



Memorandum

TO: NEIGHBORHOOD
SERVICES AND
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

FROM: Jill Bourne

SUBJECT: Library Facilities and
Customer Experience Plan
Status Report

DATE: March 23, 2026

Approved

Date:

4/1/2026

COUNCIL DISTRICT: Citywide

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) Accept the status report on the Library Department's Facilities and Customer Experience Plan, including findings and recommendations.
- (b) Refer and cross-reference this status report to the City Council for consideration and adoption at its May 5, 2026, meeting.

SUMMARY AND OUTCOME

In February 2025, the San José Public Library (SJPL, "Library"), in partnership with the San José Public Library Foundation ("Foundation") and consultant Margaret Sullivan Studios (MSS), began the process of developing a long-term strategic plan for the stewardship of Library facilities citywide. The resultant Facilities and Customer Experience Plan ("Plan") outlines the status of current Library facilities and options for growth and renewal that will continue to meet the needs of residents, while leveraging potential resource opportunities and being mindful of funding realities. Adoption of the Plan does not assume an immediate funding commitment, but, rather, provides a framework to guide future renovations, systemwide growth strategies, and associated funding considerations. The Executive Brief of the Plan is being presented to the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee to solicit feedback, which will be incorporated into the final Plan prior to its consideration by the City Council on May 5, 2026, for adoption.

BACKGROUND

Public libraries have traditionally provided free access to information and ideas across the spectrum of knowledge, ensuring that residents are informed and empowered to participate in democratic governance. While modes of information access and learning have developed over time, libraries have evolved to support educational needs, applied skills and workforce development, and technology access, in addition to providing spaces for diverse community engagement, convening, and celebration.

Libraries in San José

The Library system in San José is comprised of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library - which is jointly owned and operated with San José State University and serves as the systems' main library and administrative offices - 23 permanent branch libraries, and the Mt. Pleasant Bridge Branch Library, a leased building located on an elementary school campus. Library branches are anchor neighborhood institutions, bridging access to information services, educational resources, and technology in multiple languages, fostering knowledge-building and spaces for community convening and connection. In addition to core services, the SJPL leads the City's Broadband and Digital Empowerment Strategy and key elements of the San José Children and Youth Services Master Plan in the pillar areas of: Early Learning and Childcare, Learning and Empowerment, and Meaningful and Sustaining Jobs.

Each day, the Library welcomes more than 10,300 visitors, loans 23,000 items, and answers 1,000 questions. In addition to providing core services, Library buildings are a valued resource utilized by a variety of groups and organizations. More than 330 non-governmental community partners across the city annually use libraries to hold meetings, offer programs, and conduct outreach.

The Library is consistently rated as one of the top City services, yielding 95% satisfaction in resident surveys for "Overall" services. Currently open to our communities 7 days per week at 18 locations and 6 days per week at the remaining 7 locations, the Library serves 635,112 current library cardholders, as well as any visitor to Library facilities, whether they are active card members or not.

Library Facilities

The SJPL's greatest assets include the staff who develop and provide services, print and digital knowledge resources, public technology tools, and the network of facilities where all these elements are housed and made accessible. Library buildings provide safe and welcoming physical spaces for residents to seek knowledge and engage in community.

In November 2000, San José voters passed Measure O, a \$213 million general obligation bond measure, which funded the renovation of 14 and construction of six new

library locations between 2003 through 2016. A limited renovation to the Biblioteca Latinoamericana Branch is planned to break ground in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-2027, funded by a combination of remaining bonds and California State Library grants.

Critical building systems typically have an expected useful life between 20 and 30 years, before extensive renovations and replacements are required to maintain safe and welcoming facilities. In total, 11 of the 24 locations (45%) are over 20 years old. Six libraries (24%) are between 18 and 20 years old. Seven libraries (29%) are between seven and 17 years old. The high levels of community usage experienced by branch library facilities result in deterioration and damage to these buildings, requiring ongoing investments to maintain aging infrastructure, from automated doors and elevators to flooring and furniture.

To effectively sustain these community assets, the Library began working with the Foundation to scope and procure a consultant to produce the Plan in August 2024. In late 2024, Margaret Sullivan Studios (MSS) was selected to develop the Plan. MSS is a full-service nationally recognized design firm with a focus on civic and cultural institutions, utilizing customer-based service design principles. The MSS portfolio includes public libraries across the country, becoming a leader in public library visioning, programming, and interior design.

Throughout 2025, MSS worked intensively and intentionally with staff from SJPL and the Foundation to analyze the existing facilities, understand feedback that residents have provided to date, and facilitate dozens of community engagement sessions and focus groups to understand expectations and desires regarding Library facilities and services. The process identified facilities improvements priorities and opportunities for future Library capital and funding strategies.

The Plan considers three different development scenarios for future renovations and growth, based on a location-specific review of building systems, land use, and community input.

ANALYSIS

The development of the Plan is based on MSS methodology rooted in human-centered design. Over the course of nine months, MSS engaged in an interactive process across Library stakeholders that included focus groups, surveys, community events, a community breakfast, and individual interviews. The equity-driven participatory design included multi-lingual engagement in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese to align Plan recommendations with community goals, needs, and aspirations.

Feedback from the Plan's engagement process found that Library facilities serve as important infrastructure for Council District Offices, nonprofits, neighborhood associations and other interest groups that use Library facilities at reduced or no cost, a

critical support in this high-cost region and rising economic instability. Usage of Community Rooms frequently extends to hours and days outside of regular Library operations, serving as one of the limited third spaces available to support connection and community engagement across cultures, languages, and interests.

Community members expressed a desire for adaptable, open-layout spaces for learning and engagement, opportunities for skills exchange, desire for large intergenerational community living rooms, emphasis on maker spaces and hands-on learning across all ages, and sensory-rich celebrations of cultural diversity in support of immigrant communities.

Assessing Current Conditions

To determine Library facilities performance and growth potential, the Plan drew from industry benchmarking research. Branches were categorized by size to assess capacity, service delivery potential, and expansion opportunities based on zoning constraints, site conditions, and physical development feasibility. In the Plan, SJPL locations, compared to the total location square footages of our existing branches, are grouped into three categories based on size, except for King library. Four branches are considered small, or less than 10,000 square feet (sf). Three branches are considered medium, or between 10,000 and 15,000 sf. Fourteen branches are considered large, between 15,000 and 25,000 sf. Three branches are unique, joint library-community center facilities that were integrated into the overall per capita assessments.

The Plan recognizes the fact that effective service to surrounding communities is impacted by the correlation of dedicated branch library space to the size of the population in that area. These space considerations include having appropriate areas for shelving, displays, computers, quiet areas, gathering spaces, and cultural celebrations, among other spaces desired by the residents. Recommendations drew from extensive review of the City General Plan, land use designations and demographics. The Plan identified an opportunity to adjust the City's General Plan goal of 0.59 square feet per capita to align with the national best practice of 0.75 square feet per capita. The Plan also identified 20 branches that are not meeting the General Plan goal of 0.59 square feet per capita. At present, only one branch exceeds the 0.75 square feet per capita national best practice threshold. A detailed chart is provided in the attached Executive Summary.

An analysis of population shifts, library parcels, and the City's General Plan and Area Specific Plans identified opportunities to expand branch square footage and add library branches in targeted areas where population is expected to grow and library services may be co-located in new development. The Plan also incorporated SJPL's Equity Index, integrating social, economic, and mobility characteristics of surrounding neighborhoods in the prioritization of library spaces.

Community feedback for enhanced customer experiences guided Plan considerations for flexible and adaptable library spaces. Versatile delivery experiences include the potential for multi-modal furnishings that can transform library spaces into programs of varying sizes and accessibility needs throughout the day.

Safety and Security

To ensure that libraries are accessible and welcoming to all residents, building safety and personal security are critical concerns. While public spaces provide essential opportunities for their communities, these carry inherent risks due to their accessibility and shared nature. Infrastructure failures of aging systems can cause safety issues at library branches. Additionally, systemic issues of inadequate support for behavioral health and substance use are increasingly posing public safety and health hazards for public libraries.

As library facilities are redesigned and renovated there will be opportunities to update critical aging infrastructure and integrate enhanced security features. These features may include additional security cameras and secure areas, as well as enhanced lighting, open and flexible floor plans that improve lines of sight, adaptable spaces that minimize hidden or secluded areas, and updated elevators, along with additional building and design features aimed at creating a safe and welcoming environment for all customers.

Project Prioritization

The Plan provides estimated costing for recommended projects as options for growth and renewal. The proposed investment framework prioritizes immediate needs and long-term system growth. Projects are grouped in three scenarios to reflect where investment will have the greatest impact, prioritizing targeted improvements to existing facilities and strategic expansion opportunities across the system. The Plan's multiple scenarios provide flexibility for future fiscal conditions and opportunities.

- **Renew and Sustain Scenario Cost:** \$131,856,000
The Renew and Sustain scenario prioritizes targeted re-investment in eight existing facilities, focused on realigning interior spaces, recapturing underutilized areas and activating outdoor spaces for programming.
- **Growth on Site Scenario Cost:** \$431,904,000
The Growth on Site scenario includes expansions and additions at existing branch locations where capacity can be increased to better meet community demand.

- Co-Locate/Build New Scenario Cost: \$394,272,000
The Co-Locate/Build New scenario identifies opportunities to co-locate or build new library facilities through partnerships, co-location with other civic amenities, or new construction, particularly in underserved or high-growth areas.

Together, the investment scenarios represent a comprehensive, systemwide approach to Library improvements with an estimated total aspirational cost of \$958,032,000, with mitigation options available through creative partnerships. Project costs are based on a dollar-per-square-foot methodology, with additional projections for soft costs.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The Library will provide a report of the Plan to City Council for full adoption on May 5, 2026.

COORDINATION

This memorandum was coordinated with the City Attorney's Office and the City Manager's Budget Office.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This memorandum will be posted on the Neighborhood Service and Education Committee Agenda website for the April 9, 2026, City Council meeting.

The community consultation process for the development of the Plan employed a comprehensive discovery, engagement and planning process that included 4,400 touchpoints, including 3,000 survey responses, 180 community partners, the San José Library and Education Commission, the San José Youth Commission, Mayor Matt Mahan, City Manager Jennifer Maguire, Assistant City Manager Lee Wilcox, Deputy City Manager Angel Rios and County Supervisor Betty Duong, and others included in attached Executive Brief.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION AND INPUT

An overview of the Plan was presented at the Joint Special Meeting of the Library and Education Commission and the Youth Commission on October 27, 2025. The Library and Education Commission and Youth Commission each unanimously voted to accept the Plan update.

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The item is scheduled to be heard at the Neighborhood Services and Education committee meeting on April 9, 2026. A supplemental memorandum with the Committee's recommendation will be included in the City Council meeting agenda.

CEQA

Not a Project, File No. PP17-009, Staff Reports, Assessments, Annual Reports and Informational Memos that involve no approvals for any City action.

PUBLIC SUBSIDY REPORTING

This item does not include a public subsidy as defined in section 53083 or 53083.1 of the California Government Code or the City's Open Government Resolution.

/s/

Jill Bourne
City Librarian, Library

For questions, please contact Jill Bourne, City Librarian, Library, at jill.bourne@sjlibrary.org or (408) 808-2398.

ATTACHMENT:

Attachment A – Facilities and Customer Experience Plan Draft Executive Brief