San Mateo County Libraries

Agenda Item IV.

To:	JPA Operations Committee
From:	Anne-Marie Despain, Director of Library Services
	Danae Ramirez, Deputy Director of Library Services
Date:	May 5, 2021
Meeting:	May 11, 2021
Re:	Phased Reopening Plan Update

Background

On March 13, 2020, 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 March 16, 2020 to help mitigate the spread of the coronavirus in our community.

Staff were able to quickly pivot and adapt their technological skills, creativity, and service ethic to the new environment and mobilized to provide dynamic, high quality, enhanced virtual services to serve the need of our communities.

On May 18, 2020, the Library's COVID-19 Phased Reopening Plan was presented to the 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 on June 6, 2020 and began offering curbside services three days a week at all locations. A month later, on July 14th, service was expanded to five days per week. Curbside and virtual services have continually been evaluated and adjusted to add improvements and expanded services.

The Operations Committee and Governing Board received regular status updates in September 2020 and February 2021 and approved recommendations for staff to continue Phase 2 operations and prepare to advance to Phase 3: Limited Public Access to Facilities in early 2021.

Discussion

Phase 3: Limited Public Access to Facilities is the next step in our careful, phased approach to reinstituting library offerings and access. On April 22, 2021, San Mateo County Libraries moved to Phase 3 or Express Service, allowing the public to enter our buildings for the first time in over a year.

The decision to allow modified in-library service, follows months of planning and San Mateo County's move to the "Orange Tier" of California's coronavirus tier system. Library staff have worked closely with our 12 member cities, towns, and county to prepare for reopening. Phase 3 library operations comply with the best practices and requirements indicated by the CDC, California COVID-19 Industry Guidance for Retail, and the County of San Mateo.

The State of California has made significant progress against COVID-19 administering more than 20 million vaccines and stabilizing case rates and hospitalizations. On June 15th, California plans to fully reopen its economy across the state if there is enough vaccine supply to vaccinate Californians 16 years and older; and hospitalization rates remain low.

In Phase 3, library service days have increased from five days per week to six days per week. Hours increased as well and included a combination of three days of Curbside/ Walk-Up Service and three days of Express/ In-Library Service. Curbside Service hours are currently Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, 10am—5pm. (The Sanchez Library, Pacifica's second location offers Curbside Services Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 1-5pm.) Express Service hours are Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 10am—5pm, with the exception of the Sanchez Library which does not offer Express Service.

To ensure a low-risk environment for all, Express in-library days include midday building closures to clear buildings and clean high-touch surfaces. Plexi-glass has been installed at service desks and designated staff greeters have been placed at entrances to monitor building capacity and to review current safety requirements with all visitors. Members of the public are required to wear a mask, encouraged to keep visits to 60 minutes or less, and are not permitted to gather.

With two weeks of in-person service behind us, we have invited 9,400 community members back into our buildings successfully and safely. The public response has been overwhelmingly positive and exuberant, everyone who visits is thrilled to enjoy their community library once again. On our first day of Express Service, we welcomed over 1,400 customers across the system for browsing, computer use, and a wave of friendly faces.

Our libraries have been bustling but we have not reached maximum capacity at any location, nor encountered any significant challenges. Staff are comfortable and confident returning to their roles in the library and shared the below stories which demonstrate the pure joy our patrons feel being back:

- A child at the new Brisbane Library declared, “This is the happiest place on earth!"
- One woman walked in and acknowledged that she knew yelling in the library wasn't okay, but she might not be able to help herself - she was so excited. She was giddy when she left and said, "This is the best day, I don't care what else happens today. This day is already the best!"
- A customer exclaimed, "I just have to tell you; I am having a wonderful time!”
- A family looked hesitant to walk up to our doors. Our greeter waved them over and the kids asked if they could go in. When they heard the answer, they jumped up and clapped with joy cheering, “We can go in! We can go in!”

These wonderful experiences and exclamations of gratitude were the sentiments shared in every library.

Next Steps

Over the next few months, we look forward to gaining new insights from our community members about their needs and safely expanding in-library services while also continuing to support curbside services for those who prefer a contact-free experience. 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.

We will continue to offer an expanding array of digital materials, online resources, and an exciting line up of virtual programs and events for all ages, and in June, we look forward to dedicating considerable effort and resources to support our ongoing and new summer learning programs.

Staff recommends continuing Phase 3 operations through July, which will give us time to review and monitor Express Service, devote resources to summer learning initiatives, and conduct a thorough review of what Phase 4: New Normal operations will look like under new restrictions and guidelines.

We continue to find wisdom in making prudent choices and learning from each phase of our plan to introduce new services safely and successfully.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with accepting this report.

Recommendation

Recommend JPA Operations Committee accept the Phased Reopening Update and provide input and direction to staff on next steps.