



FY2012 Operating Budget Testimony
Siobhan A. Reardon, President and Director
Free Library of Philadelphia
Presented before City Council Committee of the Whole
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Council President Verna and Members of Council: I am Siobhan Reardon, President and Director of the Free Library of Philadelphia. Joining me this afternoon is Robert Heim, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Free Library. I also want to recognize Mike DiBerardinis, Deputy Mayor for Environmental and Community Resources. We are pleased to report that the Free Library is busier than ever, with more jobseekers, small businesses, young people and other customers taking advantage of our wide range of resources daily. We are looking forward to another productive year, and to make this possible are seeking \$33,968,362 in city funds for Fiscal Year 2012. We request \$29,268,037 in Class 100, \$2,772,666 in Class 200, and \$1,927,659 in Class 300 and 400. In addition, we are seeking \$11,879,884 in Commonwealth and Federal support.

With a stable schedule, a growing complement of staff, and a number of exciting innovations, the Free Library has been able to enhance its services to the citizens of Philadelphia. We are also proud of the level of minority and women contracting, which has more than doubled our goal of seven percent and reached 15 percent. While the overall dollar amount of contracting is small, we have made a concerted effort to reach out to new vendors, which include the 100 percent minority-owned Personal Security Services, which handles cash management; and subcontractor 503 Corp, a minority-owned firm that works on HVAC maintenance.

Our growth and accomplishments are not meant to minimize the challenges that the Library has faced in recent years. The employees of the Free Library are second to none, however, and I want to publicly thank them for their professionalism, their flexibility, and their diligence. Along with a committed Board of Trustees and the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation, which supplements our activities, we are poised to have an even greater impact in the coming year.

We do know the impact of our work today. Recently, the Free Library commissioned a study by the Fels Institute of Government at the University of Pennsylvania to quantify the impact of our work on the public and the city. More specifically, we were seeking to assess what value the Free Library creates and adds to the economic lives and futures of its users and the citizens of Philadelphia. I know you will share our pride in the results, the highlights of which reported that in just one year:

- 10,788 people could not have learned to read without the Library, and 14,024 people taught someone else to read using the Library. The economic impact of these two facts is \$21.8 million.
- Nearly 1,000 individuals found jobs directly because of the Library, with an economic value of \$6 million.



- 8,630 small businesses either were started or improved because of Library resources, resulting in almost \$4 million in economic value.
- Homes within ¼ mile of a Library are worth an average of more than \$9,000 than homes farther away. This additional value produces \$18 million in additional taxes.

Evidence of the Free Library's impact is also apparent in monthly performance statistics, almost every one of which is up from last year. In-person visits to library locations have increased by nearly eight percent, and virtual visits by 5.5 percent. We have welcomed over 5,000 new cardholders, and seen a 16 percent increase in the use of our 850 free public computers. Equally interesting is the growth in the use of electronic resources and virtual access. There has been a 42.7 percent increase in the usage of electronic resources, such as Dun and Bradstreet; and a 21.6 percent increase in downloads, including library card applications, the Philadelphia City Scholarship application, and the One Book, One Philadelphia calendar in highest demand. We have just begun to collect data on specific users groups, but can report that in the eight months since the beginning of this fiscal year, there have been over 35,000 pageviews of our specialized webpages for job seekers, and more than 5,200 of our entrepreneurs' pages.

While freelibrary.org has become our 55th branch, our physical branches continue to play a critical role in their neighborhoods. Not only do customers check out materials, participate in the afterschool program, and conduct research, but they also enjoy a variety of programs, where offerings have increased by 21 percent. This year we have been able to continue to provide a stable schedule and more convenient hours for our customers. Every branch is open five days a week, with nearby branches alternating the day they are closed. Additionally, there are evening hours four nights a week in every area of the city. Regional Libraries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, and Parkway Central has hours seven days a week. For the first time last summer, Central was open on Sundays, and welcomed 1,000 visitors every Sunday. The Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is open Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. As a result, the number of opening hours at all locations has increased from 59,620 at this point last year, to 64,553 this year.

Building repairs and improvements are an important component of ensuring that locations remain open. To date this year, we have installed new HVAC systems in Joseph Coleman Northwest Regional, and the Fishtown, Lovett, Lillian Marrero, and South Philadelphia branches. Charles Santore has new floor tiles and shelving, and Roxborough has a new handicapped ramp. Currently, Holmesburg is closed to replace the boiler, and leaks are being patched at Eastwick. Roof work is planned at Haddington shortly. While our goal is to keep the branch open while work is being done, it can be necessary to close for the safety of our customers and employees. Lenient return policies are instituted for customers who may have to travel to another location to return materials.

Scaffolding is currently in place in front of Parkway Central, as we clean and repoint the exterior and repair windows of the historic building. Shakespeare Park will be renovated too, creating a more welcoming entrance off of the Parkway. This work is slated to be done by the end of June,



as is the renovation of larger space for the Mayor's Commission on Literacy. Next steps include renovations to the Popular Library immediately inside the building, among other improvements.

Services to young people are a hallmark of our work. The LEAP Afterschool program, serving 80,000 children, would not be possible without the assistance of the Teen Leadership Assistants. Between two and three are assigned to each branch, and the teens assist the younger children with their homework and other literacy activities. Equally important, they gain valuable work experience. Virtually all of our Teen Leadership Assistants graduate from high school on time and a significant percentage go on to college. Recent graduating seniors matriculated at Community College and the University of Pennsylvania, and several received full academic scholarships to Temple and LaSalle.

The Free Library also hosts Work Study students and interns. In fact last semester, the Free Library hosted the largest number of Federal work study students we have ever had – a record 116. In addition, we are hosting dozens of graduate level interns. Together, these students provided over 10,000 hours of support to our staff and customers across the library system.

Another way that the Free Library has supplemented its hard-working staff is through the Way to Work program, made possible by Federal stimulus funds through the Mayor's Office of Community Services. We provided temporary employment for 38 General Departmental Workers who were assigned to a variety of tasks such as general labor, custodial, book sorting, grass cutting, and maintenance. More recently, we have been able to re-hire 20 of these people who are gaining meaningful work experience as they seek to leave the public assistance rolls.

This year we welcomed Judith Renyi as Executive Director of the Mayor's Commission on Literacy. E. Steven Collins of Radio One is Chair of this revitalized body. The Commission was established to ensure that all adults in Philadelphia are equipped with the literacy skills necessary for the workforce, parenting, and community life. Part of our budget request is \$1 million to increase literacy services in the neediest neighborhoods. Additionally, we are in the early stages of developing the "National Literacy Summit: Philadelphia 2011" to be held November 14 and 15. This convening of thought leaders, educators and workforce professionals will explore what literacy means in the 21st century and collaborate on crafting solutions that we can pilot in Philadelphia and then share with the nation. Judith is here with me today, and would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

The Free Library is very proud of two of its staff members who have been named "Movers and Shakers" by the national publication, *Library Journal*. Jennifer Wright is Assistant Chief of Materials Management and has overseen the expansion of our digital collections while encouraging the Library to be more tech savvy. Robert Sisson, a reference librarian, has initiated highly successful community service fairs, senior services fairs, and business expos at the Northeast Regional Library, where over 800 people attended the most recent Job Fair. Both Jen and Robert represent a new generation of librarians and new thinking about how we serve the public. We are committed to continuing to move in creative directions, such as offering Freegal, an online music service through which customers can download up to three songs from the Sony catalog each week.



A focus on new Americans represents a new area of emphasis for the Free Library. Conversation groups have been formed so that international adults can practice their conversational skills in an informal atmosphere, allowing them to build their confidence in a relaxed environment. Topics are determined by group interest and may include small talk, foods, holidays and customs, shopping, travel or common American slang. Volunteers have been trained to lead the Groups, which are being held at Blanche Nixon/Cobbs Creek, Fumo Family, Independence, Kensington, Northeast Regional, Parkway Central, Paschalville, Richmond, Walnut Street West, Welsh Road, and Wynnefield.

A particularly exciting example of a Free Library innovation are our Hot Spots, technology outposts housed in community centers that offer computers with internet access, computer skills training, and one-on-one support from Computer Assistants. Open 20 hours a week, the outposts are located at Heavenly Hall at 40th and Poplar Streets, the Village of the Arts and Humanities at Germantown and Lehigh Avenues, the Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia at 2416 South 7th Street, and the Institute for the Development of African American Youth at Broad and Susquehanna. None of these neighborhoods had been directly served by the Library previously. We are very pleased that our first hire on this project is Outreach Specialist Khaleef Aye, a product of the Free Library's LEAP Afterschool program at the Cecil B. Moore branch.

The Free Library will continue to develop innovative and meaningful services for our users and the citizens of Philadelphia. We have been working through a strategic planning process, which will point the way towards these new directions under the guidance of our new vision: *Building an enlightened community devoted to lifelong learning*; and mission: *The Free Library of Philadelphia advances literacy, guides learning, and inspires curiosity*.

My thanks to City Council for your support and your role in making the Free Library's successes possible. This spring we are hosting tours of our branches for Board members and special guests, and I would be delighted to have you join us one afternoon to see these successes and the impact of our work in action. Please let me know when you can join us. In the meantime, I am happy to answer any questions you might have.