

Report of the Future of the Library Task Force



MARCH 21, 2011
6:00 PM

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG
GOVERNMENT CENTER

Outline



- Chapter I. Introduction
- Chapter II. Status of the Library Before Funding Reductions
- Chapter III. Library Funding Trends in Recent Years in 13 Peers
- Chapter IV. What Does the Community Think about the Library?
- Chapter V. A Model for Considering Alternatives
- Chapter VI. Future Funding of the Library
- Chapter VII. Operational Recommendations for the Library
- Chapter VIII. Center City Library Sites: Current Operations and Recommendations
- Chapter IX. Library/County Relationship
- Chapter X. The Library of the Future

Chapter I. Introduction



Quick Facts

| | Beginning of FY 2008-2009 | Beginning of FY 2010-2011 |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Total Budget | \$41,239,738 | \$25,362,983 |
| County Funding | \$37,913,162 | \$21,091,815* |
| Sites: | Main Library ImaginOn 6 Regional Libraries 16 Branches | Main Library ImaginOn 6 Regional Libraries 13 Branches |
| Weekly Hours: | 66-71 | 32-46 |

*The County also assumed responsibility for an estimated \$1,924,965 in maintenance and security expenses.

Chapter II. Status of the Library Before Funding Reductions



- Relative to libraries in peer communities, was the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library overfunded prior to budget reductions?
- Relative to libraries in peer communities, was the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library overbuilt prior to budget reductions?
- For this chapter and throughout the report, two sets of peer communities will be used.

Chapter II. (Continued)



- The most comprehensive collection of data derives from an annual survey conducted by the Public Library Association.
- The most recent report of the results of this annual survey was issued in the late spring of 2010 and presents data for FY 2008-2009.
- Data for 987 public libraries were reported, including 56 in the population group 500,000 to 999,999. With a population of 890,515 in the Legal Service Area, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is included in this group of 56 public libraries.
- Hence, the other 55 libraries form one set of peer libraries for the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library.

Chapter II. (Continued)



- Because the data in the annual PLA Reports will generally lag by two years, a smaller group of peer communities was needed for which current year information could be obtained.
- Question to the Charlotte Chamber: What cities does Charlotte most frequently “compete” with?
- What counties are used by Mecklenburg County for performance comparison on the County’s evaluation scorecard?
- Resulted in an unduplicated list of 13 peer communities.

Chapter II (Continued)



Conclusions:

- The Charlotte Mecklenburg Library was not overfunded, nor was it underfunded, prior to the budget reductions.
- The Charlotte Mecklenburg Library was not overbuilt, nor was it underbuilt, prior to the budget reductions.
- With funding, number of branches, and total square footage, it was about “in the middle of the pack.”

Chapter III. Library Funding Trends in Recent Years in Peer Communities



- The UNC Charlotte Urban Institute was retained to collect and present information about governmental revenue and library funding in the 13 peer communities for FY 2007-2008 through FY 2010-2011.

Chapter III. Library Funding Trends in Recent Years in Peer Communities (Continued)



- After considering the changes in general fund revenues in the 13 peer communities, the Task Force concludes that the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library received, in a relative sense, the greatest decrease in local government funding for FY 2008-2009 to FY 2010-2011 and over the single year from FY 2009-2010 to FY 2010-2011.
- Except for the Dallas Public Library, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library received a much greater percentage reduction than any of the other libraries.
- This may have occurred because the strategic and operational goals of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library are not properly aligned with those of the County.

Chapter IV. What Does the Community Think about the Library?



- In January 2011, MarketWise conducted surveys on behalf of the Future of the Library Task Force

Key Findings

- 87% of those who participated in the telephone surveys believe that the Library is very or extremely important to the community.
- Regarding funding cuts, 48% believe funding of the Library should increase and 6% believe it should decrease.

Chapter IV. What Does the Community Think about the Library? (Continued)



- No statistical differences in the % that choose each of the following options:
 - a. Not closing more branches. Keep the current branches which are within 3 miles of most residents and reduce operating hours even more, or
 - b. Close more branches, as long as the remaining branches are within 5 miles of most residents and operating hours are increased.
- 77% agree that Library branches should remain open in economically challenged areas, even if it means closing the branch closes to them.

Chapter V. A Model for Considering Alternatives



- Approximately 74% of the operating budget of the Library is spent for personnel compensation.
- The number of staff available determine the number of sites that can be operated and the hours those sites can be open to the public.
- At the current funding level, the Task Force does not believe the existing distribution of staff represents the most efficient utilization of this limited resource.
- A staffing model was developed to be utilized along with the existing financial model.

Chapter V. A Model for Considering Alternatives (Continued)



- The Library delivers Basic Library Services through SERVICE POINTS.
- A small branch will normally have one Service Point. A regional library will have two or three. The Main Library has five.
- For the current “modified” single shift of 32 to 37 hours a week, on average 5 FTE are required to staff a single Service Point.
- To return to a regular double shift of 66 to 71 hours a week, an additional 3 FTE would be needed.

Chapter VI. Future Funding of the Library



- To provide Basic Library Services, the Task Force recommends that the Library be funded on a per capita basis, with the target derived from a comparison with a peer group of communities.
- For the near term, that peer group is the thirteen communities identified earlier.
- For FY 2011-2012, the Task Force recommends that the Library be funded at the mean or median of that group, that is, at \$27.89 to 28.66 per capita.

Chapter VI. Future Funding of the Library (Continued)



- Adjusting for the maintenance and security expenses assumed by the County, the funding currently provided to the Library is \$25.84
- If the Task Force's recommendation is accepted, the Library's funding would be increased by \$1.8 to \$2.5 million.
- Longer term, the Task Force recommends that the County consider a fundamental change to the budgeting process whereby the funding of Quality of Life Assets be reviewed as a separate and distinct budget category.

Chapter VII. Operational Recommendations for the Library



- The Task Force believes that the current distribution of staff across the library system is an inefficient utilization of this limited resource.
- Should additional staffing not become available through the recommended increases in funding, the Task Force recommends that the staffing currently available be redistributed according to the following priorities:

Chapter VII. Operational Recommendations for the Library (Continued)



- Hours at the regional libraries should be increased by adding 2 FTE staff per Service Point.
- Branches located in the challenged neighborhoods, areas of the County where economic and educational attainment are low, should continue to operate at the current 32 hours per week, that is, at a “modified” single shift.
- The remaining FTE staffing should be allocated to branches based on distance to the nearest regional library and branch utilization.
- Recommendations related to Programming, Volunteer, and Fundraising are also given in this chapter.

Chapter VIII. Center City Library Sites



- It is the view of the Task Force that there is more space in Main Library than is needed for the functions that should be carried out in the Center City and that there is an opportunity to achieve financial savings by relocating or reorganizing some of those functions.
- The Task Force recommends that the Board of Trustees appoint a committee of engaged community members to explore possibilities for the facility.

Chapter VIII. Center City Library Sites (Continued)



- The Task Force views ImaginOn as a particularly valuable, but unique, community asset.
- The Library manages the facility and utilizes approximately 40,000 square feet of its 105,000 square feet to provide library services for children.
- The Children's Theatre of Charlotte also utilizes the facility and contributes approximately \$500,000 annually to its operations.
- Because ImaginOn is unique among libraries, the Task Force recommends that the funding requirements be separately presented and considered each year.
- The Task Force concludes by observing that a strong, central Library presence in Center City Charlotte remains very important.

Chapter IX. Library/County Relationship



- If the Library is to properly serve the citizens of Mecklenburg County, it is essential that there be a close working relationship between the Library and the County, especially on issues of strategic importance.
- The Task Force makes a number of recommendations for improving that relationship, stressing that both the Library and the County have responsibilities for achieving the desired outcome.

Chapter IX. Library/County Relationship (Continued)



- The Task Force further recommends that the Foundation For The Carolinas Board of Directors appoint a committee of five persons in July 2012 to evaluate the progress that has been made.
- Should that committee find that satisfactory improvements have not been made, it should make a judgment as to why that is so and report its findings to the boards of the Library and the County, along with recommendations about what needs to be done.
- If the committee determines that a change in governance structure is needed, the Task Force provides certain characteristics that structure should incorporate.

Chapter X. The Library of the Future



- If the recommendations presented in this report are adopted, the Task Force is confident that the Library will use the funding currently available to provide Basic Library Services to the citizens of Mecklenburg in the most effective and efficient manner possible.
- Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees and the Board of County Commissioners to determine what those services should be and to ensure that funding is available to provide those services.
- Once the recommendations presented in this report have been acted on, the two boards should jointly oversee the development of a new strategic plan for the Library, which can subsequently be formally embraced by both bodies.