

Bellingham Public Library Level of Service Summary – April 2026 update

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Date of Adoption</u>	<u>Low/ Minimal 1</u>	<u>Medium/ Operational 2</u>	<u>High/ Optimal 3</u>	<u>Current Levels 2026 (pop 98,340)</u>
Library Facilities-- Square ft/capita	01/19/2016, Renewed 9/2022	0.6	0.8	1.0	.58
Open hours per week-- Total number per location	06/21/2016 Revised 5/2026	45	56	67	Central: 48 Fairhaven: 24 Barkley: 24 Bellis Fair: 23
Access hours per location:	06/21/2016 Revised 5/2026	Evening after 6 pm: 2 hours/week	Evening after 6 pm: 4 hours/week	Evening after 6 pm: 6 hours/week	Central: 0 Fairhaven: 0 Barkley: 0 Bellis Fair: 0
		Weekend: 8 hours	Weekend: 12 hours	Weekend: 16 hours	Central: 8 Fairhaven: 4 Barkley: 4 Bellis Fair: 7
		Weekday before 6 pm: 7 hours/day	Weekday before 6 pm: 8 hours/day	Weekday before 6 pm: 9 hours/day	Central: 8 Fairhaven: 4 Barkley: 4 Bellis Fair: 4 (Tues-Friday)
Library Materials-- Expenditures/capita	03/21/2017, Revised 8/2024	\$5.87	\$8.81	\$11.74	\$6.24
Library Staff Total FTE	03/13/2018	50	58	64	50.3

Note: the figures for each standard represent the minimum for each level of service. For instance, the Medium standard for Open hours per week / per location is 56-66.99 hours. Similarly, the Low standard for Library Staff Total FTE is 50-57.99 FTE.

2026 Library Facilities: Central Library 44,000 sf; Fairhaven Library (excluding the auditorium) 7,250 sf; Barkley Library 1,420 sf; Bellis Fair Library 4,553 sf. Total = 57,223 sf

Background

Established Level of Service Standards:

From 2015 to 2018 the Bellingham Public Library (BPL) Board of Trustees worked with library management to develop a series of Level of Service (LOS) standards to evaluate and determine how resources dedicated to the library benchmark against 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 Bellingham Public Library had a higher level of usage per capita than most libraries. This demonstrated use and demand from the community also factored into the development of these LOS standards. Each standard identifies three levels of service:

1. Low or minimal – needed to provide basic 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 "...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."

Revisions to the Standards:

From 2022 to 2026 the Bellingham Public Library (BPL) Board of Trustees worked with library management to review and revise the four established Level of Service (LOS) standards to reflect changes in community needs and, in the case of the Materials standard, a mechanism to adjust for inflation. A summary of changes is provided below:

- 2022: Library facilities – square footage per capita. 2016 standard was renewed without change.
- 2026: Open hours per week for the Central Library and for the library branches. 2016 standard was changed to one systemwide standard with updated LOS goals and the addition of evening, weekend, and weekday access expectations. Updated LOS goals were informed by a nationwide review of level of service standards for open hours and community feedback received since 2016.
- 2024: Library materials – expenditures per capita. Levels of service revised to include multiplier for inflation, with guidance to update every 3 years. The next update will be completed in 2027 for the years 2028, 2029, 2030.
- Library staffing in FTE. 2018 standard was not re-evaluated in this time period.