

Lisa Driscoll

From: Michael Fischer <bichael@berkeley.edu>
Sent: Thursday, December 2, 2021 11:08 AM
To: SupervisorMitchoff; John_Gioia; Lisa Driscoll
Cc: Alison McKee; rachel; alan smith
Subject: Library Need for Measure X Funds

Dear Supervisors Mitchoff and Gioia —

As you may know, I am El Cerrito's designated County Library Commissioner and currently the chair of the Commission. I am a resident of El Cerrito and therefore one of Supervisor Gioia's constituents. I'm writing in this later non-official capacity and as a resident of Contra Costa County.

I understand that the Finance Committee will be discussing Measure X at its Monday meeting and want to provide you with some thoughts as to use of some of those funds for library purposes.

I orally addressed the Board on this issue on November 16. At that meeting I heard comments, from both Board members and others, emphasizing the importance of equity and reaching underserved populations with these funds.

I would like to provide you with my perspective, based in part of my over four years experience as a library commissioner as well as a life-long user of California's public library system. Specifically I want to urge that at least some Measure X funds be used for two specific library purposes:

1. Early Literacy Outreach Van Staff: Last month the Library Administration received a grant of \$100,000 from the Bella Vista Foundation for a mobile outreach early literacy van. It is anticipated that the van will be used principally in our most underserved areas to promote literacy. The amount the van can be used is dependent, of course, on the availability of personnel to staff it. Using some Measure X funds for the van's deployment to underserved areas of our county appears clearly to be a use contemplated by Measure X.
2. Library Hours: One of the issues I have spent a great deal of my time and energy on since becoming a library commissioner is how many hours the library is open. I believe that this issue, even more than the sorry state of some of our library buildings, is THE equity issue facing our libraries. At the November 16 meeting of the Board of Supervisors I discussed why open hours, *i.e.*, library access, is a critical need especially for our most needy and underserved population. (Copy follows.) In short — library access equals vital internet access. As you know, the current structure of our library system provides a minimum (and in my view woefully inadequate) number of hours that each library is open — namely 40 hours a week. Cities can provide for additional hours for libraries within their purview and some, principally those cities with greater resources, do so. But libraries in unincorporated areas of the county are restricted to 40 hours and in our more underresourced cities library hours are either left at 40 hours or at a still inadequate 46 hours. I would refer you to County Librarian Alison McGee's presentation to the Measure X Advisory Committee which shows the relationship between city resources and library hours.

Allocating some Measure X funds for increased hours in our most needy and underserved areas is clearly a use contemplated by that act. As my previous remarks noted, library access often provides the only way our most needy population can access the internet — a need that is vital for information and access to vital service. Library hours are, however, a complex issue. This is not an area where one size fits all. Library facilities vary tremendously

across the county and this affects operations at each location. Because of the ability of cities to fund hours, the availability of resources for those hours is also significantly skewed.

I urge that the Board allocate a specific amount of Measure X funds for increased library hours on the order of several million dollars. This allocation, though, would be part of a direction to the Library Administration and Library Commission, in conjunction with the Richmond Public Library, to come up with a proposal, subject to Board approval or modification, for allocation of these funds within the county to our most needy and underserved populations. This proposal should include possible funding for hours for the separate Richmond Public Library and the effect of Richmond Public Library hours on the usage by Richmond residents of adjacent Contra Costa County Public Library facilities.

I am happy to discuss this matter with you at your convenience.

Thank you for what you do for our county and for bringing greater equity to our residents.

Michael A. Fischer

cc: Alison McKee, County Librarian
Rachel Rosekind, District 1 Library Commissioner
Alan Smith, District 4 Library Commissioner

Remarks of Michael A. Fischer at the November 16, 2021 Board of Supervisors Meeting on Allocation of Measure X Funds

I am Michael Fischer, El Cerrito's appointed Library Commissioner but speaking today in my personal capacity. I also serve as a member of AARP Internet Access Working Group where we have learned the critical importance the internet has for all of us whether it is access to vital government services, employment opportunities, education, or other information. That is why I'm speaking in support of that part of County Librarian Alison McKee's request for some Measure X funds for increasing library hours. For our most vulnerable and underserved population, access to the internet is often only available through libraries and only when they are open.

Let me give you an example. In 2018 hours at the El Cerrito library were increased from 35 to 50 hours a week which resulted in an increase in computer logins by 48% as compared to no increase in logins in other county libraries which had no increase in hours. This is the digital divide staring us in the face.

El Cerrito did, fortunately, find the funds to increase library hours. Our most needy areas, though, either in cities or in unincorporated parts of the county, cannot provide this funding. I urge the use of some Measure X funds to close this inequitable gap.