

## Library Hosts Meeting to Discuss Future Funding



More than 60 guests, including City leaders, business owners and community members, gathered at the Central Library, January 12, 2012 to learn about future sustainable funding options for the Denver Public Library.

City Librarian Shirley Amore welcomed everyone, thanked them for their interest in the Library, and presented statistics, including the fact that more than 4 million people visited the Library in 2010 and checked out 9.3

million books and other materials.

"The demand for information remains high, even though the format keeps changing," Amore said, citing that there were 30,000 eBooks checked out in December alone.

### Budget shrinking

Amore stressed that while demand remains high, the Library's budget has been shrinking.

"We have cut hours across the system," she said, adding that 18 of the Library's 23 branches are open only 32 hours per week, and that one branch is open 36 hours per week. Four branches are open 48 hours. "Unless there is a solution to the City's structural budget problem," Amore said, "the Library will be faced with making more tough decisions about reducing service hours or closing branches."



Library Commission President Kevin O'Connor spoke about the Library's budget situation and his love of libraries, and began by telling the audience, "Libraries are in my blood. I see libraries as a living room for dreamers."



O'Connor explained that Library Commissioners published a [white paper in 2011](#), outlining the Library's funding situation and the difficult decisions facing the Commission, putting forward two options:

- A dedicated mill levy for library service and staying within the City structure
- A dedicated mill levy and creating a separate library district

"We know that in cities where there is a library district, they aren't looking at layoffs or reducing hours," O'Connor said. "We need to present a gift of sustainable funding for libraries to the people of Denver. That would make us a world class city."

### **Facing budget challenges**

Denver City Budget Director Brendan Hanlon gave a budget overview and an update on the City's Structural Financial Task Force, a group of City officials and business leaders, charged with presenting recommendations to the Mayor on how to resolve the budget gap.



"We are faced with challenges," Hanlon said. The City has had to close more than a \$400 million gap for City services over the last few years." "The Task Force is looking at dynamic ideas from across the City." The Task Force is set to release its findings on January 23.

### **Library district directors share expertise**

Eloise May, Director of Arapahoe Library District, and Jamie LaRue, Director of Douglas County Libraries (district), spoke about the differences between a library district, and dedicated funding, but staying within the City.



LaRue started off with a quick survey of the room, assessing how much people typically pay per month on information, entertainment, and social connection. "It would only cost taxpayers about \$4-\$5 per month per household to fund a Denver Public Library district," he stated, "while many of you have indicated that you pay between \$100 and \$500 per month on items such as cell phones, internet, and cable alone."

"One aspect I like about a library district is that there is no layer of government between the person who walks into the library and the people who are running the library," he said. "There is a great deal of accountability." He added that "library districts outperform municipal libraries according to research conducted by the Colorado State Library." He used Douglas County as an example relating that when he was hired as the Director of the County Library, it was one of the worst libraries in Colorado. Twenty years later, as a library district, it is rated one of the best libraries in the country.

May added that with districts, there is no "spend it or lose it," and districts can do long-term budget planning, which allows for consistent level of service year-to-year. "Another advantage is that there is a single purpose board solely focused on providing library services." She admitted, however that, "any funding increase depends on elections."



Denver Public Library Friends Foundation Mike King concluded the meeting and told the group, "I wouldn't be the person I am today if not for the Library." He added that he would love for his son to be able to ride his bike to the local branch library as he did when he was growing up. "It's high time we fund our libraries at the appropriate level," King said. "It's time to take action. Let's join together and make something happen."

For more information visit <http://denverlibrary.org/budget>