

Lakewood Pierce County Library building update

Aging building in critical condition

Welcome. As a valued Lakewood Pierce County Library customer, the Pierce County Library System would like to give you an update on the Lakewood Library.

Overview

Through the years, the Library System has taken many steps to repair and maintain the aging, well-loved and well-used building. It has actively maintained and repaired any issues that the Library System has noticed at the Lakewood building, including:

- Repairing roof and building envelope leaks.
- Upgrades to public and staff furniture.
- Fixing plumbing issues including replacing the hot water heater.
- Improving landscaping.
- Maintaining fire protection system.
- Repairing elevator.
- Repairing sewage system.
- Repairing heating and cooling system.

Now, all of these systems are approaching end of their lifecycles and are coming due for replacement. The Library System plans to convene an advisory committee to review the building and while it is meeting, the Library System does not plan to invest further in the needed maintenance and repairs.

The building, owned by the Pierce County Library, is aging and in critical condition. The Lakewood Library serves 60,000 people and the layout does not align with today's service model and the dated, aging building is hard and costly to maintain.

The Pierce County Library System is committed to providing quality library services for Lakewood residents in a safe, accessible manner and space.

Current Situation

Recently architects conducted a Building Condition Assessment of the Lakewood Library and rough estimates showed the building requires \$10-\$15 million in repairs for improved safety and access, including replacing the roof and damage throughout the building from the leaky roof, replacing the elevator, heating and cooling system and plumbing system, and upgrading windows and doors. This estimate includes both urgent needs and long-term investments.

The roof needs a total replacement, with a rough estimated cost of \$2.4-\$3.5 million and involves a total removal. Therefore, the Library System will need to remove all books, materials and furniture from the building for a roof replacement, which may equal the cost of the entire property's value.

The overhang areas at the public and staff entrances are waterlogged and cannot sustain another year of rainfall. Thus, removing the books and furniture from the building is urgent.

Repairs far outweigh the value of the building. The Library System is evaluating its options to serve the community best, which include moving to a short-term location to provide limited services, taking services to places in the community and assessing a mid-term location for library services.

The Library System is coordinating with the City of Lakewood to form a community advisory committee to understand the public input from 2019, review the significant building needs and provide advice to the Library System about how it could best provide library services for Lakewood.

If you are interested in applying to participate on the advisory committee, please email director@pcls.us.

Background

The Tenzler Library, now the Lakewood Pierce County Library, opened in its current location on Wildaire Road in 1963. In 1991-92, the FRIENDS of Lakewood Library, who owned the Lakewood Library, donated the library building and \$350,000 for renovation to the Pierce County Library System. At that time, the FRIENDS

could no longer maintain the 33,000-square-foot building, which was becoming a challenge for the FRIENDS to afford the costly repairs and maintenance.

In 1993-1994, the Library System renovated the building.

With funding from the 2006 voter-approved levy, the Library System invested in an overall updated layout with the following:

- An improved customer service desk and access to movies and music.
- More places to read and study, with a better placement of noisy and quiet activities.
- Additional computers adding keyboards with Korean characters.

In 2009-2010, the Library System created a Facilities Master Plan for the 1,800-square-mile library district. Key findings for nearly all locations and especially Lakewood included:

- Buildings are too small: noisy, uncomfortable, and overcrowded. For Lakewood, the building layout is poor, with non-public space in the basement and an upstairs, making access and service cumbersome, with two floors of public space.
- Too few seats and spaces for people – seating, group activities, social interaction.
- Not enough books and materials or accessible shelving.
- Limited computers/limited technology.
- Too few meeting rooms.
- Customers want services to be convenient and accessible.

The plan also identified two libraries needed expansion or relocation: Lakewood and Sumner. Findings in the study concluded the following specifically for Lakewood Library:

- Both community members and community leaders said the library is too small to meet residents' needs.
- Community members expressed a need for a better division between adults and children/teens areas, with living room areas so parents could be with their children and work on computers.
- Books, movies, and materials, quiet and nosier activities, meeting rooms, group study, and parking vehicles need better spaces.

All of this holds true today, in 2022.

The primary mechanism for funding the improvements outlined in the Facilities Master Plan was a publicly funded bond, needing a super majority (60%) of voters' support. With the 2007-2009 recession, timing for a bond measure was not possible. In recent years, the Library System updated parts of the Facilities Master Plan and again concluded Lakewood and Sumner Libraries needed significant improvements and possibly new locations.

In 2019, the Library System conducted extensive public engagement to learn the public's interest in new libraries for Lakewood, Tillicum and Sumner. People expressed an interest in a new library for Lakewood as well as Tillicum, with 84% of survey respondents favoring a new library. Although, many residents expressed mixed opinions and showed an attachment to the current building. In particular, many people shared concern that any changes or moves of the building must include the massive, historic Douglas fir slice from the original Tenzler Library. The Library System has been steadfast in its commitment that any changes or moves with the Lakewood Library include preserving the notable tree slice.

The Library System conducted outreach and engagement work in three languages (English, Spanish and Korean) to ensure diverse participation. Overall, nearly 5,000 residents participated in the Library System's engagement efforts, with more than 900 people responding to a print or online survey.

In the 2019 community engagement, people described an interest in the Lakewood Pierce County Library being a place to:

- Access books, movies and other materials (83%).
- Use technology (70%), such as computers and copiers.
- Enjoy quiet and noisy activities including reading and relaxing (68%).
- Participate in events and classes (66%).
- Work and study areas (65%).

The City Council for Lakewood has also noted a new library for Lakewood as a priority in its strategic plan and in previous public surveys; residents noted the library a community priority.

With the community input, the Library System was planning to hire an architect to determine solutions for the existing building or a new building. Then, in early 2020, the world shut down with the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, the Library System delayed its further discussion with the community and determining next steps to serve Lakewood residents best.

The Lakewood Library boasts the highest annual visits of any of the 19 Pierce County Libraries, hosting 262,000 annual visitors (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic).

In addition, the Lakewood Library serves as one of the highest-use libraries for checkouts of books, movies and other materials, realizing 430,000 items checked out annually, which is the fourth highest number in the Library System, following Gig Harbor Pierce County Library (616,000), University Place Pierce County Library (493,000) and South Hill Pierce County Library (537,000).

Concerns or Comments

Email Connie Behe, Customer Experience Deputy Director, Pierce County Library System, cbehe@piercecountylibrary.org.