

Level of Service Standards -- Bellingham Public Library

June 1, 2018

From 2015 to 2018 the Bellingham Public Library (BPL) Board of Trustees has worked with library management to develop a series of Level of Service (LOS) standards in order to evaluate and determine how resources dedicated to the library measure up in regards to community needs and expectations. LOS standards were established in four major areas of library services:

- Library facilities—square footage per capita;
- Open hours per week for the Central Library and for the library branches;
- Library materials—expenditures per capita;
- Library staffing in FTE.

To develop these standards, peer libraries across the nation and libraries within the state of Washington were used as benchmarks. Comparisons with these libraries confirmed that BPL has a higher level of usage than the vast majority of these other libraries. This demonstrated use and demand from the local community also factored into the development of these LOS standards.

Each standard identifies three levels of service:

1. Low or minimal – needed to provide the most basic of library services;
2. Medium or operational – allows the library to provide all needed services;
3. High or optimal – allows the library to enhance services.

In 2017, BPL and the City of Bellingham initiated a sustainability funding study for the library's future. The consulting firm BERK was hired to conduct the study and produce a report—“Bellingham Public Library Services and Funding Models Study”, published December, 2017. On November 13, 2017, BERK presented findings from the report to the Bellingham City Council. At that meeting the City Council voted unanimously on the motion “...moved to direct the Administration to give recommendations to the Library Board of Trustees to move forward to Goal 2 {i.e., medium/operational} or 3 {i.e., high/optimal} as a priority.”

At the beginning of 2018, BPL is operating below the low/minimal standards for staffing, at the low/minimal standards of open hours for the central library and the branches, and slightly above the low/minimal standard for materials facilities¹. Upcoming budget requests will directly tie to a plan to attain the medium/operational standards over time. The standards listed on the following table are meant to represent an integrated approach to library services that need to be assessed and implemented in conjunction with each other.

¹ Facilities square footage includes the large auditorium and two basement meeting rooms at the Fairhaven branch, none of which is actively used for library programs or services. Subtracting this space would place library facilities below the low/minimal standard.

BPL Level of Service Standards

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Date of Adoption</u>	<u>Low/ Minimal</u>	<u>Medium/ Operational</u>	<u>High/ Optimal</u>	<u>Current 6/1/2018</u>
Library Facilities-- square ft./capita	1/19/2016	0.6 sf/cap	0.8 sf/cap	1.0 sf/cap	0.65 sf/cap
Open hours per week-- Central Library	6/21/2016	56 hr/wk	64 hr/wk	68 hr/wk	56 hr/wk
Open hours per week-- Branch Libraries	6/21/2016	28 hr/wk	36 hr/wk	40 hr/wk	28 hr/wk
Library Materials-- Expenditures per capita	3/21/2017	\$5.00/cap	\$7.50/cap	\$10.00/cap	\$5.50/cap
Library Staff FTE	3/13/2018	50 FTE	58 FTE	64 FTE	46 FTE

There are several factors to take into account when applying these standards to BPL's services.

- The standards are not meant to be addressed independently from each other. E.g., it is unrealistic to reach the medium/operational level of open library hours while operating at the low/minimal level of staffing FTE.
- The three levels within each standard are reference points within a continuum, or sliding scale. It is not expected that an increase from the low/minimum level to a higher level would happen in one fell swoop. Rather, that gain would be attained in incremental steps.
- The standards should be reviewed periodically by the BPL Board of Trustees to determine that they are still an accurate representation. A partial list of issues that should be examined when standards reviews are conducted include:
 - Levels of community use, such as volume of circulation, number of library visits, and program needs and participation;
 - Amount of open hours and number of library branches;
 - Library materials data---size and age of collections, holds ratios, turnover rate, etc.;
 - Implementation of new technologies and their effects on library services, staffing and space.
- The one standard that is very difficult to address incrementally is the library facilities standard. A significant addition of library facility square footage can happen only through a major project. However, there are small steps that can be taken to address facility needs, such as renovating existing space to make it functionally better and to utilize other community spaces for outreach services.