

July 23, 2021

Mariana Moore, Chair
Measure X Community Advisory Board
County Administrator's Office
1025 Escobar Street, 4th Floor
Martinez, CA 94553

Dear Chair Moore and Measure X Board Members:

I write in support of Contra Costa County Librarian Alison McKee's request for the allocation of funds to support increased open hours for the libraries in our County.

By way of background, I have been a member of the Library Commission for six years, first as Supervisor Mitchoff's appointment when I resided in Walnut Creek and now that I live in Pittsburg, Supervisor Glover's appointment. I have been the Commission's Vice-Chair and am now its Chair.

Thus, I write this endorsement with substantial experience with our Library, and its needs, priorities and resources, and from the perspective of a person who has lived in two distinctly different areas of the County. A comparison between these two areas, between Walnut Creek and Pittsburg, clearly demonstrates the inequities that exist within our County, inequities that are highlighted by the libraries in each. The Librarian's Measure X proposal is designed in a very clear-cut fashion to address these inequities.

As the Contra Costa County Library Commission observed in its 2016 study, **Promoting Excellence in Library Service in Contra Costa County**,

[T]he Library's funding model ... puts some community libraries at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to their peer libraries located within the county's wealthier community.... Our primary conclusions are that funding for the Library is not adequate ... and that inequities in Library services continue despite the expressed need for the Library to reach out to underserved populations."

Furthermore, the request put forth by the County Librarian to augment County support for open hours at all of our libraries is fully consistent with the purposes of Measure X. The funds provided by that measure, estimated to be at least \$88 million a year, are to be used for the following:

- Keep Contra Costa's regional hospital open and staffed;
- Fund community health centers;
- Provide timely fire and emergency response;
- Support crucial safety-net services;

- Invest in early childhood services;
- Protect vulnerable populations; and
- Fund other essential services.

The request for additional library hours clearly falls within the last four items to be addressed by Measure X which are underlined above.

As the information provided by County Librarian McKee shows, the existence of city funded library hours at the highest level basically tracks city household income. The four cities with the greatest number of city-funded library hours are those with the highest household income. This is a classic example of social inequity in action.

A significant part of the problem with the uneven distribution of library hours comes from the lack of adequate funding for libraries under the present system. This results in a per person expenditure in Contra Costa County that is substantially below that in neighboring counties. Alameda stands at 51% more, Solano at 70% more, Napa at 137% more, and Marin at 273% more.

This problem has been with us for some time and results from the joint responsibility for libraries in our county between the cities and the county. Richer cities can afford better libraries and libraries that are open more. Whatever the justification for this arrangement in the past, the existence of Measure X money to fix it makes the change imperative.

I ask that the Measure X Board remember that today's libraries do much more than store and check out books. They provide broadband access and enable usage by underserved populations; aid people experiencing homelessness, provide access to a wide variety of printed and electronic materials, and provide educational access and programs for people of all ages.

I doubt there is anything the Measure X Board can recommend that would have a greater, more immediate impact on providing critical services to underserved and inequitably treated residents of our County than responding positively to this proposal for expanded open hours.

Sincerely,

Peter A. Wilson
190 Pelican Loop
Pittsburg, CA 94565
925-360-7170