



San Francisco Public Library

Consolidated Minutes of May 10, 12 & 14, 2022 Community Meetings on the Status of the Chinatown Branch Renovation

**Meeting Dates: May 10, 2022 (4:00- 5:10pm), Chinatown Branch Community Room
May 12, 2022 (6:00-7:30 pm), Virtual Meeting on Zoom
May 14, 2022 (11:00 am – 12:30pm), Chinatown Branch Community Room**

AGENDA

- Welcome and Introductions by Library Chief of Branches Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor
- Chinatown Branch History by Library Chief of Branches Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor
- Guiding Principles by Library Chief of Branches Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor
- Community Engagement by Library Chief of Branches Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor
- Project Features and Upcoming by Public Works Architect Andy Sohn
- Questions and Answers

Welcome Remarks and Introductions: Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor

Rebecca welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the meeting to discuss the preliminary designs for the Chinatown Branch renovation. She introduced the following people:

- Michael Lambert, City Librarian (May 10, 2022)
- Maureen Singleton, Chief Operating Officer (May 12, 2022)
- Kate Patterson, Director of Communications
- Connie Wolf, SFPL Commission President (May 10, 2022)
- Teresa Ono, Commissioner (May 10, 2022)
- Chao Qun Huang, Chinatown Branch Manager
- Architect Andy Sohn, Lead Architect from Public Works

Chinatown Branch History: Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor

- Rebecca went over a timeline of the branch's history beginning in 1921 when it opened as the North Beach Branch.
- In 1958, the branch was renamed the Chinatown Branch to reflect the community it was serving.
- In 1996, seismic renovation was completed, and the footprint of the building was increased.

- The branch was designated a San Francisco Historic Landmark in 2002. Required by law to maintain historical elements.
- In 2011, the branch was renamed the Chinatown/Him Mark Lai Branch in honor of the noted historian of the Chinese American experience.

Guiding Principles: Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor

The branch doubled in size when it was renovated in 1996, but it is not meeting 21st-century needs. We looked at how we are serving the public now and how we will serve them in the future? Guiding principles were developed to move branches into the 21st century:

- Flexible and adaptable building designs. Easily adjustable space allows the library to serve multiple purposes.
- Preservation of historic Carnegie Libraries. Highlight and maintain beauty and address areas that need improvement.
- Multifunctional community program areas for different community uses.
- Transparency and ease of wayfinding so patrons can easily identify where services and materials are located.

Community Engagement: Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor

- In 2018, a feasibility study was done to assess the needs of the branch.
- We sought community input and had three community meetings in June 2019.
- The project was paused due to COVID19 and in 2021 a newsletter and survey were sent to the Chinatown community to re-engage them in the project.
- Minutes, the newsletter and survey results are available at www.sfpl.org/chinatown-renovation.

Project Features: Andy Sohn

Ground Floor

- Enlarge community room so that it can hold 100 people and is multi-functional
- Reopen the historic entry from the sidewalk
- Create a gallery/display area at the entry

Main Floor

- Remove the steel truss work and mezzanine floor
- Replacement structural systems will be concealed in walls and ceilings leaving the Historic Reading Room in its original configuration
- Dedicated Teen area with Teen motif, special seating and collections
- Enclosed study rooms
- Add restrooms

Mezzanine

- Staff break area, staff work room, and add staff restroom

Building

- Repair and restore historic brick façade and entry steps
- Provide new interior stair that connects the entire building
- A single elevator serving all floors
- New lighting and security system
- More electrical outlets for charging devices
- WIFI throughout and laptop lending on both floors
- Roof access and new enclosed equipment

Environmental Resiliency

- Replace all heating and air conditioning systems and air condition entire building
- Install additional cooling in the Community Room for weather relief cooling center
- Enhanced air filtration with MERV 13 filters
- Provide rooftop solar energy and battery back-up systems
- Comply with city electrification ordinance and use no natural gas
- Use only renewable power

Andy compared photos of the branch's reading room from the 1970s with the current reading room. Removing the bracing in the current reading room and concealing them inside the walls and roof will optimize the floor plan, create more seating and restore the reading room to its original grandeur.

Andy presented two sets of preliminary plans with alternate locations for the study rooms, Teen area, staff work and break areas. Can mix and match between plans until we get it right.

Upcoming: Andy Sohn

- Structural and historic evaluations are complete
- Design phase began in October 2021 and continues
- Community engagement meetings in May 2022 and again in the fall of 2022
- Historic Preservation Committee approval process will start later in the fall, with full approval in the winter
- Bidding and construction dates to be determined

Questions and Discussion – May 10, 2022

Note: Respondent Andy Sohn is identified as PW for Public Works; LIB represents Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor

What features are behind the wall now where the historic entry used to be?

- (PW) None currently. New entry will feature wood casings and a bronze door.

Where will the public computing area be?

- (LIB) There will be laptop kiosks so that patrons can check out a computer for use wherever they are sitting. The locations of fixed computers are still to be determined.

Concerned that teen area is not enclosed. If teens are in the area and start to get noisy, they may not feel welcome.

Maybe have moveable partitions?

- (LIB) When we're closer to the final plan we will have a better idea of the space.

What are the red desks in the floor plan?

- (LIB) The desk in the teen area is the circulation desk and the desk in the reading room is the reference desk. The idea is to have the quieter service desk in the reading room and busier service desk next to teen area.

You mentioned adding a third restroom. Where will this be?

- (PW) It's not on the drawing but will be added on second floor. First floor will have the same number of restrooms, a family restroom serving the children's area that is not for the general public, two public restrooms and a staff restroom. They will be all gender, with sinks, grab bars, etc.

What is area adjacent to staff area on ground floor? Is that a story space? Currently enclosed story time room is used for presentations.

- (PW) That area is just library space. The Storytime room won't be enclosed anymore.
- (LIB) Would think of the Storytime circle (area indicated on floor plan) as an area where you could have a Storytime carpet, picture books, play to learn etc. and could also use space for Storytime. Community room could also be used for Storytime. Going back to guiding principles the idea is to have flexible spaces.

We are looking at a renovation that doesn't meet the needs of the neighborhood. Space is crowded now and how flexible can meeting room really be? Can meeting room be more accessible?

- (PW) We can make it architecturally flexible with the types of structures we use. The wall can be wide open, can have doors that slide open, etc. so that room flows into the rest of the library space. Operational aspect is up to the library. We can't expand the space, so we need to maximize flexibility.
- (LIB) Mission Branch renovation is a great example of what we're looking at for Chinatown. Mission Branch currently doesn't have a community room, but we are

adding one. We have a limited footprint to add this room, but architects have done a great job making sure it's visible and accessible. This is where teens could hang out, do homework etc. Doesn't have to be just community room but a flexible space that the branch engages with.

Are there structural changes planned for the mezzanine?

- (PW) There will be some minor changes. The elevator will be gone and some of the mezzanine will be removed.
- (Michael L.) Idea is to restore grandeur of the historic reading room.

Is building another floor out of the question?

- (PW, LIB) Yes, for a lot of reasons. If you add a floor then you also have to oversee that floor, the collection doesn't drive the need and it is extremely expensive.

Previous plans had a garden area, is this still part of the plan?

- (PW) Yes, we will have a roof garden. The space is underutilized now, the intention with reconfiguration of stairs and elevator is to make it a more accessible and usable space.
- (Michael L) In a way this is an opportunity to add another floor because the roof is currently underutilized. Mechanical equipment makes it prohibitive to use space. In this design we have the opportunity to reclaim space by moving or shrinking equipment.
- (PW)- ay not be able to shrink much but the equipment will be quieter. Not able to do programs on the roof now because equipment is too noisy.

What's the status of the temporary location?

- (LIB) We're looking for a space now so the more spaces we hear about the better. Let people know we're looking.
- (Michael L.) We're not closing the branch this year, maybe in spring of 2023.

Possibly the CCSF Chinatown campus for a temp location?

What's great about this library is its Chinese book collection. That is the most important aspect so want to hear what the plans are for this collection.

- (Michael L.) The size of the collection is still to be determined, but I want to clarify what our goals and vision are. In looking at the data, the physical circulation of books peaked 10 years ago. Circulation was 2/3 physical and 1/3 digital, now it is 54% physical and 46% digital. The plan is to celebrate books and they will be the main feature. But we're not hearing complaints that we don't have enough books; we hear complaints that we don't have enough space. The new space will be open and airy with better sight lines.
- (LIB) Our collections department is working hard on the opening day collection and making sure that it meets the community needs. We want to connect the community with books and want them in hands and not on shelves.

Because so much is on the internet, we could weed out a lot of periodicals.

- (LIB) The industry is digitizing, and this is something that we are looking at as an organization. Digital inclusion is a concern, patrons still need access to the materials.
- (Michael L.) Don't want people to choose. We have the largest book budget per capita in the country so we can give the best of both worlds.

E-platforms in other languages not as robust.

- (LIB) We recognize the limitations of e-platforms. Rest assured that the community focus of physical collections is not going away.

There are a lot of children that gather in the parks and other spaces close to the library after school etc. Is engagement being done with them?

- (LIB) Yes, Aileen, Chao, Tiffany and other Chinatown branch staff have all done outreach to these communities. Engagement is extremely important to us.

How long do we have to make suggestions?

- (Michael L.) We're very open to suggestions. You can contact staff directly or send email. We will be having additional community meetings in the fall.

Questions and Discussion – May 12, 2022

What are the plans for the rooftop?

- (PW) We plan to redo the roof terrace by bringing the stair to the roof, improving the terrace finishes and features, and acoustically isolating the air conditioning equipment.

Do you absolutely need solar panels? There is limited public space in the neighborhood. Can the floor space be maximized on the roof?

- (PW) City buildings are required to use renewable energy when possible. The solar panels won't take away from the roof experience. With the mechanical equipment on the roof, it will not be a very large space, but it will be nice. The Library will have to discuss patron access issues: limiting the number of people, security, monitoring, etc.

Can you change the orientation on the roof to have an east facing view?

- (PW) It would be difficult to do that since we would want to stay off the original historic structure.

Will the number of books be reduced?

- (LIB) We are working with the Collection Development Department and plan to have a robust Chinese language collection. We are constantly reviewing the collection needs and can't say right now what the size will be.

Will there be a temporary site while the library is closed?

- (LIB) Yes, we plan to have a temporary site where patrons will have access to materials, public computers, library services and programs.

How big will the temporary site be?

- (LIB) Similar to the Mission temporary site, the Chinatown temporary site will be about 2,000 to 2,500 square feet. We are looking for a space that is as move-in ready as possible. If you have suggestions for possible sites in the neighborhood, please let us know and send them to chiefofbranches@sfpl.org or cob@sfpl.org.

Will there be acoustic mitigation?

- (PW) Yes, we have an acoustician as part of the design team to help address issues such as noise from the restrooms. The Teen and Adult areas will have some separation, but they have not been designed yet. The branch will also have enclosed study rooms.

Will the Teen area have natural light and ventilation?

- (PW) In one of the preliminary plans the skylight is above the Teen area. In the addition, there are high windows and we'll see if they can be operable to let in natural ventilation. After the renovation, the building will have better ventilation and an improved mechanical system that brings in outdoor air.

Will people enter the Children's Room through the community room?

- (PW) No, there is another entrance into the Children's Room. The community room will be a usable space, functioning as a living room/reading room when it is not being used for a program.

Will the library be completely closed during the renovation? Will construction overlap with the Portsmouth Square renovation?

- (LIB) Yes, the branch will be completely closed.
- (PW) We'll find out the timeline for the Portsmouth Square renovation.

Will the Teen area be larger, and will there be flexibility about who can use the space? Will adults be able to borrow the chairs?

- (LIB) Much like it is now, adults will be able to use the space when teens aren't using it. We have signs reserving the space for teens during certain hours, otherwise adults are

welcome to use the space if it is empty. We need to set the floorplan before we can buy furniture, but we are planning to have furniture that is moveable and adaptable.

Are the windows Palladian?

- (PW) No, the existing historic windows in are designed in a neo-classical, Beaux Arts-style façade but not Palladian. The original Powell Street façade, windows, and steps, will remain and will be fully restored.

Will there be acoustic issues if the mezzanine is removed, such as echoing noise?

- (PW) No, removing the mezzanine won't affect the acoustics. The acoustician will study ways for the ceiling and walls to absorb noise.

Can the study rooms be reserved? How many people will the study rooms hold?

- (LIB) Patrons won't be able to reserve the study rooms in advance so that a broad number of library patrons can use them.
- (PW) The study rooms will hold two to four people – we haven't determined their size or locations yet.

Questions and Discussion – May 14, 2022

How long will the branch be closed?

- (PW) The renovation could take up to two years.
- (Michael L.) The Chinatown Branch will be open another year, then closed for renovation next spring at the earliest.

The branch needs more electrical outlets to plug in laptops.

- (LIB) Branch staff have let us know that more outlets are needed, so we plan on providing more charging stations.

How will the popularity of digital content affect the collection?

- (LIB) The Library has a robust collections budget and we will continue to have printed materials, while adapting to changing patron needs.
- (Michael L.) The reality is that there is a finite amount of space. We don't receive complaints that we don't have enough books. We do receive complaints that there aren't enough seats. The needs of the community are changing, and the Library wants to meet these needs.

Doesn't lowered shelving mean less books?

- (Michael L.) The demand for physical books peaked about ten years ago when physical items were two thirds of our circulation. The pandemic only accelerated the demand for digital items. Digital items now make up forty-six percent of our circulation. However,

patrons will not have to choose one or the other. The physical book is still alive and well, and the Library will continue to meet patron demands for them.

- (LIB) Lowered shelving makes it easier for patrons to browse and have access to materials. The Library wants to see its books checked out and utilized rather than sitting on the shelf.

Will the Library have the capacity to fill patron requests for books and deliver them to the branch?

- (LIB) Yes, patrons will continue to be able to reserve books and have them delivered to a branch for pickup.

Does the City cap the amount of money it gives to the Library for the renovations? Does the City consider cost increases?

- (Michael L.) The Library receives dedicated funding through the Library Preservation Fund, 42% of which is from property taxes, with the remaining amount coming from 2.3% of the general fund. The renovation is self-funded, and we are not asking the City for additional money. The Library has applied for \$13 million from the State's Infrastructure Grant Program for the Chinatown and Mission renovations.

As we come out of the pandemic there will be more demand for books. The Chinatown community has a lot of older people who prefer books.

- (Michael L.) Since 2012, physical book circulation has been declining every year and we need to use our space for what the community is demanding. We will continue to invest in the physical collection, but the books need to earn their space on the shelf. Not all books are equal, and some collections, like non-fiction are less important compared to the branch's special collections. The Chinese language collection, children's books and best sellers will remain in the building.
- (LIB) How patrons access materials is just as important to the Library as what they can access. The Library has a new Digital Equity Manager whose focus is supporting digital inclusion and helping folks be more comfortable with using technology.

How long do you anticipate the Library will be closed, and will there be a remote site?

- (Michael L.) The branch will be closed for about 2 years. We are looking for a temporary site for the library and additional spaces where we can have programs.
- (LIB) We welcome your suggestions for sites that are ADA accessible and mostly move-in ready.

Will there be enhanced security after the renovation?

- (PW) We are working with a security consultant regarding closed circuit television and video. There are concerns around privacy when using this technology.

- (Michael L.) We are committed to having libraries that are safe and are adding three full-time security positions. Some of our branches have fixed post security guards and if one is needed at Chinatown, then one will be provided.

Are study rooms and a Teen area necessary? Do the demographics show that there are fewer teens using the Library?

- (Michael L.) The majority of the spaces in the library are for adults.

I am delighted that teens will have their own area and seating. The teen years are an important age and it is important to make them feel welcome.

Will there be only one study room?

- (Michael L.) The final design hasn't been decided. We will have more community engagement meetings this fall.
- (PW) The preliminary designs are based on feedback that we received from staff and earlier community engagement meetings.

What is the plan for the roof?

- (PW) There will be mechanical equipment on the roof, and we'll work with the Library to see how the roof can be used by patrons.
- (Michael L.) We know that patrons want access to the roof, and we will look at ways to provide the best possible patron experience.

Is it possible to add another floor on top of the addition?

- (PW) It would be problematic structurally to add another story.

Why reopen the historic entry? I don't think it was ever used to enter the library.

- (PW) It is worth restoring and provides a more elegant entry into the community room.
- (Michael L.) Patrons will have access to the community room when it is not being used for programs.

Some ideas for a temporary site are the Chinese School on Stockton Street, the City College campus on Kearney and the Empress of China restaurant.

- (LIB) If you have more suggestions for a site, you can email them to cob@sfpl.org.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michael Roman and Florinda Battad