

Seattle Public Library

Overview

The Seattle Public Library's facilities include 26 branch libraries and the Central Library, as well as storage and shops space. Library buildings can be divided into five major categories:

1. There are ten buildings designated as historic landmarks, including seven Carnegie-era libraries (built in the early 1900s) and three modern buildings.
2. Eleven branch libraries are either more-recent construction built primarily during in the early 2000s (eight buildings) or non-landmarked buildings developed between the 1950s and the 1970s (three buildings).
3. Five small library branches are essentially storefronts, four of which are part of larger buildings.
4. The Central Library is a 12-story 363,000 square foot building that serves as headquarters and hub of the library system. It houses the bulk of the Library's extensive collection of books and materials (including rare "special collections" in the Level 10 Seattle Room), a 375-seat auditorium, public meeting rooms, a gallery, large public areas for reading and access to 330 public computers, a data center housing system-wide servers, and Library administration.
5. The Maintenance and Operations Center (MOC), which houses the Library's materials distribution system and also serves as the Library's maintenance shop and storage facility.

In 2020, the Library embarked on an asset preservation program funded by the seven-year Library Levy passed in 2019. That levy, which included funding for seismic retrofits at century-old Carnegie-era branches, will conclude at the end of 2026. The 2019 Library Levy built off capital investments from two prior efforts. The 2012 Library Levy, which concluded at the end of 2019, provided an essential seven-year funding stream to maintain the five new and 22 updated libraries that had been renovated, expanded or replaced during the previous systemwide capital program called "Libraries for All" (LFA). The Library's LFA program, which was completed in 2008, had increased the amount of physical space by 80% to a total of over 600,000 square feet, greatly increasing the demands on the Library's major maintenance program. In August 2026, Seattle voters approved a new, seven-year Library Levy that replaces the expired 2019 levy and will be the primary funding source for the Library's capital program from 2027 through 2033.

The Library Major Maintenance program provides ongoing funding for work that preserves or improves building integrity, efficiency and functionality.

Thematic Priorities

The Library's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects generally fall into one or more categories: asset preservation, operational efficiency, environmental stability, public service improvements, and safety and security.

Asset Preservation

The overriding priority of the Library's capital program is to extend the useful life of its buildings. As the Library's buildings have all surpassed the ten-year mark since the conclusion of the final Libraries for All bond projects, the buildings require attention to flooring, casework, finishes and restroom fixtures.

2027-2032 Proposed Capital Improvement Program

Major repairs and replacement to roofs, building envelopes, HVAC and other critical building systems, doors, windows, flooring and casework are also examples of asset preservation items funded through the Library's CIP budget. The 2019 Levy also funded two Carnegie-era branch seismic retrofits, at the Green Lake and University branches. The 2026 levy includes funding to complete the seismic retrofit of the Columbia branch; construction may begin as early as December 2027.

Most of the Library's typical CIP schedule of projects can be predominantly classified as asset preservation work. There are also elements of enhanced safety, improved access, energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. In recent years, the balance of non-IT Levy CIP funding has paid for mechanical systems replacement at multiple branches, specifically electrification per Citywide mandate and adding or upgrading heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems at various branches that do not possess air-conditioning.

The iconic Central Library often requires a significant portion of CIP funds, usually distributed over multi-year projects. Historically, larger, complex and challenging projects at the Central Library have been planned and staged sequentially to minimize the impact on Library services to patrons. Age-related upgrades to Central's mechanical systems will need to be pursued during the next few years when funding allows.

While the majority of the Library's projects are essential for preserving the Library's physical assets, many of them also contribute to the Library system's other essential themes: operational efficiency, environmental sustainability, and improved service to the public.

Library Operational Efficiency; Environmental Sustainability; Safety and Security of Public/Staff

The Library delivers direct services to Seattle residents, who expect highly functional and welcoming library buildings. Major maintenance work carried out under these priorities supports:

- upgrades to help the Library reduce operating costs while minimizing impact to the public;
- renovations to enhance the environmental sustainability of Library buildings; and
- repairs and improvements that augment the safety of library facilities (immediate safety concerns and building integrity are highest priority).

Public Service Improvements

Public service improvements mostly encompass work that enhances the library patron experience, such as Reimagining Spaces projects that have been completed over the past several years, e.g., at Rainier Beach, Lake City, Ballard, Beacon Hill, Highpoint, South Park and Northeast branches. These projects have typically entailed increased meeting room space; improved internet connectivity for devices; lowered shelving and improved layout for enhanced sightlines/security/accessibility; and updated carpet, paint and restrooms. While there are no projects in the near-term solely dedicated to public service improvements, these improvements are often included in branch seismic retrofit projects. Public service improvements will likely be included in the scope of the retrofits at Columbia and one other branch during the upcoming 2027-2033 Library Levy period.

Project Selection Criteria

In selecting major maintenance work to accomplish in a typical year, the Library evaluates the preservation of building integrity, impact on safety to the public and staff, importance of the work to core library building functions, operational efficiency gains (both economic and environmental), and opportunities to improve or preserve service to the public.

The Library conducts condition assessments and updates information based on inspection by the capital program manager and facilities maintenance staff. The Library obtains professional evaluations of roofs, mechanical, HVAC and lighting systems to flag deficiencies and identify areas where the capital program may be able to reduce operating costs. Library public services managers develop proposals to change the functional use of library space; public input can play a role. These proposals are evaluated for feasibility, cost and urgency, and capital program staff works with Library services managers to scope alternatives. Ultimately, that information is incorporated into a comprehensive facilities plan, which uses industry standards to develop replacement timelines and to approximate costs. The Library senior management team has ultimate responsibility for authorizing and prioritizing functional building modifications.

Many library facilities are open seven days per week during normal operations, which requires careful planning and staging of projects to keep libraries open as much as possible while capital improvement work is underway. Flexibility is critical to respond to building issues as they emerge.

CIP Highlights

In August 2026, Seattle voters approved the 2026 Library Levy to replace the 2019 Library Levy, which concludes in 2026. Passage of the levy adds capital appropriations commensurate with the spending plan as authorized in Ordinance 127419, including \$24.3 million in 2027. These appropriations support the Library's CIP, addressing safety upgrades and deferred and scheduled capital maintenance needs. Other planned expenditures include \$13 million for the Columbia branch seismic retrofit, with additional funding to address elevator repair, mechanical/HVAC systems upgrades, and other deferred maintenance needs. In 2027, the proposed budget provides \$785,000 in base Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) funding, which is also tentatively planned for the Columbia branch seismic project.

The Library's ongoing efforts to convert century-old Carnegie-era buildings from fossil fuel-based HVAC systems will continue into 2027. This effort aligns with the City's mandate to move away from dependence on non-renewable energy sources, while also providing cooling and smoke refuge centers for members of the community during extreme heat and/or wildfire smoke events. With the help of an engineering consultant, the Library has prioritized branches that will be transitioned from fossil fuels, based on immediate maintenance needs, air-conditioning status, years since last remodel and proximity to other Libraries. Of the highest priority locations, the Library has completed the electrification conversion of Broadview, Northeast, Southwest, Capitol Hill and Green Lake branches. Electrification of University branch is being implemented concurrently with seismic retrofit work in 2026. With funding assistance from a \$5 million Hazardous Mitigation Grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) supplemented by the 2019 Library levy, two other high priority branches (West Seattle and Fremont) should be completed by the end of 2026 and two others (Columbia and Queen Anne) will likely be completed in 2027.

2027-2032 Proposed Capital Improvement Program

Preliminary planning work has begun on the multimillion-dollar seismic retrofit at the century-old Columbia branch; construction is tentatively scheduled to begin in 2027. Another levy-funded project, refurbishing and upgrading the Central public elevators, will begin in 2027.

CIP Revenue Sources

Historically, REET was the primary source of funding for the Library's CIP, with an additional smaller allocation from the General Fund. In 2012, the Library worked with the Mayor and City Council to develop a Library levy proposal that voters approved in August of that year, and subsequent library levies have served as the primary funding for the Library's capital program since then. One of the core areas the levy funds is major maintenance. Upon passage of the 2012 Library Levy, the City shifted most major maintenance funding from REET/General Fund to the levy, which provided a significant increase in funding for major maintenance projects. The 2019 Library Levy continued support in preserving the Library's capital assets, including significant investments in seismic retrofits, and the voter-approved 2026 Levy will continue to do the same.

REET revenue plays a vital role in supporting projects that are beyond the scope of the Library's levy-funded major maintenance program. For example, while the levy has been the primary funding source for the seismic retrofit projects at Carnegie-era branches, supplemental funding has been necessary to pursue building upgrades that have been considerably less expensive when performed concurrently with the seismic work. Contingent upon that supplemental funding, expanded scopes can include the addition of air-conditioning; accessibility upgrades (such as elevators) to increase access for patrons with mobility challenges; mechanical system modernization and electrification for increased energy efficiency and reduced reliance on fossil fuels; and other interior enhancements. As mentioned above, the Library's \$785,000 2027 REET allocation will augment seismic retrofit funding at the Columbia branch.

The Library has also been active in pursuing external sources of capital funding. Over the past few years, the Library has been awarded:

- a \$5.25 million FEMA grant to fund air-conditioning for five non-air-conditioned branches - University, Columbia, West Seattle, Queen Anne and Fremont;
- a \$1.27 million congressionally-directed FEMA Hazardous Mitigation grant allocation to partially fund the seismic retrofit work at the University branch; and
- a \$1.95 million Washington State Department of Commerce grant for the University branch seismic retrofit.

In 2027, the Library will continue to pursue both federal and state funding opportunities, particularly to support seismic retrofit work at the Columbia branch.

Summary of Upcoming Budget Issues/Challenges; Future Projects on the Horizon

Aging Buildings and Infrastructure

Library buildings are among the most intensively-used City facilities in Seattle. Prior to the pandemic, the Central Library hosted over 1.2 million visitors annually, with library branches serving over 3.6 million visitors. The Library's historic landmark buildings have unique features such as brick facades, slate roofs and other details. When undertaking maintenance and repair work, it is essential to use designs and materials consistent with their landmark status – all factors that increase major maintenance costs.

The venerable Central Library has now entered its third decade of service; it poses a different set of challenges. A building of Central's size, complexity and intensity of use requires significant annual maintenance to preserve core functionality and continually improve building efficiency. At least two major areas of concern will require significant funding beyond the annual Levy major maintenance allocation: (1) updating Central's mechanical and HVAC systems to align with current City policy and lessen its carbon footprint, and (2) replacement of Central's unique façade, comprised of thousands of diamond-shaped windows. Additionally, the Library is interested in exploring whether Central's spaces could be refigured to better serve patrons and the Library's evolving operational and security needs.

Elevators and escalators, which are vital to maintaining accessibility for patrons, pose an additional upcoming challenge as these items may require imminent retrofitting or upgrading due to life cycle maintenance needs or revisions to building codes, which are frequently changed to meet new safety measures.

Seismic Preparedness

A 2016 survey conducted by the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection identified seven unreinforced masonry (URM) facilities in the Library's property portfolio requiring seismic retrofit to reduce the risk of injury and loss of life during an earthquake. The survey classified buildings into three categories of vulnerability (critical, high, and medium) with regard to life safety impacts. Three of the seven Library facilities - Green Lake, University and Columbia branches - fell within the high-vulnerability category (with the remainder in the medium-vulnerability category) and the Library Board of Trustees identified those branches as a critical issue to be addressed. As mentioned, since then, the Library has begun or completed seismic retrofit projects at these three most vulnerable branches, and the 2026 Library Levy is also anticipated to fund one more.

Adjusting to a Changing Climate

The Library is also adapting to a changing climate, often working with the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) to identify potential areas for improved energy efficiency and, per mayoral directive, to lessen the Library's reliance on fossil fuels. Several branches – including most of the landmarked branches, some built a century ago – are not air-conditioned, and rising summer temperatures can lead to closures which impact patrons and Library operations. The Library continues to explore logistics and funding options to add air conditioning to high-use branches that currently lack air-conditioning, which would increase branch comfort year-round and also allow those branches to serve as cooling centers during extreme heat events. The Library has previously received funding for decarbonization and electrification efforts through the JumpStart Payroll Expense Tax Fund, and received a 2024 FEMA grant to partially fund air-conditioning for five non-air-conditioned branches.

ADA Improvements - Library

Project No:	MC-PL-B3012	BSL Code:	BC-PL-B3000
Project Type:	Ongoing	BSL Name:	Capital Improvements
Project Category:	Improved Facility	Location:	Various Locations
Current Project Stage:	N/A	Council District:	Multiple
Start/End Date:	N/A	Neighborhood District:	Not in a Neighborhood District
Total Project Cost:	N/A	Urban Village:	Not in an Urban Village

This project represents ADA improvements for The Seattle Public Library, and includes work on accessible paths and adjustments to casework, restroom fixtures, and railings.

Resources	LTD Actuals	2026 Revised	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Total
Real Estate Excise Tax I	1,046	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,055
Total:	1,046	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,055
Fund Appropriations / Allocations *	LTD Actuals	2026 Revised	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Total
REET I Capital Fund	1,046	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,055
Total:	1,046	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,055

O&M Impacts: N/A

Central Library Infrastructure Improvements

Project No:	MC-PL-B3013	BSL Code:	BC-PL-B3000
Project Type:	Ongoing	BSL Name:	Capital Improvements
Project Category:	Improved Facility	Location:	Central Library 1000 4th Ave
Current Project Stage:	N/A	Council District:	Council District 7
Start/End Date:	N/A	Neighborhood District:	Downtown
Total Project Cost:	N/A	Urban Village:	Not in an Urban Village

This project provides for improved infrastructure at the 363,000 square foot Central Library. Central requires substantial infrastructure work to achieve operational efficiency and set the stage for its eventual programmatic re-imagining. Changes to Central also require additional lead time for planning and design, due both to its unique physical configuration/infrastructure and iconic architectural status. Typical improvements may include, but are not limited to, structural and mechanical repairs or improvements, safety and security upgrades, lighting and signage enhancements, and wall and floor surface repairs.

Resources	LTD Actuals	2026 Revised	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Total
Real Estate Excise Tax I	1,617	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,617
Total:	1,617	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,617
Fund Appropriations / Allocations *	LTD Actuals	2026 Revised	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Total
REET I Capital Fund	1,617	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,617
Total:	1,617	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,617

O&M Impacts: N/A

* Funds are appropriated through the Adopted Budget at the Budget Summary Level. All Amounts shown above are in thousands of dollars

IT Infrastructure

Project No:	MC-PL-B3100	BSL Code:	BC-PL-B3000
Project Type:	Ongoing	BSL Name:	Capital Improvements
Project Category:	Rehabilitation or Restoration	Location:	Various Locations
Current Project Stage:	N/A	Council District:	Multiple
Start/End Date:	N/A	Neighborhood District:	Multiple
Total Project Cost:	N/A	Urban Village:	Multiple

This project represents system-wide Information Technology (IT) Infrastructure improvements for The Seattle Public Library, including enterprise equipment upgrades and integrated library system (ILS) replacement.

Resources	LTD Actuals	2026 Revised	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Total
2019 Library Levy Funding	2,616	5,384	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,000
Seattle Voter-Approved Levy	-	-	459	927	1,715	495	632	323	4,551
Total:	2,616	5,384	459	927	1,715	495	632	323	12,551
Fund Appropriations / Allocations *	LTD Actuals	2026 Revised	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Total
2019 Library Levy Fund	2,616	5,384	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,000
2026 Library Levy Fund	-	-	459	927	1,715	495	632	323	4,551
Total:	2,616	5,384	459	927	1,715	495	632	323	12,551

O&M Impacts: N/A

Library Major Maintenance

Project No:	MC-PL-B3011	BSL Code:	BC-PL-B3000
Project Type:	Ongoing	BSL Name:	Capital Improvements
Project Category:	Rehabilitation or Restoration	Location:	Various
Current Project Stage:	N/A	Council District:	Multiple
Start/End Date:	N/A	Neighborhood District:	Multiple
Total Project Cost:	N/A	Urban Village:	Multiple

This ongoing project provides for major maintenance to Library facilities, which include the 363,000 square foot Central Library and 26 branch libraries as well as storage/shops facilities. Typical improvements may include, but are not limited to, structural and mechanical repairs or improvements, safety and security upgrades, lighting and signage improvements, wall and floor surface repairs, landscape and exterior hard surface repairs, energy efficiency upgrades and projects that enhance service delivery or facilitate operational cost-savings at our libraries. This project preserves building integrity and improves functionality, and provides responsible management of the Library's building assets to ensure their long-term operational use.

Resources	LTD Actuals	2026 Revised	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Total
2019 Library Levy Funding	21,818	15,792	-	-	-	-	-	-	37,610
Federal Grant Funds	1,086	5,724	-	-	-	-	-	-	6,810
General Fund	3,289	(1,694)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,595
Payroll Expense Tax	2,760	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,760
Private Funding/Donations	1,069	(1,069)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Real Estate Excise Tax I	11,270	1,062	785	992	835	900	900	851	17,595
Seattle Voter-Approved Levy	7,834	56	-	-	-	-	-	-	7,890
Seattle Voter-Approved Levy	13,952	-	21,805	9,257	24,817	20,286	11,164	11,651	112,932
State Grant Funds	1,839	1,950	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,789
Use of Fund Balance	259	1,475	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,734
Total:	65,175	23,297	22,590	10,249	25,652	21,186	12,064	12,502	192,714

Fund Appropriations / Allocations *	LTD Actuals	2026 Revised	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Total
2012 Library Levy Fund	21,786	56	-	-	-	-	-	-	21,842
2019 Library Levy Fund	21,818	15,826	-	-	-	-	-	-	37,644
2026 Library Levy Fund	-	-	21,805	9,257	24,817	20,286	11,164	11,651	98,980
General Fund	440	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	440
Library Fund	6,033	7,421	-	-	-	-	-	-	13,454
Library Trust & Memorial Fund	1,069	(1,069)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Payroll Expense Tax	2,760	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,760
REET I Capital Fund	11,270	1,062	785	992	835	900	900	851	17,595
Total:	65,175	23,297	22,590	10,249	25,652	21,186	12,064	12,502	192,714

O&M Impacts: N/A

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Major Capital Equipment

Project No:	MC-PL-B3200	BSL Code:	BC-PL-B3000
Project Type:	Ongoing	BSL Name:	Capital Improvements
Project Category:		Location:	Various Locations
Current Project Stage:	N/A	Council District:	Multiple
Start/End Date:	N/A	Neighborhood District:	Multiple
Total Project Cost:	N/A	Urban Village:	Multiple

This project represents system-wide major depreciable equipment purchases for The Seattle Public Library, such as the Library's Automated Materials Handling System (AMHS).

Resources	LTD Actuals	2026 Revised	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Total
2019 Library Levy Funding	34	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	34
General Fund	1,470	230	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,700
Seattle Voter-Approved Levy	469	(3)	-	-	-	-	-	-	466
Use of Fund Balance	8	(8)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total:	1,981	219	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,200
Fund Appropriations / Allocations *	LTD Actuals	2026 Revised	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Total
2012 Library Levy Fund	469	(3)	-	-	-	-	-	-	466
2019 Library Levy Fund	34	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	34
Library Fund	1,478	222	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,700
Total:	1,981	219	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,200

O&M Impacts: N/A

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