

PUTTING LIBRARY RESOURCES WITHIN REACH OF MORE ARLINGTONIANS

Libraries are a critical community resource. In addition to providing access to print, digital publications, and media, libraries are gathering places that provide a welcoming atmosphere and comfort to all, especially those in need. Moreover, librarians are often trained to serve as community navigators connecting people with information, opportunities, and assistance.

The County Manager's Proposed FY 2020 Budget proposes no changes to library hours or service locations within the current system with the exception of adding funding to the materials budget. As demand grows at our libraries, we have not kept pace with even the inflationary costs associated with materials. The library's ongoing collection budget has been at the same level since FY 2012. The collections budget needs to accommodate the explosion of digital materials and platforms, which are expensive, popular, and frequently requested by patrons, while maintaining more "traditional" collections, which are still in heavy use. Without this funding, the library will continue to have some of the longest hold times for e-books in the region and will continue to see a decline in adult users of the collection.

As noted in the Manager's Message, the Proposed Budget describes a series of alternative ideas for the Board to review if it does not agree with the recommendation for a tax increase by the Manager. Two of those options involve libraries. While neither of these options is recommended, they each present questions for the Board and the community to contemplate while we consider our priorities.

The Connection: Located in the Crystal City Underground, this flexible space has offered innovative programming and reached an underserved audience. First opened in September 2016, it is considered a success by the nearby community. The Connection from its start was intended only to be an experimental demonstration project. With the changes coming to Crystal City and Pentagon City, the future of a library in that area must be part of the discussion with the community. (Closure of the Connection would save \$73,809 per year).

Glencarlyn Branch Library: Glencarlyn library has the lowest number of checkouts of materials and is the most geographically isolated library branch in the system – primarily serving a relatively small number of nearby residents while other more populated areas of Arlington are underserved.

In the past, the Manager has suggested reducing operations at the Glencarlyn branch. These suggestions have understandably been met with concern by community members. Missing from past conversations on this subject is a full discussion of possible alternative uses of the library building if it were no longer to serve library patrons. The Glencarlyn branch is the oldest in the Arlington public library system. Its land was bequeathed in 1914 for use as a library in the will of Glencarlyn citizen Samuel S. Burdett. The branch, called the Burdett Library, opened in 1922 and was managed by a Trust. By 1936, this library became a de facto branch of the Arlington public library system, with the County renting the building from the Board of Trustees of the Trust. In 1959, the surviving Trustees deeded

the branch to the County. The current building opened in 1963. If the building is no longer used as a library, determining whether it could be repurposed for other County or public use or whether it would need to be sold to a private owner would require further legal research.

If the Board pursues an optional proposal to eliminate services at Glencarlyn, County staff would engage with the community in a discussion regarding the building's future use and to chart a pathway forward. Any future change to use would hopefully continue to allow the property to be used as a community resource even if it were not a library. (Closure of the Glencarlyn Branch would save \$226,941).

In surveying library services across the County, one area notably suffers from a lack of access. A physical location to borrow books and enjoy programs is most noticeably missing from the western end of Columbia Pike and the nearby neighborhoods. Recent Census data show that people living on the western end of Columbia Pike (in the vicinity of the Arlington Mill Community Center) are less likely to have a library card, that those who do are more likely to be inactive or lapsed users, and that individuals and families are likely to have lower household income, lower educational attainment, and live in poverty. If the right opportunity presented itself, expanding access to library services at Arlington Mill could serve as a social and economic catalyst for the surrounding neighborhood. It also aligns with the County's efforts to invest in Columbia Pike as a major transit corridor and creates efficiencies and convenience by co-locating multiple County services and facilities. Furthermore, by positioning the location for increased pedestrian activity and use, the County could derive more value from its investment of staff and facility resources. An alternative to accepting the full cuts noted above would be to redirect resources from each of the facilities and invest them at Arlington Mill Community Center for a library program. Such an effort could entail a new library space, with limited public hours, on the first or second floor of the Arlington Mill Community Center.