San Mateo County Libraries

Agenda Item VII.

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| To: | JPA Governing Board |
| From: | Anne-Marie Despain, Director of Library Services |
| | Carine Risley, Deputy Director of Library Services |
| Date: | February 3, 2021 |
| Meeting: | February 8, 2021 |
| Re: | Phased Reopening Update |

## Background

On March 13, the Library JPA Operations Committee and Governing Board held emergency meetings to discuss our level of response to COVID-19. The difficult decision was made to close our libraries starting on Monday, March 16 to help mitigate the spread of the coronavirus in our community.

On May 18, 2020, the Library's COVID-19 Phased Reopening Plan was presented to the JPA Governing Board. The plan has four phases: Phase 1: On-site Planning and Preparation, Phase 2: Customized Curbside Services, Phase 3: Limited Public Access to Facilities, and Phase 4: New Normal. The board approved the Plan and provided authority to the Library Director (after consultation with public officials and JPA members) to transition library operations as needed and, on a case-by-case basis, to the appropriate phased level of service.

San Mateo County Libraries transitioned into Phase 2: Customized Curbside Services on June 6. Operations are continually assessed and comply with the best practices and requirements indicated by the CDC, California COVID-19 Industry Guidance for Retail, and the County of San Mateo. In September, the JPA Governing Board accepted staff recommendations to continue Phase 2 Operations and Curbside Service through the end of 2020 and prepare to advance the libraries into Phase 3 no earlier than January 2021.

## Discussion

Staff have conducted a thorough review of what our modified services could look like following current restrictions. Under the State's industry guidance, libraries are mandated to follow retail guidelines and are encouraged to maximize curbside or outdoor services. While San Mateo County's current purple tier status does allow libraries to open with modifications and up to 25% capacity, the retail guidelines prohibit many beloved features of our library buildings and require closure of public seating. Unlike retail stores, libraries have thousands of items going out and being returned daily, which increases space needs as well as safety precautions and processes.

Staff have been working to prepare our facilities and services in compliance with all guidelines and requirements from the CDC, California's COVID-19 Industry Guidance for Retail, and San Mateo County. Due to the extended timeline of Phase 2 services, we have the opportunity to use this time to further prepare our library spaces, train staff on new procedures, refresh collections, and redesign browsing experiences to support discovery and self-directed experiences.

Increased community spread, the inclusion of San Mateo County in the regional stay at home orders from December 17 to January 25, and concerns about transmissibility of virus variants all contributed to the decision to postpone expanding library services. Staff also continue to serve in emergency support assignments during the pandemic, including acting as contact tracers, and more recently, assisting with the vaccination effort.

While several libraries in the area discontinued services for the duration of the regional stay at home order, staff have confidence in our Phase 2 operations and hear daily from the public about just how much our services mean to them. Sample comments include:

"*Thank you for being open and still serving us during this time. You've made it easier to stay home.*"

*"My family and I have been using curbside pickup regularly since the spring, and deeply appreciate everyone who is working to make the books and the many other library services available to us during this time. Driving down to pick up new books is regularly a highlight of my day, and the time outside and away from home is very welcome. It has been quick, safe, and easy, and books have been a valuable distraction and a way to make something good of this time."*

"*Thank you for this! This is really saving my life. I mean it. My wife and I don't have anything to do at home so we have been putting old movies on home and watching them nonstop. It is giving us something to do so we don't go out of our minds! You're doing a really great job keeping us sane.*"

When it is safe to do so, we will move into Phase 3 services and allow limited access to public facilities while also maintaining curbside services. Giving our communities the choice of coming into the building or receiving services outdoors will be an important feature to preserve in the coming months as the vaccine rolls out. Safety for staff and the public remains a primary consideration, and we will be engaging labor on our plan in the coming weeks. Measures to ensure a low-risk environment for all will include midday building closures on public access days for cleaning and sanitization and designated staff greeters at entrances to monitor building capacity and to review current safety requirements with all visitors.

For the health and safety of all, staff recommend continuing preparations to implement Phase 3: Limited Public Access to Facilities as early as April 2021; and when the County moves into the red tier. Our goal is to make prudent choices to protect the safety of our community members and staff while providing a high level of service.

## Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with accepting this report.

## Recommendation

Recommend JPA Governing Board accept the Phased Reopening Update and provide input and direction to staff on next steps. Operations Committee members present at the February 2, 2021, meeting concurred with this recommendation.