



## Salem Public Library Renovation Project

### Salem Residents Offer Views on Library Design

### The City of Salem Invites Public Input

Salem Public Library has been listening to Library patrons and the community at large on their hopes for the upcoming renovation of the Library building — including the design of Library space and services offered within its walls.

Salem voters approved a bond measure in 2017 to retrofit the Library to withstand a seismic event. This seismic retrofit provides a simultaneous opportunity to upgrade Library facilities to better serve current and projected community needs and interests. (See <https://www.cityofsalem.net/library-upgrade>.)

Several recent initiatives to solicit public input on priorities for use of spaces and features in the main Library building have engaged Salem residents. People also were asked about their favorite programs and collections, as well as community use of Library facilities. These initiatives included:

- *A 2018 community survey of Library use to deepen understanding of Library customers and Salem residents*

Survey results highlight ways to engage current users with relevant programs, materials and services, as well as to attract new users who have yet to discover all the Library has to offer. For survey results, go to <https://www.cityofsalem.net/library-upgrade>, under “What We’ve Learned”, and click on [survey of community Library use](#).

- *A Library Open House (January 31, 2019) presenting results of the community Library use survey, and soliciting feedback on hopes for the future of the Library building, favorite parts of the Library’s collections, and preferences for the interim Library location (for Library services during construction)*

[Click here](#) for **word cloud** summary of public input.

- *A survey offered online and in print, in both English and Spanish, (February 12-26, 2019)*



**Hopes described for the future of the main Library building**

The survey invited input on priorities for improving/adding Library features and spaces, as well as favorite Library programs and services, and changes to increase Library use. (Complete [Survey Monkey](#) results are [available here](#).)

- *A community Open House (February 19, 2019) featuring a presentation on diverse architectural approaches to Library design by Laura Klinger of Hacker Architects, lead architect for the Library renovation project*

The fifty participants provided feedback on desired improvements/additions to the Library building, and what they value most about the Library's spaces, features, programs, services and collections. (Summary of [community meeting comments available here](#).)

- *Listening sessions involving project architects with Library staff, Library Advisory Board, Friends of the Library and the Library Foundation produced advice on Library improvements, including design elements to improve visitor experience and Library functions. (See [available list](#) of "Top 10 Programming Themes".)*

This feedback is supplemented by recent statistics on circulation and turnover in the Library's collections ([click link](#) to view [circulation/turnover report](#)) and will include results of upcoming Open Houses on Library renovation design options (late April) and unveiling of the final Library design (fall 2019).

## Key Findings

Public responses to date confirm that people have diverse preferences in what they value most about the Library's spaces, features, programs, services and collections, and what they would like to see improved.

- For example, answers to the question "How Important is it to you that the following features and spaces of Salem Public Library be improved?" show that all spaces and features are viewed as somewhat or very important. *This underscores the importance of **flexible space** in the final Library design — space that can serve multiple functions or be easily repurposed over time.* (See Question #1 in [Survey Monkey](#) summary, [available here](#)).
- Another consistent finding was the desirability of free parking. *Nearly 88 percent of survey respondents say "free parking" is important to increased Library use — a finding borne out in other feedback.*
- *Recent statistics show upward trends in circulation/turnover of the Library's collections.* Books remain central to the Library's collections and comprise the lion's share of its circulation. While many respondents express interest in maintaining/growing a vibrant book collection, the highest growth in collection use is in resources other than books (e.g., eBooks, CDs, audiobooks, DVDs, etc.). This is especially true of younger Library users.
- *About 25 percent of households in the Library's service area have an active Library card, and Salem's population is expected to grow around six percent over the next five years.* This presents an opportunity for the library to add 5,000 new users. The biggest growth potential in Library users is elementary school age children and their parents and other younger adults (age 25-45).

- *Library services for children are of high value to the community as a whole.* The community survey also shows a strong linkage between people who were exposed to libraries as children and those who use libraries as adults, another incentive for the Library to maintain a vibrant space/program for children and teens.
- *While less statistically significant, many people express a strong attachment to the Library's art collection, including the etched glass panel.*
- Other comments include feedback on placement of computers (in ample, private work spaces throughout the Library, rather than collected in a single room), interest in developing a collection of "things" (from tools to cooking utensils), a desire for use of natural light, comfortable furniture in the reading room, a closer connection between spaces for children and teens, improved safety around the Book Return, a covered walkway between the Library and the parking lot, and a café on Library premises. For others, the availability of public meeting and study areas are among the Library's most important services.

## Who We Heard From

In weighing these findings, it's important to keep in mind who responded to opportunities to provide input, and whose voices were not heard.

The community survey on Library use is most representative of *all* Salem residents, providing information on Library use and non-use across a broad demographic spectrum. Even in this survey, views of non-English speakers, and those who have yet to use the Library, are underrepresented.

The online/paper survey attracted over 300 respondents, but most are motivated, frequent Library users (55 percent use the Library weekly). More important, this sample was heavily weighted toward an older demographic: (37 percent of respondents are over age 65; 68 percent do not have children living in their homes). The Open Houses attracted a similar cohort of older, frequent Library users.

## Future Listening Efforts

Salem Public Library and City staff plan to continue conversations about how the Library can best serve community needs. Initiatives are underway to obtain feedback from parents of young children and from non-English speaking families. Public input will inform upcoming decisions about use and design of the Library building, as well as future Library programs, collections and services.