

Fiscal Year in Review, Part 2

The following is part 2 of a review of the Columbus Public Library's October 1, 2019-September 30, 2020 fiscal year.

The 2019/2020 fiscal year also saw the continued development of a new library building project.

Outreach efforts were made the fall and winter of 2019/2020 with visits to service organizations, employee groups, book & coffee clubs, and community events to gather public input regarding library services and components to include in a new library. This re-launched development of a new library building project gave the community multiple opportunities to give feedback regarding space, programming, and services they enjoy and want to see expand.

Through the process of community engagement, the project expanded from a library to a community building. Encompassing the Library, community room, Art Gallery, City Hall offices, City Council Chambers, and leased space for a Children's Museum and coffee shop, the proposed building would bring together multiple entities in downtown Columbus to create community connections. This building would provide the community of Columbus with much needed gathering spaces, activities for families and individuals, access to technology, and opportunities to collaborate, study, be creative, and access entertainment and educational resources. This modern facility would provide opportunities to adapt and grow with the needs of the community for years to come.

Concept site and floor plans were presented to the community in the summer of 2020. An educational campaign was launched leading up to the November 3 general election where a special bond election would ask voters to approve the issuance of bonds to fund the library/cultural portion of the project. The educational campaign also informed voters that no additional taxes were needed to fund the development, construction, or furnishing of this building. These bonds would be paid using an existing half percent (½ %) sales tax that was approved by voters in 2016 for the exclusive purpose of constructing new fire, police, and library/cultural buildings.

The Columbus Library Foundation continues to raise funds for this project through private donations and grants. These funds will help to offset the public cost of the project.

Voters approved the issuance of bonds for the new building project. Because October 1 marked the start of a new fiscal year, results of the November 3, 2020 vote will be included in the summary of the 2020/2021 fiscal year. Details regarding the development of final plans for the library's temporary location as well as design details for the new building's exterior, floor plan, parking, etc. will also be included in next year's summary.

Also spanning both the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 fiscal years is Platte County's inter-local agreement with the City of Columbus for the Columbus Public Library to provide walk-in library and bookmobile service to residents outside city limits of Columbus and Humphrey. This inter-local agreement regarding the provision of library services, including a bookmobile, to residents outside of city limits was set to expire in June 2020. During the spring and early summer, a new contract was drafted and approved by both parties.

This current contract runs July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2023 with a stipulation that the July 1, 2021-June 30, 2023 years are pending a vote by rural county residents during the November 3, 2020 general election. The Platte County Board of Supervisors placed a question on the county's ballot regarding asking rural voters to vote "Yes" or "No" for this library services contract. A "Yes" vote results in the continuation of library service, including the bookmobile, through June 2023. A "No" vote would end library service, including the bookmobile, to rural residents.

This vote failed to pass so the current contract will expire June 30, 2021, ending library and bookmobile service to rural residents. Further details of the results of this election and the consequences thereof will be reported in next year's summary, as it falls in the 2020/2021 fiscal year.

Overall, October 2019-September 2020 was a busy year for the Columbus Public Library, albeit in a different way than previous years. Less programs were offered and attended, less people visited the library building, used the computers, and checked out material. However, if we focus on the positive impacts the library made this year in the lives of our community members, it was a great success. Whether it was finding the perfect books and movies to entertain the kids so Mom and Dad could work at home, or bringing joy to someone's lonely summer without their grandchildren, the library continued to serve the community in quiet, impactful ways. Those moments fulfill our mission to connect people with ideas, something we did every day. Thank you Columbus, for another fantastic year!