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Press Release

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Board Approves Moving Forward on MAIN LIBRARY FOR THE 21st CENTURY Plan

At its regular meeting on November 14, 2006, the Board of Trustees for the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County approved moving forward with the *Main Library for the 21st Century* (ML/21) plan. This project is designed to achieve two key objectives: improved customer service to meet changing needs and demands through the adoption of a new service model, and reduction of operating expenses for the Main Library through a new staffing model.

The project is part of the *Strategic Plan 2004-2008: A Blueprint for the Future* and is driven by the Library's mission of "Connecting people with the world of ideas and information" and by its Vision. The Library's vision is to excel in customer service, be the first choice for information, anticipate and meet changing needs, assure equitable access to the Library's resources and services, and be a dynamic force in the community.

The plan is based on thorough analysis of extensive data gathered from multiple sources including statistical usage trends, customer surveys, documented observations of over 23,000 users, staff input, and benchmark studies of comparable public libraries. *ML/21* is an exciting and different new service model that is customer-focused, designed specifically for today's users, and emphasizes convenience and increased access to a broad spectrum of technology.

Reference Service

One of the key changes in the new Main Library plan would be in how reference service is handled. Reference questions have dropped 40% over the past 15 years, in large measure because customers prefer finding answers on their own and want everything to be convenient, fast, one-stop, and intuitive. The new Main Library model would have a central reference desk instead of 6 subject department reference desks and roving reference, whereby librarians would move about the Library to approach the customer rather than requiring the customer to come to the desk (this would also eliminate the barrier of furniture). Information kiosks installed throughout the building would allow customers instant online access, while a remote reference center would be devoted exclusively to staff responding to reference requests by phone or online to make service more efficient and uninterrupted. The nonfiction collection would be installed in straight Dewey order rather than divided into less intuitive subject departments, while a few specialized collections would be created to meet high demands—jobs, small business development, grants—to make it easier for customers to find materials and to facilitate browsing.

Genealogy & Local History Department

To capitalize on the unique materials and strengths of the collection a Genealogy & Local History Department would be created that will provide greater access to and in-depth research services in the areas of genealogy, river history & culture, Cincinnati history & culture, African American history & culture. Conservation, preservation, and digitization projects would be developed to assure access to valuable primary source materials and rare resources. The customer benefits would be more focused and comprehensive collections, greater accessibility, more available staff time to assist with in-depth research, expanded staff knowledge and training in defined areas, new products and content such as digitized collections.

Popular Library

Another significant change would be the creation of a Popular Library or a Library within the Library. It would combine high circulation, high demand materials that include fiction, audiovisual, and a sampling of nonfiction into a single popular library on the first floor with full circulation capabilities. Customer benefits would be a convenient, easily accessible, one-stop location that facilitates and encourages browsing, and provides fast service.

Technology Center

A Technology Center would be created to provide more convenient access to a computer, greater variety of software & technologies, more staff with expertise who can better assist customers and provide more technology training. This would entail consolidating most computer devices into one area, adding software and expand functionality, expanding time limits, providing staff dedicated to technology, and increasing computer training programs for the public.

Other Changes

Other changes would include the creation of quiet study areas with appropriate seating and furniture that are more conducive to reading and studying, with fewer distractions, and more conveniently located. A new Teen Center would provide a space with relevant collections, technology, physical space, and programs of interest to customers ages 12-18 with full circulation capabilities to meet the unique needs of teens. Homework Central would add a center adjacent to the Children's Center to offer tutoring, study areas, technology resources, and furniture conducive for studying and doing homework.

"*ML/21* is needed to address the changing ways customers use libraries today," said the Library's Executive Director Kim Fender. The project can be funded from the 2007 Budget as part of the Ongoing Maintenance and it is projected that these costs will be recovered within one to two years of facility alterations through the operational cost reductions. "All reductions in staffing associated with the plan will be achieved through attrition and reassignments when feasible," continued Ms. Fender. "We believe that not only service to our current customers will be greatly enhanced by these changes but that they will attract many new users, making the Main Library even more of a vital asset to the community."

✓ **Information about events at the Main Library and 41 branch libraries is available on the Internet site: www.CincinnatiLibrary.org.**