Nov 25 Listening Session Mini Report

Goals

1. To center the knowledge and experience of all community members in the pursuit of a solution to the dilemma of public safety at the libraries.
2. To build trust in this process among a range of stakeholders and constituencies.
3. To cultivate a core of participants who will consistently return to future sessions.
4. To develop a community-based process for studying and addressing these issues.
5. To articulate a shared approach to promoting public safety at the library.

Purpose

We assembled to address an issue of shared concern, namely that a fight among students occurred at the South East branch that prompted the closure of the library during useful hours, rendering a crucial resource less accessible to the public.

We came together to learn from each other and begin to get to know one another. As we do, we can break down barriers that sometimes prevent us from talking – hierarchies, roles, identities – and we can operate from a position where everyone is valued equally, experience is privileged as a source of knowledge, not position or prestige.

We proposed that a community-based response such as this requires a slow, deliberative process. There are no silver bullets and no short-cuts to doing this right. Patience and consistent and ongoing participation will help us build momentum, with the hope that we grow and expand our base over time. We acknowledged the need to trust the process and surrender to the Sharpie and to the post-it and to the sticky paper that hangs on the wall.

This is precisely the sort of problem that we're only going to solve if we work together because we each possess a piece of the puzzle but we don't know yet how they fit together. There is much we need to learn that does not exist in a textbook or an academic study. And, as we learn things, we need to consistently focus on action: What modes of action do these new insights instruct us to take? If we retain this horizon, that what we learn here will inform action, from which we will learn more and take further action, we have a good chance of being successful.

Who Are We?

We are a team of problem solvers - neighbors, parents, patrons, and professionals - willing and ready to work together in the service of a shared commitment to preserve the libraries for open access and safe use for all, especially students.

<u>Insights</u>

1. The library evokes widespread feelings of deep appreciation and collective ownership—the library is for everyone and needs to have the ability to serve everyone. Libraries are a place to approach the world outside of this local community through access to information and can inspire creativity and foster curiosity.

2. A library may be a haven or sanctuary for students who feel marginalized, intimidated, or threatened elsewhere, for instance at school or even at home. That feeling of being unsafe prior to arrival can affect the environment inside the space, especially without the necessary tools for nonviolent conflict resolution.

3. Safety is a feeling based on the trust that others will have your back; a physical and emotional protection that we all need and deserve. Although, since we perceive safety differently depending on our own identity, position, and experience, we should provide ways for all people to explore what safety means to them.

4. As a geographic cornerstone, surrounding neighborhoods and populations have a role to play in the maintenance of a shared public space, like a library. Because patrons can use any library branch, their sense of belonging may shift and even wane as they travel.

5. Encountering a library full of hundreds of students can bring feelings of anxiety, chaos, and exclusion for adult patrons based on the sheer volume of students from throughout the city who appear unsupervised outside of formally structured time.

6. Students need access to "third spaces" to socialize and just be with friends after school, where they are not forced to spend money. Third spaces can build community with others in person and serve as unplugged social environments.

7. While identifying student needs is best left up to the students themselves, initial ideas include increased mental health resources, recreational opportunities, academic support, and sustainable relationships with mentors. Whether or not and how libraries can serve these functions remains to be determined.