



Office of Community Involvement



## Library Community Budget Advisory Committee

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TO: Chair Jessica Vega Pederson and Board of County Commissioners (4) pages  
FROM: Library Advisory Board  
DATE: March 14, 2025  
SUBJECT: Library Budget Advisory Committee Report & Recommendations

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Library Advisory Board (LAB) fully supports the Multnomah County Library's (MCL's) proposed Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) budget. This budget continues to allow MCL to fulfill promises of the Capital Bond Project and library mission while supporting ongoing bond work, addressing a deficit, and incorporating aspects of MCL's Future Staffing Initiative. In considering difficult financial decisions in this deficit environment, we are especially appreciative of the effort MCL has taken to ensure the final proposed budget did not result in the elimination of any staff. We recommend adoption of the FY26 budget as proposed.

### **PROCESS**

In accordance with Chapter 19 of the County Code, LAB serves as the Community Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC) for MCL. LAB holds monthly meetings throughout the year and is kept up to date on library operations, programs, policies, priorities, and the budget. This year, the CBAC subcommittee of LAB met four times, beginning in December, to explore specific budgetary issues, including economic forecasts, internal service charge projections, staffing and personnel, and program offers. MCL Director of Finance & Facilities Katie Shifley led these sessions and provided information, reports, and budget briefings for the committee's review, supported by Maddelyn High, Management Analyst. The CBAC subcommittee updated LAB at regularly scheduled meetings throughout the process. Based on these discussions, LAB approved this report on March 4, 2025.

### **EMERGING ISSUES AND CHANGES**

The FY26 budget prioritizes services that improve equity while addressing a deficit with targeted reduction proposals. It seeks to hold non-personnel budgets flat while balancing short-term costs with longer-term needs that will arise as bond projects come to fruition.

LAB would like to highlight the following developments in the FY26 Budget:

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- Like all county departments this upcoming fiscal year, MCL was tasked with creating a budget within the constraints of a challenging economic forecast. MCL and LAB discussed and decided on reductions or eliminations with MCL's [service priorities](#)—particularly, those that take place in MCL's physical spaces as new bond projects come online—in mind.
- LAB supports the use of MCL's robust fund balance for special projects and one-time costs; namely, projects that address bond-related operating needs:
  - Limited-duration positions will work on materials handling work for new and reopening libraries, and change management.
  - New staff technology and capital equipment purchases (specifically new play area installations), which were included in previous operating budgets and have been allocated in this area, with support from The Library Foundation.
- LAB applauds the library's Future Staffing Initiative, which studies and adapts staffing and service models to better address new needs arising from bond projects, and positions the library to keep personnel costs down as ongoing library district revenue growth slows. In collaboration with an external consulting firm, MCL developed this initiative to maintain its commitment to strategic priorities that improve equity within the library community. **The initiative shuffles existing staff and resources, sunsets three small programs, changes in-house security positions to contracted positions, and results in no layoffs at this time—a huge accomplishment given the current budget outlook.**
  - This initiative allows MCL to have only a 1% increase in personnel costs between FY25 and FY26 requested budgets, and provides more staff to new and reopening bond locations.
  - The three sunsetted programs are **School Corps**, **Books2U**, and **Listos para el Kínder**. While valuable to those who use them, these programs serve a relatively small population, duplicate other community services, provide services that can be incorporated into other library operations, or provide services that do not directly align with MCL's service priorities. LAB is interested in continuing to monitor the impact of these eliminations over the next year to ensure no disparities in service emerge.
- **LAB supports MCL's proposed \$1.4 million in deficit cost reductions.** We appreciate that these budget reductions are designed to minimize service impacts, protect staffing levels outlined in the Future Staffing Initiative, and avoid reductions that would have negative

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**Staff:** Katie Shifley, Director of Finance & Facilities; Maddelyn High, Management Analyst

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effects on library equity commitments. This is important as the library opens significant new spaces in FY26. These reductions include:

- Reducing the size of the substitute staffing fund (substitute services are covered in the new staffing plan)
- Reducing the travel and training budgets and the branded materials budget
- Lowered hold allowances for digital materials and some databases
- A small reduction in contracted coverage of janitorial and security services; and
- Reductions in contracted Qualified Mental Health Provider (QMHP) support at Central Library.

## BUDGET FEEDBACK

We recommend that the Library District Board adopt the proposed budget of \$123.5 million and 541.75 FTE for FY26. LAB recommends adopting all Library program offers as proposed.

LAB's further comments and recommendations are as follows:

- **LAB applauds the rollout of the Future Staffing Initiative and its commitment to equity for MCL services.** We hope that future staffing decisions and potential layoffs will be considered in light of MCL's priorities and commitments to its community.
- In light of the forecast of reducing budgets for MCL and County departments on the whole, LAB implores more transparency of internal services costs. **Specifically, we recommend inviting customer departments to collaborate on policies and decisions that determine internal service costs that will impact them.** As these costs continue to grow, especially with the new and expanded facilities included in the Library Bond project, better forecasts of and flexibility in these costs prove to be essential in developing future budgets.
- **LAB applauds MCL's efforts to request Supportive Housing Services funds to support two dedicated Peer Support Specialists at Central Library.** These specialists provide resources, support, and referrals to community members facing mental health or substance use challenges—services that are particularly impactful when delivered in a community setting. By supporting this resource at Central Library, MCL reinforces its commitment to provide a safe and accessible environment for all patrons as well as staff; these positions ensure crucial support to librarians in the current precarious climate.

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Further, these positions also mitigate the impact of the 50% reduction made to an existing contract with QMHPs to address this year's deficit.

- As the County economic forecasts project continued sluggish property tax revenue growth, departments will continue to face challenging decisions around how to maintain programs and personnel. LAB appreciates the efforts of MCL to meet the demands of this restrictive budgetary environment, and feels that MCL has made the best possible decisions given the conditions; however, additional fiscal years with these restrictions will severely impact the long-term stability of services, ultimately hindering MCL's ability to honor the commitment made to our communities. **We strongly urge Commissioners to evaluate and implement timely policy initiatives that address this revenue growth decline.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Library Advisory Board wishes to give special thanks to Finance & Facilities Director Katie Shifley and Management Analyst and LAB staff liaison Maddelyn High, who provided outstanding support for the work of the board. LAB also thanks County Economist Jeff Renfro for his time in aiding LAB's understanding of the economic forecast implications. We thank the Library's Executive Management Team for their support throughout the year.

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