



To: Library Board

Fr: Pete Loeffel, Library Director and Robert Trunley, Assistant Library Director

Meeting Date: September 18, 2024

Re: Proposed change to library hours

Purpose/Need

Library staff is proposing to modify the library's weekday hours Monday-Thursday from 9:00 am - 9:00 pm to 9:00 am - 8:00 pm. This modification is being proposed based on patron usage patterns that have changed since 2020.

Background

Library staff is continually observing patron usage patterns and statistics to evaluate library services. Library staff evaluates patron traffic patterns by looking at items such as:

- The number of patrons in the building in a given hour
- The number of patrons checking items out in a given hour
- The number of reference questions and service requests in a given hour
- The number of public PC logins in a given hour
- Meeting room and conference room reservation times

The 8:00 pm to 9:00 pm was traditionally the hour with the least amount of usage before 2020. As library usage increased back towards pre-pandemic levels, staff have observed that the 8:00- 9:00 pm hour has become even slower than before 2020.

The number of patrons checking out after 8:00 pm is now four times less than during peak hours, with less than 20 patrons on average checking out after 8:00 pm. The average number of patrons using the Adult library after 8:00 pm is less than 20; the Children's library is even less, with about five patrons on average.

Earlier this year, WPL's Firefly Room had 79 reservations that went beyond 8:00 pm out of a potential 120 weeknights. Groups with evening reservations, however, often leave before their reservation end time.

Children's Library programming would not be affected by this change. Adult Library programs would have a minimal shift.

WPL would still have a comparable weeknight closing time with similar Wisconsin libraries. WPL is currently the only library in Milwaukee County that is open until 9:00 pm, and three libraries are open until 8:30 pm. Twenty-two of the top thirty-three circulating libraries in Wisconsin close at 8:00 pm or earlier on weeknights.

The proposed change would increase staff efficiency by allowing staff to perform off desk tasks when they would otherwise be scheduled at a service desk from 8:00 pm - 9:00 pm. For example, with the current hours two circulation attendants may be scheduled at the desk from 1:00 – 5:00 pm, with two other circulation attendants scheduled at the desk from 5:00 pm- 9:00 pm. With the new hours, those two evening circulation attendants may work a shift from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm. This effectively creates an opportunity from 4:00 pm– 5:00 pm when they can perform needed off-desk duties. Likewise, this shift presents an opportunity for part-time librarians to have off-desk time to work on collection development and other activities. The shift would increase opportunities for team meetings. The shift would allow for more librarians to be available during key hours.

While this change is not primarily being proposed as a cost saving measure, City facilities staff estimates that closing earlier at 8:00 pm weeknights would save heating, cooling, and electricity costs totaling about \$6,000 annually.

If approved, this change would take place at the start of 2025.

Project Costs

There are no costs to implement this change. City facilities staff estimates a cost saving of \$6,000 annually.

Recommendation

To approve the change as proposed.