

HOOT



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Friends of the Piedmont Avenue Library

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SUPPORTING THE PIEDMONT AVENUE BRANCH, OAKLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

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City of Oakland Budget Update – From the Oakland Public Library Advocates



As the City of Oakland prepares for what is certain to be a tough budget season in 2021, OPL Advocates have already begun urging the City Council to protect and restore funding for Oakland Public Library.

A report* under review by Oakland City Councilmembers in December projects the city's budget gap for the current year as \$32 million. This will grow to \$62 million, the report states if no "fiscal corrective action" is taken.

In response to the budget shortfall, Mayor Schaaf recently announced a series of austerity measures. Among them: Temporary workers were terminated, all conference attendance was eliminated, all department directors will forgo scheduled raises, and departments were asked to submit reduced budgets (by 10 percent and 20 percent) for the remainder of this fiscal year. Note: Salary proposal passed by the council on 12/23.

For us, this all means working hard, starting now, to make sure every single Councilmember knows that the library has continued to provide essential services to Oaklanders throughout the pandemic – and that OPL should be prioritized in upcoming budget decision-making.

Our overall goal so far will be to urge the Council to fully fund the library under the terms of Measure D. Of course, we will be in touch with you as always to

share what we know, and find the best way forward to protect and support our vital library staff and services.

OPL Advocates attended the Dec. 7 meeting of the City Finance and Management Committee, when the report was reviewed. We submitted the following e-comments to committee members:

"Since the pandemic struck in March, the Oakland Public Library has provided crucial resources and services to all Oaklanders, regardless of age, race, gender, ethnicity, income level, and housing status. It has, as always, distributed books, online and print information, movies, music, magazines, toys and tools. However, even though its doors have been closed to the public, the library has also innovated and expanded its services, responding to the community's new and greater needs.

"The library has distributed thousands of meals and produce bags to the hungry, collected masks to keep people healthy, created online resources for families and young children to prepare them for the start of school, offered free virtual legal consultations, distributed Wi-Fi hot spots to OUSD, and offered free Wi-Fi and mobile printing services outside its buildings, all to lessen the digital divide. On the horizon, the library plans to further expand and innovate, for example, enriching Oakland's children by providing



art and science kits and remotely visiting classrooms. The impact the library has had during this crisis is profound.

"During the midcycle budget process this year, the library lost substantial Measure D funding. Given the crucial role that the library continues to play in the community, we ask that full funding be restored during the next budget cycle."

OPL Advocates, founded in 2013, is an informal coalition harnessing the organizing prowess and library passion of myriad groups, including the LAC; the Friends of the OPL nonprofit organization; Branch Friends groups representing all of OPL's locations; the Youth Leadership Council; library unions SEIU Local 1021 and IFPTE Local 21, and the grassroots group Save Oakland Libraries. OPL Advocates members meet monthly to share strategies, goals, and resources.

**Report submitted to the Finance and Management Committee by city administration*

Next door to our Piedmont Avenue Library is a building that has sat empty for the last ten years. Formerly used by the Oakland Unified School District as a Childhood Development Center, it has two or three classroom-sized rooms, bathrooms, a kitchen, and enormous yard areas, with playground equipment, in both front and back. At one side is an abandoned garden plot where children used to grow vegetables. The yard has also been home to a goose, a rabbit and a pet snake.

In the 1980s and early 90s, it was alive with activity. Three teachers, each of whom had two or three aides, held classes to prepare young children from low-income families to enter school. The cooks who staffed the kitchen made lunch for the children.

Each of Louis Segal's three children went to the CDC before they attended Piedmont Avenue Elementary. His comment, "Wonderful, absolutely wonderful." He couldn't praise it enough and said it helped his family in innumerable ways. Ask him about it and you'll get a picture of what a vital place it was.

But when Oakland's funds for those programs were no longer available, the building was locked and has sat empty ever since. There are no funds to restore the CDC or plans by OUSD to do so. There are discussions, however, between OUSD, the city, and OPL regarding the use of the empty CDC building!

Meanwhile, the building that was housing Piedmont Avenue Library on 41st Street at Piedmont Avenue was sold



CDC Building January 2021

and the library was forced to move. A couple of portable buildings, meant to serve as a temporary replacement, were brought to Piedmont Avenue Elementary School property and fitted out with shelves, tables and chairs and a counter for checking out books and other materials.

Undaunted, the capable, resourceful and dedicated Piedmont Avenue Library staff have coped with the limited space, choosing and adapting programs to fit the cramped environs.

That a vital service like our library, with continued high circulation, operates in one of the smallest spaces in all of Oakland's library system says a lot about our staff's commitment and capability. To quote our Supervising Librarian, Jenera Burton, "Our branch once again is proving small but mighty."

Imagine what we would do with a larger space!

Friends of the Piedmont Ave Library

Notes from the 1/12/21 meeting

The Friends of PAL has been incorporated as a nonprofit. Over the next several months we will begin to develop a fund-raising plan.

Financial report. Because of the pandemic and shut down, there was little activity during 2020. Current balance: \$23,330.00

OUSD, the city, and OPL are in discussions regarding the use of the empty CDC building. We have reached out to Sam Davis, new District 1 school board member, and invited him to our February meeting.

Louis Segal will be our new liai-

son with Piedmont Avenue Elementary School. We are concentrating on building a connection with PAES, highlighting our library as a resource for them.

Renate Woodbury will produce a hard copy of the Hoot each month. It will be available at our library's sidewalk pickup and at select merchants.

Supervisory librarian Jenera Burton reported curbside pickups are going well.

The next zoom meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 2/16 at 7pm. Please add your name to our mailing list – contact@freindsofpal.org.

"I always knew, from the time I found myself in that little segregated library in the South, all the way up the stairs of the NYC Library, I always felt in any town, if I can get to a library, I'll be okay. It really helped me as a child and that never left me."

—Maya Angelou

I've been an avid reader since I could read. In high school I used to cut school to read in the Berkeley Public Library. I'm writing this column to share some of the books I love. I hope, perhaps, you might grow to love a few of them.

HISTORY

Sometimes the line between history and literature is very porous. **Eduardo Galeano**, with the mind of a historian and the heart of a poet, wrote a wonderful trilogy in the 1980s *Memory of Fire*. The three volumes *Genesis*, *Faces and Masks* and *Century of the Wind* have been compared to John Dos Passos' USA Trilogy. But it is much more than that. If you're curious about the Americas, all the Americas, or if you like your history with passionate flair, the trilogy will inspire and infuriate, delight and enlighten.

Finally, I'll let Galeano speak for himself in his introduction to *Genesis*: *"I was a wretched history student. History classes were like visits to the waxworks or the Region of the Dead. The past was lifeless, hollow, dumb. They taught us about the past so that we should resign ourselves with drained consciences to the present: not to make history, which was already made, but to accept it. Poor History had stopped breathing: betrayed in academic texts, lied about in classrooms, drowned in dates, they had imprisoned her in museums and buried her, with floral wreaths, beneath statuary bronze, and monumental marble."*

"Perhaps Memory of Fire can help give her back breath, liberty, and the word. Through the centuries, Latin American has been despoiled of gold and silver, nitrates and rubber, copper and oil: its memory has also been usurped. From the outset it has been condemned to amnesia by those who have prevented it from being. Official Latin American history boils down to a military parade of bigwigs in uniforms fresh from the dry cleaners."

"I am not a historian. I am a writer who would like to contribute to the rescue of the kidnapped memory of all America, but above all of Latin America, that despised and beloved land: I would like to talk to her, share her secrets, ask her of what difficult clays she was born, from what acts of love and violation she comes...I do not want to write an objective work—neither wanted to nor could. There is nothing neutral about this historical narration. Unable to distance myself, I take sides: I confess it and am not sorry... What is told here has happened, although I tell it in my style and manner Galeano, [Memory of Fire: Genesis, translator Cedric Belfrage]."

Louis was born in Oakland, raised his family in Oakland, dropped out of school in 1968, worked many jobs over the decades, dropped back into school in the 80s, got a Ph.D. in history, and taught in many universities in Northern California from 1993 to 2015.

The Oakland Public Library is offering sidewalk service



Piedmont Avenue Branch is open for pickup Tuesday – Saturday 10am – 1pm. Patrons can pick up holds for books, DVDs, CDs, and WiFi hotspots at our doors. Mobile printing service is also available.

Step by Step instructions are at the OPL website <https://oaklandlibrary.org/services/cards-and-visiting/sidewalk-service-oakland-public-library>