

A Study of the Montgomery County Library System

The 2010 annual meeting of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, MD (LWVMC) adopted a study of the Montgomery County Public Library system. The goals were to examine the library system's structure, funding and role in a changing Montgomery County. A major reason for adopting this study is the fact that LWVMC could not testify on the effect that drastic cuts would have on the library system during the economic downturn of 2008-2010.

OVERVIEW

The Montgomery County Public Library (MCPL) is a department of county government. Its mission is to "offer free and equal access to services and resources that connect the people of Montgomery County to ideas and information which sustain and enrich their lives". A department director, appointed by the County Executive, is responsible for the overall management of the system. The Library Board, consisting of 12 members appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council, functions as an advisory agency to the library department. MCPL is the only library system in Maryland where the Library Board is advisory and not responsible for managing the system.

Under the Library Board are the Library Advisory Councils (LACs), whose members act as liaisons between the community and the Library Board. Although a goal of the Library Board is to have an LAC in every branch, currently not every branch has one.

HISTORY

From 1893 until 1950 independent public or subscriber-funded libraries provided limited library services to residents of Southern Montgomery County. After a Home Rule Charter passed in the 1940s, LWVMC advocated for the consolidation of the seven existing libraries into a countywide system. Nothing was accomplished until after the Maryland state legislature provided for matching state funds for county library systems. The League of Women Voters continued to lobby for a countywide system, and on May 31, 1950 the County Council created a Department of Public Libraries with a library director and an advisory library board.

FACILITIES

Branches

The library operates 20 branches throughout Montgomery County. There are three levels of libraries in the system: At Level 1 are the regional libraries: Bethesda, Gaithersburg, Germantown, Quince Orchard, Rockville Memorial and Wheaton. The level 2 libraries are Davis, Marilyn Praisner, Potomac and Olney. The remainder are level 3.

Planning and Financing

Since MCPL is a county department, the Montgomery County Technical Services Department maintains, updates, and installs all computers and internet services. The General Services Department of the County maintains, renovates and updates all library buildings and designs new library facilities. This is funded by the

ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS ARE INVITED TO DUPLICATE THIS FACT SHEET WITH ATTRIBUTION GIVEN TO LWVMC. BEFORE REPRODUCING, PLEASE CONTACT THE LEAGUE OFFICE AT 301-984-9585 OR LWVMC@EROLS.COM FOR CORRECTIONS OR UPDATED INFORMATION, OR CHECK OUR WEBSITE, MONT.LWVMD.ORG, FOR THE MOST UP-TO-DATE VERSION.

operating budget of Montgomery County. Every year the budget manager and library director -- with input from LACs and branch managers -- design and plan for interior refreshment and maintenance of several branches; these activities are funded as a separate line item in the Library operating budget. New facilities and major renovations are funded through the Capital Improvement Program.

The new 2013-2016 Strategic Library Facilities Plan has been written with the premise that brick and mortar public library buildings in 2016 will still exist but with completely different content and purpose. The plan is not only to continue to refresh, renovate, and redesign existing buildings, but also to expand MCPL's reach beyond library walls to deliver services. The plan also emphasizes the following objectives and goals for the library facilities:

- incorporate new and emerging technologies and tools into building structures
- present opportunities for change and flexibility to suit community needs and targeted audiences
- provide a public input process to gather continuous participation from communities
- ensure ADA compliance.

Libraries often close 6-8 months before construction starts. Because no alternate facility was provided when the Olney branch closed for renovations, the neighboring community was greatly upset. MCPL has a new policy that when a library closes for renovation, some type of auxiliary facility in the area must be made available to residents.

Other Resources

In addition to the materials collection, all libraries have computer stations and meeting rooms that have direct outside access. Some libraries also have smaller private rooms for tutoring. There is a charge for meeting rooms. Room reservations and fee collection are coordinated by the county, which collects the fees and then gives a small percentage to the Library Department. All libraries have free parking, except at the Rockville and Bethesda regional libraries which charge for parking. Charges for library parking could become more prevalent in the future.

PERSONNEL

The Public Services Administrator of Branch Operations is responsible for the recruitment, hiring and training of library department personnel. He/she works closely with the county's Office of Human Resources because library employees are under the county government. Recruitment follows Montgomery County's policies and procedures for hiring personnel.

For professional staff, each branch has a branch manager; the five largest have assistant managers. Branches also have assistant supervisors and librarian 2s, the latter are subject specialist/research librarians. Each branch also has a least one children's librarian. Regional libraries cost about \$1.5 million to staff, level 2 about \$1 million, and level 3 about \$800,000 annually. With libraries changing so fast, one of MCPL's main focus is to have a good inservice training program. MCPL was able to add two positions at the department level. They chose a person whose expertise was in writing grants and one whose main focus was inservice training.

Support staff run circulation desks and shelve books. Due to the union contract, volunteers may be used to supplement library staff but only doing jobs that are not in the realm of the paid staff. Volunteers do projects such as book discussions, displays, and garden design and maintenance. Student volunteers run teen reading workshops, help with summer reading programs and teach e-book downloading. Friends of the Library (FOL) also runs some library programs.

The hours that a library can be open are determined by the personnel available. Since the 2008 economic downturn, library hours have been dramatically cut. Many branches opened late several days a week, and all Sunday service was cancelled. MCPL has been able to rehire staff this past year, and seven branches now have Sunday hours.

Usually when libraries close for renovation, the department tries to relocate staff. However, because of the budget cuts, the Gaithersburg and Olney staff positions were eliminated. The county will have to rehire staff for these branches when they reopen.

COLLECTION

MCPL has three main collection areas in all branches: Adult Circulating, Children's Circulating and Reference. The size and scope of each individual branch collection depends on the size of the branch and the needs of the local community. Resources beyond an individual branch collection can be obtained through the library's reserve system, where individuals can obtain a resource located at another branch or even outside the system and have it delivered to their local library. The Ask a Librarian Program is another way of expanding resources to the community: county residents email or phone in their reference questions or participate in an electronic chat.

Material Selection

The selection of materials for all the libraries is done by a committee of three librarians. The committee meets with the branch managers, and -- with community input through representatives of the LACs and FOLs and board members assigned to the particular branch -- decides on MCPL's purchases. The committee also looks at circulation statistics, branch profiles and projection of future needs for each library. MCPL tries to incorporate materials that reflect the diversity of the users served. Included are materials that serve users of various reading and educational levels, with diverse points of view -- including minority and majority views on a subject, of multicultural backgrounds, whose primary language is not English, and who require adaptive access and formats.

The collection is not archival, that is it does not keep copies of every item ever purchased, and is revised continually to meet broad contemporary needs. Materials are withdrawn for datedness of information, damaged or badly worn condition, insufficient use or lack of space. The Library does not withdraw materials selected for the collection solely because of content objections from users, other citizens or groups. Books which have outdated material, but which are classics or basic in their subject or of other historic importance, are maintained in the collection.

Types of Materials

The makeup of the collection has changed over the years from 100% printed books to including music, film, recorded books and now internet databases and e-books. The library collection is constantly changing due to innovative resources: e.g., at the time of this writing, demand for books on CDs was up, and demand for

DVDs was down. E-books are a new technology challenge since some publishers of e-books have been reluctant to license their books to libraries. The most radical change has been in the reference section. These are usually some of the most expensive items in the collection and should be updated on a continuous basis. This has resulted in using more online databases and services. MCPL also uses services such as Baker and Taylor, a rental system that provides best sellers in multiple copies that can be returned when demand lessens. A local authors program provides access to local author publications that might not otherwise be purchased by the library system. MCPL will catalog a copy of the book and place it in the author's local branch.

LIBRARY SERVICES

MCPL offers a variety of programs for all age groups and interests. There is an excellent schedule of services and events on its website (<http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/Content/Libraries/Index.asp>).

People with Disabilities

The Disabilities Resource Center provides information and services for people with disabilities. MCPL formerly provided a free Talking Book program through the Library of Congress but now refers potential users to the Maryland State Library for the Blind in Baltimore. All libraries have adaptive technology such as JAWS (speech-activated and oral software) available, and patrons can check out Perkins brailers at the Rockville Library. Volunteers provide tutoring and demonstrations of adaptive technology by appointment at the Rockville Library computer lab. All libraries also have large-print book collections. Videos with added narrative to describe the action, sign language videos, and instructional materials for adults and children are available at the Rockville Library. MCPL provides services for the homebound upon application. Books and other materials are delivered by volunteers or by mail. In general, these products and services are not widely publicized and are probably not used as much as they could be.

Non-English Speakers

MCPL provides reading and research materials in six world languages for children and adults. Foreign language materials at each branch are reflective of the needs of the community. However, these materials are available to anyone through interlibrary loans. Books, videotapes and DVDs provide instruction in speaking, reading and writing English for speakers of all languages. Several libraries have study rooms that can be used for individual tutoring or conversation groups. English conversation groups meet weekly at nine libraries. The Long Branch Library has a language lab with eleven computers containing software to help adults and children learn English. Non-English speakers who wish to use Ask a Librarian for reference can be connected to a conference call with a volunteer interpreter in each of more than 150 languages.

Services for Children & Teens

The Noyes Children Library building is still open but for limited hours. However, every library branch has a children's collection and offers preschool story hours. The MCPL homepage on the web has links to Homework Help, book lists, Ask a Librarian, and Fun Stuff -- which offers games and learning programs. There is also a link to the International Digital Library which offers downloads of children's books in 61 languages.

Teen programs are usually the most neglected in libraries. Branches do not have a teen librarian, but all branches have a librarian who has knowledge of teen literature and is responsible for teen programming. Some libraries have teen book give-a-ways and chess clubs, and most have a small teen collection.

Services for Seniors

Services for seniors include sale of senior metro cards at branches and provision of free dial-up service for internet access at home. Individual libraries have book discussions, Literacy Council tutoring, life-long learning sites and Jefferson Café discussion groups. Many of these services are not limited to seniors.

FUNDING

Budget Cuts and Additions

The Library is a county department; therefore, it goes through the same budget process as other county departments. A county budget liaison works closely with the MCPL department director and the chairs of library facilities, programs and collections -- as well as with the branch managers, the Library Board and the

LACs -- in establishing budget priorities. Libraries suffered greatly as a result of the recession of 2008-2010 when MCPL's budget was cut by 30%, from \$40 million to \$28 million. Most of the cuts in the first two years were in staffing and materials. The downturn continued in the 2011 budget, and library hours were cut. In the 2012 budget, the library was able to add personnel and restore Sunday hours to some libraries. In the FY12 budget draft of \$29.1 million, 85% went to staffing, 11% to materials and 4% to other operating expenses.

Limits on Fundraising

Since the library is a county department, it is precluded from fundraising. This differs from the other libraries in the state, which have set up foundations that are federally recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofits and can therefore raise funds. The Friends of the Library is the main fundraiser for MCPL. In Maryland, public libraries also receive some funding from the state and federal governments.

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

The Friends of the Library of Montgomery County (FOLMC) was formed in 1983 as a private non-profit 501(c)(3) umbrella organization for fundraising by individual Friends affiliates within Montgomery County libraries. Unique in the U.S., FOLMC is the only Library Friends group with an executive director. The director is assisted by a development coordinator, as well as a 21-member board of directors.

FOLMC has about 2,500 members, and operates three used bookstores in Wheaton, Rockville and Germantown, employing 30 full-time, part-time, and seasonal workers, who -- with volunteers -- staff the stores seven days a week. FOLMC has a million-dollar-plus budget, with 81% of the monies used for support, enhancement and advocacy of library services. In 2012, the grants totaled \$134,106. The Wheaton and Rockville stores pay the County an annual rent of 10% of the sales.

FOLMC distributes the funds as grants to individual libraries for programming, equity funding for libraries that do not have local FOLs, pilot programs and the like, using proceeds from fundraising events -- such as authors' luncheons and spelling bees, corporate grants, United Way contributions, membership fees and store sales.

FUTURE

With technology and access to information changing at such a rapid pace, the future of libraries is a familiar topic for debate. Since MCPL is committed to the brick and mortar buildings, the question is how these buildings will be used -- because fewer and fewer reading and reference materials will be in hard cover. In reading the literature and from the study committee's interviews, libraries will become more community-oriented spaces with rooms for meetings, classes, teen centers, workshops and creativity labs.

The creativity lab seems to be a major endeavor for libraries. These are rooms equipped with the latest technology to allow users to create projects with new tools that might not be available to them anywhere else. Services could also branch out beyond library walls to places like grocery stores, hospitals, or malls or by combining with schools and colleges. As has already been stated, virtual services such as Ask a Librarian will probably be expanded. All these ideas promote the MCPL mission of free and equal access. Check the Montgomery County Public Libraries website for updates on the wealth of programming and information: <http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/libraries/index.asp>.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

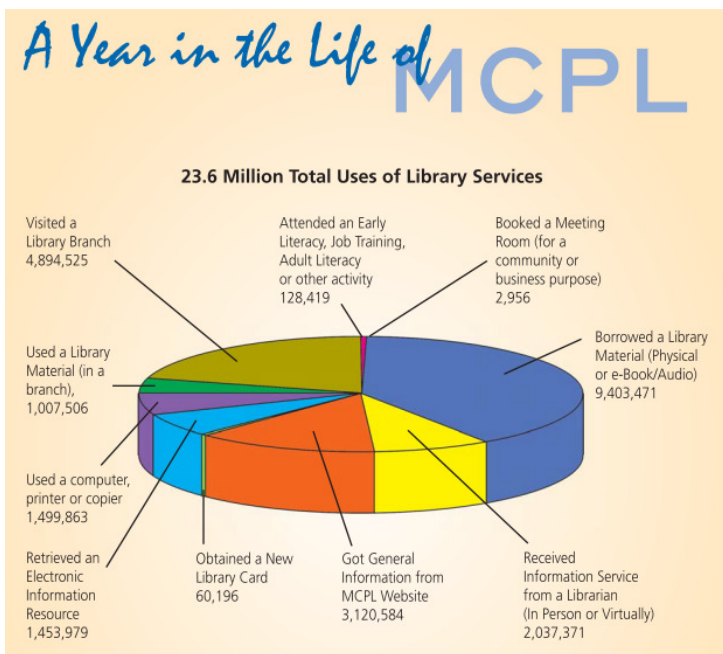
FOL Friends of the Library

LAC Library Advisory Council

MCPL Montgomery County Public Library

FOLMC Friends of the Library of Montgomery County

LWVMC League of Women Voters of Montgomery County



SNAPSHOT DAY 2011 Highlights

Library Snapshot Day, sponsored by the Maryland Library Association under the auspices of the American Library Association, provides an opportunity for libraries across the state of Maryland to collect statistics, pictures and stories that show how people love and use their libraries.

October 5, 2011 Statistics

Visitors to MCPL branches	16,099
Database retrievals	5,652
Questions answered by Information Staff	3,676
Attended VIP Reads/programs/classes	623
Workforce assistance actions (i.e. resumes, job applications, career guidance)	27
Items circulated (books, DVDs, CDs and other materials)	25,564
Interlibrary Loan items circulated	42

Graphics taken from MCPL's *Report to the Community 2012*

(<http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/libraries/newsandevents/reporttothecommunity.pdf>)

CONSENSUS QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that a public library system is a basic community service? Why or why not?
2. What community services should libraries provide?
3. What should the process be for allowing adequate input to MCPL for resources and services?
4. Should public library services and resources be basically free and accessible to all persons?
[Meeting rooms, parking, public transportation, qualifications]
- 5.A. Should MCPL charge for certain services? Yes or No
- 5.B. If so, what kind?
6. How can the county ensure adequate funding for library services and materials in the future?

This Fact Sheet was prepared by the LWVMC Library Study Committee: Elaine Apter, Co-Chair and Connie Tonat, Co-Chair, Marlene Cohn, Marjory Olson and Linda Silversmith.

The committee would like to thank all those many interviewees who donated their time and expertise to help with this study.

Resulting Positions:

LIBRARY SERVICES

We support county libraries as a basic community service that should be publicly funded. (2013) Support for:

1. Montgomery County Public Library is a basic community service. It should provide a variety of materials and resources to all residents of Montgomery County through public funding.
2. Libraries should provide access to print and electronic media, and a full line of services for children and those with special needs.
3. Information about library services and programs should be available at each library as well as electronically. There should be a variety of means for public input. Every branch library should be encouraged to have a Library Advisory Committee.
4. Services should largely be free. Fees that are acceptable include room rentals and longer term parking.
5. The library system should look into various sources of revenue in addition to county funding such as foundations and retention of fees by the library system.