



**TO:** North County Library Authority (NCLA), City of Los Altos / Town of Los Altos Hills City Library Commission, MaryJo Price, Rose Baiza

**FROM:** Library Commission Services Subcommittee

**SUBJECT:** NCLA Funds for County Strategic Initiatives / Request for revised legal opinion

Earlier this year, after much study, deliberation, and community input, the Santa Clara County Library announced its five-year Strategic Plan (2023-2028). This plan is intended to provide guidance, clarity, and focus on how its libraries should invest resources on the identified wants, preferences, and needs of its current users as well as create opportunities to expand its user base.

On January 30, 2023, the NCLA considered four options about funds collected through the parcel tax outlined in Measure L, including:

- Stop collecting the parcel tax
- Use the excess funds to extend open hours for both libraries
- Continue to collect the parcel tax until 2029-2030
- Use funds to restore square footage and services to the Main Library

The publication of the Strategic Plan provides us with several important options for consideration. We discuss these below. The October 3, 2022, opinion, titled *Consideration of Use of NCLA Funds Relating to Los Altos Library*, was focused on the proposed expenditure as presented to the Commission on July 18, 2022. In a nutshell, the NCLA used as a justification that the public at large lost out because of the needs of the Friends of the Los Altos Library operation inside the Main Library.

We respectfully request that the NCLA seek a revised opinion to determine whether the funds could be spent as outlined below which is more in line with the

*“augmentation of the public library services for the benefit of the inhabitants”* to specifically address Santa Clara County’s strategic objectives of:

- Create enchanting and interactive children's spaces to instill a joy of learning
- Use innovative service models to connect with community members
- Spark discovery with new technology
- Design and implement flexible public spaces that encourage library visits and elevate patron experiences

## **DISCUSSION OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

### **Create enchanting and interactive children's spaces to instill a joy of learning**

Public safety is paramount and effective learning can only occur in safe environments. While our librarians are ever vigilant, and the current layout of the library is not overtly dangerous, the current layout is not amenable to safety.

In separate incidents, 6-year-old boys were sexually assaulted in the bathrooms of a public library in Riverside and San Francisco. Visibility is key to protecting our children, youth, and other vulnerable patrons.

We need to revise our existing lobby and children’s area to maximize visibility; minimize or eliminate spaces where children and youth cannot be seen; and establish policies and procedures for access to and use of the space.

Libraries throughout the United States have come up with innovative solutions. A library in New York built a distinct children’s area with a children’s-only bathroom. The Avon Free Public Library has a family restroom, with a baby changing area, a separate stall, and a little kids' toilet. Bay Village Branch of Cuyahoga County Public Library has a Children’s Space with doors to reduce noise, and a family bathroom attached to the Children’s Space.

Supporting children’s literacy and self-led learning is paramount. Effective use of library space has never been more critical.

Other libraries have created enchanting areas, especially for early readers:



Creative Reading Spaces



Children's Garden



Aquarium



Dynamic Early Learning Spaces



In contrast, children entering the children's section of the Los Altos Library walk through double doors that are propped open, allowing sound to travel through the library. The space lacks a playful design, bold colors, or an interactive landscape that inspires creativity.

The growth in our teen population also provides us with the need to provide adequate space for studying and tutoring. Other libraries have provided space for these purposes:



Library tutor rooms



Library group study rooms

In contrast, the Los Altos Library provides one large room for teen study. Tutors often tutor students in the open leading to a lack of privacy and noise.

Measure L was designed in part to supplement the ability of the Santa Clara County Library system to purchase books and materials tailored to our community’s specific interests and for any other expenditure necessary to uphold the level of service. The population of Los Altos and Los Altos Hills has increased by over 2600 people from 2010 to 2020 with a corresponding increase in the number of children<sup>1</sup>. We would recommend that the increase in population, especially that of children, means that we are no longer providing the same level of service to children that we did in 2010.

## **Use innovative service models to connect community members with the library**

We are a country of immigrants.

Over 33.52% of residents speak a language other than English. The non-English languages spoken by the largest group are Asian and Pacific Island languages, which are spoken by 26.42% of the population.

Many libraries have established collections and programs to serve the needs of library users whose native language is not English. For example, the Cupertino Library has a non-English language collection and hosted an Exhibit on the History of Chinese American Women. The Gilroy Library has the largest Spanish Language collection in the Santa Clara County Library.

We recommend that the library provide an effective, balanced, and substantial collection for our residents. This would include purchasing materials in the languages, dialects of the groups served, and acquiring materials in a variety of formats, which may include print, audio, audio-visual, and computer software as appropriate. We also propose direct social and cultural community activities

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/losaltoscitycalifornia>

toward the Asian and Pacific Island communities. Programs such as concerts of ethnic music, exhibitions, and demonstrations of traditional arts and crafts may be considered appropriate examples. Finally, library staff working with patrons who have limited English abilities should be multilingual to provide effective service.

## **Spark discovery with new technology**

Given our location in history, time, and space, it makes sense for us to fund new technologies, new services, new ways to use old services, old ways to use services we never knew existed for the benefit of the community at large.

Funds should be brought to bear on this initiative as needed, creating agile workspaces for discovery, using the same in innovation.

We need to think bigger and bring in the entire community, especially businesses and local institutions. Holding an important role in our community's health, it's imperative that we shore up the intellectual capital available to us to meet our mission. Monies are only part of the solution.

## **Design and implement flexible public spaces that encourage library visits and elevate patron experiences.**

In the last year, our two libraries have been at the forefront of the creation of flexible public spaces. This needs to continue.

By example, the Library Commission recently voted to recommend a plan for the enhancement of Woodland Library. This proposal serves the needs of the inhabitants, providing important study and gathering places for our children. This recommendation is in line with other recommendations by the Commission. Its input needs to be considered.

We also launched a self-service program which allows vetted patrons to use Woodland Library without direct supervision. This program is innovative and was community supported. Services such as these, as they emerged should not be limited by an extremely narrow interpretation of the JPA.

## **Conclusion**

Measure L specifies that funds be used for “*augmentation of the public library services for the benefit of the inhabitants.*” The interests of our community have evolved since the adoption of Measure L by the electorate.

Please re-evaluate the current legal opinion to be more inclusive of the services needed by your constituents, recognizing the true purpose of the NCLA Joint Powers Agreement.

Thank you,

Pierre Bedard, Julie Crane, Christine Fawcett  
Library Commission Service Subcommittee