

To: Mayor and Members of Council
Chris Meschuk, Deputy City Manager

Cc: David Farnan, Director of Library and Arts
Jennifer Phares, Deputy Library Director

From: Boulder Public Library Commission

Date: December 7th, 2020

Re: Annual letter to Boulder City Council

Our thanks to City Council members for your hard work in this tumultuous year. We would also like to thank outgoing City Manager Jane Brautigam for her years of help and encouragement, and to congratulate her on her retirement.

As we find ourselves wrapping up and reflecting on 2020, I think we all can agree it was not the year we were expecting, or would have ever wanted. However, we do have things to celebrate. Most importantly, we need to honor the incredible work of the library staff and administration who have weathered furloughs, layoffs, reductions in hours, limitations in operations, and cuts in acquisitions. Adjusting to pandemic and budget restrictions, they have continued service to seniors, shut-ins, and offer on-line help. They have adapted at lightning speed to organize high quality innovative virtual programs that have reached more people than in person programming (with the exception of young children and families with young children). Library leadership guided the design of the NoBo Branch through a rigorous regulatory process, obtaining approvals from the planning board and from Council.

Early in the year we opened the beautiful gender neutral restrooms (yes, we can call these restrooms beautiful). They were five years in the making, due to some funding challenges. This improvement to the Main branch aligns with the City's equity goals, and was welcomed and recognized by a wide range of Boulder community members.

While celebrating this hard work and innovation, we need to highlight how difficult it is to see the deep budget cuts that the library has endured. The library commission and community were eagerly waiting for a public hearing with the City Council, that was years in the making. After 25 years and three previous Library Commissions briefing prior Councils on the deep budget shortfalls, we were to finally get an opportunity for a public hearing on adequate sustainable funding options for the future. But, alas, the first shut down of 2020 cancelled our hearing and we feel it is incredibly important that this be included on the Council's 2021 work plan and not forgotten.

Our greatest sadness comes from the budget cuts that the library has faced this year, cutting 17% of our budget, making operations difficult all around. COVID-19 has impacted the number of people and some of the functioning of the library, but with adequate funding, we could be doing so much more. For example, these could include summer outdoor programming, outdoor computing similar to Denver's, more support for families of school-aged children. The very least we need is the restoration of the collections budget, which has been cut 13% from an already inadequate amount. We also feel that it is important that we see the reopening of Reynolds and Meadows libraries in 2021, along with carry-out services at NoBo.

Boulder City Council has the opportunity to reignite the library district discussion in 2021. It is an opportunity for the library to attain adequate, sustainable funding, and for the City to alleviate its budget. We urge you to create a library district by resolution along with the County Commissioners. This will allow the two groups to appoint a library district board and to work through the legal, administrative, and logistical details of an intergovernmental agreement. Armed with this document, Council and County can decide whether to put the funding of the district to a vote in 2021 or in 2022. Voters will have a better understanding of the issues once these are defined in an agreement.

The library is unlike any other space in Boulder, it serves everyone. From the computers that allow for job searches, to the support offered to someone starting new businesses, to the five year olds, learning to read, and the new Americans who are learning to read English, to the most vulnerable who rely on the homebound services. Our goal is to start rebuilding to better serve our community, and to provide Boulder with the library it deserves.

The Library Commission wishes to acknowledge your dedication of time and attention to the Library's future. We look forward to continuing these discussions and working toward collectively finding a solution to the Library's long term funding needs.

Respectfully,

Boulder Library Commission

Jane Sykes-Wilson

Joel Koenig

Steven Frost

Scott Steinbrecher

Juana Gómez