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**THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

##### COMMITTEE REPORT OF

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**Committee on CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND**

**INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS**

**Hon. Jimmy Van Bramer*, Chair***

**October 31, 2019**

**Oversight: Upcoming Capital Projects in New York City Libraries**

**INTRODUCTION NO. 1451:** By Council Members Cabrera, Holden and Ulrich

**TITLE:** A Local Law in relation to creating a task force to review the feasibility of creating a New York city museum of African American history

**RESOULTION NO. 1092:** By Council Members Barron, Rodriguez and Van Bramer

**TITLE:** Resolution calling upon the President to lift the Cuban embargo and end the Cuban travel ban.

**Introduction**

On Thursday, October 31, 2019, the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations, chaired by Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, will conduct an oversight hearing on *Upcoming Capital Projects in New York City Libraries.* This hearing will explore upcoming capital projects in the Brooklyn, Queens, and New York Public Library systems. Witnesses invited to testify include the Department of Design and Construction, the City’s three public library systems, and other interested stakeholders.

**Background**

***New York City Public Library Systems***

Library services in New York City are provided through three independent systems: the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL), which serves the borough of Brooklyn; the New York Public Library (NYPL), which serves the boroughs of Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx; and the Queens Borough Public Library (QPL), which serves the borough of Queens.[[1]](#footnote-1) Collectively, the three systems operate 216 local library branches throughout the city in addition to four NYPL research library centers, located in Manhattan.[[2]](#footnote-2)

New York City public libraries offer free and open access to books, periodicals, electronic resources, mobile technology, and non-print materials.[[3]](#footnote-3) Local branches also offer career services and internet access, along with educational, cultural, and recreational programming for adults, young adults, and children, including early child literacy development and after school initiatives, English for Speakers of Other Language classes, High School Equivalency test preparation, computer skills training, workforce development, and job seeker services.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The City’s public libraries focus on equitable service delivery by ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to information, programs, and resources at locations throughout the five boroughs.[[5]](#footnote-5) Each of the three library systems maintains robust and diverse collections in multiple languages and provides access to computers, wireless Internet, and other technology at no cost, serving as a critical utility for low-income and non-English speaking households.[[6]](#footnote-6) The three library systems also promote equitable access to mobile technology by providing widespread Wi-Fi access and lending of tablets and laptops.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Additionally, the City’s public libraries continue to expand their services offered to incarcerated New Yorkers and to individuals experiencing homelessness in each borough. Services include Video Visitation, allowing incarcerated people to communicate with their loved ones at the library through video conferencing, and the opening of a second permanent library space with the Department of Correction.[[8]](#footnote-8) The libraries have expanded literacy programs in shelters and continue to partner with the Department of Homeless Services to better serve the homeless community.[[9]](#footnote-9)

BPL is the sixth largest public library system in the United States.[[10]](#footnote-10) It offers more than 4 million physical items and 700,000 digital materials to nearly 700,000 active cardholders, as well as cultural offerings, literacy, out-of-school-time services, workforce development programs, and digital literacy.[[11]](#footnote-11) System-wide, BPL welcomed 7.9 million visits to their branches, provided 1.8 million computer sessions on 2,600 devices, and circulated more than 14.3 million materials last year.[[12]](#footnote-12)

NYPL is the largest public library system in the United States, with four scholarly research centers and 88 branch libraries in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island.[[13]](#footnote-13) It provides free and open access to its physical and electronic collections and information, as well as to 103,000 free programs and services for New Yorkers of all ages.[[14]](#footnote-14) System-wide, NYPL serves more than 17 million patrons annually and millions more online, with more than 55 million accessible items, from e-books and DVDs to renowned research collections.[[15]](#footnote-15)

QPL consists of 65 locations, including branch libraries, a Central Library, seven adult learning centers, a technology center, two universal pre-kindergartens, and two teen centers.[[16]](#footnote-16) It offers free access to a collection of more than 5 million books and other materials in multiple languages, technology, and digital resources, and more than 80,000 educational, cultural, and civic programs a year.[[17]](#footnote-17) In 2018, QPL had over 11.4 million visitors and 904,000 active cardholders, circulated 12.4 million items, and provided more than 3 million computer sessions.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Ten-Year Capital Strategy**

 The City’s Ten-Year Capital Strategy for Fiscal 2020-2029 totals $116.9 billion in all funds.[[19]](#footnote-19) For the libraries, the Ten-Year Capital Strategy provides $894 million in Fiscal 2020–2029 for capital construction and reconstruction projects.[[20]](#footnote-20)

As outlined in the Council’s Fiscal 2020 Preliminary Budget Response, the Fiscal 2020-2029 Preliminary Ten-Year Capital Strategy presented by the Administration failed to live up to its guiding principles, in part because many of the Ten-Year Capital Strategy categories have a dramatic decline in planned spending, or no spending, in the second half of the plan, showing a lack of planning for capital needs over the full ten-year period.[[21]](#footnote-21) The Ten-Year Capital Strategy presented as part of the Fiscal 2020 Executive Budget still fails to address planning in the out years for many City agencies, as well as for libraries.[[22]](#footnote-22)

**Highlights of the Ten-Year Capital Strategy**

In the Ten-Year Capital Strategy, the libraries focused on the protection of the growing collection of library materials, reconstruction of branches, increasing accessibility for people with disabilities, and upgrading the technology infrastructure to improve online and computer access.[[23]](#footnote-23)

**Brooklyn Public Library**

The Ten-Year Capital Strategy provides $278 million for BPL, of which $93.1 million is allocated for the comprehensive renovation of branches and is distributed among five libraries (Brownsville, Canarsie, Eastern Parkway, New Lots, and New Utrecht) designated as most critical by BPL.[[24]](#footnote-24) In addition, $26.3 million is allocated for the second phase of a comprehensive rehabilitation of the Central Library.[[25]](#footnote-25) Additional funding for other branches focuses on public service enhancements, cyclical replacements of building components (roofs, HVAC systems, and boilers), and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.[[26]](#footnote-26)

**New York Public Library and Research Libraries**

The Ten-Year Capital Strategy provides $280.5 million for NYPL, of which nearly $4 million is allocated to the Research Libraries.[[27]](#footnote-27) Of this amount, $74.6 million is allocated for the comprehensive renovation and outfitting of branches and is distributed among five libraries (125th Street, Fort Washington, Hunts Point, Melrose, and Port Richmond) designated as most critical by NYPL.[[28]](#footnote-28) In addition, $29.4 million is allocated for construction of a new Westchester Square branch.[[29]](#footnote-29) Additional funding for other branches focuses on maintaining and upgrading facilities, including roof, window, and door replacements, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.[[30]](#footnote-30)

**Queens Borough Public Library**

The Ten-Year Capital Strategy provides $335.5 million for QPL, of which $97.1 million is allocated for comprehensive renovations, new construction, and expansion of branches.[[31]](#footnote-31) In addition, $28.3 million is allocated for an expansion and renovation at Jackson Heights Library.[[32]](#footnote-32) Additional funding for other branches focuses on renovations and rehabilitations, systems upgrades, and cyclical replacements of building components (roofs, windows, and doors).[[33]](#footnote-33)

**City Capital Funds for Libraries Added At Adoption**

In its response to the Fiscal Year 2020 Preliminary Budget, the Council urged the Administration to add additional capital funding for the library systems to address their most critical capital needs including maintaining and renovating aging infrastructure.[[34]](#footnote-34)



As evidenced by the bar graph above, some funding was added for the library systems at budget adoption; however, it is much less than the $150 million in capital funds (with $50M allocated to each system) that the libraries had requested for Fiscal Year 2020 at their hearing testimony during the Executive Budget Hearing in May 2019.[[35]](#footnote-35) Specifically, testimony submitted by the President and CEO of QPL stressed the need for this funding “to address capital projects shortfalls and critical infrastructure needs.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Likewise, BPL submitted testimony stating that each of the three library systems needed $50 million to “compensate for the lack of adequate funding in the ten year plan” and to enable libraries to stop “limp[ing] year to year” and do more than “only address emergencies…”[[37]](#footnote-37) In addition, the testimony of the BPL noted specific projects, such as improving accessibility at the Leonard Library, that were stalled due to funding shortfalls.[[38]](#footnote-38) Finally, the President of the NYPL noted in his testimony that “capital funding is so crucial” in order to keep the promises made to all New Yorkers to maintain strong and vibrant libraries.[[39]](#footnote-39) Adequate capital funding is necessary to ensure that libraries can continue to provide vital services to the communities of New York City.

**Int. No. 1451** - A Local Law in relation to creating a task force to review the feasibility of creating a New York city museum of African American history

This bill would require the Mayor to establish a task force to consider the feasibility of creating a museum dedicated to the history, significance, and documentation of African American life and culture in New York City. The task force would have 11 members, including the Commissioners of the Departments of Cultural Affairs and Parks and Recreation, or their designees, and the chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission or his or her designee. Of the eight remaining members, five would be appointed by the Mayor, and three would be appointed by the Speaker of the Council. These appointed members would include representatives of institutions, organizations, corporations, or associations that are organized or operated primarily for historical, cultural, educational, religious, or charitable purposes and which are connected to African American heritage, history, or culture. The chairperson of the task force would be designated by the Mayor after consultation with the Speaker of the Council. All members would be appointed within 60 days following the effective date of the local law and would service for 12 months after the last member is appointed. Finally, the task force would be required to submit a report of its recommendation to the Mayor and Speaker of the Council within 12 months after the last member is appointed. In formulating its recommendations, the task force would consider the feasibility of establishing a New York City museum of African American history, potential sites for the museum, systems that would be necessary for the museum of provide outreach to the five boroughs, the level of coordination among appropriate City agencies and other relevant organizations that would be necessary to the implementation and operation of the museum, and outreach and educational materials and efforts, including technological tools, that would be necessary to support the operation of the museum.

Section two of the bill would provide that the local law would take effect immediately.

**Conclusion**

At the hearing, the Committee expects to receive an update on ongoing capital projects for each of the New York Library systems, an overview of upcoming and planned projects, and to learn how the Council may better support needed capital improvements in libraries.

Int. No. 1451

By Council Members Cabrera, Holden and Ulrich

..Title

A Local Law in relation to creating a task force to review the feasibility of creating a New York city museum of African American history

..Body

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. New York city museum of African American history task force. a. The mayor shall establish a temporary task force to consider the feasibility of creating a museum dedicated to the history, significance, and documentation of African American life and culture in New York city.

b. The task force shall consist of 11 members, as follows: the commissioners of cultural affairs and parks and recreation or their designees, the chair of the landmarks preservation commission or his or her designee; five members to be appointed by the mayor; and three members to be appointed by the speaker of the council. Appointed members shall include representatives of institutions, organizations, corporations, or associations that are organized or operated primarily for historical, cultural, educational, religious, or charitable purposes and which are connected to African American heritage, history, or culture. The mayor, after consultation with the speaker of the council, shall designate a chairperson of the task force. Each member of the task force shall serve without compensation for a term of 12 months, to commence after the final member of the task force is appointed. All members shall be appointed within 60 days after the effective date of this local law.

c. No appointed member of the task force shall be removed except for cause by the appointing authority. In the event of a vacancy on the task force during the term of an appointed member, a successor shall be selected in the same manner as the original appointment to serve the balance of the unexpired term.

d. The task force shall meet at least quarterly and shall hold at least two public meetings prior to submission of the report required pursuant to subdivision f of this section to solicit public comment on the establishment of a New York city museum of African American history.

e. The mayor may designate one or more agencies to provide staffing and other administrative support to the task force.

f. The task force shall submit a report of its recommendations to the mayor and the speaker of the council no later than 12 months after the final member of the task force is appointed. In formulating its recommendations, the task force shall consider the following:

1. The feasibility of establishing a New York city museum of African American history;

2. Potential sites for the museum;

3. Systems that would be necessary for the museum of provide outreach to the five boroughs;

4. The level of coordination among appropriate city agencies and other relevant organizations that would be necessary to the implementation and operation of a New York city museum of African American history; and

5. Outreach and educational materials and efforts, including technological tools, that would be necessary to support the operation of a New York city museum of African American history.

g. The task force required pursuant to this section shall dissolve upon submission of the report required pursuant to subdivision f of this section.

§ 2. This local law takes effect immediately.

BM

LS # 7770

2/8/2019 3:30 p.m

Res. No. 1092

..Title

Resolution calling upon the President to lift the Cuban embargo and end the Cuban travel ban.

..Body

By Council Members Barron, Rodriguez and Van Bramer

Whereas, In December 2014, the Obama Administration announced its intention to normalize and restore diplomatic relations with the Cuban Castro regime, including expanding new regulations for travel and trade; and

Whereas, On October 14, 2016, a Presidential Policy Directive enshrined United States-Cuba Normalization Objectives including: 1) Government-to-Government Interaction; 2) Engagement and Connectivity; 3) Expanded Commerce; 4) Economic Reform; 5) Respect for Universal Human Rights, Fundamental Freedoms and Democratic Values; and 6) Cuban Integration into International and Regional Systems, to be implemented until such time as a future president reversed the Directive; and

Whereas, In 2016, the changes introduced by the Obama Administration enabled Americans to visit Cuba as individuals or in groups through 12 categories of authorized travel including family visits, official business of the U.S. government, foreign governments and certain intergovernmental organizations, journalistic activity, professional research and professional meetings, educational activities, religious activities, public performances including clinics, workshops, athletic and other competitions and exhibitions, support for the Cuban people, humanitarian projects, activities of private foundations or research or educational institutes, exportation, importation or transmission of information or informational materials and certain authorized export transactions; and

Whereas, In June 2019, President Trump rescinded the Obama administration’s recently enacted Cuban-American cultural trade and travel freedoms of 2016 by imposing new restrictions on Americans traveling to Cuba that no longer permitted group educational or cultural visits known as “people to people” trips unless they were booked before June 5, 2019; and

Whereas, The new travel restrictions preclude major cruise ships, private yachts or fishing vessels, as well as major airlines from stopping in Cuba unless individuals can prove they are traveling “under the support for Cuban people” category and can present proof of an itinerary with meetings and visits with local business owners or evidence of participation in local activities that include staying in a private home rather than a hotel; and

Whereas, Representatives of Cuban tour companies have cited the travel ban as detrimental to the economy and travel industry of the Cuban people; and

Whereas, While travel restrictions for Cuban-Americans visiting relatives in Cuba remain unchanged and are limited to no more than three visits per year, tighter restrictions have been imposed on the number of allowable financial remittances to family members, and are now capped at $1,000.00 per person every three months compared to the unlimited remittances allowed under the Obama administration authorizations; and

Whereas, A United Nations General Assembly resolution found the Cuban embargo to inhibit collaborations between the two countries in a number of critical areas including education, cultural exchanges, scientific research, environmental protections and medical care such as vaccines for meningitis B, hepatitis B, monoclonal antibodies for kidney transplants and the only therapeutic vaccine in the world against advanced lung cancer, all of which serve as a detriment to the people of the United States and the people of Cuba; and

Whereas, Furthermore, the United Nations confirmed the Cuban embargo is opposed by a majority of the nations in the world as well as a majority of the people in the United States; and

Whereas, Historically, New York City has played a significant role in supporting a vibrant Cuban immigrant community comprised of businesses, newspapers, social and cultural organizations and political activism; and

Whereas, The New York metropolitan area is home to 150,000 Cuban-American residents who self-identify as being of Cuban ancestry; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, The Council of the City of New York call upon the President to lift the Cuban embargo and end the Cuban travel ban.

CD

LS 12227-12563

10/11/19

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2. *Id*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Id*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Id*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Id*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. About Brooklyn Public Library, https://www.bklynlibrary.org/about. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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13. About The New York Public Library,https://www.nypl.org/help/about-nypl. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
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16. About Queens Public Library, https://www.queenslibrary.org/about-us/queens-public-library-overview. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
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18. Queens Public Library Fast Facts, https://www.queenslibrary.org/about-us/queens-public-library-overview/fast-facts. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The City of New York, Ten-Year Capital Strategy Fiscal Years 2020-2029, I-1, *available at* https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/typ4-19.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Id*. at 102-103. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. New York City Council, Response to the Fiscal Year 2020 Preliminary Budget and Fiscal Year 2019 Preliminary Management Report, 51-52, *available at* https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/04/Fiscal-2020-Preliminary-Budget-Response\_FINAL.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. New York City Council, Finance Division, Report to the Committee on Finance and the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, International Intergroup Relations on the Fiscal 2020 Executive Plan, the Ten-Year Strategy for Fiscal 2020-2029, and Fiscal 2020 Executive Capital Commitment Plan, 4, *available at* https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/05/Libraries.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The City of New York, Ten-Year Capital Strategy Fiscal Years 2020-2029, 102, *available at* https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/typ4-19.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Id.* at 103 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Id.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Id.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Id.* at 103-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Id.* at 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Id.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Id*. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
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34. New York City Council, Response to the Fiscal Year 2020 Preliminary Budget and Fiscal Year 2019 Preliminary Management Report, 59-60, *available at* https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/04/Fiscal-2020-Preliminary-Budget-Response\_FINAL.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *See infra* notes 36-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Testimony of Dennis M. Walcott, President and CEO, Queens Public Library, Fiscal Year 2020 Executive Budget Hearing, May 21, 2019, *available at* https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=7283225&GUID=614EBC7B-8A41-4CB4-A4D4-0C8F724AB9B5. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Testimony of the Brooklyn Public Library, Fiscal Year 2020 Executive Budget Hearing, May 21, 2019, *available at* https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=7283225&GUID=614EBC7B-8A41-4CB4-A4D4-0C8F724AB9B5. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
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