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City Auditor recommends more resources, responsiveness for Long Beach Public Library



Long Beach Public Library Department director Glenda Williams speaks at the opening of the Billie Jean King Main Library opening on September 23, 2019. (Photo by Brittany Murray, Press-Telegram/SCNG)

By HARRY SALTZGAVER | hsalt@gazettes.com | Grunion Gazette
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The Long Beach Public Library should expand operating hours, increase non-English materials and do away with late fees, according to a report on the system City Auditor Laura Doud released on Wednesday, Feb. 10, which details how the library system could better serve the ethnically and socioeconomically diverse communities that depend on it.

The library system's officials, according to the director's response to the audit, have agreed to implement all 29 recommendations. But while the library expects to implement some of those changes later this year, the director wrote, coronavirus-caused budget constraints and City Council oversight may delay other recommendations.

"I commend the Library for starting to implement our recommendations," Doud wrote in the release, "and quickly adjusting to meet the needs of the community during

these challenging times through their contactless pick up services, online programming, and partnerships.”

Long Beach has 11 library branches across the city, as well as the Billie Jean King Main Library. Those facilities, though, have been closed for nearly a year because of the pandemic.

Doud’s office conducted its audit of the city’s public library system in 2019, but the 62-page published report — available on the [city auditor’s website](#) — was delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The library system, according to the audit’s findings:

- Doesn’t have operating hours that meet the needs or desires of the community;
- Has a lack of language diversity, with 97% of programs presented in English and 95% of library materials in English;
- Has a fine structure for overdue materials that limits access for low-income community members because when fines aren’t paid, library services are suspended; and
- Lacks adequate adaptive technology for people with disabilities, with only two locations having such services.

Each finding came with recommendations to fix the problems. The library system, for example, should train staff at all of its branches to help people access adaptive technology, the report said.

Library Director Glenda Williams provided a written response to the audit, which was included in Doud’s published report. In her response, Williams lauded the library system’s recent accomplishments — including receiving, in 2017, a National Medal for innovation from the Institute of Museum and Library Services — but also agreed that there’s more officials can do ensure the LBPL serves everyone equitably.

“Library Administration fully recognizes that despite the accolades, there is still work to be done to better reach and serve Long Beach’s economically, linguistically, and racially diverse residents,” Williams wrote. “We are committed to taking the actions necessary to better align our programs and services with the needs of Long Beach residents who speak languages other than English.”

Williams, though, also noted the city’s current coronavirus-caused budget problems and projected deficits in the future — and how that may limit what the library can accomplish in the short-term.

“More than ever, we need the support of the City and residents to build an ever-stronger public library that is equipped and capable of providing the support Long Beach residents need,” she wrote. “We look forward to the opportunity to implement the improvements recommended by the City Auditor and working to better service the Long Beach community as funding streams come online.”