

MEMORANDUM

September 22, 2016

TO: Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst 

SUBJECT: **Discussion – Homeless in Silver Spring CBD and in Libraries**

Expected for this session:

Uma Ahluwalia, Director, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
Parker Hamilton, Director, Department of Public Libraries

In previous sessions, the HHS Committee has noted the apparent increase in homeless people in the Silver Spring Central Business District (CBD) and concerns from some community members about homeless people in the Silver Spring Library. Director Ahluwalia has shared with the Committee that the Regional Services Center, Libraries, Police, Chamber of Commerce, and DHHS have been collaborating to address concerns about several areas including from Progress Place, the library, and Veterans Plaza. Enhanced homeless outreach, behavioral health interventions, enhanced enforcement of criminal activity, and increased communication with downtown stakeholders are all strategies being considered. At this session, Director Ahluwalia and Director Hamilton will be able to update the Committee on these efforts and provide a focused update on strategies for libraries.

As background for the discussion, attached at © 1-8 is a toolkit from the American Library Association, “Extending our Reach: Reducing Homelessness through Library Engagement” and at © 9-14 an article from the Pew Charitable Trusts, “Enlisting Public Libraries to Help Fight Homelessness.”

Tips and tools you can use from the American Library Association's
Social Responsibilities Round Table and Office for Literacy and Outreach Services

Extending Our Reach: Reducing Homelessness Through Library Engagement

“The best thing that libraries can do for the homeless is to treat them with the same status afforded to all other library patrons....the library has been a focal point of my homelessness.”

Kevin Barbieux, “The Homeless Guy”

Key Terms

Some common terms that relate to issues of homelessness include:

Homeless: Federally defined as “a person sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g. living on the streets) OR living in a homeless emergency shelter.”

Hidden homeless: These include people who are precariously housed and at eminent risk of becoming literally homeless. They may be doubled up with friends or relatives, or temporarily staying in a motel or sleeping in their cars. Hidden homeless refers to the fact they are not visibly homeless.

Chronic homelessness: Federally defined as “either (1) an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more, OR (2) an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.”

Throwaway youth: A term used to describe two types of circumstance: 1) A child who is asked or told to leave home by a parent or other household adult, without adequate alternative care being arranged for the child by a household adult, and with the child out of the household overnight, or 2) A child who is away from home and is prevented from returning home by a parent or other household adult, without adequate alternative care being arranged for the child by a household adult, and the child is out of the household overnight.

Affordable housing: Housing, either ownership or rental, for which a household will pay no more than 30% of its gross annual income.

Continuum of care: Organization of service providers established by Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to oversee community planning around homelessness. Continua work together to define needs, plan strategies, and prioritize funding for supportive housing services.

This Toolkit is designed to help librarians and library staff create meaningful library services for people who are experiencing homelessness.

The Homeless Population in the U.S.

The label “homeless” can be difficult for many people to use and understand. In many ways this term has come to be a label for people, replacing their identity. However, it is really only a description of a particular and, frequently temporary, housing condition.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issues an Annual Homeless Assessment Report, reporting the number of individuals and families who were homeless in the previous year. The report provides results of local counts of people homeless on a single night in January (Point-In-Time counts) and patterns of all people who used residential programs during the fiscal year.

According to the 2011 Annual Homeless Assessment Report:

- 636,017 people were experiencing homelessness during the Point-in-Time (PIT) count.
- 77,186 families—236,181 people—were homeless on the night of the PIT count.
- 107,148 people were chronically homeless—persons with severe disabilities and long homeless histories.

From the 2010 Report:

- More than 1.59 million people spent at least 1 night in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program.

Homelessness among Youth

Homelessness among youth is a particular area of concern. According to the 2002 National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMA^{RT}), conducted by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, nearly 1.7 million youth nationwide were missing due to a runaway or throwaway episode.

The homeless youth population is equally divided between males and females.

The National Coalition for the Homeless estimates that 20% to 40% of homeless youth are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. This particular population, although resilient, may be especially vulnerable to victimization, mental health challenges, sexual exploitation and violence, and increased rates of suicide.

Equity of Access

Library services for people experiencing homelessness may be limited or denied in many circumstances, including:

- Library card or access policies requiring a permanent address
- Prohibitive fines, fees or other penalties or the perception that services incur fees
- Staff who are not trained in service to people who are poor or homeless or who are made uncomfortable by prejudices against people who are poor or homeless
- Limited promotion at the community centers and organizations (food banks, shelters, after-school programs) that serve people experiencing homelessness
- Limited access to the library building by either lack of transportation or service hours
- Lack of programs or resources that address people's experiences or current situations

Share information from this toolkit!

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Key Terms

Emergency housing: Temporary housing provided on an emergency basis. Stays at emergency shelters are limited in time and the amount of time varies among shelters. For some programs, emergency shelters are the first step in a series of steps as homeless adults and youth move from emergency to transitional to permanent housing.

Transitional housing: Housing that is more stable than emergency housing and that can be for a longer period of time, such as 1 to 2 years. Once homeless youth and adults have been stabilized in emergency housing, they may move to transitional housing as a next step.

Supportive housing: Subsidized housing directly tied to specific supportive services for homeless individuals or families who have come from emergency shelters or the streets. Supportive housing may be categorized as transitional (people may stay for up to 2 years) or permanent (there is no limit on the length of stay and clients abide by a lease).

Housing First: A term that has come to mean providing a chronic homeless person with direct and immediate access to housing. It reverses the traditional concept of "treatment first and then housing" to "housing first and then appropriate treatment." Housing first is a consumer driven model. It is producing successful outcomes for keeping people from returning to the streets.

Harm reduction: Harm reduction is a nonjudgmental philosophy that allows young people and adults to have input into their own recovery plans. A harm reduction approach begins with the person, allowing each person to progress at a comfortable pace.

Case management: The process of arranging for provision of an array of services and supports for an individual or family that is based on assessment of their unique needs and designed to address the specific needs identified.

These definitions come from a variety of sources, including: Larkinstreet.org; Anendinten.org; HUD; the Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources; National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

Steps to Getting Started

Take a breath. You did not create the situations that cause homelessness and you probably will not be the superhero who solves them all. You are here to do your part and you are not alone.

Open your mind. The best place to start is with our own feelings and perceptions. What do you think of when you think of homeless people? How do you think the library plays a role in their lives?

Get the stats. What is the reality of homelessness in your area? Check local statistics. Ask your local community leaders and service agencies for input. This may come in handy when you speak to your supervisor, the library board, local elected officials, or to library funders.

Read. There are many articles and books on homelessness. Read a few to help get a better understanding. Don't forget local newspapers, newsletters, and social media. You can even sign up for online newsletters, so you will automatically be kept current with issues, workshops, legislation and other topics related to homelessness.

Discuss. Share your concerns and plans with your colleagues. They are working in the same community as you and are probably as concerned and as uncertain about the same issues. Sometimes a team effort can be more meaningful and motivating than an individual one.

Don't worry. You will make mistakes. Things will not always work out. Partners won't always come through. People will not always be as supportive as you would like. Just revise your plan and keep going.

Reflect. You are learning and developing new and much-needed library services for some of your community members. Everyone benefits!

Essential Library Services for People Who Are Homeless

Libraries will be most successful in providing those services aligned with the general mission and purpose of libraries. For all of the other ideas of how to help those experiencing homelessness — food, clothing, personal or medical care — libraries can play an important role as partners or supporters of other service organizations.

Programming

Library programming is a popular service for all patrons. For the most part, people who are homeless want the same programming as other library users: computer classes, educational workshops, storytimes, arts and crafts, and social activities.

If there is something unique to programming for patrons who are homeless, it is the need for outreach and promotion. Physical barriers and social exclusion prevent many people who are homeless from getting to the library or learning about programs in a timely fashion. Make sure that shelters, organizations that work with people who are homeless, and transitional housing facilities regularly receive fliers, emails, and other promotional materials.

Programs of particular interest to people who are homeless may include programs on health, mortgage or rental assistance, and applying for government benefits.

When seeking ideas for outreach and programming, one of the best places to look for ideas is in local street newspapers. Street newspapers are usually written, edited, and filled with articles and opinion pieces from the viewpoint of people who are homeless.

Reference (or Preventative Librarianship)

Reference can be among the most essential services librarians can provide and it should be one of the key pieces in serving library users who are homeless. Information of most need to people who are homeless or in jeopardy of becoming homeless may include where to find shelter, food or a shower; accessible medical care; help in finding employment; or how to find a professional that can help stop an

eviction or foreclosure.

Many of these reference questions can be easily answered by having a list of local social services available at the reference desk, in literature racks or displays, or on a library resource page. To increase awareness and collaboration throughout the library, involve staff in researching contact information for social service organizations and develop a plan to make sure this information is regularly checked and updated.

Library Services to Young People in Transition

Libraries have a special place in the lives of children and young people. By far the most important consideration when working with young people in shelters or foster care is to help them recognize the public library as a consistent, safe and welcoming place.

Library cards are the first step to building a connection, so it is especially important for administrators and other decision-makers to examine library policies to make sure they are as inclusive as possible. If possible, be flexible when the situation warrants it.

Be aware that some young people have not had much experience with libraries or that their experiences have been negative ones. Look for ways to rebuild trust and convince young people that the library is worth a second chance. Framing the library as a source of free information and entertainment (computers! gaming! music!), a place to meet and hang out with friends, and a safe haven where they can escape from daily trials and tribulations, may get teens and kids looking at libraries in a whole new way.

Libraries can look to participate in special programs for youth. Some libraries offer a program called "Safe Place Training" and youth can text 69866 with the word "safe" to locate the nearest youth shelter or "safe place" and the phone number.

Partnerships

In most communities, there are organizations that have the specific experience, training, and contacts to provide services to people who are homeless. Locating partners can be as easy as attending local government meetings, joining meet ups of social

service organizations, consulting a directory of local social services, searching the Internet or phone book. Likely partners include:

- Transitional housing facilities
- Food banks and community organizations
- Health clinics and hospitals
- Faith-based organizations (churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.)
- Educational institutions and after school programs

The library can play a key role as resource provider, community center, and facilitator for multi-organization collaborations. An initial conversation can spark ideas for larger conversations or just be a reminder of how the library can play a role in the lives of community members.

In the words of those we serve...

"I needed a book about how to live through this more than I needed to know I had somewhere to stay, to know I had a way to get to school or to know what I would have for dinner. I needed a book to prove to me that survival was possible." *Sassafras Lowery, from introduction to the anthology Kicked Out, describing her experience at the library after being kicked out of her family's home*

"Even though people say that we're victims and that we're this and that, you can't be a victim and vulnerable and survive on the streets, or be homeless. There comes a little bit of self-sufficiency, and a little bit of direction that's of our own making..." *Homeless youth of color who identifies as queer*

"And it's always good to be able to have a safe space to relax and just open a book and just let the words take you. And having a place you can do that safely, without being harassed or attacked or any of that is extremely ideal, and extremely beneficial to the reader and pretty much everyone involved." *Homeless youth, when asked what he would want librarians to know about him*

Policies

Library policies can often stand in the way of providing equitable services to those experiencing homelessness. Developing effective policies and helping library staff properly utilize them can be the most important steps. Policies should strive for clarity, be posted or readily available, and be enforced equitably and with sensitivity.

Use of Materials and the Internet

The library's collections, available for borrowing or for use in the library, provide a tremendous benefit to all members of the community. The same is true of the Internet. As a general practice, policies dictating the use of materials and the Internet should be as simple as possible to help ensure full use by those within the community. Where there is the need to register users for service, registration policies should be as straightforward and inclusive as possible. When developing usage policies, consider:

- Does the policy reflect the Library Bill of Rights Article V, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views"?
- Do any user registration requirements (utility bills, driver's license) preclude certain populations from obtaining borrowing privileges or Internet access?
- Are alternative forms of identification made acceptable and are library staff aware of the alternatives?
- Are there policies in place that prevent gender identity discrimination by offering creative solutions to patron name changes?
- In the event individuals cannot obtain immediate borrowing privileges, are staff prepared to suggest other options, including use of the materials within the library or a free day pass for the use of computers?
- Are there possible exceptions or alternatives to fines?

Personal Conduct

Libraries can and should develop policies that outline what is considered appropriate and inap-

propriate use of and conduct within the library and its facilities. Conduct policies should help patrons understand the environment of the library and help staff maintain a space that is beneficial for all users. When developing policies on patron conduct, consider:

- Does the policy respect the rights of individuals under the First Amendment?
- Do library staff and patrons understand warnings, processes for appeal, and means of regaining admittance to the library should conduct violations occur?
- Do policies provide a clearly understandable measure or determination for disruptive conduct (e.g. "behavior poses a nuisance to other patrons", "an intention to disrupt") avoiding arbitrary or debatable standards or expectations?
- Do stated and posted policies emphasize that the library welcomes everyone equally and does not discriminate?
- There is a difference between deliberate behaviors and behaviors or circumstances beyond the patron's control. Do library staff understand how to effectively address either behavior as it affects the library environment?

As much as there should be a focus on patron conduct, there should also be a focus on staff conduct. It is more than just treating all users alike—it is treating all users to an excellent customer service experience. That includes being helpful, respectful, and friendly no matter the outward appearance of an individual.

Issues of patron conduct should be respectfully addressed. Some issues—odor, cleanliness—may require a refined approach, seeking to provide help to the individual (ready print-outs of shelters, clothes banks, etc.) as much as maintaining a comfortable environment for other patrons. In all situations, staff should also be prepared to conduct themselves responsibly and safely, understanding when situations escalate beyond their control and when to request medical or security support.

Model Programs

Baltimore County (Mary.) Public Library Street Card—Resources for Help

<http://www.bcpl.info/community/street-card>
Created by the Baltimore County Public Library in cooperation with the Baltimore County Communities for the Homeless, the Street Card provides information on employment, food and emergency assistance, health, financial support, legal issues, and shelter. Information is available in print and online.

Denver (Colo.) Public Library Community Technology Center

<http://denverlibrary.org/ctc>
Denver Public Library's (DPL) Community Technology Center team provides regular visits to the area day shelter for homeless and low-income women. Women receive instruction on job interviewing techniques and technology skills. Once class is over, participants receive bus tokens to go to the main library for a tour and to get library cards.

Pima County (Ariz.) Public Library Homeless Service Agencies

<http://www.library.pima.gov/community/guides/homeless.php>
Pima County Public Library's Homeless Service Agencies guide provides information (phone number, address, description) for local services. Information is organized into categories (veterans, domestic violence, youth) which may help individuals find the specific help they need.

Queens (N.Y.) Library

<http://www.queenslibrary.org>
New York's Queens Library provides outreach service to homeless shelters. The library coordinates these services with the city's Department of Education family shelter liaison. The outreach service promotes the library's programs, events, and services. The library also highlights family offerings, children's programs, and job search help.

San Francisco (Calif.) Public Library

<http://www.sfpl.org/>
San Francisco Public Library formed a homeless and poverty outreach library team in partnership with the city's Department of Public Health and the SFFirst unit (San Francisco Full-Integrated Recovery Services Team). The full-time, in house social worker and the SFFirst director, a psychiatrist, provide staff training to better serve the community. Their team includes formerly homeless people who go through a 12-week vocational program. These "health and safety associates" reach out to homeless patrons in the library and distribute information on where to find shelter, showers and hot meals.

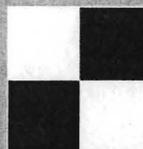
San Jose (Calif.) Public Library Homelessness—A Panel Discussion

<http://sjpl.org/tags/homeless>
In an effort to improve library services to those experiencing homelessness, the San Jose Public Library initiated a panel discussion to help library professionals learn about the issue. The event brought together library professionals, students, and social workers and the resulting web page compiled resources, statistics, and information.

Traverse Area Library District

<http://www.tadl.org/>
Traverse Area District Library partners with a faith-based winter shelter to offer on-site book club meetings. This partnership fosters outreach and promotes community through open dialogue and shared experiences.

OLOS Resources on Delicious



Interested in more resources? See OLOS's annotated list of resources on Delicious:

<http://www.delicious.com/alaolos/poorandhomeless>

ALA Policy Statement: Library Services to the Poor

The American Library Association promotes equal access to information for all persons, and recognizes the urgent need to respond to the increasing number of poor children, adults, and families in America. These people are affected by a combination of limitations, including illiteracy, illness, social isolation, homelessness, hunger, and discrimination, which hamper the effectiveness of traditional library services. Therefore it is crucial that libraries recognize their role in enabling poor people to participate fully in a democratic society, by utilizing a wide variety of available resources and strategies. Concrete programs of training and development are needed to sensitize and prepare library staff to identify poor people's needs and deliver relevant services. And within the American Library Association the coordinating mechanisms of programs and activities dealing with poor people in various divisions, offices, and units should be strengthened, and support for low-income liaison activities should be enhanced.

The American Library Association shall implement these objectives by:

1. Promoting the removal of all barriers to library and information services, particularly fees and overdue charges.
2. Promoting the publication, production, purchase, and ready accessibility of print and nonprint materials that honestly address the issues of poverty and homelessness, that deal with poor people in a respectful way, and that are of practical use to low-income patrons.
3. Promoting full, stable, and ongoing funding for existing legislative programs in support of low-income services and for pro-active library programs that reach beyond traditional service-sites to poor children, adults, and families.
4. Promoting training opportunities for librarians, in order to teach effective techniques for generating public funding to upgrade library services to poor people.
5. Promoting the incorporation of low-income programs and services into regular library budgets in all types of libraries, rather than the tendency to support these projects solely with "soft money" like private or federal grants.
6. Promoting equity in funding adequate library services for poor people in terms of materials, facilities, and equipment.
7. Promoting supplemental support for library resources for and about low-income populations by urging local, state, and federal governments, and the private sector, to provide adequate funding.
8. Promoting increased public awareness—through programs, displays, bibliographies, and publicity—of the importance of poverty-related library resources and services in all segments of society.
9. Promoting the determination of output measures through the encouragement of community needs assessments, giving special emphasis to assessing the needs of low-income people and involving both anti-poverty advocates and poor people themselves in such assessments.
10. Promoting direct representation of poor people and anti-poverty advocates through appointment to local boards and creation of local advisory committees on service to low-income people, such appointments to include library-paid transportation and stipends.
11. Promoting training to sensitize library staff to issues affecting poor people and to attitudinal and other barriers that hinder poor people's use of libraries.
12. Promoting networking and cooperation between libraries and other agencies, organizations, and advocacy groups in order to develop programs and services that effectively reach poor people.
13. Promoting the implementation of an expanded federal low-income housing program, national health insurance, full-employment policy, living minimum wage and welfare payments, affordable day care, and programs likely to reduce, if not eliminate, poverty itself.
14. Promoting among library staff the collection of food and clothing donations, volunteering personal time to anti-poverty activities and contributing money to direct-aid organizations.
15. Promoting related efforts concerning minorities and women, since these groups are disproportionately represented among poor people.

ALA American Library Association
Office for Literacy and Outreach Services



**The Pew Charitable Trusts / Research & Analysis /
Stateline / Enlisting Public Libraries to Help Fight
Homelessness**

STATELINE

Enlisting Public Libraries to Help Fight Homelessness

April 04, 2016

By Sophie Quinton



Some of the people waiting to enter Washington, D.C.'s central library are homeless. A growing number of public libraries are trying to do more to help them.

WASHINGTON — Every weekday morning, people line up outside the central library in the nation's capital and wait for it to open. Last Monday, about two dozen people, some carrying shopping bags or large backpacks, clustered around the entrance. At 9:30 sharp, the doors opened and they trooped in.

Public libraries have long been havens for people with nowhere else to go. Now, a growing number of library systems are adding services for patrons who are homeless, hungry, or suffering from drug addiction or mental illness. For the District of Columbia, that means hiring a social worker, partnering with nonprofits and organizing social hours.

The library can be part of the city's efforts to reduce homelessness, said Jean Badalamenti, the social worker for the system here. "I see the library as playing a role in that, since this is where people are," she said.

Libraries in the Internet age offer more than books and computer access. On a typical day, Washington's central library, the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library, less than a mile from the White House, hosts all types of events, from free tax preparation assistance for adults to poetry workshops for teens.

Increasingly, public libraries also are providing social services, such as serving children free lunches during the summer, said Sari Feldman, president of the American Library Association. Reaching out to patrons who don't have a safe place to sleep at night is part of that trend.

Libraries are safe, open for long hours, and offer everything from public bathrooms to a place for people to search for online job listings. "I think libraries are fully equipped and ready to address community needs, and this is another community need," Feldman said.

The 21st Century Library

Homelessness has fallen nationally since 2007. But in big cities such as Los Angeles, New York and Washington, the numbers keep rising, according to the latest federal statistics. One in a hundred Washington residents is homeless, according to the nonprofit Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' latest tally, and the homeless population has increased 11 percent since 2011.

Public libraries don't track patrons' housing status, and librarians say there's no way to tell whether someone lacks housing just by looking at them. But many library regulars in low-income neighborhoods and central cities don't have a home or a job to go to.

Some patrons who lack housing also struggle with mental illness or addiction, and need more than a quiet place to study or read. They might have breakdowns in the reading room, start fights in the lobby or sneak into the bathroom to use drugs.

During the recession, behavioral incidents spiked in the main branch of the Salt Lake City Public Library, said Tommy Hamby, the library's adult services coordinator. "We saw a lot of what our manager called 'new homeless,'" he said: panicked people who had just lost their homes and were in crisis mode.

Public libraries have expanded services in a number of ways. San Francisco was the first to hire a social worker, in 2009. Washington and Denver have followed suit. The Dallas Public Library has used grant money to station two AmeriCorps volunteers behind a help desk — as well as answering questions, they might help proofread resumes or help with food stamp applications — and to hire someone who refers patrons to social services.

In 2012, the Salt Lake City Public Library began stationing three outreach workers from Volunteers of America, Utah, a nonprofit, at its main branch. "When that happened, it really, fundamentally changed the way we engaged with our patrons," Hamby said.

The outreach workers were trained to work with people experiencing mental illness, addiction and homelessness. They do everything from giving directions to nearby food banks to escorting victims of domestic violence to battered women's shelters and helping patrons get state ID cards. "I helped a lady get a divorce decree once," said Ethan Sellers, who leads the Volunteers of America library team.

They also can step in to calm people in crisis and have trained library staff to do the same. "Our police calls went down dramatically, our security calls dropped dramatically," Hamby said.

Making the Homeless Feel Human

Effective programs also involve a philosophical shift. One of the first things the Dallas library did, for instance, was to require staff to take turns greeting all patrons at the door. Treating homeless people with respect was the first step, said Mary Jo Giudice, the library director.

Joe Borrego first walked into the Dallas library two Thanksgivings ago. Originally from South Dakota, he had lost his job in the oil fields, then fallen out with his brother and lost a place to stay.

A pamphlet distributed by the library help desk helped him figure out the basics, such as where to find food. But he says that encouragement from library staff did more to get his life back on track. "Without that additional push, I'd probably still be sitting there on the homeless side of things," Borrego, 37, said.

He started attending coffee hours the library arranges to help regular patrons and staff get to know each other. A lifelong guitar player, he started taking piano lessons — one of the arts classes the library introduced based on feedback from coffee hour attendees, most of whom are homeless.

Staff members encouraged him to show off his guitar skills at open mic nights around the city and to spend his nights at the Bridge, a homeless shelter and recovery program, rather than on the street.

Borrego said that the activities forced him to socialize and have faith in people again. He's now working as a busker, playing guitar on street corners and earning enough money to pay rent on a shared apartment.

Washington's library introduced coffee hours inspired by Dallas' model in November. And San Francisco's library has found another way to welcome homeless patrons: by hiring them. Five people who are working their way out of homelessness now make rounds of the building, offering advice to their peers and helping enforce library rules.

An Expensive Day Shelter?

Not every person who is homeless wants help. Some Dallas library patrons who are homeless mock the library's efforts, Borrego said. And not every library can afford to hire a social worker, although most can bring in local community organizations for occasional workshops and events.

Libraries also have to contend with how the presence of down-and-out people can make some more affluent patrons uncomfortable. Take this online review of the Salt Lake City Public Library's main branch, from a woman called Shauna: "I don't feel comfortable walking outside by myself, especially at night, because of beggars and homeless people."

The Salt Lake library raised some eyebrows when, in 2014, it briefly considered staying open 24 hours a day to give residents a safe haven. "Why not improve existing services for the homeless and return the downtown library to taxpayers," one *Salt Lake Tribune* reader commented. The idea was eventually rejected as too costly.

When Salt Lake's librarians hear those kinds of complaints they explain that libraries are open to everyone, including people who don't have a home, Hamby said.

Some patrons conflate homelessness with other issues, Dallas' Giudice said. "The people who live downtown are constantly accosted by people panhandling — which is illegal" in Dallas. But that's not something that happens in the library, and street beggars aren't necessarily homeless.

The Dallas library had a daylong forum for area residents, business owners and patrons experiencing homelessness last May and will have another, focused on mental illness, this year.

Libraries do have codes of conduct that allow them to temporarily eject or suspend patrons for minor offenses, such as falling asleep or smelling bad, and to ban them for longer periods for serious offenses, such as doing drugs.

But public libraries are public spaces, and library staff members like Washington's Badalamenti want to preserve that. "The public library is one of the last places where people from all different backgrounds can be together," she said.

At the end of this year, Washington's central library will shut its doors for a major renovation. It's unclear where many patrons will go during the three-year overhaul — or where city vans that transport people downtown from far-flung homeless shelters will stop.

The library's jutting upper floors create a covered, outdoor space that's a perfect drop-off point. From here, homeless people can easily fan out across the city in search of free meals, some money, or their case workers.

Families can stay in Washington's homeless shelters 24 hours a day, and the city maintains a drop-in day center for individuals in the Northeast of the city, near the National Arboretum. There isn't a plan to open more such day centers, said Dora Taylor, public information officer for the Department of Human Services.