

Watsonville Public Library: Potential for Greatness

Summary

Because the new main branch of the Watsonville Public Library opened on April 14, 2008, the timing seemed appropriate for the Grand Jury to do a review of the library's budget, staffing, facilities, services, and programs.

The new state-of-the-art facility offers a wide range of public services, such as self-checkout stations, wireless Internet access, and laptop computers for use on the premises. In addition, it is staffed with dedicated employees who appear passionate about the library's function and mission. The library is a cornerstone in the Watsonville community, with an estimated 390,000 patron visits during 2008.

Although the library provides a strong community benefit, the Grand Jury identified a number of concerns regarding library operations, including:

- The Main Library is more than double the size of the old Main Library, but staffing has remained the same.
- The ability to properly assist patrons will be tested without additional staff.
- A variety of safety challenges exist in the new facility and the adjoining public parking garage.
- The materials budget is notably low, about five percent of the current budget, and the amount has remained the same for the past four years.

Background

The City of Watsonville's population has more than doubled since 1980. Latinos account for over 75 percent, and Spanish is spoken in half of the households. Two library branches, the Main Library and the Freedom Library, serve the Watsonville area.

The original library was founded in the 1860s and has been located on Union Street since 1975. In April 2008, after ten years of planning, the newly constructed two-story Main Library facility opened in the new multi-use Civic Center building in downtown Watsonville. It is much more modern and expansive than the single story building that it replaced.

The new Main Library now includes the California Agricultural Workers' History Center (CAWHC) and the Literacy Center. The CAWHC is a new facility named to reflect its primary focus on the agricultural workers themselves (e.g., cannery employees, tractor drivers, produce harvesters, farm cooks, and irrigators) rather than the development of the industry or machinery. It provides space, equipment, and materials for research as well as ongoing educational history displays on the second floor. The CAWHC complements the collections of the Pajaro Valley Historical Association, the Agricultural History Project and archives in Capitola, Aptos and Santa Cruz. Future plans include access to computers, a scanner, and audio equipment to enable the public to add to the collection of

historical photos, written materials, and recorded oral histories. Rotating exhibits of historical relevance are to be displayed in both English and Spanish.

The City of Watsonville has provided a Literacy Center for over 20 years, which has helped hundreds of adults learn to read and write. The center was started by Literacy Volunteers of America and joined the Watsonville Public Library in 1999. Previously housed in a small independent space, it now adjoins the first floor of the Main Library and has its own entrance. The Literacy Center has increased in size and offers a pleasant learning environment. Through the “Opportunity to Read” program, clients are given one-on-one tutoring tailored to suit the needs of the individual learner. Clients either walk in or are referred from Cabrillo College, Watsonville/Aptos Adult School, Head Start or Migrant Head Start.

The Freedom Library is the only branch of the Watsonville Public Library system. It offers many of the same services as the Main Library to residents in the northern Watsonville and Freedom communities. The Freedom Library became part of the Watsonville Public Library system in 1996 and moved to its current location at the corner of Freedom and Airport Boulevards in 2000. In a separate building on the premises, the Freedom Library includes a Homework Center, which offers homework tutoring for school-age children.

On June 3, 2008, voters approved Measure R, which permanently extends the quarter-cent sales tax passed in 1996, formerly known as Measure B. This critically important tax generates about \$8.3 million annually for the county libraries, including 80 percent of the Watsonville Public Library operating budget.

Findings

Budget

1. The Watsonville Library System's funds come from the following sources:
 - Quarter-cent sales tax (Measures B and R)
 - Watsonville General Fund
 - Property taxes
 - Library fee and fine revenue
 - State of California Public Library Fund grant
 - Donations
2. The projected general operating budget for 2007-08 includes:
 - \$2,101,614 from Measure B, which is allocated using a population-based formula.
 - \$501,403 from Watsonville General Fund contribution (a fixed amount that is protected from budget cuts due to a Measure B stipulation).
3. The overall budget includes \$125,000 for materials and books for both the Main Library and Freedom branch. This amount has not changed in the past four years. No additional funding was obtained for materials for the new library.
4. The new Main Library was completed within its allocated \$9,000,000 budget.

5. In May 2005, the California Cultural and Historical Endowment awarded a grant of \$300,074 to the City of Watsonville for the construction of the California Agricultural Workers' History Center at the new library. Due to a delay in paperwork processing by the Watsonville Public Library, the final grant amount paid was \$130,000.
6. The CAWHC was financed largely through grant awards to the City of Watsonville's Public Library from the California Cultural and Historical Endowment, a \$100,000 donation from the Ow Family Trust, and a \$10,000 federal technology-matching grant for equipment.

Staffing

7. The Watsonville Public Library employs approximately 50 staff, 14 of whom are full-time. Some students are employed part-time to assist staff.
8. There are seven librarians, including the Library Director.
9. Staffing both floors of the new library requires a minimum of seven employees, more than double the number required at the single story former Main Library.
10. Since more employees are needed to keep the new Main Library open but no additional hires are planned, staff who previously only worked behind the scenes are being assigned to work some hours on the floor with the public.
11. Neither the Main Library nor the parking garage has a security person on duty to ensure patron and staff safety.
12. The Watsonville Library and the Freedom branch share one full-time custodian. Custodial staffing has not been increased since the opening of the new library.
13. Most employees belong to one of the three following bargaining units: clerical-technical, mid-managers, and management.
14. The Literacy Center, Library Link, and Friends of the Library all utilize volunteers.

Facilities

15. The Main Library is a two-story, 42,000 square foot facility within the Civic Center, which has an adjoining parking garage.
16. Patrons must walk around the block from the library's entrance to the parking garage, as there is no direct access.
17. The first floor of the Main Library is dedicated to children's services, which includes a craft room and a theater. This floor also provides five self-checkout stations, a circulation desk, and a reference desk. The second floor includes two conference rooms; four study rooms, a large capacity community room with kitchenette, the California Agricultural Workers' History Center, a teen room ("Teen Space"), and a computer lab.
18. A federal technology-matching grant tripled the number of computers to 90. Patrons have access to computers in the computer lab, Teen Space, and the children's area.

Both walk-up and Americans With Disabilities Act compliant stations are also available. Patrons can also check out laptops for use on the premises.

19. An additional 8,000 square feet for expansion is available on the second floor.
20. Although the Main Library has an after-hours book deposit, it does not have a book deposit accessible by car.

Services

21. The computer/Internet services include
 - Over 40 databases, including NewsBank and InfoTrac, five databases in Spanish, two for children, and four accessible only in person at the library.
 - Wireless Internet (WiFi) service.
 - Both adult and children’s computers accessible in Spanish and English.
 - MyLibraryDV™ (videos-on-demand), a service enabling patrons with broadband Internet connections to download and view a selection of movies and educational programs at home. This service is available to computers using a Microsoft Windows operating system (Windows 2000 and more recent).
 - Spanish and English versions of the library website.
22. A Spanish/English translator is always available in the libraries, and approximately one-third of the book collection is in Spanish.
23. Once a book has been requested by patrons at least five times, that book will be purchased or leased for the library collection.
24. Interlibrary loan service (loans of books from libraries throughout the United States) is available and free to cardholders.
25. The children’s area provides several early-literacy learning stations with specialized computers for children up to eight years old.
26. For patrons needing assistance, walkers with baskets are available to use while in the Main Library.
27. The Literacy Center tutors approximately 70 individuals each week and offers regularly scheduled classes and discussion groups.
28. The CAWHC is not yet open to the public on a regular basis.

Programs

29. Programs are offered in English and Spanish whenever possible. The programs include
 - Raising a Reader, an early childhood program that encourages parents and children to read together.
 - Outreach to the community, which includes school visits and participation in city-sponsored events.
 - Computer skills classes.

- Summer reading program.
 - LibraryLink: volunteers bring books, news of community events, videos, and other library materials to homebound patrons.
 - Adult programs that include immigration issues, divorce and health directives.
30. The Homework Center in the Main Library closed February 29, 2008. Despite demand, there are no firm plans to reopen it. The Freedom branch, however, continues to operate a homework center.
31. The Freedom branch provides a large children's area offering family-oriented programs.

General

32. The seven-member Watsonville Public Library's Board of Trustees is appointed by the City Council. The board meets monthly to oversee the administration of the libraries and make budget recommendations to the City Council and the City Manager. Specifically, the board has the power and duty to "contract with schools, county or other governmental agencies to render or receive library services or facilities" (City of Watsonville, Charter Section 910).
33. The Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) plans to cut library technician positions in the next academic year, which may cause elementary school libraries to close.
34. Due to budget and staffing constraints, the two libraries will no longer be open on Sundays.
35. Main Library hours are: 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday; Freedom has the same hours except it is open only from noon to 4:00 p.m. on Saturday.
36. Approximately 1,000 patrons visit the new library each day, which is a substantial increase over the number of visitors to the old library.

Conclusions

1. The permanent extension of the sales tax measure devoted to library funding is essential to maintain library operations and enable long-term planning. The City of Watsonville could not afford to support current library operations without this supplemental funding.
2. The allocation of sales tax revenue directed to the library should increase with the growing population of Watsonville since the allocation is based on population size.
3. The materials budget for 2008 is very modest. No additional funds were designated for the purchase of materials for the new library. It would be helpful and efficient to have public input on purchasing materials.

4. The City of Watsonville and the Watsonville Public Library suffered a loss of approximately \$170,000 by not submitting the necessary grant documents to the California Cultural and Historical Endowment in a timely manner.
5. The Main Library has more than doubled in size without additional staffing. This increase requires employees to work some hours on the floor with the public, reducing their time available to complete other duties. Concerns for daily library operations exist, such as covering a shift for an absent worker, or having enough time to effectively address a patron's needs.
6. Some safety challenges exist at the new facility:
 - Monitoring the expansive space on two floors.
 - Ensuring all patrons have left the building prior to closing.
 - Ensuring staff and patrons can walk safely to the unattended parking garage at night.
7. Some programs would not exist without volunteer participation (e.g., tutors in the Homework Center, Literacy Center, and Library Link program).
8. There is still a need for a homework center at the Main Library based on previous demand. It would be a valuable community resource because of the impending Watsonville elementary school library closures.
9. The public may be inconvenienced by the closure of the libraries on Sundays.
10. The custodian has limited time to service both branches and to respond to unexpected maintenance needs.
11. Fulfilling public expectations for the CAWHC will be a long-term commitment. The center has the potential to attract researchers who would use and add to the collection of historical resources.
12. The Literacy Center provides a safe and welcoming environment for adults who desire to learn to read and write.
13. The video-on-demand service would be improved if it were accessible to more than Microsoft Windows operating system users.
14. The Library Board appears to function in an advisory rather than an administrative manner, which is contrary to the city charter.
15. More conference rooms are available at the new facility; however, limited staff time may slow the development of additional programs or services for these rooms.
16. Adding a drive-up book drop outside the Main Library would help patrons return books without the need to park and enter the building.

Recommendations

1. Since Watsonville's population is growing, the Library Director, City Manager and the Library Board of Trustees should monitor annually the population-based allocation of countywide sales tax money to ensure the library receives its fair share.

2. Procedures for completion of grant applications should be established and monitored carefully, so that opportunities for such funding are not missed. More than one staff member should be aware of the grant application process to ensure impending deadlines are met.
3. The Library Director should request that the City of Watsonville increase the materials budget. More bilingual (Spanish-English) and Spanish language publications should be obtained for the interested public. The purchase of additional materials will enhance the depth of subject coverage.
4. More standing book orders could increase purchasing efficiency. The library could form teen and senior advisory boards for input on material purchases.
5. The Grand Jury recommends that the library explore new partnerships with local businesses as a supplemental funding source.
6. When financially feasible, both library branches should re-establish open hours on Sundays.
7. In order to operate with greater efficiency and safety, the new library should hire additional staff to handle the increased patronage.
8. Re-establishing and restaffing the Homework Center in the Main Library should be a high budget priority.
9. Staffing should be increased to accommodate regularly scheduled hours for public use of the CAWHC. Increased librarian hours devoted to local history would accelerate the development of the collection, as would the sponsorship of workshops to collect oral histories. Library staff should develop a website to publicize the purpose of the center and the facilities and equipment available.
10. A garage attendant should be on duty at night until 9 pm to alleviate safety concerns for patrons and library staff. Similarly, patrons and staff could benefit by having some designated reserved parking spaces available on the ground floor of the garage.
11. Library supervisors should consider the experience and desires of the staff working with the public. Personnel assignments should be best suited to their interest and abilities, when possible. Those lacking experience to effectively communicate and interact with the public should receive additional training.
12. The City of Watsonville should add library custodial staff to provide regular and on-demand service at both branches.
13. The library should consider establishing a volunteer coordinator position to actively recruit volunteers from community sources such as local senior centers, high schools and colleges.
14. Within the purview of union rules, volunteers might be trained to help with library tasks. The Library could offer student internships, and volunteers could act as docents to orient visitors to the new facility.
15. The Library Board's effectiveness could be improved by taking a more active role in fulfilling its charter responsibilities. The board could consider ways to improve

library service to schoolchildren who may be affected by impending closures of PVUSD elementary school libraries.

16. While computers using Microsoft Windows 2000 or newer Microsoft computer operating systems can use MyLibraryDV™, the library’s technical services staff should investigate other alternative video downloading to broaden accessibility to those using Mac or other system software.
17. The Grand Jury recommends that library management consult with the City of Watsonville to establish a location for a drive-up book drop at the Main Library.

Commendations

1. The City of Watsonville is commended for recognizing the need to replace the previous library and organizing the team required to secure funding, develop plans, obtain agreements between multiple parties, and build a modern Main Library.
2. The City of Watsonville is commended for its commitment to support a library that is an essential community resource, serving the educational and recreational needs of the public, and offering public meeting rooms.
3. The Grand Jury commends the planning team for the thoughtful interior design of the new library. The lighting fixtures, furniture and color schemes chosen create a pleasant ambiance.
4. The library staff is commended for its team spirit and dedication to serving the public. The Grand Jury gives special recognition to the employees who have made commitments to serve the library for many years and to those staff who took the initiative to apply for and receive grant funding for various programs or services.
5. The Grand Jury commends the library staff responsible for obtaining the technology grant that tripled the number of computers available to the public.
6. The Library is commended for the “Human Book Chain” event to move books from the old library to the new one, generating positive publicity and interest in the new facility while involving the community in a fun activity.
7. The Friends of the Library is commended for organizing ongoing book sales to supplement library funds.
8. The Literacy Center is commended for receiving national accreditation for its “Opportunity to Read” program from ProLiteracy America, validation for meeting high standards for the center’s planning and performance.
9. The Main Library is commended for providing push-walkers with baskets to patrons.

Responses Required

Respondent	Findings	Recommendations	Respond Within / Respond By
Watsonville Library Director	5, 10-12	1-14,16, 17	90 days October 1, 2008
Watsonville City Manager	5, 10- 12	1-3, 7-10, 12, 17	90 days October 1, 2008
Watsonville Library Board of Trustees		1, 15	90 days October 1, 2008

Sources

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Media

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“Cabrillo to Purchase Downtown Library.” Amanda Schoenberg, June 13, 2007.

“City Council to Break in Civic Plaza with Special February Meeting.” Staff Report, January 21, 2008.

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“New Library Still Needs Old Tax.” Carol Heitzig, March 24, 2008.

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