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**For immediate release**

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**Berkeley's City Council Puts a Neighborhood Branches Bond Measure  
On the November 2008 Ballot to Improve Neighborhood Branch Libraries**

On Tuesday, June 24, the Berkeley City Council voted unanimously to approve putting a \$26.1 million dollar Bond Measure on the November 2008 ballot to renovate and upgrade Berkeley Public Library's four branch libraries and the Tool Lending Library. Neighborhood library users need buildings that are safe, easier to access, and more welcoming. Two of the branches of the Berkeley Public Library (BPL), South Branch and West Branch, have serious seismic safety issues from structural deficiencies. They all need to be brought up to current building codes, including provisions for physically disabled access. The buildings are overcrowded and need to be improved to help library staff give even better service and to allow users to accomplish their reading, research, and learning needs, and attend programs at their neighborhood branches. With community input, the library will also make building renovations that improve ease of use, with better lighting and acoustics. Green buildings are planned, and the library will keep the wonderful historic structures of their branch libraries while creating expanded, safe and inviting environments for their neighborhoods.

City Councilmember Darryl Moore commented: "As the City Council's representative on the Board of Library Trustees and the Board's Vice Chair, it is vital for my constituents, and for all of Berkeley's residents, to pass the Bond to make our Neighborhood Branch Libraries safe and truly functional. I speak for the entire City Council when I say that these Branch Libraries need to be the safe places in our Berkeley neighborhoods where kids and families, seniors and students and all our library users can get valuable information and recreational resources and to connect with their friends and neighbors inside the library or through the wonderful free computers available for all. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to help get this measure on the November 2008 ballot, and I urge all Berkeley residents to cast their yes vote for it."

After completing a Branch Libraries Master Facility Plan (BLMFP) study, a physical evaluation of the four BPL branches and the tool library to assess their feasibility to serve the community, both now and into the future, it became clear to staff and to the consultants, Noll & Tam Architects, who were hired to evaluate the buildings, that these improvements need to be completed in order for the Berkeley Branch Libraries to truly function safely, and as their users need and want them to. Many of these findings echo a similar, but less in-depth 1996 study of Berkeley Public's branch libraries. According to Board of Library Trustees (BOLT) President Therese Powell, "Along with my fellow BOLT members, I have been, for years, committed to making our Berkeley Branch Libraries safe and to improving them: it was the primary reason that I put my name forward as a possible appointee for a BOLT appointment by the City Council. I am so pleased to be able to work on this campaign, and for the entire Board of Library Trustees, I want to thank the Berkeley City Council for considering and accepting our recommendation for a Library Bond in November 2008."

Findings and recommendations reached in this 2008 report benefited from much inclusive participation, community outreach and staff input. Teams of expert consultants visited and examined each branch. Community surveys and branch community meetings solicited input from patrons. Library staff provided invaluable empirical input. A BLMFP Advisory Board participated in visioning workshops to stimulate discussion and exchange ideas. And finally, the Board of Trustees provided considered discussion and direction. John Selawsky, a member of the Advisory Board and the President of the Berkeley Board of Education, in a letter to the Berkeley City Council, recently wrote: “The branch libraries sorely need renovation and upgrades. I frequent both the main, downtown library and South Branch, and I know from experience that the South Branch is an old, out-of-date building, in need of seismic, technology, and ADA access upgrades. I have visited, but do not regularly use, the West and Claremont Branches, and I know both of these branches also need work. I consider our libraries as partners in both youth and adult literacy work, and I know that the libraries are vitally engaged in this on-going work. I also want to note that every part of town will benefit from a branch library bond measure, so there is, to me, a very compelling argument for equity and accessibility for all our residents.”

Historically libraries have functioned as safety valves in tough economic times. Berkeley’s North Branch Library and Central Library were both built during the Great Depression when people needed libraries to help them find jobs and recreation in that very difficult period. In our times libraries, not only offer these same services and programs, but also bridge the Digital Divide by offering access to computers.

Recommendations developed for each branch were based on balanced consideration for all branches and the role of the Central Library. Programmatic improvements to the branches reflect their current overcrowded conditions and the need to update the library staff’s ability to effectively function and serve library patrons. Recommendations for conceptual designs, project schedules, construction costs, and overall project cost are based on planning and phasing scenarios for the library system as a whole. Also to be completed in Fall 2008 is a three-year *Library Strategic Plan* that will describe Berkeley Public Library’s long-range needs, goals, and service priorities. This report will be very helpful in making decisions about branch improvements should the ballot measure pass.

Total project costs for all the branches total \$26.1 million escalated to the beginning of scheduled construction. The Berkeley Public Library Foundation, which raised over \$5 million for the Furniture, Fixtures & Equipment (FF&E) for the Central Library campaign (1998-2002), will be asked to raise over \$2 million for the Berkeley Public Library branch projects following passage of the bond.

For more information, call 510-981-6195, 510-548-1240 (TTY), or go to <http://berkeleypubliclibrary.org> and click on [Our Organization](#), then scroll down to **Branch Facilities Planning**.

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