



Fw: Item 7.1 City Council May 5 2026

From City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Date Mon 5/4/2026 8:14 AM
To Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>

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Sent: Saturday, May 2, 2026 10:34 PM
To: City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Subject: Item 7.1 City Council May 5 2026

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Item 7.1

To: Honorable Mayor, Members of the City Council, and City Administration

From: A Dedicated Supporter of the San José Public Library

Date: May 5, 2026

Subject: The Essential Role of the San José Public Library: A Vision for Continued Investment

Dear Mayor Mahan, City Manager Maguire, and Members of the City Council,

As our city stands at a pivotal crossroads, navigating shifting development patterns and complex economic realities, I am writing to express my profound support for the San José Public Library (SJPL) system and to urge the City Council to continue its vital investment in our libraries. Over the past year, the development of the 20-Year Facilities and Customer Experience Plan has shown us that our libraries are far more than just buildings with books; they are the very soul of San José. They are our most critical neighborhood infrastructure—cultivating connection, advancing digital equity, and anchoring our diverse communities.

Now more than ever, during times of economic uncertainty, our city must recognize that strategic funding for the library system is not a luxury. It is a high-return public investment that yields immense social, educational, and economic benefits for more than one million residents.

Celebrating the Library's Major Accomplishments

Before looking toward our next 20 years, it is critical to celebrate the exceptional accomplishments and operational excellence that our library system has demonstrated:

- **Unmatched Community Reach and High Satisfaction:** Each day, the San José Public Library system welcomes more than 10,300 visitors, loans approximately 23,000 items, and directly answers 1,000 questions for our community members. Serving 635,112 active cardholders, the library consistently earns a 95% satisfaction rating in resident surveys.
- **A Legacy of Prudent Stewardship:** Building upon the immense success of the 2000 Branch Library Bond Measure (Measure O), which built 6 new branches and renovated 14 others, the library system has proven its dedication to the careful management of public assets. Most recently, the library successfully reduced its deferred maintenance backlog from \$43 million in 2021-2022 down to approximately \$20 million, showcasing a disciplined approach to fiscal and operational management.
- **A Platform for Equity and Upward Mobility:** The library is an industry leader in advancing digital and educational equity. Its Family Learning Centers and tailored career programs serve historically underserved populations with remarkable success: 98% of Career Online High School participants and 96% of Resilience Corps participants identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC).
- **A Hub for Strategic Partnerships:** Over 330 non-governmental community organizations partner with the library annually to hold meetings, offer programming, and directly provide resources to our residents. Our libraries have moved from a passive service model into an active platform that multiplies the community impact of our non-profit, educational, and civic sectors.

The Core of the Aspirational Vision: Moving Forward with the Facilities and Customer Experience Plan

The newly developed Facilities and Customer Experience Plan outlines an inspiring, data-driven framework to modernize and expand our branches over the next two decades. Grounded in robust data, including the library's Equity Index Tool and demographic trends, the plan presents a measured, needs-based strategy to address severe space deficits. Currently, nearly 500,000 San José residents are not being adequately served by current industry square-footage benchmarks. To bridge this gap, the plan outlines an intentional addition of roughly 400,000 square feet systemwide to help us reach the standard of 0.75 square feet per capita.

The plan proposes four vital strategic roles for our libraries:

1. **City as Classroom:** Connecting residents to learning and workforce development beyond traditional boundaries.
2. **City as Connected Communities:** Creating a sense of belonging across cultural, economic, and generational lines.
3. **City as Cultural Connector:** Elevating San José's diverse histories, languages, and immigrant heritage.
4. **City as Civic Activator:** Serving as the bedrock of civic participation, public dialogue, and neighborhood safety.

By adopting these roles, our branches will directly elevate outcomes in critical areas including Early Learning and Childcare, Educational Success, Meaningful and Sustaining Jobs, and Personal Health & Wellbeing.

Why the Library is More Critical Than Ever in Hard Economic Times

When financial uncertainties and economic constraints inevitably arise, the natural instinct can be to restrict municipal investment. However, history and data show that during these exact moments, the community's reliance on the library intensifies. In a downturn, the library becomes our city's first line of defense:

- **Bridging the Digital Divide:** For the thousands of residents without reliable, high-speed home internet or computer access, the library acts as an essential gateway. It enables job seekers to apply for work, students to complete their homework, and families to access critical social services.
- **Driving Economic Wellness and Workforce Training:** Through targeted programs like the Career Online High School, workforce preparation, and skills workshops, the library directly supports economic mobility. It offers low-income residents the resources needed to transition into stable careers.
- **Providing Safe, Inclusive Community Living Rooms:** In a region with high living costs, the library stands as one of the few completely free, welcoming, and safe public spaces available to all. It offers educational programs, youth after-school hubs, and climate refuge for families, seniors, and youth who have nowhere else to turn.

A Smart, Sustainable, and Phased Approach

The beauty of the 20-Year Facilities and Customer Experience Plan is its fiscal responsibility. The plan does not ask for an immediate, insurmountable upfront financial commitment. Instead, it outlines a flexible, phased investment roadmap that prioritizes immediate needs while laying down the foundation for future long-term growth:

- **"Quick Wins" and Realignment:** In its initial phases, the plan focuses heavily on low-cost renovations, reconfiguring underutilized spaces, and activating existing outdoor footprints. This allows the library to maximize its return on investment without immediate building additions.
- **Innovative Partnerships and Co-Location:** The plan embraces strategic co-location and public-private partnerships, proposing the integration of branches with parks, schools, community centers, and mixed-use developments. This model decreases overall capital expenses and maximizes public resources.
- **Diversified Funding Scenarios:** From local capital campaigns to philanthropic support from the San José Public Library Foundation, individual Friends of the Library donations, and regional grants, the plan builds a collaborative platform to scale and leverage various funding avenues.

Investing in our public libraries today is a direct investment in the future of San José. By providing high-quality, adaptable facilities, the city ensures its workforce is competitive, its neighborhoods are safe, and its community remains tight-knit and inclusive.

Even when resources are constrained, our libraries prove that the return on investment is always greater than the sum of its parts. I urge the Mayor, the City Council, and the Administration to support the adoption and the continued, phased funding of the 20-Year Facilities and Customer Experience Plan. Let us continue to keep our city's most human infrastructure thriving for generations to come.

Thank you for your leadership and for your ongoing commitment to the residents of San José.

Brian Darby



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