

Wells Branch Community Library District

Recovery and Development Plan: 2021-2022

Who we are:

Wells Branch Community Library District is a Special Purpose District, created by local election on August 8, 1998 and regulated by Texas Local Government Code 326. The district is a stand-alone government funded primarily by sales tax (0.5%) and governed by an elected Board of Trustees.

Demographic information was collected from city-data.com and reflects the entire zip code 78728. This does not match district boundaries exactly, but is reflective of the community. These numbers are 2019 estimates. Compared to state averages, Wells Branch community is younger and more likely to rent, move, and have a college degree.

- population 21355, up from 20299 in 2010 and 17298 in 2000
- 96% of adults have a diploma and 47% have at least a 4 year college degree
- average household income is \$60,219
- 66% residents speak English at home, 21% speak Spanish at home
- 19% were born outside the United States
- 22% have moved within the last year, 78% have moved within the last 5 years

Our Core Values

- We create a welcoming and safe space for gathering and learning.
- We promote literacy, lifelong learning, community and diversity with a variety of materials and programs designed to enhance the lives of our patrons.
- We adjust and grow in response to community needs.
- We fight the digital divide with access to technology and training.
- We provide equal access and privacy to everyone.

Our Long Range Plan

Traditionally, the Library District maintains a Long Range Plan that describes goals and objectives for five years into the future. This plan has components for the physical facility, collection/circulation, programs/services, personnel, technology, and budget/administration. Our most recent plan covered 2016-2020. Almost all of the goals and initiatives set forth in that plan were completed. We planned to write a new plan in 2020 to cover 2021-2025.

On March 16, 2020, the Wells Branch Community Library District was forced to close its doors in response to the global pandemic. Fifteen months later, with services partially restored, COVID19 is still a threat to community health and safety. These extraordinary circumstances have led to changes in the way people work, learn and gather that will have long-term impacts for library services. It has also necessitated a deep scaling-back of library plans, programs and services and continual re-evaluation as resources and needs are constantly changing.

Programs & Services

Prior to March 2020:

The WBCL was open 7 days and 61 hours per week for browsing, gathering and studying. In 2019 we had 104154 people through the doors. There is no fee for residents of Texas to get a library card.

The library is very program focused with daily offerings. Prior to closure, our weekly schedule included 10 story time programs, 3 elementary enrichment programs and 2 adult DIY programs. Monthly offerings included 3 teen programs, 2 book clubs, 3 computer workshops, 3 language groups, 4 yoga sessions and a resume workshop. We had a monthly cultural presentation (First Fridays) with dance/music, regular series' of special interest programming (i.e. gardening), and a Family Craft Night each month called Try-It. 2019 programs included:

- 597 children's programs attended by 14527 people
- 14 YA programs attended by 179 teens
- 291 adult programs attended by 2190 people

During the Pandemic: In March 2020, the library was completely closed with only digital and virtual access for patrons. All programs were cancelled.

Within weeks, we set up a system for contact-free circulation and reading recommendations, tech support over the phone, and more. We set up safety and quarantining systems for materials. Storytimes, reading groups, and special programs began via Facebook right away, and some transitioned to Zoom for interactive participation in July 2020. Our archived virtual programs are housed in a digital storytime room now for families to access at their leisure, but will get smaller as publisher permissions expire.

Within 2 months, we launched interactive programming (using Zoom) and had to-go program kits for patrons to participate. We set up computer access by appointment for patrons. To meet the need for hands on crafts and science activities, we began offering to-go packs in time for summer reading 2020 which began June 1. We give out about 75 activity-to-go bags each week for crafts and science and have packs for adult DIY activities as well.

We added the Dial-A-Story platform for families. This is a means for patrons to call into a phone tree and hear librarians in a recorded story, poem, library newscast, joke, or chapter of a longer book.

November 2020 we had our first live outdoor program. Programs for the remainder of 2020 were cancelled as the concern level went from 3 (medium) to 5 (highest) for Travis County Health Department. As the numbers fell again, we resumed outdoor programming for special events in March 2021.

Starting May 2021, we are open some hours for grab and go browsing and the remaining hours are for contact free services and computer appointments. As of June 2021, we have some recurring programs meeting live outdoors (and some indoors when weather is inhospitable) as well.

Going Forward: It is our intention to resume regular business hours and services in the fall of 2021. This assumes that infection rates continue to fall and no new issues arise.

The library will continue reintroducing our live programs as quickly as can safely be done. Of special concern right now is that the overwhelming majority of our programming was attended by young children, who are not eligible to receive a vaccine and are thus the main population that can get sick and spread the virus.

To minimize patron contact and eliminate the need to handle money, all late fees have been suspended through the closure. Printing is free for up to 5 pages. Regular fee schedule may be reinstated, with notice, when we reopen for regular hours.

Starting in summer 2021, some live in-person programs for older children were held indoors. An option is available for families to elect an outdoor seating or to watch the program livestreamed.

We will simplify the circulation rules. Adding a Library of Things has created a number of special circulation rules that are cumbersome to explain and remember.

The Library of Things will be developed over 2021 and 2022.

- Increase the number of armchair traveler kits and games available.
- Monitor that we have adequate supplies of chargers and ereaders to meet community needs.
- Add a set of Wonderbooks, a Playaway read-along device
- Increase the number of wireless hotspots available to patrons

The LAB will be reopened for some regular weekly DIY programming in summer/Fall of 2021. By summer 2022, we hope to be hosting our previous weekly offerings as well as regular family crafts and special programs.

Book clubs, computer classes, and other adult programming will transition back to live in person in Fall 2021. This will include regular offerings for patrons who need assistance with our technology and databases and promotion of the enhanced digital library.

Storytimes and other programs for the youngest patrons will resume with some meeting outside in Fall 2021. Those will transition back indoors by Spring 2022.

With virtual learning and other hindrances to academic success, parents have increased requests for math assistance. We will launch programs in fall 2021 for elementary math tutoring.

The Family Place Play Area, along with its workshop series, will be evaluated for reopening quarterly.

Facility

Prior to March 2020: The 16,000 square foot library was opened in 2004. There are two buildings, the library proper and a separate facility which was originally available for private rentals and has been transitioned into a space for library programs, including our adult crafting space (the LAB). The gated front yard has picnic tables and some musical experience toys for young children. Outdoor breezeways are covered and offer fans and electrical outlets.

During the Pandemic: There were many repairs and upgrades during the closure. The HVAC units were upgraded to include a HALO air cleaning system that removes many germs from the circulating air. Furniture and storage in the children's area were replaced with smaller and sleeker options, allowing for a new run of shelving to house the youth graphic novels. The exterior was tuck-pointed, gutters replaced, and some uneven sidewalks were reworked to remove tripping hazards.

Going Forward: We will continue to make necessary repairs to an aging building and replace landscaping to beautify the grounds.

The library will be closed in the fall of 2021 for three weeks to accommodate a remodel. This is step 1 of the Long Range Construction Plan. All carpeting is being replaced and the two large cement service desks are being removed. We are flipping the nonfiction collection (currently in the back of the facility) and the YA collection (currently near the entrance). Moving teens to the back will give a sense of heightened privacy and reduce noise. It will also make it possible to close off that area in the future. The large circulation desk is being replaced by a much smaller welcome desk near the front door and a separate self-check station.

We will add a permanent engineered sun shade to the front lawn to make the yard safer and more pleasant for programming and families.

Collection and Circulation

Prior to the March 2020: The library spends a minimum of 10% of the budget each year on collection development and participates in continual purchasing, evaluating and weeding.

- Inventory is done annually in four sections over four days.
- In 2019, the library circulated 224707 items. Of those, 19365 were digital circulations.
- We offer digital circulation through Tumble Books, Overdrive, and Hoopla.
- The Texas State Library publishes standards for library collections to be basic, enhanced or comprehensive based on a number of criteria. The Wells Branch Community Library strives to always achieve comprehensive status.
- Our ultimate goal is a collection that is complete, balanced, current, and responsive to the needs and requests of our community.

During the Pandemic: Throughout the closure, we were able to continue purchasing and evaluating the collection. We have maintained regular inventory schedule.

Physical circulation was limited during the closure to items patrons requested from home which were gathered by staff for contact-free check-out. Returned items were also quarantined for safety according to the best science of the time. We began offering the service to adult patrons in April 2020 and extended to all accounts later in the year. The borrowing limits for each account were necessarily much lower than usual. Physical circulation in 2020 was 60962, down from 206220 in 2019.

Digital circulation increased dramatically to 31629 in 2020 from 25668 in 2019. In 2020, digital materials represented 34% of library circulation.

We reopened the doors for limited browsing hours summer 2021. At that time, we discontinued quarantining and returned circulation limits to pre-pandemic numbers.

We have introduced a 'Library of Things' during this period as well. As many patrons were working and learning from home, we began circulating a set of internet Hotspots. We also added board games and 'storytime in a bag' kits for families.

The DVDs were all organized and cataloged into an alphabetical system from the numerical by order of acquisition system that was in place.

Magazines were cataloged and put into the circulation system for patrons to search and reserve.

Going Forward: We are committed to devoting a minimum of 10% of the budget to collection development. Current trends for digital circulation have caused us to increase spending in that area by 50% from 2019 to 2021 and reduce the print spending accordingly.

The additional Library of Things (hotspots, games, ukuleles, programs in a bag) will be continued and expanded according the community input.

Technology

Prior to March 2020:

Fourteen public access computer stations were available for patrons to use for up to 3 hours per day with high speed internet connection and printing available. Those computers were managed with software to protect patron privacy and secure the network from malicious or unintentional damage. In 2019, there were 14088 sessions on our public machines. The document station let people copy, print, scan and fax. Wi-Fi was available in the building and on the grounds 24/7.

The catalog and collection were managed with Biblionix Apollo which incorporated several add-ons like Gabbie Text-a-Librarian service, auto calls and text notifications, and Novelist book recommendations. Databases available include the TexShare Database Research Suite and Mango Language Learning Platform.

Digital Library, which includes Overdrive, Tumblebooks and Hoopla, increased in popularity every year by approximately 1%. For 2019, digital circulation comprised about 11% of total circulation, which was 10% in 2018 and 9% in 2017.

During the Pandemic: During the pandemic closure, there was a significant ice storm that caused power fluctuations throughout the area. The patron server became unreliable after that. Both the patron server and staff server were replaced with a more robust virtual system. While patrons could not physically browse and extensively borrow during the closure, the digital library remained completely available and usage increased dramatically.

Going Forward: It is the intention to reopen in September 2021 with services that were in place before the pandemic closure. That includes walk-up computer access, the quick print station, and document station for scanning/copying/faxing, which have been unavailable since March 2020. Unfortunately, additional surges of infection in the area may delay a full and safe reopening. We will continue the mobile printing service in either case, as it has been popular.

Personnel

Prior to March 2020: We had four MLS librarians working 155 hours per week, Four assistant managers working 110 hours per week, six library associates working 64 hours per week, and a bookkeeper/building manger working 25 hours per week. We also had an average of 68 hours each week of volunteer assistance.

All staff were First Aid/ CPR/ AED certified and managers were trained to be Deputy Voter Registrars. Employees are all cross-trained to work at any of the three service desks and perform all basic circulation and technical services. Employees regularly attended conferences, local group meetings and specific workshops for continuing education and networking. Staff also took advantage of archived webinars for targeted learning.

During the Pandemic: We were incredibly fortunate not to lose any of our managers or assistant managers through the crisis, but three of our entry level part time employees did move on.

Volunteers were not in the library from March 2020 until June 2021. Those who have come back were completely retrained.

Everyone's CPR/First Aid/ AED certifications, as well as DVR training, expired during the pandemic.

All in-person meetings and conferences were cancelled during the pandemic. Many transitioned to a virtual setting and staff took advantage of some opportunities.

Going Forward: We will replace part time associates in 2021. We will continually reevaluate staffing needs and hours quarterly.

Staff will be given the opportunity to renew CPR/First Aid/ AED training and DVR certification during the August 2021 remodel closure. Managers will also be encouraged to become notaries as that is a service that is regularly requested in the area.

Conferences, courses and workshops are starting to open again. We will resume sending employees to all applicable opportunities for inspiration and networking.

Budget

Prior to March 2020: The library is funded primarily by sales tax; we collect one half of one percent of sales within the district boundaries. The district had enjoyed steady increases year over year of income that allowed us to build a cushion for emergencies and capital improvements. We paid off the comptroller overpayment from 2010-2012 and the mortgage, so the district was carrying no long term debt.

During the Pandemic: Income has fluctuated greatly and there has been an overall decline in spending, which translates to a decline in sales tax income. While the library has not been hit as hard as some industries, there is a real reduction in income from the recent past years. Fortunately, the savings we have in place and reduced costs (few performers to pay, less janitorial services, fewer staff hours, less consumables being used) meant that we did not dip into those savings.

Going Forward: We establish and follow a budget each year and will continue to do so. We set the budgeted income for 2021 to be 10% less than 2020. We will reevaluate income forecasts annually. We also have an independent audit of our financial transactions and position every year, required by law.

Approved by Board of Trustees August 12, 2021

Potential Future Developments

Improvements that could be achieved without major investments of capital or facility closure

Re-instate open LAB hours and access for patrons to use the tools showcased in our DIY series of programs. As demand increases, we could also offer expanded programming for the LAB with guest experts teaching and/or meet-up crafting groups hosting events in the space. We could also hold special events for teens and tweens in the LAB on specific equipment.

Further develop customization of outdoor spaces for passive and program use, perhaps adding cooling/misting fans or a heating element to make them more comfortable year round.

Expand the digital branch by incorporating services such as acorn, kanopy, infobase, eRead Texas, or other offerings as funds, availability, and community interest support.

Offer field trips and library tours for schools, senior living communities, daycares, etc.

Create and deliver off-site programming to meet non-users where they are and give them information about the library.

Host a meet & greet regularly (once per month?) for community members to come discuss library possibilities and concerns with management. This could be like the Coffee with the Principal programs they have at local schools. It could even be held in local restaurants as a social outreach each quarter.

Along with other area libraries, create a team of fresh eyes to walk through spaces and see what the staff may not see. Ask for feedback and address the issues. This is similar to an image audit.

Create a Library Ambassador program with 2 branches. The first would be for live tabling at community events, meeting people face to face and talking about the library. The second would be for purely social media ambassadorship, boosting library posts and messaging, and could be done by people who are at home on a computer and want to help but cannot come in person.

Continually improve hospitality by simplifying user experience, removing unnecessary barriers, and making processes and interactions more standardized.

Solicit meaningful input from the community, including those who do not use the library, to drive planning and expansions.

Long Range Construction Plan (over 5-10 years):

1. Remove large-footprint service desks, re-carpet entire library proper, and switch the shelving areas for Non Fiction and YA. This is scheduled for Fall 2021.
2. Enhanced Teen Area. The teen space will be relocated in 2021. Long term, we would like to add a glass wall, similar to what surrounds the children's area, for noise privacy. This is still major construction, but would not change any structural components of the building. Once that is in place, a media/gaming setup could be installed for special programs and for teens to use during regular hours without disturbing other patrons.
3. Added community room and expanded space by walling in the breezeway. This is major construction, as it would require HVAC, exterior walls, load bearing supports, and a change to the building's footprint.
 - a. If we enclose the breezeway and add a large community room on the street side of the enclosure, that would add space and service/program opportunities without compromising a lot of permeable groundcover. The facility was originally designed with two buildings, separated by the breezeway, for private rentals. Rentals were discontinued years ago, so that separation is no longer valuable.
 - b. Showcase community art as part of the expansion through the breezeway by installing fixtures specifically designed for rotating collections.
 - c. With the additional space created by walling in the breezeway, we could add private spaces (by reservation) for online job interviews or medical appointments. A private space with adequate technology and connectivity to effectively meet with potential employers, social workers, physicians, counselors, etc. would alleviate some of the more glaring inequalities of the digital divide. Space could also be allocated for self directed education as that has taken off in popularity of late
4. Expansion of the children's area into the current Reference Space to allow additional shelving and a separate work space for youth services. This is another major construction since it would involve moving a load-bearing wall.