a library card. According to the Library Foundation website the library reaches more citizens of the county than any other public or private cultural or educational service. It is estimated that 13,000 people use the system each day.

The system-wide open hours per week have grown to 964 hours compared to the 630 open hours of 1985. As of 2003 there are 1,910,841 volumes in the collection, plus 60,170 audio-visual materials – CDs, cassettes, DVDs, books-on-tape, videos, etc. The system also has 1,043 databases and 105 current electronic serial subscriptions (e.g. *The Oregonian* via Internet).

Another 5-year levy passed in November 2002 by 58% of the voters for continuation of current services. Total 2003 library operating revenue was \$40,757,216 and of that amount \$5,591,869 was used to add materials to the collection. (See Figure 1 for revenue and Figure 2 for expense details.)

The system operates with a total of 450 paid staff as of June 2003, 97 of whom are librarians with ALA/MLS (American Library Association/Master of Library Science) degrees. Total staff expenditures were \$27,770,649 in 2003.

To improve access to resources, the Fort Vancouver Regional Library rejoined Metropolitan Interlibrary Exchange (MIX) in 2002 uniting with Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas counties. This is an example of the efforts to connect the metropolitan library systems in the *reciprocal free service area*.

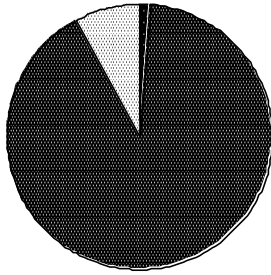


Figure 1
2003 Sources of Revenue

County Government	\$36,877,148	91%
Other	\$ 3,285,812	8%
Federal Government	\$ 505,777	1%
State Government	\$ 88,479	0%

Our library system has come into the world of technology in many ways, offering both use of computers within the branches to find information world wide as well as remote access via internet connections at home or office. The library has added new services for science and business patrons. This connection makes the resources available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Multnomah County Library website at www.multcolib.org has won awards for its content and “user friendliness”. Many other databases link to this resource.

Passage of the 5-year levy in November 2002 helped restore Monday hours at Central and 4 busy branches. In 2002, Ginnie Cooper, who had served 12 years as Director, resigned and a new director, Molly Raphael, was hired in 2004.

Besides the tax base funding of the Library there are two main groups that help raise support for the system. The Friends of the Multnomah County Library is a non-profit community organization dedicated to supporting the Library by promoting public involvement and raising money through the Friends’ Library Store at Central and an annual used book sale. The Friends also help staff the “Title Wave” used book store. In 1998 the American Library Association honored this Friends group as the most outstanding such organization affiliated with a large library.

The Library Foundation was established in 1995 by citizens who understood that a great public library is not possible through public funding alone. Since then, The Library Foundation has raised more than \$20 million in private funds from over 9,000 donors. This is not a grant-making foundation, rather they raise funds from a variety of sources to enhance programs such as the summer reading program for children and adding to the collections and buildings of the system. “The Foundation is helping to make a difference in literacy, in cultural engagement and in securing Multnomah County Library’s place as a nationally respected, actively used community institution,” according to their website.

These organizations and other groups of volunteers help increase the library’s visibility in the community. The groups include “Visiting Voices” that read to residents in care facilities, “Homework Helpers” working with students after school, “Books 2 U” people who deliver boxes of books to daycare and school facilities, library staff who run the School Corps program for teachers in all of the county’s school systems, and LIBROS the library outreach program in Spanish.

The Multnomah County Library website outlines its five year plan (2001-2005), which centers around its Mission Statement:

“Multnomah County Library serves the people of Multnomah County by providing books and other materials to meet their informational, educational, cultural, and recreational needs.

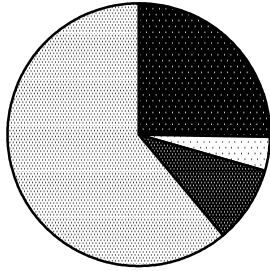


Figure 2
2003 Operating Expenses

Staff Salaries and Benefits	\$24,770,649	61%
Other (Equipment, Building Upkeep, etc.)	\$10,251,737	25%
Print Materials	\$ 3,926,118	10%
Electronic/AV Materials	\$ 1,665,751	4%

“Multnomah County Library upholds the principles of intellectual freedom and the public’s right to know by providing people of all ages with access and guidance to information and collections that reflect all points of view.”

With this background information, the study committee would like to propose the following changes in the Multnomah County Library System position:

Old Wording

Assuming stable funding is available, the Leagues support establishment of the following services priorities:

1. Replacing the card catalog with full automation, putting all holdings on computers with user terminals available in all branches and departments;
2. Increasing acquisition of books and other library materials;
3. Increasing the number of library branches, enlarging some branches and extending library hours; and
4. Publicizing the library’s holdings and services.

Proposed Changed Wording

The League of Women Voters of East Multnomah County and the League of Women Voters of Portland support a public library system that upholds the principles of intellectual freedom and the public’s right to know. We support the library as a basic community service with an assured, stable and adequate source that will allow:

- Provision of library resources in keeping with new ideas and technological advances with an easy to use retrieval system;
- Continual acquisition of materials including books, other multimedia items and software in a variety of formats and languages to serve the informational, educational, cultural and recreational needs of all library patrons;
- Continued remote access of library resources through the Internet and other state-of-the-art technology;
- Offering reference materials (print and electronic), and the support to utilize these resources, to meet the needs of science and business patrons as well as the general public;
- Access by all persons to public library services spread throughout the county with adequate hours of service;
- Maintaining the award winning Multnomah County Library Internet website as well as other forms of outreach to places where people live, work, and play, taking into account the multilingual nature of our communities;
- Sustaining visibility in the community through The Friends of the Library, The Library Foundation and other groups of volunteers.

Acknowledgements

Mikkelsen, June. Multnomah County Library Facilities Renovation Manager.

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Funding Options History: 1983-1992, Library Board, March 18, 2003.

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Multnomah County Library – Service Levels Comparison 1985/86 – 2002/03

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Credits

Prepared by the Leagues of Women Voters of Portland and East Multnomah County.

Research and writing: Rita Fawcett, Sunny Fromm, Carolyn Rundorff

Editing: Mattie Courtright, Carol Cushman, Alyda Gilkey, Jeanne Pulliam

Layout: Heather Drake