

Vision for the Future

# Library Strategic Plan

– May 2012 –



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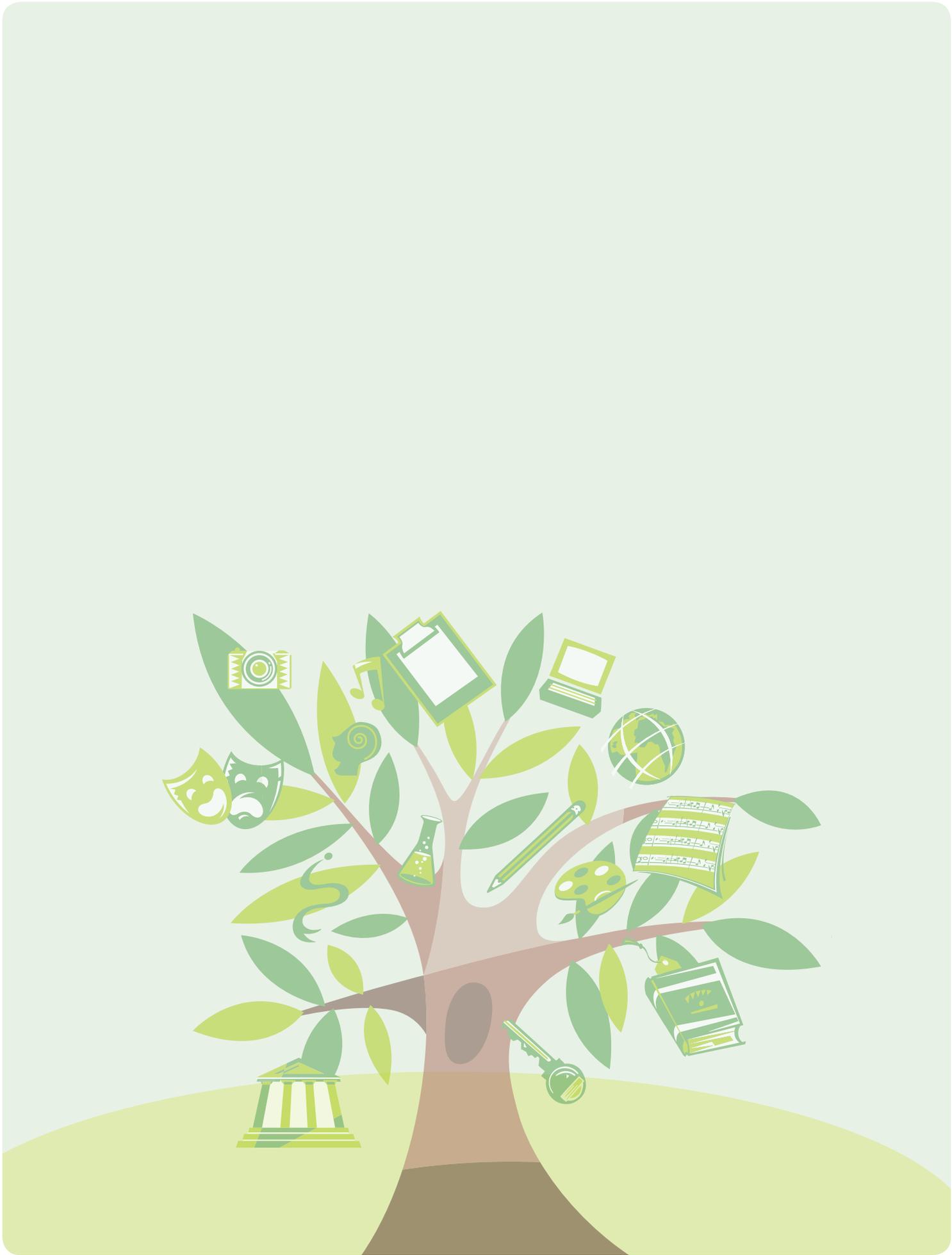
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## Executive Summary

America's public libraries, which number over 16,000 facilities, will face many challenges in the next five years. Trends



are evolving, public expectations are increasing, and funding is shrinking: all of this creates a "perfect storm" for libraries as they struggle to fulfill both the requirements and desires of the public they serve.

Perhaps most challenging, many members of the public question the very nature of libraries as anachronistic and unnecessary in this age of digital information. But the facts show that this is not the case: libraries play a vital role in providing access to information for all sectors of the population, particularly for those with no other options. Libraries are usually a community's only location that provides free access to computers, along with professional help and education, resources and material, homework assistance, and a huge variety of other services to everyone across all racial, income, gender, age, and other socio-economic spectra.

Libraries also have a demonstrable economic impact on their communities: libraries support start-up businesses and are one of the vital elements of a community's assets – along with a strong school system, well-maintained parks, a robust cultural scene, and a safe community – that attract businesses looking to relocate. However, libraries continue to be a target for municipal budget cuts: U.S. mayors reported in November that hours, staff, or services at local libraries was the second most prevalent area recommended for budget reductions, second only to maintenance and services at public parks and gardens.

The challenges facing libraries in the City of Ventura are no different. Ventura residents have high expectations for library services – an auspicious sign, since it shows that they have been receiving a high level of service for years, which has established their expectation set point at a high mark. Recently, Venturans' dissatisfaction with their libraries has grown – again, a national or at least regional trend, evidenced by the spate of nearby communities (Santa Clarita, Camarillo, perhaps Simi Valley) that have recently opted to leave their public library systems and instead contract with private providers.

Through a year-long strategic planning process that included vigorous, comprehensive and often very passionate conversations about the future of public library services in the City, Ventura residents have made their goals clear: they want libraries that are warm, welcoming places – they want libraries close to their home – they want a multitude of collections and programs – they want advanced technology – and they want a place that will serve all ages.

But how can the City provide all that with the limited resources available? Revenue directed to the library through property tax assessments is very low: \$17 per capita. Although the City of Ventura supplements that income with \$90,000 of Community Development Block Grant funding each year, and the County Library System provides an additional \$350,000 in funding, bringing per capita spending in Ventura up to almost \$24, that is still far lower than the national average of \$48, or even the state average of \$33 per capita. This comparison becomes even more glaring when Ventura is compared to a nearby community: Ventura's annual spending amounts to only 38% of the Thousand Oaks library budget.

It is clear that in order to provide Ventura residents with the priority services they want, the current picture of the traditional library will have to change.

Most people have one of two visions of a “traditional” library in their heads. It might be an authoritarian marble monolith of a building filled with row upon row of imposing leather-bound volumes, where studious scholars research quietly at long wooden tables and the stacks are patrolled by intimidatingly knowledgeable staff. Or conversely, it may be a small building just off the village square where smiling librarians greet giggling children by name as they come for story hour, neighborhood residents come in and select from a plentiful collection of both the latest best-sellers and dearly beloved favorite books, and elderly patrons snooze behind newspapers until it’s time for them to amble along home for lunch.

Obviously, libraries today don’t fit perfectly into these iconic packages. What is less obvious is that these broad characterizations of a “typical” library are relatively recent and are only a blip in the evolution of libraries in our nation. The roots of the library system diverge significantly from these pictures. Back in the 18th century, Ben Franklin founded America’s first lending library: not a haven for bookworms, but a place that provided workingmen access to self education at a time when schooling beyond the age of ten was reserved for the upper class. Famously, it lent out books – then considered imported luxury goods. Nearly forgotten is the fact that it also lent out scientific and practical tools like telescopes and microscopes.

Libraries have always evolved with the times. So what does a library look like in the 21st century? It probably has less to do with a “collection” and more to do with

*“Libraries will get you through times with no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries.”*

– Anne Herbert

a “connection.” If we can let go of our picture of what libraries have meant to us in the past, a new model may evolve – one that we can create here in Ventura, pay for with currently available resources, and expand incrementally as other funding sources emerge.

This strategic plan lays out a plan to address Ventura’s library priorities, and articulates a means by which to achieve a new paradigm that will serve to bring residents together in the library of the future. The plan addresses priorities and findings in three key areas – Facilities, Collections and Services, and Technology – and provides an overview of funding requirements and options. The funding recommendations are specifically formulated in light of the current economic situation, with little start-up money required and incremental resource growth to support the long-term community vision.

The recommendations outlined in this plan, to be implemented over a five-year period, direct sustained action on three distinct fronts – at the Foster Library, at the Avenue Library, and on the Eastside – in order to achieve three goals: sustainable library service downtown and on the Westside, a new model of library service on the Eastside, and increased use of the library system as a whole.



## Strategic Plan Priority Actions

### 2012-13: Year One: Library Operations

1. Commit to continued partnership with the Ventura County Library System
2. Appoint Strategic Plan Work Group
3. Create a plan to establish an “express library” presence on the Eastside
4. Prioritize continuation of Westside library branch with dedicated funding source
5. Use available trust funds to improve Foster and Avenue branches and services
6. Refocus to adopt a more patron-centric work focus
7. Expand volunteer base
8. Rethink how programming can be provided to the community
9. Reconfigure opening hours to accommodate residents
10. Incorporate a permanent Eastside library into the City's Capital Improvement Program

### 2013-14: Year Two: Community Engagement

1. Introduce new model of library service at temporary Eastside location
2. Continue redesign of interior and exterior of Foster Library
3. Expand programs for all users
4. Build a virtual branch presence
5. Annual community workshops

### 2014-15: Year Three: Articulating the Need

1. Create a marketing campaign to support enhanced library services
2. Reallocate existing funds to acquire fresh materials
3. Finalize redesign of EP Foster and Avenue branches
4. Establish annual user survey
5. Collaborate with community partners, including schools
6. Create a funding plan

### 2015-16: Year Four: Defining Library Excellence

1. Hold community forums
2. Continue to develop community partnerships
3. Identify Capital Campaign support group
4. Promote library services through social media
5. Increase classes and online events for seniors and teens

### 2016-17: Year Five: Bricks and Mortar

1. Finalize plans for proposed facility on East End
2. Roll out Capital Campaign
3. Provide ongoing fresh collections and services.

## Background

Library service in the City of Ventura is currently provided by the Ventura County Library System (VCLS). The VCLS, a county agency, serves most of the cities in the County and all of the unincorporated County property. The VCLS operates two libraries within the city: the main EP Foster branch in downtown Ventura and the smaller Avenue Library located on Ventura Avenue on Ventura's Westside. The VCLS also runs the Saticoy Library located just beyond the border of Ventura, which serves some of the east end residents.

Since revenue shortfalls resulted in a recommendation to close the Helen P. Wright Library in January of 2009, there has been extensive community discussion about library service provision in the City of Ventura. That recommendation understandably sparked months of public debate over the necessity of such a closure, the value of library services that meet the needs of our disparate community, who manages and operates the libraries, and how to fund these vital services. The Wright Library was officially closed on December 1, 2009, and in the spring of 2010, its collection was moved to the EP Foster Library.

While the face of libraries in the City of Ventura was going through monumental change in 2009 and 2010, so was the VCLS. Early in October of 2010, the City of Camarillo elected to leave the VCLS and contract with a private firm for library services. Later that month at its joint meeting with the City's Library Advisory Commission, the Ventura City Council voiced its interest in analyzing its options to improve library services in the City while maintaining the flexibility either to continue existing service as provided by the VCLS or to leave the system to contract with an alternate entity.

In early 2011, the City issued a Request for Proposals

(RFP) to library and municipal consultants to conduct a strategic plan. The goal of the planning process was two-fold:

1. To analyze potential service delivery models for Ventura's library system. How could Venturans maximize their investment in public libraries: through a city-run system, staying with the VCLS, or contracting with another private or public entity?
2. To involve the community in constructive conversations about priorities for library service, in order to develop a comprehensive and long-range strategic plan that ensures that Ventura's library system is delivering priority programs and services.

Ultimately the City retained the services of Santiago Library Consulting (SLC), a Miami-based firm. SLC started working on the strategic plan in April 2011.



## Strategic Planning Process

The planning process undertaken by SLC to develop the Vision for the Future employed several approaches:

- A. The consultant team reviewed literature and materials provided by City staff. These included, but were not limited to: the 1997 City of Ventura Community Library Needs Assessment & Plan; Library and City budget information; City long range strategic plans; the Library system's Memorandum of Understanding; and the 2005 City General Plan.
- B. The consultant team met monthly with a 20-member Steering Committee composed of community stakeholders, library staff, local school representatives, and library advocates who were selected jointly by the Library Advisory Commission and Friends of the Library. The Steering Committee evaluated the outcomes of community-wide focus groups and online surveys, reviewed information on best practices for public libraries, and developed recommendations for Commission and Council review.
- C. Key person interviews were conducted with 21 civic leaders from library, government, business, and community institutions.
- D. A survey was issued on-line and on paper. Over 2,400 responses were submitted and analyzed.
- E. The consultant analyzed financial and operational information from potential library operators, gathered through a Request for Information (RFI) in order to recommend a service delivery model to City Council.
- F. In July 2011, sixty people attended "Creating the Vision: Ventura's Libraries and the Community," a public event at the Ventura County Museum. Miami-Dade County Library Director Raymond Santiago and Santa Clara County Library Deputy Director Nancy Howe provided an overview on evolving library trends relating to community engagement, programming, and technology facing libraries today, and held a panel discussion on how these trends relate to Ventura.
- G. The consultant team held 15 "community conversations" and made 11 presentations to Community Councils, service organizations, non-profit partners, community leaders and school PTOs. At these meetings, they discussed the planning process and gathered input into the community's goals for its library system.
- H. The consultant team submitted an interim report, "Strategic Direction for Library Services," to Council in November 2011, recommending that the City continue to work with the VCLS and take a more visible and proactive role to ensure that all improvements to service are implemented early in 2012 or to withdraw from the County Library and become a city-run library.
- I. Members from the Steering Committee provided outreach and secured input at several community events including Saturday Downtown Farmers Markets, Family Festival in the Park, Ventura Unified School District SummerFest and the 4th of July Street Fair.

## Service Priorities

### Introduction

Ventura residents are passionate about their libraries. In recent years, the community has come together on many occasions to share their thoughts with the City Council on how public library service should be delivered to the city of Ventura. With the past events in mind, the strategic planning process focused on expanding citizen engagement in productive conversations about the future of the libraries.

In the first phase of the planning process, the consultants issued a survey, held multiple community conversations about libraries in various venues throughout the city, and met with the Steering Committee to get initial feedback and to analyze results and findings.

To develop the survey, Santiago Library Consulting used service guidelines set up by the Public Library Association to narrow the scope of the questions and examine 18 common library service roles. Public libraries across the United States provide a wide range of services for their communities, and each service requires staff focus and resources to support the effort. The survey asked responders to rank and prioritize each of the 18 service areas and determine the service goals that would be most meaningful for them at the public library. This process identified the top reasons why residents were not satisfied with library service or were not using the library, and it gathered zip code and age group information for each responder.

In addition to specific public service roles, the community conversations explored topics that had been discussed at library meetings over the past five years. Specifically, the consultants addressed those concerns with questions and discussions to determine how widespread the concerns were, and what could be offered as a solution in the five year service plan.

Through this information gathering phase, a set of five service priorities was articulated, all of which focus on the services and programs provided by the library system:

- Reading for Fun
- Literacy for all ages
- Lifelong Learning
- Homework Help
- Technology

Participants in the planning process also discussed barriers to library usage, which were consistent among both users and non-users. In order to bring more people into the library, residents would like to see:

- More locations for library service
- More materials, books, and programs
- More technology/eBooks
- Convenient hours

This plan focuses on incremental change in three program areas and outlines the funding picture in order to emphasize Venturans' goals for their library system, and address the inadequacies that keep the library from being more prominent in their lives.



## Facilities & Location

Residents who participated in the library strategic planning process consistently stated that they want more convenient locations for library services. This



makes sense in a community such as Ventura, which is geographically long and narrow. With the current status, residents on the east end of Ventura have to travel up to ten miles to reach the central Foster Library (see map on page 24). While the Saticoy Library is available, it is small with little parking. The closure of the Wright Library has left the east end of Ventura feeling underserved and ignored.

There is also prevalent dissatisfaction with current library facilities. At its best, a library is the “community living room,” with space that is welcoming, clean, safe, easy to navigate, and accessible to all neighborhoods. While the Wright Library was felt by many to be a “homey” and welcoming environment, the Foster branch in downtown Ventura doesn’t have the same appeal: it is a more institutional building with parking that many feel to be inadequate, and its location in the semi-urban downtown is off putting to many residents.

In the past ten years, neighboring communities in Ventura County have spent significant capital improvement dollars on new library facilities and the remodeling of older facilities. As a result, Camarillo, Oxnard, and Thousand Oaks are places that Ventura library users like to visit.

The provision of a traditional library on the East end of Ventura must be prioritized as a long-term goal for the City of Ventura, but with the current funding available (see Funding section), that is not a near-term reality. However, the residents in the east end should have some local library services. One possibility is to provide a “new paradigm” of a library that will meet the needs of Ventura residents, but without the cost of a traditional library facility.

Across the country, library systems have been establishing “express” branches to meet the needs of growing communities in times of economic stress. These branches offer a plethora of traditional library services but without the full physical collection, and with fewer staff. Adapting sociologist Ray Oldenburg’s “third place” concept to the express library model may provide a map to guide the community to a new idea of library service.

Where home is the “first” place and work is the second, third places “host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work.” Oldenburg suggests that these places – pubs, cafés, bookstores, libraries, and more – form the foundation of social capital in a community, and writes that these informal gathering spaces “lend a balance to the increased privatization of home life. . . . Though a radically different kind of setting from a home, the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support that it extends.”

The Library Work Group, established during the course of the Strategic Plan, made up of community members and library and city staff, has discussed the concept of an Eastside Learning Place: an express library that could provide such a “third place” and serve the library needs of the east end Ventura residents, while the community can continue to develop plans for a major branch in the area.

## An Eastside Learning Place: A Vision for the Future

At its heart, the Eastside Learning Place retains a limited collection: a carefully culled blend of practical reference materials, new and popular



books and movies as well as an inviting collection of other items – from shovels to backpacks – that can be loaned. There are also donated books and materials that are either free or exchangeable. The Eastside Learning Place is a safe physical place where the entire County library collection is available by ordering online or requesting in person. This takes one well-trained professional librarian and a handful of rotating volunteer assistants/concierges who provide a “high touch” gateway to the “high tech” online catalogue. There is a special part of this component designed for kids and families.

It shares space with a café, a casual gathering space that complements the quieter, more traditional study environment. This is a locally owned micro-enterprise with more the feel of Latte 101 or Palermo than Starbucks. Like Palermo or Django’s, this business probably has some kind of sideline retail offerings, whether it be local art, used books or specialty foods.

The Eastside Learning Place also has at least two other components. First, a “homework center” with computer

workstations offering individual tutoring and places for home schoolers and groups of kids working together on school projects. This is staffed primarily by volunteers, but needs a trained staff coordinator. Second, a meeting place where lectures, book clubs, neighborhood meetings, story hours, and performances can take place.

In all this, there is a focus on developing and serving a regular clientele. There need to be volunteer “hosts” who take ownership of the various components that make up the Eastside Learning Place, creating social magnets for a variety of users: home schoolers, home officers, senior citizens, young families, and teenagers. These need not be staff or even full-time volunteers, although some of each will be helpful. Some can simply be “alpha users” or self-initiated “docents” who anchor the more free-floating loyalty of more casual users. In his book, “The Tipping Point,” Malcolm Gladwell calls such people Connectors (people who “link us up with the world ... people with a special gift for bringing the world together. . . a handful of people with a truly extraordinary knack for making friends and acquaintances”) and Mavens (“information specialists” or “people we rely upon to connect us with new information who accumulate knowledge and know how to share it with others”).

## Collections & Services

A poll commissioned by the American Library Association (ALA) shows that national library-use figures are up several percentage points from a year earlier. Ventura's library system is heavily used – the traditional markers of circulation and new library cards show steady growth over the last three years, following a decline corresponding with the closure of Wright Library. In the last year, Ventura has instituted a new measure for library usage: in acknowledgement of the evolving use of libraries as community gathering places, VCLS has installed door counters at the two Ventura libraries to count daily visitors. In 2012, an average of 40,225 people per month have visited Foster and Avenue libraries.



While the key element of any library is collections and programs, the location for this vision is important. A variety of potential venues should be pursued: existing commercial sites, City-owned property (like the Community Park) and other temporary sites could be explored.

Providing a library site on the Eastside of Ventura cannot take the place of services downtown and on the Westside. During the planning process there was much lively conversation about the concept of reducing the size of the EP Foster Library downtown in order to provide funding for an eastern branch; while the Steering Committee prioritized services for the east end, they were not willing to do so at the expense of the main Foster branch. Over the span of the strategic plan period, ongoing effort must be made to improve the Foster branch in terms of design, layout, and accessibility.

The Avenue branch is also considered a gem in the city library system, and serves an important and distinctive need to the community in which it is housed. The Avenue Library moved to the ground floor of the Casa de Anza in 1996 when the historic 1920s building was restored as a project of the Westside Community Council.



In July 2013, the lease payments will increase to fifty percent of market rate. The City must work now to ensure that there continue to be sustainable library services on the Westside, with a dedicated funding source.

## Annual/Monthly Circulation, Attendance & Library Cards Statistics



These figures show statistics for libraries within the City of Ventura: Foster, Avenue, and, for part of fiscal year 2009/10, the Wright Library.

Year	Circulation		Program Attendance		New Library Cards		Internet Usage		E-Books Access (system-wide)		Reference Inquiries	
	Annual	Mo. Avg.	Annual	Mo. Avg.	Annual	Mo. Avg.	Annual	Mo. Avg.	Annual	Mo. Avg.	Annual	Mo. Avg.
2009/10	283,482	23,624	6,863	572	3,292	274	34,601	2,883			45,974	3,831
2010/11	294,705	24,559	9,187	765	4,028	336	42,497	3,541	2,450	204	35,626	2,969
2011/12	218,415	24,268	4,292	536	3,635	404	50,445	5,605	10,767	897	16,207	2,026

Circulation: All materials that are physically checked out of the library: books, magazines, DVDs, audio books, etc.

Programs: Includes only library-sponsored programs, so does not indicate use of Topping Room by community groups. Note: numbers increase significantly each June with the Summer Reading Program, so monthly average in the current fiscal year is low.

Reference requests have declined due to increase in internet searches.

With so many survey responses citing "Reading for Fun" as the predominant feature of their desired library system, supporting Ventura's devotion to reading and learning will remain the core function of the library, with special attention to expanding the collection in print, AV, and digital formats to ensure that residents have access to all media.

One of the library's primary purposes in our nation is to provide resources and materials for residents from birth to death to support essential reading skills. Educational success in the K-12 schools relies on the ability to read and comprehend information. Programs like "Ready to Read" will support early learning for children and the important role of parents/caregivers in the core curriculum of library services. Adult literacy programs are also a core service of the public library in partnership with other community organizations.

Keeping library services relevant as we move throughout our lifetime is often a challenge to public libraries. Providing current, informative and convenient programs for all ages will keep the library in the forefront of all residents' awareness. Partnering with community experts on topics of interest helps to further integrate the library into the community. Providing meeting space and technology resources helps attract innovative programming to continue the mission of lifelong learning for residents of Ventura.

Ventura's unique demographics should and do help shape how library services are provided in the community. 32% of the city's residents self-identify as Hispanic and 25% of Ventura residents speak a language other than English at home. The Avenue library serves this population with a collection in Spanish and services geared toward the Latino community. One issue that the VCLS has grappled with is providing Spanish-speaking staff to assist non-English

speakers. While the VCLS is working on this, volunteers can be utilized to directly serve Spanish speakers.

Ventura's library system can also aim to serve an active senior population. While only 14% of Ventura residents are over the age of 65, this demographic's participation in the planning process speaks to a high level of civic engagement by the senior population. Many of these residents have time to be active in their community. Serving the senior population helps the library continue its central role of reading for fun and lifelong learning.

Youth under the age of 18 make up 28% of the city's population. The public library has a long history of service to the children of the community with story time, book collections and homework support. The library should become a strong partner with the public school system to help educate the leaders of tomorrow with K-12 curriculum support and tools to succeed while in school. Early literacy for young children and their caregivers along with programs for reading geared toward school-age children and teens continue to be the primary focus of public libraries in the United States. The City of Ventura residents expressed a desire to expand the focus to include technology and programming to supplement the educational and recreational needs of kids of all ages. With almost a third of the city population under 18 years of age, it is a top priority for the library.

As more school work is transferred to an online environment, and as schools continue to cut school library resources, providing the resources children need to complete assignments will continue to challenge many families in the community. Libraries are the safe place that parents have sent their children for decades to get homework help. Now it is more essential with school children needing resources beyond the average family support system. After school tutoring, online tutors, study rooms and online access will be vital services if the library



is to continue to support the children and families in Ventura. Effective community-wide partnerships, particularly with schools, will

generate the results that the community is looking for.

In addition, the large number of families in Ventura – over 25,000 households include children – impacts the volume of materials, programs and services that the public library should make available in order to attract residents on a regular basis. With many two-parent working families and single-parent households, time is precious for Ventura's families. Making an effort to encourage families to take advantage of library services will be a focus of the future. With over 50% of the population living in a family unit with children, we must reach out to this key population group to gather input and provide services that will help them grow and continue to live and work in the city.

What is clear from the participation in the planning process is that Ventura's libraries must work more strategically to generate interest and support from citizens of all ages, particularly adults aged 21-55. Both areas were of prime importance to this vocal demographic in the city along with learning about technology.

Most importantly, customer service is not one-size-fits-all in today's library. The flexibility of services, ability to meet needs, and up-to-date knowledge of the community will be the most challenging aspects of library service as the city implements the strategic plan. Service models for public libraries are changing more rapidly now than at any time in their past. Library leadership must support staff with training, visioning, and materials to help them meet the demands of the public.

## Technology

Libraries are critical community partners in helping the public discover and master new technological and informational advances. Emerging technologies don't only affect the way we as a people access and use our libraries: they change the very way we think and process information. In the brief "Checking Out the Future: Perspectives from the Library Community on Information Technology and 21st Century Libraries," Jennifer C. Hendrix writes that the digital revolution has forced libraries to "go beyond merely incorporating technological advances to include rethinking the very core of what defines a library – the sense of place, of service, and of community." Technology is and must remain a primary focus for the public library to stay at the forefront of the community as the central lifelong learning provider.

How do we stay on top of technology? How do we educate our public to help them excel in school, become ready for the workforce and continue with lifelong learning? Public libraries are the top providers of technology and information in their communities. This includes free Wi-Fi and internet lab access, free access to vetted, authoritative databases, free downloadable content, and self service opportunities ranging from online account maintenance to self-check units in branch. Access to content 24/7 has been a primary goal of the Ventura County Library for many years. Budget, staffing, and equipment maintenance and upgrades are required to maintain excellence in this target area of library service.

In a 2011 survey by the Online Computer Library Center, 1,298 U.S. Public Library staff were asked to weigh in on top priorities and key initiatives. In the realm of technology 36% of respondents felt that ensuring adequate Internet access was a top priority, while 32%

focused on providing access to licensed e-collections and e-books. Ventura libraries have provided free internet access in both wired labs and wireless (Wi-Fi) to users for many years. As users and demand grow, bandwidth remains a constant budgetary challenge; it is vital that the library serves the community with sufficient internet service.

For 2012 the top initiative for US libraries, by far, was the expansion of ebooks and e-resources to sustain the relevance of libraries for younger clientele. Ventura County's eLibrary has over 45 databases, many of which translate into several languages. These also include multiple reference databases for students of all ages, in addition to a growing collection of downloadable ebooks (currently over 900) and audiobooks (over 5000).

One of the top trends in technology as identified at the 2011 American Library Association annual conference focuses on the rise of mobile apps providing library access to patrons as they seek services in non-traditional locations. Patrons using mobile devices in public libraries



enjoy ready access to Wi-Fi as 87% of libraries nationally provide free access. The use of apps is

especially relevant to patrons seeking social-reading interaction through shared data, reviews and ratings.



## Funding

Ventura's libraries are funded predominantly through property taxes. The full 2010/11 library budget was \$2.4 million, with revenue sources as follows:

\$1,800,000	Property tax within Ventura city limits
\$200,000	Property tax from adjacent unincorporated areas
\$150,000	County general fund coordination
\$100,000	Fees and miscellaneous income
\$90,000	Community Development Block Grant funding
\$60,000	Donations and contributions

The most prominent barrier to improving library services is funding. Nationwide, there is a direct correlation between per capita spending and the quantity and quality of services provided. Ventura's library funding is distinctly low. Because Ventura is part of the County Library System, and so is the beneficiary of countywide services, it is impossible to break out per capita spending for the City alone. However, as you can see from a comparison with regional libraries, the County's available resources are low.

Neighboring Library	Per Capita Spending <sup>1</sup>	Population	Branches	Population served per FTE
Ventura County	\$23.38	441,679 <sup>2</sup>	15 <sup>3</sup>	4,167
City of Moorpark	\$21.06	38,000	1	5,368
City of Oxnard	\$25.31	200,000	3	3,317
Thousand Oaks	\$63.36	130,000	2	1,385
State of Calif. Average	\$32.70			

<sup>1</sup> Figures provided by California State Library for fiscal year 2009/10. Per Capita spending includes: staffing, collections, programming, technology and capital improvements.

<sup>2</sup> Population served by VCLS, actual County population per 2010 census 823,318.

<sup>3</sup> With the closure of H.P. Wright Library and the withdrawal of Camarillo Library from the County System, the 2012 Ventura County Library branches number 13. Current VCLS FTEs = 73.25.

Libraries in the vicinity of Ventura serving similar population bases are spending more per capita than is currently allocated in Ventura, and as a result, these communities are able to offer updated facilities, more materials, multiple branches, extensive programming and more staff to serve the library patrons. These and other libraries are supplementing property tax income with other revenue sources, mostly by adding to libraries' budgets with unrestricted general funds. For example, Ojai contributes approximately \$140,000 to its local library operations annually through a designated parcel tax.

The City of Ventura, through its partnership with the VCLS, supplements its core revenue source of property tax income through other means. As the disparity between Ventura's per capita income (\$16.70) and per capita spending (\$23.38) shows, the city receives significant financial support from the VCLS beyond what it collects through the primary revenue source of property tax income. The system-wide support provided by the County results in an economy of scale that the City alone could not achieve. IT services is a good example of that: in this day and age when internet accessibility is such a crucial element of a library, core functionality in that area is vital; the County provides that day in and day out. Replicating that level of service as a stand-alone library would create a significant expense.



## Three Models

There are at least three models that offer some plausible optimism that an organic variation on the Eastside Learning Place concept might actually be feasible, given an actual physical space in which to launch it.

First, there is the “food co-op.” While that specific fad has largely withered, similar models continue to morph in response to community sentiments and desires, such as “community supported agriculture” or “community gardens.” These volunteer-driven enterprises draw their viability neither from professional staffs nor a handful of volunteers, although like most of life they exhibit strong traces of the Pareto Principle (the 80/20 rule that says that 20 per cent of the volunteers provide 80 per cent of the energy.) We have our own modest version of this at EP Foster in the form of the Friends Bookstore. In a library, having trained staff is vital; volunteers must supplement the services of qualified librarians.

Second, there is “Libros Schmibros” in East Los Angeles. A single individual accidentally parlayed his extensive collection of books into a used book store/lending library, cultural center and “great good place.” There remains something about books and libraries and learning that evoke uncommon passion and ingenuity that is only enhanced by the proximity of caffeine-laced

beverages. While this model is proving successful in L.A., the drawback is that it depends on the largesse and energy of one individual being in the right place at the right time.

Third, there is the classic small community non-profit. Prosaic as it is, it works in thousands of instances with its well-worn cast of underpaid and overworked staff, fresh-faced interns, dedicated board members and more (or less) numerous volunteers.

What gives added plausibility to one or a combination of more than one of these models to succeed in creating an Eastside Learning Place is the unique combination of potential sparks: an Eastside hungry for their own “library”; an Eastside with a paucity of “great good places”; the peculiar passions inspired by books, libraries and learning; and the leverage that comes with a “center of gravity” provided by the City (with help from a landlord) offsetting the biggest cost (rent) and a conventional library hub around which all the ancillary functions can group with some fluidity depending on both customer appeal and volunteer availability and energy.

Back in the last great economic crisis, Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney starred in a series of movies based on the Hollywood trope of “Let’s Put on a Show!” All it took was a barn, energetic teenagers and a flair for turning sheets into stage curtains. The Eastside Learning Place doesn’t have to be a sustainable model that endures for decades. It just has to burn brightly for a few years, fueled by idealistic inspiration and volunteer labors of love. Eventually it can be superseded by a more formal “library of the future” with a reasonably “permanent” home. But it will have served its purpose – filled a void using minimal resources and provided an experimental prototype for the shape of things to come. Operationally, it is possible for the VCLS to make some modifications to the Foster branch in order to fund a 24-hour per week express branch on the Eastside. This would only fund staff, and provides no support for start-up costs, rent and utilities, internet connections, etc.



## Strategic Plan for Public Library Service in the City of Ventura 2012-2017

The Library Advisory Commission and Steering Committee met jointly in October and recommended that the City of Ventura should continue to work with their long-standing service provider, VCLS, as long as there was an agreement to work collaboratively to address and improve service in the areas of need. The committees recommended a timely request for further conversation with County leadership to discuss the areas of concern. A summary of the recommendations for improvements include:

- Refresh the collections.
- Refocus to adopt a more patron-centric work focus.
- Refurbish the current library furnishings.
- Incorporate merchandizing ideas into the design of the library.
- Reallocate existing funds to acquire “fresh” materials.
- Reconfigure the technology area.
- Rethink how programming can be provided to the community.
- Reach out to the Latino population in our community.
- Establish a library presence on the east side of town.

The Work Group has been meeting monthly since the City Council reviewed the RFI results and has implemented changes to the libraries and worked on a concept for an Eastside Branch. A version of the Work Group should stay intact to continue implantation of the Strategic Plan.

The strategic initiatives outlined for the next five years will help to guide the process of improved library service by providing a blueprint that sets the vision in place, on a timeline that is attainable utilizing the



city's limited resources. To provide excellent service to the community at the public library branch

locations in Ventura, facilities, staffing and programming improvements have been integrated into the strategic initiative plan.

The strategic plan that follows is a framework for library service in the City of Ventura, with each year building on the previous year's growth. There will be opportunities for innovation in every area of library service each year. Some will require funding, but most revolve around creating a customer-centric environment. With strong and effective leadership, the library will stay on course as the center of community life in the City of Ventura.

The plan is purposefully detailed in the first year, with less specificity in years two through five. This will allow for innovation and nimble response to community trends and outside influences, or in order to achieve the overarching goals of the plan.

## 2012-13: Year One: Library Operations

### Charting a secure future for library services to Ventura residents

Library supporters have been vocal and persistent in sending a message to city leaders about their desire for improved library services in the City of Ventura. As a result of their continued advocacy, the library will be a high priority for city leaders in 2012-13. In the first year, the focus of the strategic plan will be to build consumer confidence among library users through incremental improvements and to establish the foundations of a plan to ensure the provision of library services at three sites: Westside, Eastside, and Downtown Ventura.

#### Priority Actions:

1. Make a commitment to continue partnership with the Ventura County Library System to provide library services in Ventura
2. Appoint Strategic Plan Work Group to steward implementation of the Strategic Plan, made up of representatives from the VUSD, LAC, Steering Committee, City, County, and community stakeholders
3. Create a plan to establish a library presence on the Eastside of Ventura, and determine the resources necessary to implement the plan
4. Ensure that library services continue on the Westside, with dedicated funding source
5. Use available trust funds to improve Foster and Avenue branches' services, programs, and technology using priorities established by the Library Work Group and with input from the Library Advisory Commission
6. Refocus to adopt a more patron-centric work focus, and increase one-on-one interaction with the public to raise the level of engagement with patrons

7. Expand volunteer base to supplement library services
8. Rethink how programming can be provided to the community; increase PR and marketing efforts and Internet presence to provide greater awareness of the current services offered
9. Reconfigure opening hours to accommodate residents
10. Incorporate a permanent Eastside library into the City's Capital Improvement Program

### Year One Focus: Facilities



In year one of the plan, along with daily service, the focus needs to be on facilities, security, and locations. Each of these were mentioned

repeatedly by survey responders and community advocates. Redesigning and reallocating current space will help to rebuild the infrastructure of the library to ensure continued growth.

Identifying a library location for the East Side of town must be a priority because over 45% of survey responders asked for a location closer to their home. Step one will be to identify locations and determine cost models for a temporary facility to begin building library support in the growing East Side of Ventura.

## 2013-14: Year Two: Community Engagement

### Commitment to provide excellent library service

Year Two begins with a clear plan for geographically dispersed library sites, and begins to build on that foundation.

Keeping Year One strategies in place and moving forward, it is time to add new areas of focus to further improve library service to residents in Ventura.



#### Priority Actions:

1. Introduce new model of library service to the community at a temporary Eastside location
2. Continue redesign of interior and exterior of Foster Library: paint, furnishings, design
3. Expand programs for all users, especially Hispanic and teen residents through creative partnerships
4. Build a virtual branch presence through online book clubs, chats, and online activities for all ages
5. Hold annual community workshop to review plan progress

## Year Two System Focus: Technology

During the year of community conversations, technology was one of the most discussed topics. Will a library be needed? Will books go away? Why do I need a library; I use the Internet? Responding to the questions was simple. Libraries are not going away. They are being used more than ever and in Ventura, they provide access to technology for hundreds of citizens each day. Today's technology is rapidly changing, and libraries across the nation are revamping their interior space, staffing allocations and budgets to accommodate demand for the latest technology.

The City of Ventura can use technology planning to create a more efficient workspace, introduce more self-service technologies, and create a more robust online presence by building the Virtual Branch for 24/7 access. The library user of tomorrow wants information instantly and at all times of the day. If the library is to remain relevant, it must prepare existing locations with technology that attracts all users, not only those who are comfortable with the service model of today.



## 2014-15: Year Three: Articulating the Need

### Gaining community support for additional funding

Year Three of the strategic plan will build on a greater understanding of the value of the public library in the community. The real work can begin on educating the public about services that are available for them to use at the library branches throughout the city. With two years of solid improvements in place, it is time to identify and begin to cultivate alternative funding sources to support the long-term vision for libraries in Ventura.

#### Priority Actions:

1. Create a marketing campaign to support enhanced library services: communicate costs/impact and benefits of library facilities to citizens and establish new event program (e.g., author visits)
2. Reallocate existing funds to acquire fresh materials for the collection with special attention to DVDs, current titles, and paperbacks for teens, adults, and children
3. Finalize the redesign of downtown EP Foster location and Avenue branches
4. Establish an annual survey of users to gauge the effectiveness of the current library service model
5. Create partnerships with the academic, non-profit, and business communities
6. Create a funding plan to support expanded library services

## Year Three System Focus: Partnerships

In recent years, Ventura's citizens have been actively supporting library service improvements. With facilities and expansion as a goal of the community, it will be essential that the library become more integrated into the community at large. Forming effective partnerships with small business, non-profit, corporate, and scholastic entities will encourage the community to support the growth of the library.



## 2015-16: Year Four: Defining Library Excellence

### Are we truly an “Engaged Community?”

Year Four is the pivotal year in moving from the old way of delivering library service to a new phase of next generation public library service. Has the City of Ventura successfully communicated the role the library plays in the quality of life for the residents? Has the City and Library leadership built a grassroots level of support along with the political infrastructure it needs to generate a financial commitment to funding libraries? If the answer to these questions is “Yes,” then Year Four will be fun.

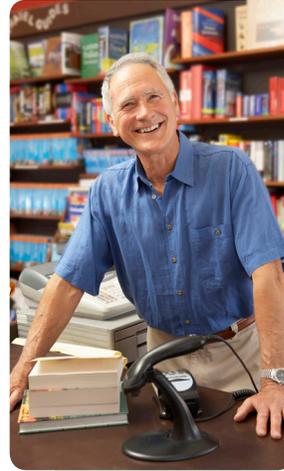
#### Priority Actions:

1. Hold community forums to share building/design plans to gain support
2. Continue to develop community partnerships: Arts, music, events that solidify the “art feel” of Ventura
3. Identify a group of citizens to spearhead fund-raising for a Capital Campaign
4. Promote library services using the latest social media tools and media sources and advance the library’s online presence for content and information sharing
5. Increase classes and online events for seniors and teens

## Year Four System Focus: Service

The public library has a unique role in the community, serving multiple generations of users who all have different demands. We will always have our pre-K,

school age, teens, adults and seniors, each creating a different set of service concerns. The gap between the ages is widening and libraries must stay on top of trends and provide services that are relevant to the user, not the librarian.

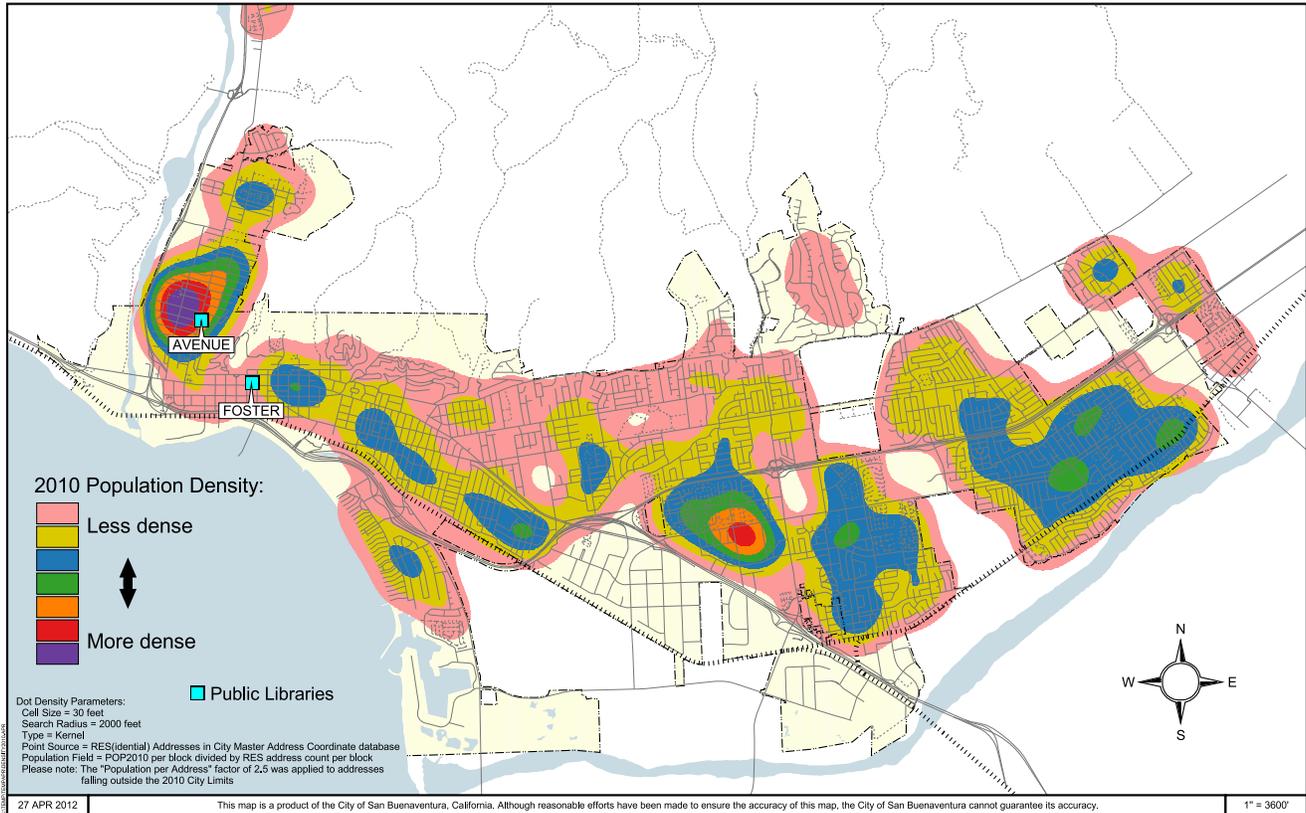


In Year Four, it will be imperative that the City of Ventura has a plan in place for daily library

operations that provides a flexible model of service to meet the needs from newborns to seniors. The library’s role as the provider of lifelong learning opportunities will become more difficult because of the rapidly changing information world. Programming and educational partnerships will be essential to keep up with the demands of employers, schools and universities. With facilities updated for ease of use, staffing levels at an efficient level and self-service applications incorporated into the daily operations, Ventura’s libraries will be the community living room that everyone was talking about in 2011.



# Library Locations & Population Density





## Survey Results

2446 people participated in the survey process representing just over 2% of the population. This level of involvement is average in most library centric surveys.

### Highlights of the survey responses:

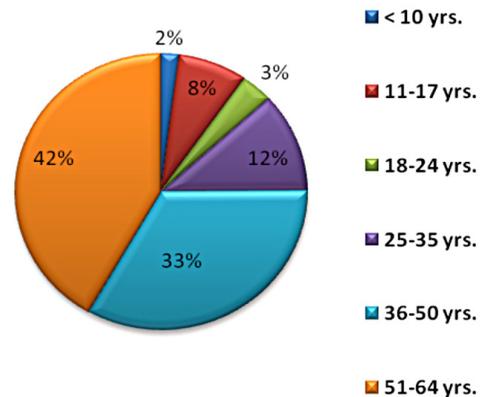
- Almost equal split between over 50 years of age and under 50 years of age in respondents
- Half of the respondents live in the 93003 zip code
- 99% of the people who responded think the library is important to the community
- 78% of the responders have visited the library in the last 12 months.
- “Location” was the highest rated barrier to more frequent library use

## Question #1 – What is your age?

### Age Group Summary

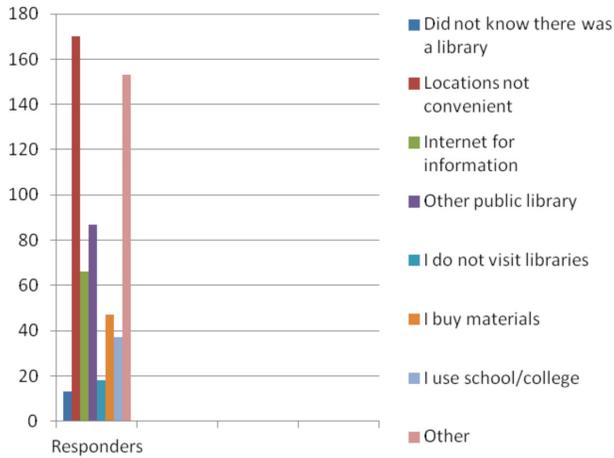
The active solicitation of all population groups in the City of Ventura provided a full spectrum of respondents. Although the consultants actively and repeatedly attempted to get a higher number of teens and preteens to respond, efforts were not successful. As is in most community campaigns, Ventura has a very engaged over 50 years of age population. The consultants captured a wide range in ages in the survey.

### Ages





## Question #5 – Why have you not visited the public library in the City of Ventura?



There were 153 comments written under “Other”. The bulk of the comments centered on location of the library.

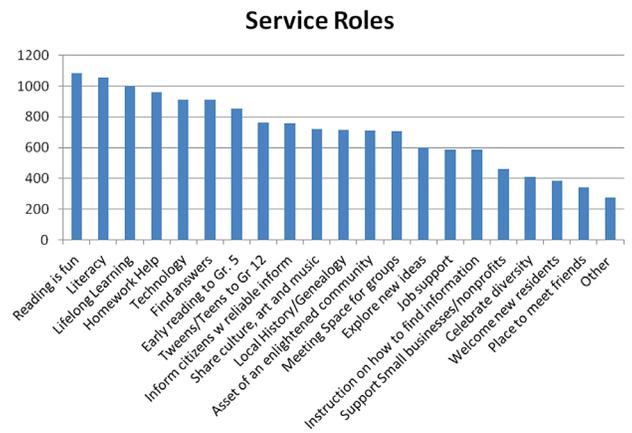
- Eastside needs a library
- Not convenient to home/school
- Not safe for my kids downtown
- They used to go to Wright Library

## Question #6 – What services do you think are important for a public library to provide?

Reading is the primary goal of all libraries around the world. The City of Ventura is no different in its desire to make that the number one priority for library service. Close behind is a focus on literacy for all ages, lifelong learning, homework help and technology. The services Ventura residents requested are dependent on two key factors of the delivery of excellent library service:

Highly trained staff and new resources

The majority of “Other” comments mentioned additional materials desired such as: DVD’s, story time, café, author visits, computers and books. There were multiple mentions about Inter Library Loan from other libraries as well as quiet study areas.





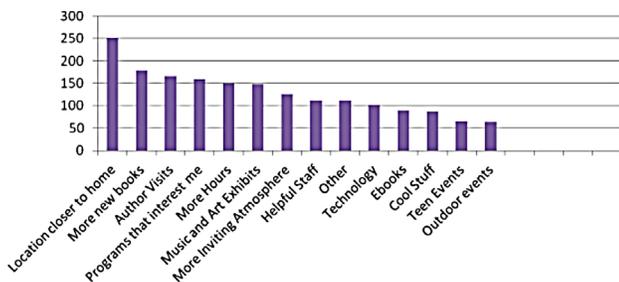
## Question #9 – If you do not visit the City of Ventura public libraries what would you bring into the library?

The fact that 22% of the survey responders are NON USERS tells us that this segment of the population wants to be heard on the library issue.

Location again comes up as the top reason why people did not go to the library in the City of Ventura. We heard from East Side and Midtown residents who wanted a location closer to home.

- Better parking
- Quiet Spot for adults on second floor
- More Security
- More friendly
- More like a bookstore
- More new materials/services

**What would bring a non-user into the City of Ventura Libraries?**



## Question #10 – If you have visited another public library that you really enjoyed, please tell us where the library is located and why you enjoyed your visit.

Over 700 responders shared which public library they enjoyed visiting and why. With local communities surrounding the City of Ventura placing an emphasis on public library building in the past 10 years there are locations that popped were referenced frequently as a response to this question.

The community of Camarillo was most identified: approximately 60% of all responders chose Camarillo as their favorite. The new central library has a café, large children's area and many nooks for visitors. The library was built with approximately \$6 million of city funding and is currently operated by LSSI, a non-city private concern.

The community of Oxnard was also a local favorite for Ventura residents. The highlights are extensive children and adult programming, a pleasant atmosphere, easy accessibility, and lots of books. Oxnard is a city run and owned library.





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