

Lawton Public Library Business Case for Kathleen Wyatt Nicholson Branch Library

Overview

The Kathleen Wyatt Nicholson Branch opened to the public on May 7, 1997. The building and land was gifted to the City of Lawton for the express purpose of operating a branch library with stipulations that should the branch library cease operations, the property would revert back to the family of Kathleen Wyatt Nicholson.

Hours

The branch library was open 25 hours per week for many years. In 2014-2015, the hours were trimmed to 21 hours per week. In 2015, the branch hours were further reduced to 15 hours per week.

Service Model

Lawton Public Library (LPL) is set up in a headquarters/satellite library format. In some communities, library locations are decentralized and/or of more equitable size. Lawton's main library has the Family History Room, the computer lab, CreateSpace, Lawton Adult Literacy Center, children and teen areas, meeting rooms, and the Digital Memory Center. These services are not available at the branch.

Libraries across the United States have adopted various business models including "express libraries". Even though it is not officially designated as such, Lawton's branch has evolved into an express library. Express libraries focus on quick checkouts including picking up holds and interlibrary loan material, returning items, and other limited services. Express libraries concentrate on convenience over amenities. For instance, there are no in-person classes or events at the branch.

Upkeep

The branch library has had minimal renovation over the years. In 2020, a \$780.00 memorial was received which allowed for a new ADA ramp, bicycle rack, and outside motion sensor light.

Novak Report

In November 2020, the Novak Report identified the need to assess the business case for operating the Branch Library.

Decrease in Circulation

Per the Novak report, "between FY2014 and FY2019, checkouts at the Branch Library have decreased by 44%..."

Using this same logic, between FY2013 and FY2019, checkout at the Branch Library have decreased by 24%. Furthermore, factoring in the circulation per open hours, there is a 27% increase between FY2013 and FY2019.

Decrease in Branch Customers

The branch customer versus main customer statistics are misleading at best. In fact, this statistic is no longer tracked by library staff in this way. The more apt statistic is door count.

Per the Novak report, “between FY2014 and FY2019...total customer counts have decreased by 37%.”

Using this same logic, between FY2013 and FY2019, total door count at the Branch Library have increased 68%. Furthermore, factoring in the door count per open hours, there is a 179% increase between FY2013 and FY2019.

In addition, as of 6/1/21, there are 998 customer accounts that have the branch library specified as their preferred location for picking up materials.

Library Strategic Plan

Lawton Public Library’s Vision Statement is: All people in our community value & use the Lawton Public Library.

Lawton Public Library’s Mission Statement is: Provide opportunities to engage in life-long learning.

Library Goals:

- Lawton Public Library will provide exceptional customer service to all individuals in the library, on the phone, and through technology.
- Lawton Public Library will provide beneficial resources and services throughout the community for all ages and interests.
- Lawton Public Library will provide comfortable, safe, clean public places for individuals and groups.
- Lawton Public Library will promote its mission and vision to the community.

The branch library is an integral part of achieving the above goals.

Costing

The branch library costs can be broken into three categories: direct library costs, indirect library costs, and city costs. In 2018, it was estimated that it cost \$33,689.28 to operate the branch library per year. These numbers were updated in 2021. It is now estimated that it costs \$33,633.00 per year to operate the branch library. See below.

If the branch were shut down, it is reasonable to assume that the main library’s door count and circulation would increase and staff hours would be shifted to the main library. Shutting down the branch would save the City under \$10,000.00 per year.

Please note that the branch library’s internet is covered through e-rate. With the phone system now through Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP), the monthly telephone charges may very well be less.

Kathleen Wyatt Nicholson Branch Library		
Estimated Costs		
		Annually
Direct Library Costs		
Utilities: Electricity & Gas		\$1,335.00
Telephone		\$400.00
Internet (Staff and Public)		\$0.00
Pest Control		\$240.00
1 Staff @ Branch (\$12 x 16 hrs/week)		\$9,984.00
Staff Courier (\$11 x 2 hrs/week)		\$1,144.00
Supplies		\$500.00
Sub-Total		\$13,603.00
Indirect Library Cost		
Supervision Hours		\$5,980.00
Main Library Assistance for holds, questions, etc.		\$7,800.00
Library Materials		\$3,900.00
Sub-Total		\$17,680.00
City Costs		
Lawn Mowing		\$750.00
Building Maintenance		\$520.00
City Water		\$820.00
Gasoline & Vehicle Repair (6.5 miles between locations)		\$260.00
Sub-Total		\$2,350.00
Total Estimated Costs		\$33,633.00

Comparable Service Populations

Using the newest Public Libraries Survey available through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), for populations of 50,000 to 99,999, of the 577 public libraries in the United States, 343 of them have branch libraries. Lawton Public Library has 2 locations which is the median average for this population size and less than the mean average.

Table 3A. Number of public libraries in the 50 states and the District of Columbia with branches and bookmobiles, and number of service outlets, by type of outlet and population of legal service area: Fiscal year 2019

Population of legal service area	Number of public libraries	Number of libraries with		Number of outlets				Number of stationary outlets per library		
		Branches	Book-mobiles ¹	Stationary outlets			Book-mobiles ¹	Mean	Median	Maximum
				Total ²	Central libraries	Branches				
50,000 to 99,999	577	343	113	1,580	552	1,028	125	2.7	2.0	15

SOURCE: IMLS, Public Libraries Survey, FY 2019. Data elements CENTLIB, BRANLIB, BKMOB, POPU_LSA from the Public Library System Data File (PLS_AE_PUD19i) were used to produce this table.

Potential Repurposing

There have been discussions over the years about potentially repurposing the building for other uses. One such use could be a permanent book store for the Friends of the Library. Another suggestion was to use the building as a literacy center. It is unclear if the family of Kathleen

Wyatt Nicholson would agree to this or not. According to the deed terms, if the building is not used as a library, it reverts back to the family.

The Personal Touch

Library staff have looked into installing contactless lockers in areas of town to allow for 24/7 pickup/drop-off locations. The price point of these locker systems continue to drop but average around \$35,000.00 per unit. Library staff have explored grant opportunities but it is still a wish list item, not an affordable solution. That being said, 24/7 access does not address the need for personal connection. The branch library is within walking distance to large neighborhoods of housing. Many people want personal interaction.

Serving Comanche County

The Lawton Public Library is tasked with serving the whole of Comanche County. All Oklahoma public libraries are required to serve their entire county to receive state aid funds and other state library grants. Lawton Public Library receives County funding in part because it serves the whole county. There is one other public library in Comanche County: the Elgin Public Library. People in Fletcher and Sterling tend to use the Elgin Public Library. People in Indianahoma and Cache tend to use the branch library. Indianahoma to the branch library is 17 miles. Indianahoma to the main library is 24 miles.

Technology

The branch library allows individuals to print, copy, scan, and fax documents. Customers can use the wireless access in the library or in the parking lot.

Events & Activities

While the branch library does not currently offer library events or classes, branch customers can still participate in a variety of activities such as summer reading, winter reading, contests, passive activities, etc. As innovative approaches to library service continue to be developed, there will be more ways to transform branch level services.

Recommendation #1

The branch library status should be reviewed on an ongoing basis along with all library statistics. The pandemic has affected several services, statistics, and the new normal. Library staff and the Library Board will continue to monitor the local situation and the national trends.

Recommendation #2

The Library Board recommends restoring the branch hours to 25 hours/week. This is not possible until library FTE are restored to previous levels.

Recommendation #3

The Library Board recommends exploring the possibility of a branch on the east side of Lawton.

Board Approval

This document was reviewed & approved by Lawton Public Library Board on 6.2.2021.

Appendix A: Novak Extract

This is an extract of the Novak Report that was presented to City Council in November 2020. The full report is 274 pages. This section is in reference to the branch library.

Operations and Planning

Recommendation 54: Assess the business case for operating the Branch Library.

In addition to operating the Main Library in central Lawton, the City also operates the Kathleen Wyatt Nicholson Branch Library 15 hours per week. This Branch Library is located approximately 6.5 miles west of the Main Library in a residential neighborhood and is housed in a 1,100 square foot building that was built in 1964. After the passing of Kathleen Wyatt Nicholson in 1994, this property was gifted to the City for the express purpose of operating a Branch Library with stipulations that should the Branch Library cease operations, the property would revert to family ownership. The Branch Library opened in 1997.

Compared to the Main Library, the Branch Library is open limited hours. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Branch Library was open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:00 PM to 5:00 PM and Saturdays from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. The Branch Library is staffed by one part-time Library Assistant. The Library's annual report data shows declining counts for customers and checkouts at the Branch Library over the past several years, as illustrated in the following table. In short, between FY2014 and FY2019, checkouts at the Branch Library have decreased by 44%, and total customer counts have decreased by 37%.

Table 40: Library Usage Data, FY2014 – FY2019

Library Usage Data	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	Percentage Change FY2014-FY2019
Checkouts, Main Library	149,194	164,877	181,048	183,647	186,946	183,035	23%
Checkouts, Branch Library	19,196	15,179	11,858	10,536	10,588	10,659	-44%
Electronic Books	439	16,852	26,949	31,438	36,085	44,411	10,016%
Total Checkouts	168,829	196,708	219,855	225,621	233,619	238,105	41%
Customers, Main Library	37,088	30,762	29,034	29,083	30,641	26,446	-29%
Customers, Branch Library	1,075	984	756	750	616	680	-37%
Library Usage Data	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	Percentage Change FY2014-FY2019
Customers, Computer only	0	0	0	2,723	4,928	6,485	Not Applicable
Total Customers	38,163	31,746	29,790	32,556	36,185	33,611	-12%

In addition to the costs associated with staffing the Branch Library, the City expends financial resources running the Branch, including building maintenance, cleaning, and utilities. Given the declining trend for checkouts and customer counts for the Branch Library over the past several years, the City should evaluate the benefit of continuing to operate the Branch Library. This business case should include a detailed analysis of expenditures associated with operating the Branch Library and all available utilization data. With resource constraints affecting the entire City, it may be appropriate to realign the resources dedicated to running the Branch Library to other critical needs in the City. However, absent a detailed business case analysis, a data-informed decision about this matter is not possible.

Lawton Public Library

52	Update and formalize the Library organizational structure.
53	Develop a cross-training plan for Library staff.
54	Assess the business case for operating the Branch Library.
55	Develop a business plan for family history and genealogy services within the Library.
56	Train employees on best practices for serving Library patrons experiencing homelessness.