2024 TSCC Hearing Questions
for Multnomah Library District FY 2024-25 Approved Budget

Wednesday, May 29th at 10:30 am
501 SE Hawthorne Blvd, Portland, Oregon (Boardroom)

**1.	In FY 25, the district anticipates reopening four libraries that are currently closed for major expansion or renovation. Are projects staying on time and on budget? Have you seen any increasing material costs due to inflation and/or supply-chain shortages?**

The overall bond program (the PMO) manages the budget at a portfolio level as the allocated funds are restricted to the Library bond work. The PMO works with Library leadership, the CFO, and the executive sponsors to maximize the value of each dollar. This means that movement of funds within the program is strategically considered and decision making as to when to increase a project's budget responsibly will make the most good for a long term investment. National and global risks related to the pandemic have led to historically unprecedented market volatility including, but not limited to, double-digit inflation and escalation, supply chain commodity issues (for example 50-80 week lead times for electrical switchgear), labor shortages, and insurance industry changes. The PMO has used the $50.7M Bond Premium Reserve, savings from other bond projects, and other portfolio level contingencies to deftly provide additional funding to cover unforeseen expenses, market conditions, inflation, and betterments. Additions to an individual project's budget from the Premium Reserve or outside funds (like donor funds, grants, and partnering with outside agencies) require approval from the executive sponsors and CFO.

The overall bond program schedule is ahead of the voter-approved bond term of approximately eight years. However, the risks associated with national and global market escalation and inflation, labor shortages, and supply chain issues have created challenges. The technique used for the bond sale required that 85% of the tax-exempt bond dollars be spent within 3 years of the sale, compressing the overall bond schedule by ~2 years. In response to bond spend-down requirements, the overall project schedules and the sequencing of construction activities are aggressively putting pressure on limited regional labor and material resources as the bond program emerged from the pandemic. Individual projects have had some challenges meeting the project deadlines that were set to help achieve spend down goals and to maximize efficiency of the PMO administration. Individual project schedules have been challenged by global supply chain issues (e.g., electrical switchgear is in excess of 12 month lead time),

delayed local permit review timelines, changing requirements from utilities (PGE), and specific site conditions (e.g., unforeseen soil conditions, seismic upgrades).

Follow up: Will the increase in size of the facilities require additional employees at the libraries?

In a general sense, yes, we'll need to have some additional staff working in larger library locations. There are a lot of variables here, though.

We're rolling out automated materials handling across the majority of our locations that will reduce manual labor, including a 65 bin Sort Center at the brand new operations center. Materials movement needs within library locations may not necessarily increase significantly, even with larger spaces.

In some locations, we're adding significant community room space that can be activated through partnership models. We added a new Community Partnerships Manager position last year to develop and deepen our approach to inviting partners into our spaces. Because we've historically been so hampered by our physical spaces, we also have robust programming and outreach functions that can be brought to bear in these new, larger spaces.

We're deep in the development of a Future Staffing Initiative project. We're reassessing current staffing levels, and we've hired an external consultant who is supporting us as we work through the nuances of future staffing, discussing the FTE, job classifications, and work flows that will be needed as the system changes.

The bulk of that future staffing planning work will happen over this summer, and we envision taking a phased approach to shifting staff resources over the next few years, as we work backwards from East County Library's opening in fiscal year 2026. The library will present detailed plans for future staffing to the Board of County Commissioners this year.

2.   A 2023 audit found that "the library has struggled to respond to the changing safety and security landscape". Last year, we discussed the changes happening in many libraries, not just in Multnomah County, but nationwide. At that time, conversations were ongoing with county Behavioral Health Services about how they could bring their services to patrons. How are those plans progressing? Have you developed procedures or policies on how to connect with, or provide more, behavioral health expertise in library spaces?

Yes, safety and security continue to be a significant challenge and a core commitment for the library system, as is the case for almost every other urban library system in the country. What's happening in society in general is often reflected in our library system.

Making our libraries as safe as possible continues to be a major area of focus for the library. In addition to significantly expanding the resources geared toward security - up 80% since FY 19 - we have continued to work with our County partners to bring their expertise to bear.

Library leadership began meeting with Multnomah County Health Department's Behavioral Health team in February of this year to discuss how we might collaborate to bring additional mental health support into the library, in particular the introduction of peer support specialists. Denver Public Library employs a variation of this Peer Support Specialists program, and has had positive results supporting patrons who have high needs, and need additional support.

Peer support specialists are individuals with lived experience with mental health diagnoses, substance abuse disorder, and/or homelessness who are in recovery and have completed specialized training to use their story to establish valuable rapport, share common experiences, and strengthen engagement in care.

The library department proposed budget includes $180k in Supportive Housing Services resources to establish 2.0 contracted peer support specialists. The Behavioral Health team has been instrumental in advising on this program, helping develop the scope of work and supporting contract administration. We expect this program to launch, primarily out of the Central library, this summer, and that the peer support specialists will work closely with the mental health professionals on site to respond to behavioral health related challenges, with the goal of reducing escalations and disruptions.

We're so glad for the partnership on this, and the support to bring outside expertise and resources to bear in the library system.

Follow up: Are you seeing any improvements?

It is too soon to tell; we've certainly been able to develop this program and roll it out faster than we would have otherwise been able to, with County support.

We'll be capturing typical reporting metrics through the contract, including total number of de-escalations assisted by peer support specialists, number of referrals made, and can provide an update after the first year of the program.

3.   Challenges finding staff to act as a Person In Charge has meant decreased service for some locations. The budget mentions a new model for Person-in-Charge coverage. What is the current status of this issue, and what has the library done to ensure appropriate staffing is available going forward?

Yes, implementation of the opt-in Person-in-Charge model has had its challenges. Beginning in March of this year, any represented staff person can choose not to have the Person in Charge role for their location. This change is something the union advocated for, and allows staff that may not feel comfortable de-escalating a situation to not take on that role.

Many staff members continued to opt in, but in aggregate, this did not meet our coverage needs. Every library location has a designated number of minimum PIC-trained staff on site at any one time, including the manager. We have reassigned staff who opted-in in order to ensure more coverage at locations that don't have enough people who have opted in. However, on balance, we experienced service disruptions when we were unable to meet that minimum.

Across the system, we experienced 9 instances of reduced services since the new model began--of those, just 2 were full closures. As you saw in our FY 25 budget, we are piloting a different approach to ensuring sufficient PIC coverage. The FY2025 budget proposal adds resources to create 7.0 limited duration library supervisor positions. This is a new approach, as we don't have many library supervisors currently, but these are managerial positions for which we can hire specifically to help support PIC coverage.

Five limited duration Library Supervisors have been hired as of today at Belmont, Northwest, Holgate, Midland, and Hollywood. We plan to open another recruitment in late June to hire the Library Supervisors for Rockwood and Gresham libraries.

The goal of these new positions is to boost coverage at our highest incident locations, and reduce the need to rely on staff opting in as PIC to meet our coverage needs.

These are two-year limited duration positions, with the goal of assessing and evaluating this approach before making it permanent, or rolling it out more broadly. If successful, we will work this into our future staffing planning work.

Follow up: How will the PIC work with the newly contracted security officers that the County has available?

We don't anticipate changes to how the person-in-charge will interact with contracted security. We've had the person in charge model AND contracted security in place at library locations for some time. Staff are trained to coordinate with contracted security or on-site library safety liaisons. We have a robust person-in-charge training program that includes scenario workshops as well as shadowing experienced PICS.

4. **The Holgate Library will reopen in FY25 and will have triple the space of the current library. The East County Library will be another new, large facility. How are you taking safety and security under consideration as part of the design of these new facilities?**

Every new or renovated library space is informed by modern principles of design related to security. All of our major library projects benefit from a contracted security consultant, and that team reviews all the designs and makes recommendations on improving security before those designs are approved.

In addition to improved security camera coverage, lighting, and shorter shelves to improve visibility, the library is rolling out a new service model that has more staff on the floor "orbiting" and not fixed to a single desk.

We're also planning to have contracted security at both Holgate and East County Library facilities.

We'll talk more about this on question 7, but we're piloting new technology for staff to improve on-site communications.

These are just some of the ways - from design to technology to staffing to training - that we're trying to balance open access for all alongside having a safe and welcoming environment at our libraries.

5.   **The new capital projects are changing how libraries function. We've heard from some in the community that it feels as though libraries are changing into community centers. How would you describe the shift happening at libraries, and how is this model poised to better serve our community than the previous model?**

Libraries stopped being only a place for books a long time ago. Today they offer much more: physical space to read, collaborate or use technology and to get personal assistance in a unique kind of space that exists for everyone to use. In the past, we might have looked at the value or "busyness" of libraries along mostly transactional lines: the number of books checked out or a quantity of informational questions answered. That's no longer a good way to describe their use or to plan for the future.

Over the past generation or so, our world has embraced technology in our everyday lives so some of those needs have changed, but other important changes have been underway. We have seen the commodification of so-called third places, where someone has to make a purchase or have a certain status to use the restroom. Libraries exist in contrast to those trends. The goal of the public library is to be flexible as community needs evolve and to remain responsive instead of proscriptive about what a "valid use" of the space might be.

The essence of the public library is that it should be free and open to all. If the criticism of libraries as community spaces is that they are welcoming to people who might not have other places to be, that's ok. Libraries should be places for everyone and in any instance where our library can reduce barriers in people's lives, we will seek to do that.

Our libraries do and will have a lot more to offer, too. As we continue to focus on the human experience, we will offer new spaces and resources for self determination. Those will include new spaces for teenagers, more community rooms for groups to gather, studios with cutting edge audio/visual technology and more. Our libraries will be more flexible in nature, too, so that it's easier to change when needs shift. Libraries will remain nimble and responsive so that they can adapt to new needs and changing conditions.

6.   **Last year we spoke about concerns regarding reduced materials available in libraries. We know patrons will be able to request materials from the operations center to be delivered to their local branch, but what about the happy discoveries**

that come from browsing? Are there new ways the library is working to connect community members with new books?

The library uses many tools to connect patrons with the books they want, including book lists, book displays at locations, Everybody Reads, and always having staff available that are trained in reader's advisory.

It's important to note that there isn't necessarily a correlation between more materials and better success in finding what you want-- actually, a more curated collection usually leads to higher circulation. People find it easier to identify something appealing, and can navigate through the resources and books a little more easily.

We're also well on the way to rolling out the Intelligent Materials Management System, or IMMS. This system will work with our Integrated Library System and our Automated Materials Handling systems to make our collection more responsive to community needs.

- IMMS will allow the collection to be more dynamic in public locations by providing more granular data on collection usage and demand that can enhance materials selection.

- IMMS will shift books that are in high demand to the right location in the system to meet community needs, based on usage trend information and settings determined by library and collections staff.

Books aren't going away - patrons will have plenty of opportunity to browse and discover new materials - but we're increasingly using data and technology to shift books across the system, and to have a dynamic collection that is easily navigated and responsive to community needs.

7.   Last year we spoke with you about the Library District's special projects program, which included a pilot for staff technology, from communications equipment to mobile computing solutions. Can you tell us more about this pilot? What is the status?

The library is making significant investments in patron-facing technology through the bond program. Staff-facing technology is not a focus of the bond, so the library chose to set aside resources to make technology upgrades in library operations during this period of transition in support of the new Patron Service Strategy.

Staff technology project plans include:
- Staff phones to support and engage with new systems, like IMMS and AMH.
- New audio-visual equipment in staff work rooms
- Mobile device kits contain tablets with ergonomic cases and straps, apps for materials movement, patron interaction, language translation and interpretation and information services, and productivity tools.
- Dedicated loaner laptops for meeting rooms
- Relay+ Pro pilot deployment at library locations

Many of these investments are self-explanatory, but we wanted to share some more detailed information about the pilot communications equipment.

[Relay+ Pro](#) - is a wearable voice communications platform used across many industries for effective frontline communication. The platform also offers a mobile app that enables MCL PIC phones to be used as a Relay device. All Relay devices are assigned into groups by Library location, enabling floor staff to stay connected during operations and security incidents.

Relay Pro is currently running in Central, and will be deployed at Holgate, Midland, and Fairview when they open soon.

Relay has already been tested at Gregory Heights, Capitol Hill, Hollywood, Woodstock, Kenton, and Hillsdale. The pilot has been running for a year, and has moved through several small and large locations to test how it might be incorporated into staff routines, and in coordination with security personnel, for large events, and when conducting location open/close operations. Testing has been aligned to support the current service model and the new Patron Service Strategy.

The platform has potential as an effective, affordable, and flexible solution for frontline communications, and could be integrated as a layer in workplace security objectives. We're still learning, and can report back as we continue to evaluate over the next year.

Follow up: Are there plans for larger scale changes to staff technology given the shifts in library operations and infrastructure?

The staff technology project plans described here are all new approaches to staff technology and computing in support of the Patron Service Strategy and in alignment with new space designs. They are most evident in the new buildings and major renovations and, to a lesser extent, in "refresh" locations. Based evaluation of these implementations, the library will identify opportunities for expansion and adaptation of

these approaches in all locations in order to support efficiency, patron expectations, staff cross training, and movement of staff among various locations.

8.   Only ask if Director Oehlke will be in attendance
You've served the library as Director for 15 years, and during that time you have seen exciting changes in the library system, as well as many unique challenges. Please share, which accomplishments are you most proud of?