

Library Service Delivery and Feasibility Study

Executive Summary

Findings

Service Levels

With the exception of hours of operation, the City of Costa Mesa is receiving library service at levels below its fellow OCPL members and well below levels found in comparable cities (where services are typically provided municipally). The City receives 63 hours of service per week, a rate of 6 hours per 100 residents, well in excess of the 5.08 hours provided in other OCPL cities. Total square footage is 0.13 per capita in Costa Mesa, smaller than the OCPL average of 0.21 and barely a third of the benchmark average of 0.40. The Costa Mesa libraries hold an average of 1.28 volumes per capita compared to 1.62 in the OCPL system and 2.33 in the benchmark cities. The same pattern holds for staffing, with 0.19 FTE staff per 1,000 Costa Mesa residents versus an OCPL average of 0.22 and a benchmark average of 0.46. Moreover, facilities are dated and, in many respects, not in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. As owner, the City is required to ensure that its facilities are ADA compliant. Our interviews with and survey of Costa Mesa residents reinforce these findings: respondents clearly regard the size of the library facilities as inadequate and would welcome efforts to modernize holdings, facilities and resources.

Usage

As with service levels, usage of the Costa Mesa libraries is below average. Per capita circulation is 3.2 per year, versus 4.54 County-wide and an average of 8.31 among benchmark cities. Attendance is just under three visits per resident compared to more than four in the County system and just over five among benchmark cities.

It is not uncommon to find that libraries where facilities and/or services are below average also experience below average use. Patrons or potential patrons may look to other sources for library-related needs. By the same logic, improvements to library facilities can have dramatic effects on library attendance. The City of Orange, for example, experienced a 63% increase in library attendance after its main library was remodeled with no increase in size. Communities that expand library space experience even larger increases in library visits.

Community Needs

Interviews with library stakeholders and a survey of City residents indicate a desire for larger and more modern facilities, including more up-to-date holdings and enhanced electronic access both to and from the libraries. There is general satisfaction with library staff, as well as with parking and location. A single survey question offered respondents an opportunity to express a preference either for a hypothetical central library system or continuing with a branch system. A strong majority of respondents

preferred the branch system option. Also, our analyses of interviews and surveys suggest that residents might benefit from more information about the Costa Mesa libraries and services they provide.

Revenues and Expenditures

While Costa Mesa's level of library-related revenue is slightly higher than the average of other OCPL members, the level of spending on library services in Costa Mesa by OCPL is slightly lower than the County average. The Orange County Public Library (OCPL) collects an average of \$13.94 per resident annually in Costa Mesa-based revenues to provide library services in the City. Analysis indicates that the OCPL is annually spending approximately \$12.92 per resident to provide library services in the City. This level of expenditure is 7 percent below the countywide average of \$13.96 and 54 percent below the benchmark average of \$30.56 found in comparable jurisdictions in the State. In total, the County spends an estimated \$106,289 less to operate the Costa Mesa libraries than it receives from Costa Mesa based property taxes and other revenues. These excess revenues subsidize service to other OCPL cities and County unincorporated areas.

The extent to which Costa Mesa is a donor city can only be estimated, because the City's share of costs to provide centralized services for the OCPL system cannot be determined with any precision at this time. The OCPL does not have an established method for determining each member's share of centralized services costs. Our analyses employ a weighted average of the City's share of staffing, square footage and borrowers. The lack of an established method, agreed upon by all OCPL members, creates uncertainty in determining spending on services in each jurisdiction.

Service Options

The City of Costa Mesa has three main options for the provision of library services in the City. These options include:

1. Continue with OCPL operation and negotiate with the County for improved service levels at current or expanded facilities;
2. Provide independent library services through the City; and
3. Establish a public-private partnership to provide library services.

The City can also consider some combination of the three main options, including establishing a municipal library and contracting out for some services such as book acquisitions or cataloging. Contracted services can be provided by private firms and/or other public libraries. A joint-use agreement with the school district is also an option.

To explore the City's library service and building size options, a total of 12 alternative scenarios were developed. These scenarios include library capital and operating costs based on facilities ranging in size from 22,000 to 40,000 square feet, and with staffing levels ranging from 26 to 49. The scenarios show annual operating costs ranging from a low of \$1.63 million per year (24,000 square feet of library space in two facilities, provided by a public-private partnership) to a high of \$3.7 million per year (40,000 square feet in three facilities, operated by the City alone). Capital cost estimates, *excluding* land and financing, range from \$2.57 million for two County-operated facilities totaling 22,000 square feet, to \$16.95 million for three City-operated facilities totaling 40,000 square feet.

Based on the library financial, service, and usage analysis included in this report, there does not appear to be an overwhelming and clear-cut case for any one particular service option. Assuming incremental increases in existing revenues, any attempt to increase facility size and staffing results in annual operations shortfalls and substantial one-time capital costs. Factors that will drive the City's ultimate decisions regarding a new library building and services include the County's willingness and ability to provide higher service levels at larger facilities, and the amount of City and other funding available for library capital and operations needs. Major options for alternative funding include a joint-use agreement with an educational organization, a library capital campaign, competition for Proposition 14 funding, and institution of a special library tax (common practice in many cities).

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing findings, we recommend that the City take the following actions:

1. Based on the findings of this study, establish goals for holdings and staffing to improve library service levels.
2. Request and work with OCPL on establishment of a method for allocating centralized services costs to all branches in the system.
3. In coordination with the OCPL, Friends of the Library and the Costa Mesa Library Foundation, develop and implement a public information campaign to expand awareness of library services.
4. Depending on the City's goals, begin working with the community on a "visioning phase," whereby residents, library constituents, the City Council and staff can begin to set priorities for library roles, potential collections, programs, tenants, and services, possibly concluding with a space plan for new facilities.
5. Establish goals for size and number of facilities and for user space for improved library service levels.

6. Explore options for financing the construction, purchase or lease of space necessary to achieve desired facility size(s), such as a municipal bond, parcel tax, Proposition 14 funding, and joint-use agreement.
7. If the City decides to seek such facilities, begin discussions with the OCPL to determine the County's interests and abilities in providing staffing and other requisite resources.
8. Depending on the City's goals and the County's abilities, the City should review its options for a public/private partnership and/or joint-use agreement to provide library services.

II. SURVEY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

This chapter reviews current conditions at the two OCPL branch libraries in the City of Costa Mesa. Included are summary data on service levels, facilities, holdings and usage.

Location and Facilities

The Orange County Public Library System has two libraries in the City of Costa Mesa, Mesa Verde, in a residential neighborhood at 2969 Mesa Verde Drive, and Donald Dungan, near downtown at 1855 Park Avenue. Mesa Verde occupies 6,460 square feet and was built in 1965. Donald Dungan was built in 1983, and occupies 7,500 square feet. The total square footage of both branches equates to 0.13 square feet per resident, which is approximately one-third of the State and benchmark city averages of about 0.40 square feet. The size of the facility limits the number and type of programs available, as well as the collections and user space. Parking at the facilities is generally adequate, although staff have reported occasional pressures on parking at the Donald Dungan facility, especially when public events at the adjacent community center and retail establishments are held.

Mesa Verde is a single level facility with a well set several steps below ground and a mezzanine several steps above the main level. Access to the well and mezzanine is by staircase only. The main level houses reference, nonfiction, children's books and materials, audiobooks, and video collections. The children's area includes a separate reference section. The well contains adult fiction; the mezzanine is a reading area for periodicals. Seating is limited throughout the facility. In general, conditions are quite cramped. Book carts with items for sale crowd the entryway. Staff space too is rather crowded, especially at circulation.

Donald Dungan is a single level building, with a full range of collections, including audio books and video titles. A small children's area is set aside from, but open to the rest of the library. Collections space is, as at Mesa Verde, rather strained. But seating is ample and staff space appears to be comfortable. Patrons have easy access to both circulation and reference. There is an alcove for the Friends of the Library. A room at the back of the facility may be available for community programs, but tends to be used instead for storage of overflow materials.

At both facilities, compliance with the federal mandates of the Americans with Disabilities Act appears problematic. This is especially the case at Mesa Verde, where many physically challenged patrons have no obvious means for accessing either periodicals or adult fiction. Restrooms are not disabled-accessible and conditions are crowded enough throughout the library that movement of anyone confined to a

wheelchair would be difficult. At Donald Dungan, access points are narrow and no automated system for opening doors was detectable.

Service Levels

Both libraries are open 63 hours per week and provide service every day. OCPL supported an increase to this level of operations hours in 1996. The Costa Mesa libraries are open for more hours than either the County average or comparable cities throughout the state. It is also somewhat unusual to have library service provided seven days a week, though daily service is available at Newport Beach and other libraries in adjacent cities.

Both facilities currently house approximately the same number of volumes, 65,862 at Mesa Verde, 67,753 at Donald Dungan. Taken together, these equate to 1.28 volumes per resident of Costa Mesa. This is just over half the holdings rate for benchmark cities, and less than the County average of 1.62. At Mesa Verde, there are 3,375 audio or video holdings, and 3,404 periodicals. Comparable figures for Donald Dungan are 3,574 and 1,255. The shelving is estimated to be at or beyond capacity throughout both libraries.

Interlibrary loan of all items owned by all County branches is available. In 1998-1999, use of items owned by other County branches represented 4.9% of book circulations.

Usage

The libraries experience a relatively low level of usage, not inconsistent with their modest size and collections. Mesa Verde receives 138,628 visitors annually, compared to 164,396 at Donald Dungan. This combined annual attendance level breaks down to an attendance rate of about three per capita. Circulation levels too are lower, including those among borrowers. Costa Mesa libraries have a circulation per borrower rate of 5.07 annually, compared to 7.89 for the OCPL and 9.68 for comparable California communities.

Technology Branch

OCPL has also committed to establishing, in FY 2000-01, a "Technology Branch" in a third location in Costa Mesa. Negotiations are ongoing to identify space that would house this third facility. OCPL has suggested a relatively small facility, approximately 2,000 square feet, that would offer 10-12 workstations with public access to the internet, a modest on-site print collection, and service for picking up requested inter-library loan materials. Appendix F includes a copy of correspondence from OCPL committing to and specifying the nature of the proposed "Technology Branch."