



September 13, 2023

Dear President Strickler and Members of the Library Board,

This letter is to bring you up to date on activities during the months of July and August 2023 and to provide a look forward to some of the activities, programs, policy change request, future plans and contingency plans we are working on in the coming months.

## Programs and Activities

### Summer Reading Program

Summer Reading Program and activities made for a busy June and July at the Library. Across all locations the number of patrons enrolled increased. We also experienced a larger number of participants finishing the entire program by claiming all three prizes. Special thanks to the hard work by staff to continue making the program a success and to sponsors like the Friends of the Alameda Library, Tuckers, and Subpar.

Number of Patrons Enrolled			
	2022	2023	% Change
Main	1794	2099	+17.0%
Bay Farm Island	403	536	+33.0%
West End Branch	255	328	+28.6%

Number of Finishers			
	2022	2023	% Change
Prize 1	1318	1628	+23.5%
Prize 2	1025	1432	+39.7%
Prize 3	778	1357	+74.4%

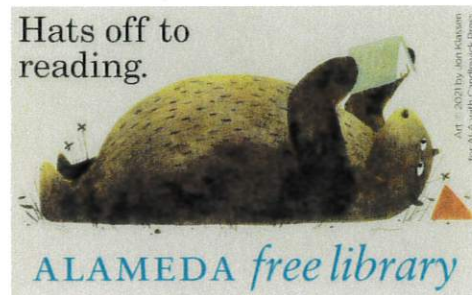
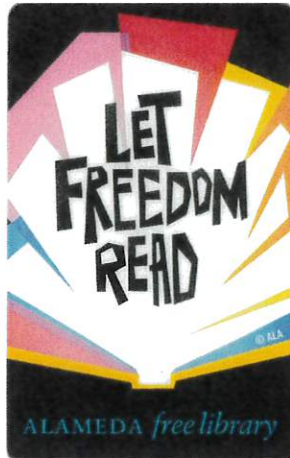
### National Library Sign Up Month

September is National Library Card Sign-Up Month. This year, staff is going to challenge themselves to double the number of average monthly library card registrations, which is 1,229 new cards for the month of September.

Staff members will be attending a variety of outreach events around town, including:

- 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten push at all three locations. Families participating will receive prizes such as stickers, Read to Your Bunny books, refrigerator magnets, give away books, tote bags, and rhyming books in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Russian.
- School Resources Liaison will be doing Library Card Drives at multiple elementary schools.
- Teen Librarian will be onsite at several high school events.
- Staff will be visiting other City departments.
- City of Alameda Employee Benefits Fair 9/12.
- Rhythmix PAL in the Park @ Chochenyo Park 9/23.

To help us meet our goals we have two brand new library card designs to choose from. Featuring the ALA "Let Freedom Read" design that draws attention to the harms of censorship, and the artistry of the esteemed Caldecott-winning author and illustrator Jon Klassen.



We would appreciate it if Board Members can spread the word on their social media or with their friends, and neighbors.

## **Policy Change Request – Remove use of Collection Agency**

### **Background**

Patrons can check out library materials for three weeks, with two automatic renewals, unless the item is on hold. If a patron does not return the book after 3 weeks from the due date, the item is considered lost and the patron is charged for the cost of the item plus a \$5 processing fee, and a \$10 collection charge. At this point, if the patron owes more than \$25 on their account, account gets sent to a collection agency. However, accounts in collections do not affect patron credit scores.

In 2016, the three major Credit Reporting Agencies stopped allowing the reporting of debt that did not arise from a consumer contract or agreement to pay. This included, but was not limited to certain fines, tickets, and other assessments. Examples include, library fees, parking tickets, speeding tickets, and court fees or fines.

### **Proposal**

After discussing this issue with the Library Senior Leadership, we concluded that it is time to stop the practice of sending patron accounts to collections. Doing so will increase accessibility and improve relationships with patrons.

The library incurs a \$10 collection fee, which covers the cost of reporting accounts to a collection agency. This fee is transferred to the patron's account to ensure that the library's expenses remain balanced. However, akin to fines, imposing an additional \$10 charge on top of the book replacement cost seems overly harsh and punitive. By eliminating this service, patrons will only be responsible for covering the book's price and a \$5 processing fee. In September 2019, exactly three years ago this month, the Alameda Free Library stopped overdue fines as a means to enhance accessibility. Eliminating the collections penalty aligns with this same principle of promoting access for all patrons.

Furthermore, we have encountered community grievances both in the past and more recently, which were conveyed to us by a member of the Friends of the Alameda Library Board and the Alameda Peeps community. Direct quotes from families include, "The act of threatening to involve a collection agency due to an overdue book seems morally questionable and doesn't align with the library's admirable principles."

There will still be the repercussions if patrons do not return the books in a timely manner. Long overdue or lost items remain on the account until patrons return the material or pay for the replacement. They will be unable to borrow anymore materials and will be locked out of using electronic resources, and computer use. This penalty is fair and does not require any additional costs to the patron account. Given all these reasons, there is no compelling need to utilize the collection agency service.

On the September 13 meeting, I will ask for the Library Board for feedback, input, and a vote on this policy change.

## **Library All Staff Meeting**

We will be having the All-Staff Meeting on Monday, October 9<sup>th</sup>. I would like to invite two Library Board members and two Friends of the Alameda Library Board members to attend for a meet and greet. I understand you all have busy schedules but if one or two of you can attend that would be great. I know lots of staff would like to put meet and put faces to the names of the Board members. I will share the agenda during our board meeting.

## **Library Projects Updates**

- Automated Materials Handler (AMH) – Met with three different vendors, Envisionware, Lyngsoe, and Tech Logic. We also visited a couple different locations to see the AMH in action. Laura Klatt is working on the Request for Quote and is on track to be submitted by the end of October.
- Laptop Lending Program – Visited the company Laptops Anytime in Hayward to see their production facility. They are a sole source on the type of laptop lending program we want to install. I'm working on the contract now. Hope I can have the contract done soon so it can launch at the end of the calendar year.
- Expansion Hotspot Lending Program – The hotspot lending program expansion is complete thanks to Lead Library Technician Marina Balingit. All 30 hotspots have been deployed and within two days all the hold requests were picked up by the patrons.
- The door counters at all three locations require an upgrade. We've already met with Sensource, a global company specializing in people counters, and obtained quotes from them. Notably, Sensource serves clients such as SFPL and the Contra Costa County Library System. By transitioning to Sensource door counters, we can monitor patron activity on an hourly basis, which will enable us to make informed, data-driven decisions. This includes determining when additional/reduced staffing might be necessary, evaluating whether we should consider adjusting our opening hours by either opening later or earlier, and more.



## Library Plans for Expansion Update

### Seed and Tool Library

The City hired Griffin Structures as the Project Manager. I asked about introductions, but the Assistant City Manager suggested it would make sense when the design team is on board early next year. In the meantime, I would like to work with Thushan and Sara on formulating the draft survey to the community.

### Alameda Point Expansion

Met with the leasing managers at the Aero Building and the cost for rental on a 2500sq ft space is \$7,500/month, which was beyond our budget so won't be going that route. We are still in talks with the Radium Runway group. They had their grand opening on the weekend of September 26. They will have more events throughout the year and one suggested Library tie-in is the Alameda Story Slam on Thursday, Oct. 12 from 7pm-830pm. We can have a booth or table set up there to promote library services.

### Library Hours Expansion

Expansion of library hours has been a part of the library's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. The City Council also suggested an increase of hours across all locations would be a good service to the community. I would like to work on a plan that can scale up operations and increase equitable accessibility, while being fiscally responsible and mindful for economic uncertainties. If plan is feasible would like to get City Council Approval for Mid-year or Mid-cycle budget.

## City of Alameda Strategic Plan Update

These Library related items are on the *draft* for the strategic plan:

- Plan and construct a branch library at Alameda Point.
- Fund and construct a tool and seed lending library at Jean Sweeney Open Space Park.
- Reimagine and update community library spaces, including teen room and computer lab.
- Increase access to technology through library lending programs.
- ~~Expand programming space at the West End Branch Library.~~
- ~~Assess Needs and consider Bay Farm Library expansion.~~

The four bullet points on top will be part of the City Strategic plan. I requested to remove the fifth and sixth item so I can focus more on the expansion of the presence at Alameda point and the tool and seed lending library. West End Branch expansion of the programming space is scheduled to happen by the end of November, but in a smaller scale that didn't rise to the level of a strategic plan. If Bay Farm Library requires a larger programming space, they can use the room at Leydecker Park or the outdoor auditorium space adjacent to the library.

Library Board  
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## Friends of the Library

### Booksale

The Friends of the Library Big Book Sale will not be taking place at the O'Club this October. They do not have enough books to fill the O'Club and not enough volunteers to staff. It will now be held in the Stafford Room on October 26-28. The hours will be:

- Thursday, October 26 – 10am-5pm
- Friday, October 27 – 10am-5pm
- Saturday, October 28, 10-4

### Library Café

On August 14, the Café started selling pastries and cookies from Firebrand Bakery. In addition, the café is expanding hours to 10:00am (except Wednesday) and will open on Saturdays. Per Susan Schonberg, "For the week ended Saturday the 19th, We had over \$350 in sales of our new treats, and sales were up 2-4 fold every day of the week. Total sales last week were just over \$600 including tips, which compares to the previous month's total sales of \$840." So far it has been a successful launch for the café.

The Café volunteers obtained the 500 signatures required to apply to rename the Dewey Café. If the City Manager approves the application, then it is the responsibility of the Library Board to make recommendations for potential names. Naming a new or unnamed City Facility requires a four-step public process with three meetings, two public outreach surveys in between, and a final meeting with City Council. The first meeting could take place on the November Library Board meeting.

If you have any questions about the items to be considered at the Board meeting, or if you would like to discuss these or any other items, please email me at [mromero@alamedaca.gov](mailto:mromero@alamedaca.gov) or call me at 510-747-7730.

Sincerely,



Marlon Romero  
Acting Library Director