



## The Denver Public Library is Vital to the Community

### Sustainable Funding Necessary to Ensure Future

The Denver Public Library is a vital community resource—free and open to all. Year after year, DPL connects Denver residents to information, ideas and experiences that enrich their lives and strengthen our community. The Library plays an important role in advancing reading and literacy from birth through adulthood and is a key link in developing a knowledgeable, productive workforce and fostering economic development. Denver residents recognize how important the public library is to equality of opportunity by providing access to knowledge for everyone free of charge.

The Denver Public Library is built on a century of proud tradition and a current record of superb service—four times in the last decade the Denver Public Library has been recognized as the number one public library for our market size in national library ratings.

### Minimum Library Service Standards Established

The Library budget has declined sharply since 2009, and in absolute terms is lower than in 2003. Service hours, staff, and materials acquisition have all been cut to meet budget constraints. The Denver Public Library Commission has expressed concern that, as a result of the budget cuts, Library standards of service are falling below those expected of a public library serving a market the size of Denver.

In cooperation with the City Librarian and Library management, the Commission has established the following minimum standards for acceptable Library service:

- **Service hours—Branches:** For a branch to be considered adequate, it must be open to the public at least 40 hours per week. A branch open only a few days a week loses its utility as a vital neighborhood and community resource. An ideal branch service level is 48 or more hours per week, to allow six-day or seven-day and evening access.
- **Service hours—Central:** The Central Library is the hub of the Library system, and receives visits from customers throughout the area. In addition, it is the logistical and administrative center of the Library system; quality branch operations depend on quality Central operations. The Central Library must be open 56 hours per week to deliver adequate system-wide service. An ideal Central service level is 60 or more hours per week, including evening hours.
- **Materials:** The Library is not a “book museum,” showcasing only old and out of date items. Customers depend on a robust acquisitions program to make up-to-date materials available to all. The Library acquisitions budget must be a minimum of \$5 million (with appropriate inflation-based increases year by year). An ideal materials budget is \$6 million, to fully meet customer needs and to re-build the collection from recent reduced levels.
- **Technology:** Computer and Internet access have assumed increasing importance as Library services in the last decade. Hardware and software must be maintained and updated, and staffing must be adequate to train and assist customers. The Commission has determined that a technology budget of \$875,000 is the minimum needed to provide adequate equipment and services; \$1.1 million is an ideal technology budget level.
- **Staffing levels:** Library management has aggressively trimmed staff in recent years, from a high of 480 FTE in 2003, to 447 FTE in 2009, to 424 FTE in 2011. With the current number of branches, the Commission believes that the current 424 FTE will not support minimum branch and Central service hours.

## 2011 Below Minimum Service Standards

In 2010, Denver Public Library attracted more than 4 million visitors—more than all other major Denver cultural institutions combined. Program attendance reached 344,000. Library users checked out 9.3 million books and other materials, engaged in nearly 41 million online transactions, used Library computers 922,973 times, and connected to free Library wireless 734,887 times. Early figures from 2011 show that demand for Library services continues to be strong.

Of the 23 Library branches, 18 are open four days (32 hours) a week. Four branches are open six days (48 hours) a week and one branch is open four days a week and a half day on Sunday (36 hours). The Central Library is open 52 hours a week, with weekend hours from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

The reduction of support to the Denver Public Library has resulted in a level of service that falls below the minimum set forth by the Library Commission for all but four branches and fails to fully meet the needs of Denver residents. Maintaining a branch system with limited hours creates inefficiency and waste in the system.

The 2011 acquisitions budget is \$4 million. The acquisitions budget falls below the minimum set forth by the Library Commission and results in long waits for new materials, and a largely static and outdated collection.

The 2011 technology budget is \$625,000. Denver Public Library provides users at home or at work with online access to information and materials through its website, and supports 539 onsite public access computers. With the current budget the Library continues to fall behind in hardware and software currency, as well as in basic maintenance and equipment expansion to meet growing public technology needs.

Relentless reduction in service hours has led to a delivery system that increasingly frustrates its customers, and inadequate acquisitions and technology budgets result in steady erosion of collection and equipment quality. Customer satisfaction has declined in the past two years due to these reductions: in a recent survey, 85% of Denver citizens believe that Library service cuts have had a negative impact.

## 2012 Service Levels Impacted by Budget Reduction

As with other city agencies, the Library has been instructed to prepare a 2012 budget with a reduction from the 2011 level of 9%, or approximately \$2,500,000.

Meeting the 2012 budget target requires eliminating about 40 FTE from current staffing levels, as well as a reduction in the acquisitions budget. Eliminating 40 FTE requires a system-wide service hours reduction from the current 856 total hours to 600–650 hours.

*This service reduction can be met in three ways:*

- **Option 1:** Keep all branches open, but reduce each branch to 24 hours/week (three days), and Central to 40 hours/week (five days). Continued cuts to the acquisition and technology budgets are also required in this option.
- **Option 2:** Keep all branches open, establish smaller service hours reductions, and drastically reduce the acquisitions and technology budgets.
- **Option 3:** Close some branches and use the savings to maintain adequate service hours at other branches and at Central, and to maintain minimally acceptable acquisitions and technology budgets. The Library is preparing budget scenarios involving closure of from 7 to 12 branches.

Options 1 and 2 fall far short of the minimum standards set by the Library and the Commission, and are unacceptable. Option 3, while creating service gaps throughout the city, maintains acceptable Library service standards at remaining locations.

## Current Library Funding Inadequate

As a City agency, the Library is funded almost entirely from the City's General Fund. In 2003, Denver Public Library's share of the City's General Fund budget was 4.16 percent (\$30,090,000 out of \$722,487,000). In 2010, the share was just 3.52 percent (\$30,087,000 out of \$855,596,000). In absolute numbers, funding in 2010 was less than funding in 2003.

Annual cost to support Denver Public Library at current level of services is \$56.32 per capita.

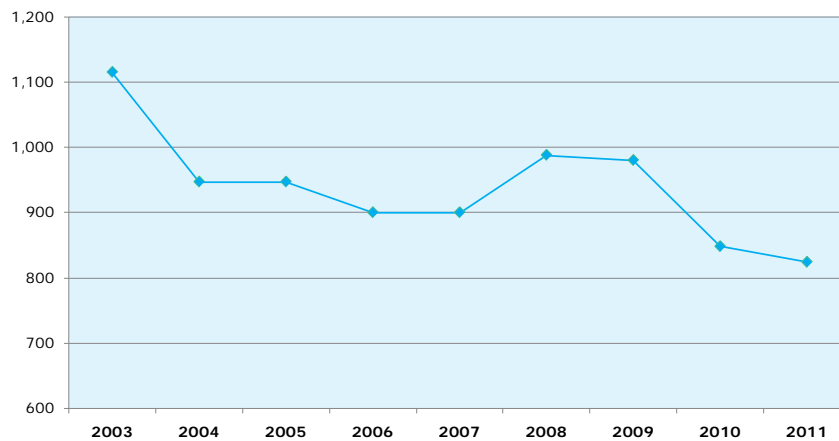
For every taxpayer dollar invested, Denver Public Library delivers a five-dollar return in services. Critically important children's and adults' programs include Story Time, where young children learn the skills they need to enter kindergarten; Summer of Reading, where 30,000 children and teens maintain and improve their reading skills over the summer; and Fresh City Life, where adults from diverse backgrounds come together to learn something new and build community.

Since 2003, the number of full-time equivalent Denver Public Library staff declined from 480 to 424. In spite of the new Green Valley Ranch branch, the number of service hours per week at libraries dropped from 1,115 to just 856. The budget for new materials decreased from \$4.5 million in 2003 to \$4 million in 2010.

Despite Denver Public Library's best efforts to be creative and efficient with funding, the current level of service is inadequate to meet the needs of Denver residents. When individuals and families show up at their libraries, they often find the doors locked and the facility dark. When the doors are open, they often find outdated materials and technology.

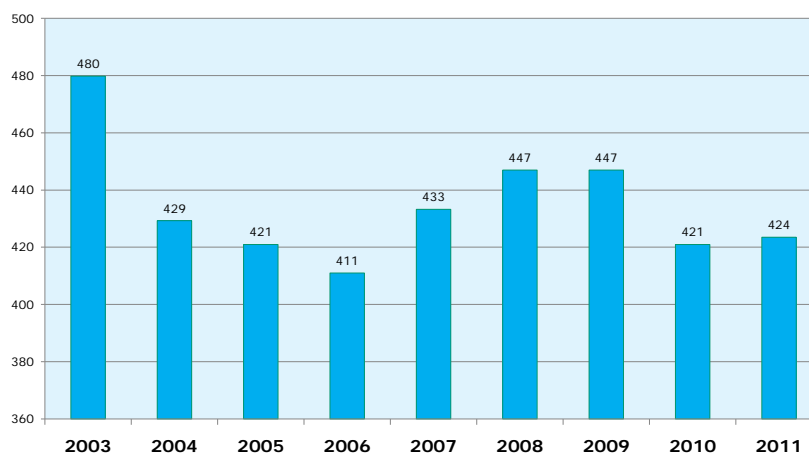
### Reduction in Hours

Service Hours per Week



### Reduction in Staff

Authorized FTE



## Future Funding Options Analyzed

The Commission recognizes that the overall level of funding from City sources is unlikely to increase substantially in the foreseeable future. The Commission has discussed two options that would improve Library funding for the future:

- **Create a Denver Library District, with taxing power**

In the past, the City has considered separating Denver Public Library from the City to achieve independent funding through a library district. Many libraries in Colorado have established funding through a library district, and have shown the advantages of this arrangement. For example, creation of a district could enable more creative service delivery systems through intergovernmental agreements with neighboring library districts. In addition, a district would establish clear responsibility for library functions and administration outside of the municipal government system. And of course a district with a proper mill levy would reduce the inadequate funding and the yearly uncertainty of the present budget.

Average mill levy for other library systems in the Denver metropolitan area is 3.713—above the 3.330 levy amount required to maintain the minimum Library standards established by the Commission. Included in the average are these neighboring systems:

Douglas County	4.0
Jefferson County	3.225
Poudre River (Fort Collins)	3.0
Pikes Peak (Colorado Springs)	3.439 in 2010, 3.526 in 2011, authorized up to 4.0
Rangeview (Adams County)	3.659
Arapahoe	4.869

- **Maintain City agency status with a dedicated City mill levy**

The City could ask voters to authorize a mill levy dedicated to the Library budget. This dedicated mill levy would range from 3.330 (minimum service level) to 3.658 (ideal service level). The annual property tax cost on a \$200,000 home would be \$53.01 to \$58.24 per year.

**The option of continuing to receive City funding at present and proposed 2012 levels would require the Commission to initiate branch closures in order to maintain minimum service levels at remaining locations.**

The Library Commission looks forward to working with the new administration and City Council to forge a solution acceptable to the citizens and City leadership and that best meets the needs of the Library's 4 million visitors each year.