

Frequently Asked Questions About the Library's Redirection Effort

What changes were planned for Fairfax County Public Library?

The library had planned to begin testing a new organizational structure in the fall to meet its long-term strategic goals and address continuing budget cuts. The new structure was to have been beta-tested at Burke Centre Library and Reston Regional Library. It included a one-desk model of customer service, with cross-trained staff answering account and information questions, and increased programming conducted within the branch as well as in the community.

Why were you planning to change the library's structure?

There are multiple factors driving the need to make some changes. The way customers use the library has been changing over time; technology is having a major impact on library customers and staff; the county is still undergoing a budget crunch, and all county agencies are required to reduce their annual budgets. In the past five years the library has cut 27% of its budget from \$31,451,366 to \$27,091,526.

Libraries in general are at a pivotal crossroads as we are called upon to meet the changing needs of our customers, brought on by technology and the Internet while providing resources with shrinking tax dollars. Libraries all across the country are trying new ways of operating.

If the new service model proved successful, the library would have been able to meet county budget reductions without reducing library hours or eliminating staff. The new infrastructure would require fewer library staff since the library would use cross-trained employees to staff a single desk. The library would implement the changes over three to five years allowing retirement and resignation to lead to the reduced staffing levels and allowing time for the transition to occur.

If it had been implemented, would it have impacted how I use the library?

Customers would have their reference and library account questions answered at the same desk. Customers may have also noticed more staff circulating in the branch offering assistance to customers as needed. Eventually there would have been more programming in the branch and in the community.

When will the changes occur?

The one-desk model is already in use at Burke Centre Library and other testing was planned for the fall, but the project was suspended in September by the Library Board of Trustees.

What does beta testing mean?

Often used by computer companies to test new software in the field, the library planned to test a new way of doing business in two branches to see if the assumptions we've made about library usage and customer needs were accurate. We had planned to test in just two branches, a community branch and the busiest regional branch in the county. Adjustments would have been made to the model before rolling it out to the other 20 branches.

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www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library

What are the library's long-term strategic goals?

The library has been going through a process of self-review since the economic downturn caused severe and ongoing reductions to the library budget in 2009 as well as the elimination of 70 full-time library positions in 2010. We've streamlined our processes and eliminated some services including text a librarian, test proctoring, online homework tutoring and grant writing support. After working with a consultant and analyzing customer and staff surveys as well as other pertinent statistical data, the library produced a strategic plan that calls for more integration in the community, more emphasis on early literacy (helping children get ready to read), creating branches that reflect the dynamics of the communities where they are located and giving customers more input into programing and other services. You can read the strategic plan on the library website. <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/news/strategicplan.pdf>

If you use the new model, will staff still be able to answer reference questions?

Yes, all branches would continue to have trained staff to assist with reference questions. All of our front line staff would have been cross-trained so that more staff is able to answer both your account and reference questions.

Was the library planning to eliminate positions?

No employees are expected to lose their jobs with the library. The reduced level was to be attained over 3-5 years through resignation and retirement. (Over 30 percent of library staff is eligible for retirement through December 2015.)

The long-term vision is that the library will reduce the number of positions required to staff a branch during operating hours. We would have learned more about our staffing needs as this new model was tested.

Did you expect these changes to impact customer service at the branch, for example create longer wait times to check out books or get an answer to a question?

We expected the new organizational model to enhance the customer experience. Thanks to the self-check-out computers now in place and payment kiosks coming in December, many transactions will not require a staff person, freeing staff to meet different community and customer needs. However, we are committed to the highest level of customer service, and if longer lines did occur, we would have adjusted the staffing to accommodate customer needs. Since staff will be cross-trained, however, available staff on duty will be able to help out at the desk if it should get too busy.

Were you still planning to offer children's services?

Yes, the plan was to still offer a full range of children's services at every branch. We would have continued to have staff with expertise in children's literature able to recommend books to our young readers and parents looking for assistance with encouraging their children to read. The library planned to increase the level of programming for children, both in the library and in the community. During this test we planned to offer additional visits to the schools, to childcare centers and to Head Start classrooms. The educational needs of the community are very important to us.

Is it true that in the plan there will not be any traditional librarians in the library, i.e., staff with master's degrees in library science?

Today we employ some staff with a master's degree in library science (MLS), but the majority of our staff doesn't have that particular degree. We had fully anticipated that at a later date, when we were hiring new staff, we would have continued to hire those with advanced degrees, but the MLS would not have been a requirement. For some branch positions, it could have remained a preferred requirement. We anticipated hiring those with management, education, technology and business degrees, as well as those with a library science degree.

I understand that the plan called for changes to also be made to library programming, can you explain?

Currently, the library has branch staff that program as part of their duties, but under the new structure the library would have had full-time programming staff that planned and conducted programs in the branch and in the community. This would have increased the number of programs staff offered, for example impromptu storytimes, additional book talks in schools and more outreach.

Where can I address additional questions or concerns I may have?

You can email comments, questions or suggestions about anything library related to libcustomerservices@fairfaxcounty.gov.