

LIBRARY COMMISSION'S FOREWORD

The 2018 Library Commission is honored to welcome you to this edition of the Boulder Public Library Master Plan.

The Boulder Public Library Commission serves to represent the library to the community, and the community to the library. We must acknowledge, with thanks, the many community members who helped to shape the vision presented in the Master Plan. During the outreach leading up to the 2018 plan we learned that the community views our library as a trusted and inclusive place of learning and innovation. It is a place where people can come together, to talk to and learn from each other about issues and opportunities of the past, present and future. The Master Plan is rooted in these values and truly represents the Boulder community's vision for our library system. We enthusiastically endorse the goals articulated in the 2018 Master Plan.

Being stewards of these ideas and objectives, the Commission is committed to the library's long term financial sustainability. As a primary focus for Commissioners throughout the Master Planning process, we will continue to advocate in support of the best path forward for funding our library system. In order for the library to continue to fulfill its potential - as an engine of social and economic mobility, a platform for civic education and dialogue, and a place to create hands-on, collaborative learning environments which address the needs of 21st century learners - then far greater financial support will be required in the years ahead. That support requires action today.



After careful analysis of the available funding strategies, backed by many hours of listening & discussion, **this Library Commission concurs unanimously on the creation of a library district as the best path toward a sustainable library system.** We are compelled to direct your attention to these considerations.

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Boulder Public Library's long term financial sustainability is a fundamental and important question to be thoroughly addressed over the next two years.

Funding the library's core services and meeting the 2018 Boulder Public Library Master Plan goals represents a significant financial investment: an approximately \$4 million increase in annual ongoing operating costs and \$1 million in annual unfunded one-time and capital expenses. The 2018 Master Plan represents extensive public outreach and dialog, reflecting our community's requests for core programs, services and expansion needs for the library over the next 10 years. Details of these goals and a carefully constructed path to achieve the vision, including a detailed analysis of the funding needed to accomplish these goals is found in Part 3. Part 5 of the Master Plan explains the library's current sources of revenues and outlines several scenarios for future funding.

Library staff have established reliable metrics and measures for every aspect of library services and programs, including the goals reflected in the Master Plan in Part 4. These metrics are reviewed by staff and Commission on a quarterly basis and summarized each year in the library's annual report to the community. Library resources are adjusted regularly based on the outcome of these metrics. We believe that the library represents a "best practice" model for budget management and reporting. The numbers bear out that our library is managing high demand services with fewer resources than are necessary to sustain existing utilization and grow to meet new demand.

How can we best ensure financial sustainability for our library system?

The Commission has identified six foundational pillars that are critical to the library's long-term success.

1. Long term, dependable and predictable revenue for core services, facilities and operational needs, traditionally a government responsibility.
2. Ability to make decisions and take action within the library's approved budget on a timeline that meets the library's needs. This includes having the ability to shift funding within an approved budget to stay current with changes in program/service demands.
3. Knowledgeable, skilled and dedicated library staff.
4. Continued community financial support for programs and special projects through the Boulder Library Foundation.
5. A strong volunteer program.
6. Collaborative partnerships with community organizations, businesses and non-profits (creating mission synergies for programs and services).

The Commission has concluded that a library district provides the most equitable, accountable and reliable option for BPL's long term financial sustainability.

We believe that dedicated funding for staffing, facilities and core services is a necessity.

The library simply cannot compete against the priorities that drive Council elections. Because of the way these bigger issues dominate Council agendas and City priorities, it is difficult for library needs to be “heard” by City staff and Council. As evidence of this challenge, we note that our library system has seen no growth in operational funding and staffing for more than 16 years. The library’s operational funding today (adjusted for inflation) is exactly what it was in 2002, when the City last had to cut services to match declining revenues. In that same period, City funding overall has outstripped inflation, keeping pace with the City’s growth in population and property values. Library staffing has decreased 16% since 2002, while City staffing has increased 12%. Unfortunately, while the City budget as a whole has recovered and increased since the City’s last fiscal downturn, the library has not been included in this recovery.

Property tax is preferable to sales tax.

Revenues from property taxes are generally more stable than sales tax (especially in a highly desirable community like Boulder). Sales tax revenues have been declining in the City of Boulder for some time, a trend that is likely to continue.

We should avoid mixed funding.

Boulder’s current small increment of property tax (0.33 mill) was dedicated in 1988 as a way to support increased library funding. However, as revenues from property taxes have grown over the years, the general fund contribution to the library budget has been correspondingly reduced - yielding no net benefit to the library from its dedicated property tax. The Commission seeks to learn from history and avoid relying on a mix of dedicated property taxes and general fund contributions.

Districting offers the most equitable, reliable and accountable approach to funding.

Districting offers a better match between the patron base and the funding base. Staff’s analysis shows that while most households in Boulder have library cards, nearly 40,000 of our library’s cardholders live outside the Boulder city limits. No other library system of Boulder’s size has a similar, disproportionate number of cardholders living outside the library’s boundaries. Districting provides a means to establish boundaries that better reflect the patron base - an approach now taken by every other Colorado library similar to Boulder in size and patron base.

Funding is more reliable in a district because it is secured directly from dedicated tax revenues rather than competing with other city departments. Changes in funding decisions can be made quickly, and unspent dollars can be retained for future years. Library districts are now the most common form of governance and funding for Colorado libraries.

A single purpose district enhances taxpayer accountability because its leadership is focused solely on the library. The library’s community assets (including facilities and library collections) remain in service to the community, directly maintained and invested in by the district at the direction of the library board.

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The Library Commission's Recommendations for 2018-2020

1. We need to complete a thorough evaluation of future library funding options.

To ensure a successful outcome for the library's funding needs, the City should devote resources over the next four months to fully evaluate the funding options identified in the master plan. Voters need specificity about the mill level amount, estimated costs per household and per square foot of commercial space, and the timing of property tax revenues coming to the library. A consultant's help will be required, and this analysis should be completed before our planned November 2018 study session with City Council.

2. We need a broad-based community discussion around the complex questions underlying BPL's long term financial sustainability - and the best path forward.

The community needs adequate time in an open, well designed public engagement process around the library's funding needs, and on any related Charter impacts. The library will need marketing and community involvement in partnership to support and achieve this end.

Our library leadership has been able to use its current funding creatively and perform remarkably on a shoestring budget. Winning the Colorado's Library of the Year award in 2016 is testament to the resourcefulness and creativity of our dedicated library staff. Imagine what the future could look like with a fully funded library system! But the library is now stretched as far as it can go. The Boulder community has told us that the library is a priority. Now is the time for the community to come together to make library funding a priority and take the steps to ensure a bright future for this essential community resource.

Respectfully submitted,

The 2018 Library Commission

Joni Teter - Chair, Tim O'Shea Vice-Chair, Juana Gomez, Joel Koenig, Jane Sykes-Wilson