

Note: the words "foot traffic" have been inserted for purposes of clarification

10/29/320

Gentlemen,

I would like to give you an update on the library.

Current services

Just to be clear – The library is open, it is only the building that is closed to foot traffic. We are providing services to the community Monday-Saturday for 43 hours a week. Along with the elibrary, WPL is offering books, DVD's, magazines, craft kits for both kids and adults, wireless internet access (there is a plugin for convenience on the patio), copy and fax service. We have shopped the shelves for patrons, issued library cards, forgiven fines, answered questions, corrected spelling for people, helped with crossword puzzles, and directed callers to community services. Our curbside service is very popular and now that new books have finally arrived, we are publicizing them online, in the newspaper, and have resumed our print newsletter.

In addition, we have given out several thousands of masks, and this week and next – Halloween/fall books to kids as part of the Chamber Trick or Treat initiative. We have offered virtual programs and activities from Patty's book discussions, speakers and trivia game nights to Joanna's story rhymes and songs, virtual classroom visits to WELK, teen fun nights. This list does not include all the activities of a smaller, but robust summer program.

Coming additions and changes

We are also working to set up a hotspot lending program and to add the Chromebooks and eReaders approved by CARES funding to our inventory for lending and usage. As you know, I am retiring April 1, 2021 and am working with the South Central Kansas Library System to secure assistance for the Library Board in the hiring of a new Director.

Continual review

The WPL Board of Trustees revisits the decision to open the doors to the public for foot traffic monthly. We discuss the trends in the county positivity rates, taking into account that the ripple effect that creates spread is considered 45 days. This as you know means what we are seeing emerge locally this week may track back to school starting in September. We check metrics from the KDHE on positivity rates, school gating measurements and ICU availability throughout South Central Kansas, currently at 13%. We also consider what we see happening in the community concerning mask usage and acceptance, risk behaviors, and pandemic fatigue. All of these play a part in determining the risk to the library and the community in opening the building to the public.

Risks

Opening our doors for foot traffic by the public would make us the only library in the area accessible to the public. This would bring people from Ark City, Wellington and the surrounding areas into our library.

People are tired of this pandemic and stressed, some suffering economically, socially and personally. We don't want to create more potential for the escalation of conflict that mask enforcement, limits on time,

occupancy, and services available within the building would bring. We are ill equipped to handle these kinds of potential crisis, and such events place patrons and staff in jeopardy. This is especially true during a pandemic when the opportunity for virus spread and physical violence are becoming more common place.

Staffing

In addition, we are short on staff and are beginning the hiring process for part-time staff to shelve, and assist at the front desk. Learning to use the library software requires a lot of training and experience, as there can often be many problems that can block an account, and search skills for customer service purposes take a while to build. New people usually work with a more experienced staff member in close attendance- often working over their shoulder to instruct when new people are learning the system. We can't train that way now and we are working to set up a system that allows for remote guidance.

We will lose at least two long-time employees that are trained to use the library system and have great public service skills when we reopen our doors to the public. We also would be trying to staff two services that are personnel heavy as our curbside services would remain.

The Science

Since we all as a community began trying to traverse this challenge of the pandemic, the scientific knowledge has continued to evolve and change.

As the science changed, our plan has adjusted and changed. New scientific studies have lowered the risk of infection through fomite transmission. This will change the way we handle library materials for quarantine and library usage. Just in the last week we are seeing state libraries, after consulting with state epidemiologists, taking positions to reduce the quarantine on materials from five days to a range of 24-72 hours. The State Library of Kansas has not offered that guidance. This is significant because with that official guidance comes liability protection.

While they have lowered one risk, scientists have raised another. Epidemiologists, the CDC and the WHO all warn that aerosol transmission is more serious than originally believed, with droplets hanging in the air for two hours. The science has also learned that infection can be caused by an accumulate of 15 minutes per day of exposure instead of the 15 minute per encounter as originally believed. This new knowledge shifts prevention efforts into environmental engineering where HVAC systems, air exchange and flow and humidity are all new factors to be considered. For us this also plays into where we would place movable book stacks and computers, staff stations and direct traffic in order to reduce risk and still provide the necessary social distancing.

These factors become an issue when you look at the numbers that could course through the building. With a max of 15 people for 30 minutes each, in the course of a day 240 different people a day would visit the library. This is significant because of the potential of infection that multiplies as numbers increase. The Georgia Tech COVID-19 Event Risk Assessment Planning Tool measures the risk that at least one COVID-19 positive individual will be present during an activity using county data and numbers of people in attendance. If we had 100 people in the library during a day, our chance of a COVID-19 positive person would be 65%. This would increase as our numbers grew. At 500 different people over a few days, that risk increases to 99%.

Upcoming months

The next few months have been predicted to be the worst of the pandemic as we go through the holidays and people visit family and friends. We will continue to assess the state of the building monthly working toward reopening. However, at this point we believe our current course is the best, safest and most responsible option to allow for continued uninterrupted service.

Thank you.