



San Francisco Public Library

Consolidated Minutes of August 19, 22 & 24, 2023 Community Meetings on the Status of the Chinatown Branch Renovation

**Meeting Dates: August 19, 2023 (10:30- 12:00pm), Chinatown Branch Community Room
August 22, 2023 (4:00-5:30 pm), Chinatown Branch Community Room
August 24, 2023 (6:00-7:30 pm), Virtual Meeting on Zoom**

AGENDA

- Welcome and Introductions - City Librarian, Michael Lambert, Chief of Branches, Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor
- Design Update, Public Works Architect - Andy Sohn
- San Francisco Arts Commission Project Planning - Aleta Lee
- Questions and Answers

Welcome Remarks and Introductions: Michael Lambert (August 19, 2023), Rebecca Alcalá-Veraflor (August 22, 24)

At this series of community meetings, the Library, Public Works, and the San Francisco Arts Commission shared these presentations:

[Library and Public Works Presentation](#)
[San Francisco Arts Commission Presentation](#)

Michael/Rebecca welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the meeting to discuss the design updates and public art opportunity for the Chinatown Branch renovation. He introduced the following people:

- Lisa Valerio, Capital Projects Manager (August 19, 22)
- Dolly Goyal, Public Service Chief (Aug 19)
- Agnes Li-Translation Coordinator (Aug 19, 22)
- Kate Patterson, the Library Public Information Officer (Aug 19, 22)
- Chao Qun Huang, Chinatown Adult Branch Manager (Aug 19, 22)
- Aileen Kuo, Chinatown Children's Branch Manager (Aug 19, 22)
- Architect Andy Sohn, Public Works (Aug 19, 22)
- Other Public Works team members (Aug 19, 22)
- Katherine Hsieh, CNL rep for Chinatown Branch (Aug 19, 22)
- Lena Yu, CNL rep for Chinatown Branch (Aug 24)
- Lorna Chee, retired Chinatown Branch Manager (Aug 19)

- Aleta Lee, SF Arts Commission Public Art Project Manager (Aug 19)

Project Overview and Branch History: Michael Lambert/Rebecca Alcalá-Veracruz

- Complete renovation of Chinatown Him Mark Lai Branch Library
 - 1921 Historic Carnegie Library (one of seven in SF)
 - Named after Chinese American historian and activist Him Mark Lai
 - Not renovated in the past SF library bond (BLIP Program)
 - Library features and building systems are outdated
 - An extensive community engagement process informed the project scope

Renovation Update: Andy Sohn

- Community Engagement
 - 2017-Council of Neighborhood Libraries; SFPL Library Commission
 - 2018-Branch Feasibility Studies; SFPL Library Commission update
 - 2019-SFPL Library Commission
 - 2019 – 3 community meetings
 - 2020 & 2021-SFPL Library Commission updates
 - May 2022- 3 community meetings
 - August 2023-3 community meetings
 - Design was modified to address many of the items that came up during the May community meetings
- Seismic and Accessibility Upgrades-were done in 1995
 - Building systems and library service style are outdated
 - Community room is too small
 - Too few restrooms
 - Historic features in need of renewal:
 - Historic Reading Room
 - Remove mezzanine
 - Remove bracing and conceal inside the walls and roof
 - Facade repair
- New Amenities Planned
 - Enlarged community room that will accommodate 100 people
 - New teen room
 - Three small study rooms added near teen room
 - Restore community room entry
 - Renewed roof terrace; was challenging to add but the community indicated this was highly desirable
 - New elevator and internal stairway connecting all levels
 - Currently you have to go outside if you want to use stairs to go from the ground floor to the main level
 - The existing two elevators don't access all of the floors

- Replace obsolete systems
- Sustainability and resiliency upgrades. Building will be LEED gold certified.
- Additional restrooms. Public conference room and restroom added to mezzanine
- Public art
- Andy walked through several slides with floor plans and artist renderings of the new amenities.
 - Ground Floor Highlights:
 - Gallery space next to the community room. Operable partitions will create a flexible space
 - Open Storytime area in the children’s room.
 - Main Floor Highlights:
 - Remove bracing and restore historic grandeur of the adult reading room.
 - Inside staircase for a sense of connection
 - Study rooms
 - Mezzanine
 - Public restroom
 - Public conference room
 - Roof
 - Move equipment to the back, creating a patron space with east facing views

Project Schedule

- Community meetings August 2023
- Design completion Fall 2022-November 2023
- Permitting Winter 2023-2024
- Bid and award Spring 2024
- Notice to proceed Summer 2024
- Construction-tentative 2 years

San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) Presentation: Aleta Lee

- The Art Enrichment Ordinance ensures that 2% of the gross construction cost of civic buildings, transportation improvement projects, new parks, and other above-ground structures such as bridges, be allocated for public art.
- Goals are to promote a diverse and stimulating public environment and commission work that is site-specific and meaningful to the community.
- 2% of the Chinatown Branch Library renovation cost will be allocated to an art opportunity for the branch.
- This will provide a budget of \$182,000 inclusive of artist design, fabrication, transportation, installation and contingency.

- Currently at the first step of the process which is project planning.
 - Arts Commission meets with the client and design team to review and discuss artwork goals, opportunities, and community outreach.
 - Arts Commission meets with community to receive input on goals and opportunities.
- There are several projects in Chinatown with public art planned so there will be one large RFQ for all projects and a Chinatown artists registry will be created.
- The artist review panel reviews submissions and makes a recommendation.
- This recommendation then needs to be approved by the Arts Commission.
- Artwork opportunity criteria:
 - Visibility and accessibility
 - Integrated with architecture/site
 - Durability and maintenance
 - Artists who can create work for the opportunity
 - Community feedback
- Artwork opportunity area has been identified as the arches in the historic reading room. The entire area is 300 square feet and painted and mounted 2D aluminum work is currently being considered.
- Presentation included examples of 2D public artwork displayed at other locations.
- Existing public artwork in Chinatown Branch-*Take Root* by Rene Yung, San Francisco based Chinese artist.
 - Commissioned by SFAC, created and installed in 1996
 - Materials are copper, copper leaf, aluminum, plexiglass and lighting
 - Community-based project that collected and etched bilingual community poems about the library
 - To be reintegrated into the new renovation of the library.
- Ways to be involved:
 - Provide input during project planning phase happening now
 - Sign up for newsletter for project updates and upcoming meetings
www.sfartscommission.org
 - Share the RFQ (out early 2024) with artists who have deep connection to Chinatown and its community
 - Listen in on Artist Review Panel meetings (Virtually on Webex)
 - Attend Artist Orientation meetings
 - Checkout finalist proposals and give feedback
 - Questions can be directed to aleta.lee@sfgov.org

Renovation Update Questions and Discussion – August 19, 2023

Michael Lambert opened the Q&A by assuring the audience that SFPL is committed to maintaining a temporary library presence during construction. The location hasn't been identified yet, but the library is working with the Department of Real Estate on possible locations, and community and staff members have been providing suggestions.

A concern was raised about safety and security, particularly regarding the rooftop terrace. Anyone will be able to access this space so how is the library making sure the area is secure?

- (LIB)-Michael assured everyone that safety and security are a high priority. Dedicated security guards have been added to several branches, and the plan is for Chinatown to have their own dedicated security.
- (DPW)-Andy indicated that there is a security consultant on board and that there will be the right amount of closed-circuit TV throughout the building and roof.

A question was asked about emergency planning and if it is being incorporated into the new design.

- (LIB)-Michael responded that the emergency plan is separate from the design work, but that it will be updated.
- (DPW)-Andy added that the building will meet all safety requirements and be seismically up to date.

The CNL representative asked about the roof area and if it will have a garden.

- (LIB)-Michael said that this is still to be determined but that we could possibly have planters.
- (DPW)-Andy said that it is not in the plans but is possible. Need to consider how it will operate, who will take care of it, etc.

There was a question about the open story area within the children's area and if that would be distracting to other children. Also, there was concern about the location of the teen area and the information desk next to the main reading room causing distraction to patrons in the reading room who need quiet.

- (LIB)-Michael shared his excitement about the functionality and flexibility of the children's space. It will have different zones, and some children's programs could use the community room. He said that the placement of the reading room is set and that we will have to monitor noise levels.
- (DPW)-Andy added that the reading room will be the same as now except for absence of the mezzanine. It will be quiet and a place for reading.

A concern was raised about only having a single elevator and access for disabled if the elevator is out of service.

- (DPW)-Andy replied that elevators are expensive to maintain and that the existing two elevators don't reach the whole building. A single new elevator accessing the entire building should provide reliable disabled access.

A question was asked about the current door to the children’s area and if it will remain, and the answer was yes it will.

There was discussion about the restoration of the community room entry door and possible vandalism. The current door has been broken multiple times and mesh needed to be added.

- (DPW)- Andy agreed with the security concern and said doors would be designed so that security features do not look added on.

SFAC Questions and Discussion – August 19, 2023

What’s an RFQ?

- (SFAC)-Aleta explained that an RFQ stands for “Request for Qualifications” and artists will usually share their resume and samples of artwork.

There was a question regarding who would be considered and whether they had to be a member of the Chinatown community.

- (SFAC)-Aleta answered that it wasn’t necessary that they be a member of the Chinatown community but that they wanted to emphasize artists with a local connection.

Chinatown Historical Society member wanted to know if there was interest in telling the history of Chinatown and the library. Historical Society members would like to partner.

- (SFAC)-Aleta replied that planning of the themes etc. is currently in process.

A question was asked about whether the artwork was on the windows or around the windows. It was clarified that these aren’t windows but five niches.

A community member asked if they were looking for a single artist for all five niches.

- (SFAC)-Arleta replied that they are looking for one artist but if there is budget left over other artwork could be purchased.

A question was asked regarding media art- changing screens etc. and if it is an option.

- (SFAC)-Arleta indicated that they are currently looking at permanent art and that the Arts Commission wants the art to be a permanent medium (vs media art).
- (LIB)-Kate Patterson has previous experience with media art and said that it is challenging to make art with new media because there are so many advances in technology. It’s difficult to address all the possible troubleshooting issues that can arise.

Michael Lambert highlighted that there will also be an art gallery space where exhibits can be brought in and artists in the community can be showcased.

The Chinese Historical Society member said they would love to do programming in community room.

The Arts Commission can transform work. For the Chinatown Muni Station the artist a traditional paper artist with no previous public art experience. Her papercut designs were translated into the metal installation.

Michael closed out the meeting by thanking everyone in attendance and letting them know that representatives from the Library, Public Works and the Arts Commission would stay behind for a little while in case anyone had additional questions.

Renovation Update Questions and Discussion – August 22, 2023

Will the skylight in the Teen area be replaced? Will the glass blocks on the floor be obscured?

- (DPW) Sohn – The skylight will be replaced with new and the existing glass blocks will remain.

What will replace the structural bracing in the Main Reading Room?

- (DPW) Sohn – The old bracing will be demolished and new structure will be imbedded in the walls hidden from view. The walls will be opened, we will inlay steel panels and then replace the plaster.

Will the library be open during the renovation?

- (DPW) Sohn – No, the library will be closed, and a temporary location will be open.
- (LIB) Alcalá-Veraflor – We are working with the San Francisco Real Estate Division and community members to find a temporary library site. The space needs to be ADA accessible, retrofitted, have an emergency exit, and be able to accommodate browsing, computer and self-check-out service.

What is the timeline for the temporary location? Do you have any leads?

- (LIB) Alcalá-Veraflor – It depends on what is available. Ideally, we would like to have a location in early 2024. We have received some suggestions from community members and hope to work with District 3 Supervisor, Aaron Peskin.

What is the ideal square footage and location?

- (LIB) Alcalá-Veraflor – We'd like the temporary site to be around 2,000 square feet and in the neighborhood, close to the branch.

Will the Children's Room be able to get natural light?

- (DPW) Sohn – No, the Children's Room will not get natural light, but we will be working with a lighting designer to make the room bright and pleasantly lit.

How will you address the noise from the Teen area?

- (DPW) Sohn – The Teen area will be enclosed.

Is it possible to build another floor?

- (DPW) Sohn – It is structurally difficult to add another floor. It will also be difficult from an operational standpoint since additional staff will be needed.

The Teen area looks small. What is the capacity? Can it be bigger?

- (DPW) Sohn – The Teen Room is proportional to the library given all the other needs in the library and will be sufficient to support the use.
- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – We expect the Teen area to be the primary destination for teens to gather and hangout and activate the community room for larger group activities and programs.

Will adults be able to use the Teen area?

- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – The area is open to adults, however when teens are present, the space will be for the teens.

Did you meet with neighborhood teens and ask them what they want to see in the Teen area?

- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – No, but that is a great idea. We will work on inviting teens to their own meeting so that they can give us their ideas about the renovation.

Will there be ventilation and heat?

- (DPW) Sohn – Yes, the new systems will make it very comfortable inside the building and the building will be fully air-conditioned with filtered air.

Will the windows open?

- (DPW) Sohn – No, the windows are up high in the spaces and will not open. Note that the existing windows do not open now.

Will the roof terrace have glass walls? Will there be a buffer?

- (DPW) Sohn – Yes, the roof terrace will have high clear glass window screen and will be set back from the edge of the building. An onsite guard, and closed-circuit TV throughout the building and on the roof will provide security.

Has the project been approved by the City?

- (DPW) Sohn – We are currently working with Planning Department on entitlements and Division of Building Inspection on permits.
- (Lib) Lambert – The project is fully funded with a budget of \$37M. We are able to self-fund this project out of our budget because of the Library Preservation Fund.

Will the square footage be the same? What will be the size of the collection?

- (DPW) Sohn – There will be a small decrease in space, but the greater utilization of the mezzanine and other efficiencies will make it feel bigger and brighter inside the branch.
- (Lib) Lambert – We will continue to meet the demand for books, however that demand peaked in 2012, and has been decreasing 3-5% every year. People aren't asking for more books, instead they are asking for more space. The library is transitioning towards having flexible spaces to serve different functions and be a place for shared experiences. We are committed to the Chinese language collection, but will have a smaller footprint for other collections, like adult non-fiction.

Will there be an area to eat?

- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – We don't allow eating in the library because we need to stay mindful of the impact of pests and managing trash.

What will be in the gallery?

- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – The gallery will have a display case where we can bring art from the Main to the branch. It will not only be a space to showcase art, but it will be a space that celebrates the community and welcomes people walking into the branch.

SFAC Questions and Discussion – August 22, 2023

The dragon motif representing Chinese culture is overdone. Is the art and imagery for the Children's Room open for discussion?

- (DPW) Sohn – The artwork in the slides are just ideas and are not the final designs in the Children's Room. We'll give your feedback to the SFAC.

Renovation Update Questions and Discussion – August 24, 2023

When the library was closed in previous fix-up projects, what was done to provide library services?

- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – We are working with the City's Real Estate division to find a temporary site, which is what we did for previous projects.
- (Lib) Lambert – Most recently we secured a leased space for temporary library services for the Mission District while their library undergoes a similar major.

Not a question, but as a Chinatown service provider, having a 100-person capacity community room is amazing and much needed.

It looks as if the roof terrace does not extend fully so one can look down at Powell Street. Why?

- (DPW) Sohn – We thought it best to hold back so that we can be in control of the number of people on the terrace. Extending the terrace to the edge of the building will also change the visual character of the building.

Is it okay for kids to be noisy in the Children’s Room?

- (Lib) Lambert – We want the Children’s Room to be a space where kids can be kids.
- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – Studies have shown that when we allow children to be children, we are supporting their social and emotional learning.

It was mentioned that the mezzanine is not used often. Is there any possibility to relocate the main floor staff work areas to the mezzanine and leave more room for the patrons on the main floor?

- (DPW) Sohn – The mezzanine is not a full floor and therefore, not a big enough space to accommodate the staff. The staff workroom also needs to be proximate to the workflow.
- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – There is a lot of back and forth between the workroom, the public area, and service desk. Staff need to be nearby to move materials around and support the service team.

I noticed that the Storytime space is an open space with no partitions like the Teen area. I am wondering how that will impact the sound level in the Children’s Room?

- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – The function of the Children’s Room is to support early learning. We have the option of using the community room for Storytimes when there are large groups.

I’m wondering about noise bleed from the Children’s Room through the stairwell.

- (DPW) Sohn – We see the building as having an active side and a less active side. The stairwell is in the active side, while the adult reading room is in the less active side in the front of the building. There is potential for noise bleed, and it is a tradeoff to establish a connection between floors, but we don’t think it will be a problem.

How much seating is provided in the main reading room?

- (DPW) Sohn – We haven’t selected the furniture yet, so we don’t have that number. There will be more seats than in the current library.

Will the restrooms in the Children’s floor have child sized toilets?

- (DPW) Sohn – The decision for child sized toilets in the Family Restroom has not been made.

The front windows look like they were designed by Michelangelo himself – how do we reconnect to the original North Beach Library?

- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – The North Beach neighborhood has its own new branch.
- (DPW) Sohn – The Chinatown Library was originally the North Beach Branch and the windows are the original historic windows. These will be restored as part of the renovation.

Will the library have triple pane glass?

- (DPW) Sohn – No, the windows will have dual pane insulated glass.

What will be the cost of the project after it is completed?

- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – The project’s budget is \$37 million.

The cable cars are outside. How do we do a shout out to the tourists?

- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – We will think of ways to draw folks into the library.

How much rent are you thinking of paying for a temporary location?

- (Lib) Lambert – Market rate

Will there be more electric outlets in the main level reading area for people to plug in devices to in the front as well as the back portion of the library where the teen area will be? Will there be more?

- (Lib) Lambert - We will take this feedback into consideration. We certainly aspire to have more.

Will the wifi signal be strong or equally strong in all parts of the library? Will there be wifi on the roof?

- (Lib) Lambert – Yes, it should be strong in all parts of the library, including the roof.

Will there be some individual seats (like the ones with the stands on the table for privacy) like at the main that are scattered throughout the library?

- (Lib) Lambert – To be determined. We’ll take this feedback under consideration.

Will the roof have a capacity limit? If so, how many?

- (Lib) Lambert – Yes, there will be finite space and capacity, to be determined.

Will the roof be able to withstand a lot of foot traffic without posing noise or potential leaks to the ceiling of the floor below?

- (Lib) Lambert - Yes, it will withstand foot traffic occupancy and there will be no noise or leaks on the floor below.

[SFAC Questions and Discussion – August 24, 2023](#)

What are the public art projects in Chinatown that will be bundled in the Request for Qualifications (RFQ)?

- (SFAC) Lee – The RFQ will include the public art projects in the Chinatown Branch, Portsmouth Square, and the Chinatown Public Health Center.

Aside from the five panels in the main reading room, what other areas in the library are being considered for display of artwork?

- (SFAC) Lee – Temporary art exhibits will be shown in the ground floor gallery space. If there is additional art budget remaining, this could lead to 2D artwork purchases for the Library. Additional wall space in the library can be determined by the design team and library staff.

Is the Library open to multi-cultural art, representing women, Ramaytush Ohlone, Italian-Americans, and African Americans too?

- (Lib) Alcalá-Veraflor – Using an equity and inclusion lens, we plan on choosing diverse art to exhibit in the gallery.
- (SFAC) Lee – The SFAC is open to multi-cultural art. We are looking for art that has a meaningful connection to the community. Artists don't necessarily have to live in Chinatown.

As the name suggests, it is the Chinatown Library. We hope that the artworks blend Chinese and Western elements with a strong emphasis on Chinese culture. This will create a sense of familiarity for us (Chinese) living in a foreign land, as if we have a home away from home.

Will there be artwork in the restrooms too?

- (DPW) Sohn – We don't have a plan for it but can consider it. Our main focus is to have serviceable restrooms.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michael Roman and Florinda Battad