

HED: Waltham is a city of readers, according to latest library data

By ARTIE KRONENFELD

Waltham's public library just saw the highest year of circulation in its history — and its numbers continue to grow.

Director Kelly Linehan presented preliminary statistics at the library's Board of Trustees meeting this week. She announced a record growth year for the library as it prepares for [a tumultuous period of renovation](#).

Linehan told trustees the library kept very busy over July and August, circulating around 60,000 books per month. The summer reading program was very popular, with around 1,400 kids signing up — nearly two-thirds of Waltham's total elementary school enrollment, according to the library.

According to Linehan, the library's circulation numbers have been steadily rising, nearly doubling in the past five years.

One trustee expressed admiration for this growth — especially within the kids' section — in the face of [nationally declining literacy rates](#). "Kids aren't supposed to read, right? But here they are taking out books."

Over the last year, the library also issued 2,000 new library cards, which Linehan said was a significant increase from last year.

Linehan highlighted that around 81% of its circulation comes from librarygoers browsing the shelves, indicating that the library is well stocked and accessible to community members less familiar with the library's collections and systems.

Preparing for a move

Meanwhile, plans for the library's upcoming redesign have been paused as the city negotiates with the neighboring 14–16 Spring St. owners to [buy the lot and include it in the new library floorplan](#).

The library board is confident renovations will be going forward, and have already received money from [a state grant for the project](#). But while the city continues to negotiate for land, details about what the renovation will now look like — or where the library will go during the transition — remain up in the air.

The library staff is taking initial steps, including updating its collection catalogue and cleaning staff spaces, but the uncertainty is taking a toll.

Linehan said that she expects the project will be “unpaused” later in September or in October. The state grant requires the library to submit a finalized design by next May.

Additionally, the library’s board of trustees:

- Approved using library funding earmarked for carpet maintenance to temporarily replace carpeting in the children's room that Linehan estimated was more than 30 years old. She said even in light of the upcoming renovation, replacing the carpeting might be more cost-effective than covering it with new area rugs.
- Discussed a potential shelving change to better showcase newer nonfiction acquisitions by moving around the library’s large print and graphic novel collections.
- Heard updates from the Friends of the Library organization, who recently bought new membership management software. Linehan said the organization plans to hold a fundraising event for the library renovation.
- Learned that seven library staff members are in the process of acquiring notary status, and the library soon plans to offer notary services in English and Spanish.
- Agreed to review library policies to ensure compliance with a [recent statewide bill](#) around free expression to protect libraries against book bans.