

Contra Costa County Library Commission Advocacy Ad Hoc Group

Final Report – November 21, 2024

This group was formed in February 2024 to explore alternative funding models and mechanisms in relation to the Contra Costa County Library. Its scope was based on interest expressed by Library Commissioners and representatives of Library Friends and Foundations at the December 2023 forum. Sue Hamill, District 4 Commissioner, and Susan Hildreth, District 2 Commissioner, are the Co-Chairs. Other members include Clifton Louie, District 3 Commissioner, Rachel Rosekind, District 1 Commissioner and Bob Sanguedolce, City of Danville, Alternate Commissioner. Alison McKee, County Librarian, attends all the group's meetings.

Since February, the group has met monthly to review financial and operational information from peer county libraries. Although Contra Costa County refers to the nine Bay Area counties in the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) as peers, in reviewing the finances and governance of ABAG member libraries, the most similar to Contra Costa in financing and organization are the county libraries in Alameda, Marin, Napa and Solano. Accordingly, these libraries have been the focal points for analysis and the group's recommendations. These library systems have multiple branches, ranging from 4 in the Napa County Library system to 12 in the Alameda County Library system. Note that Contra Costa County Library system is by far the largest with 26 branches.

Funding

The group's review of Alameda, Marin, Napa, and Solano County libraries' financial information documented that **Contra Costa County Library is the lowest-funded library among them**. Like Contra Costa, all of the aforementioned libraries receive a dedicated share of the county property tax. The California State Library publishes a useful statistic for tracking and comparatively assessing library funding: the Public Library Local Income Per Capita (LIPC). This figure is derived from the local library income divided by residents served. Below is the most recent information published by the State Library (from Fiscal Year 2022–23):

Library	LIPC- Library Funding per Person
Contra Costa	\$36.31
Solano	\$63.73
Alameda	\$64.36
Napa	\$91.83
Marin	\$121.29

Library financing is complicated, and property tax is often augmented by other sources. A primary reason that funding for Contra Costa County Library is so low is because it represents the largest library among its peers that does not receive some form of

additional funding. The information below identifies additional sources of income for Contra Costa’s peer libraries.

Library	Additional Funding beyond property tax
Contra Costa	None
Alameda	Portion of utility users’ tax
Marin	Measure B \$98 parcel tax
Napa	High property tax rate – 2.07%
Solano	Measure L 1/8 cent sales tax

Since 1992, Contra Costa County Library has placed four measures on the ballot, two parcel tax and two sales tax measures, in an effort to secure additional funding. Although all of these measures received approval levels over 61%, none prevailed to attain the required 66 2/3 % approval level.

Services

Library funding is the foundation for all services. Currently, the Contra Costa County Library funds a base service schedule of 40 open hours per week for 22 facilities funded by property tax revenues. Cities may fund 6, 12, or 16 additional hours above this baseline through their own funding stream. As of this fiscal year, 8 facilities are open 40 hours per week, 4 are open 46 hours per week, 7 are open 52 hours per week, and 3 are open 56 hours per week. Bay Point, Crockett, Prewett, and Rodeo are considered outlets rather than full-service libraries, and thus are open from 24 to 35 hours per week. Although this variability in service hours may be beneficial for the local community served by a given branch, it leads to inequitable services county-wide and exacerbates resource and opportunity disparities across the county. Plainly, whereas some cities can afford to fund additional hours, those with less resources cannot, and branches in unincorporated areas do not have any mechanism to provide additional funding.

Library hours are the “envelope” that enables our libraries to provide residents with a wide variety of services. In 2021 the County Librarian requested Measure X funding to achieve the goal of 56 open hours per week and six days of operation of Mondays through Saturdays across all full-service branches. Notably, this schedule did not include Sundays, which is critical from an equity standpoint and based on resident input to include in basic service hours. In the most recent Contra Costa Library customer survey, additional service hours as well as enhanced collections and programming were the top requests. Although peer libraries’ service schedules vary widely based on facility size, geographic location, and other factors, all of them offer Sunday service hours at some facilities. The average number of Sunday open hours is 4.5 hours per week. The average percent of facilities open on Sunday is 32 percent, as reflected in the chart below.

Library	Total number of branches	Number of branches open on Sunday	Percent of branches open on Sunday
Contra Costa	26	0	
Alameda	12	6	50%
Marin	10	2	20%
Napa	4	1	25%
Solano	9	3	33%

Contra Costa County Library is launching a pilot of unstaffed Sunday hours at the Concord Library on December 1. This marks the beginning of an effort to respond to multiple communities’ requests for Sunday service. However, given the extensive services provided by peer libraries and resident requests, we recommend fully-staffed Sunday service of at least 4 hours per week for at least 6 equitably geographically-distributed facilities.

Much of the information in this report was shared with the attendees of the 2024 Friends and Foundation Forum on October 5. There was engaged discussion, and numerous participants proposed investigating options for additional funding for the Library to achieve increased open hours, including Sundays.

Recommended Action

We respectfully request that the Library Commission endorse our recommendation that Contra Costa County Library’s limited funding be explicitly acknowledged. We also request that the Library Commission endorse the aspirational goal of 56 fully-staffed service hours per week for all full-service branches, services provided Monday through Saturday. This goal also includes fully-staffed services on Sundays for at least 4 hours per week at a minimum of 6 branches equitably distributed across the county. If this goal is realized, this model will provide more impactful, equitable, and inclusive services to all Contra Costa County residents. Last, we ask that all Library Commissioners communicate this information to their Appointing Authority.

The Advocacy Ad Hoc Group has completed its work and requests that the group be sunset by the Library Commission.