



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council

From: Dennis Quinn, Director of Library Services

Date: September 18, 2020

Reference: Report from Library on Extended-Hours Access Systems

2030: Excellent City Services with High Level of Customer Satisfaction; Use Technology to Operate More Efficiently and Effectively

2040: Foundation: Sustainable Government

Background

The FY2019-2020 work plan included a commitment from the Library to explore options for “24-hour library” services. The intent of this effort was to find ways to enhance customer service with minimal impact to staffing or budget. Staff has recognized demand for expanded service hours at the Cozby Library in recent years, but providing the same service for more hours out of the week would require an increase in staffing that would not be feasible in the current fiscal environment. An alternative model would use an automated system to allow customers to access the facility outside normal hours without requiring a commensurate increase in staffing.

Analysis, Findings

A variety of libraries and library systems worldwide currently employ some sort of automated system to grant users building access outside of normal service hours. In the US, use of such a feature is mostly confined to academic libraries, though a few public library systems have implemented it within the past few years, and it is more common among public libraries in Europe and elsewhere.

A customer utilizing such a system must typically identify themselves at the entrance to the facility by swiping or scanning a card or badge, and/or entering a PIN or password on a keypad. The system authenticates against the library’s existing account database to confirm the customer’s authorization before allowing them to enter. Upon entry, the customer may access certain areas or services, as

determined by the library and/or its governing agency. Policies regarding level of access, services available, staffing, hours of availability, and operational support vary by institution.

Such a system would allow the Cozby Library to address the demand for expanded service hours while maintaining current staffing levels. Customers not able to visit the library during normal hours would still be able to utilize library collections, spaces, and technology systems, in a time and manner suited to their schedules.

Customer safety, and the preservation of the library facility and resources, would be top priorities in the planning and implementation of such a system. Staff research has thus far identified vendors providing potential solutions, North American public libraries currently utilizing such systems, and best practices for customer safety and facility preservation. Further planning conversations would involve Library staff, the Library Board, and a range of stakeholders from the community.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends implementation of an automated system for extended-hours library access during FY2020-2021.