

ONE HOUSTON, ONE LIBRARY TRANSFORMATION PLAN

Houstonians gave the Houston Public Library a major vote of confidence on Election Day 2017 by passing a significant bond issue to support library construction projects. “On the bond election, we were successful in achieving \$123 million toward the enhancement of the Houston Public Library’s capital projects over the next five years,” Rhea Brown Lawson, Library Director, Houston Public Library, told the conference participants. The library’s One Houston, One Library Transformation Plan provides a look at how HPL is aligning its people, place, and platform assets with citywide priorities driven by customer usage and needs and how the system is planning for the future. A year after the conference concluded, the vision remains on track, however, progress on implementation has slowed because of reprioritization due to Hurricane Harvey.

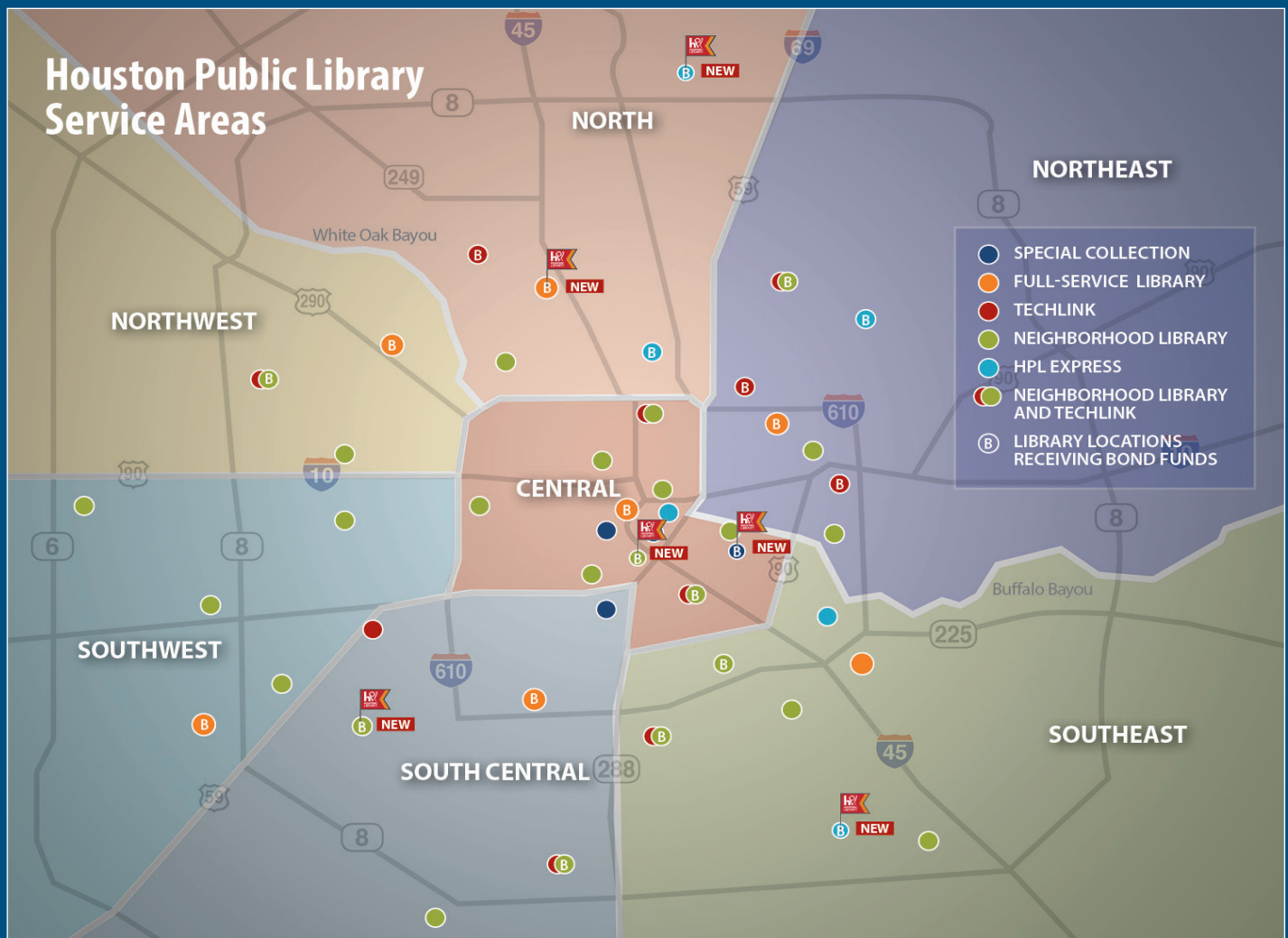
John Middleton, Assistant Director of Spaces and Communications Divisions, explained the aims of the new plan. “HPL’s goal is to ensure that our customers have access to equitable services around the city no matter what building they go into, no matter what library staffer they run into or are helped by, that their experience is equally wonderful,” Middleton said. He added, “We know that right now our system isn’t equitable in terms of access. We have some fantastic buildings and some incredible resources, but they are not available to everyone in every part of town. Part of this bond issue and part of the reason that we have this plan put forward is so we can get to that type of equity, so that our customers don’t have to go to ‘the right part of town’ or to the right building to find what they need.”

The One Houston, One Library Plan reorganizes the system into seven full-service areas across the city. Currently there are 42 unique library locations with a defined service area around each. In a research project with a team of students from Rice University, it became clear that Houston has a very mobile population who may access the library via several different service points in any given week. To enhance the customer experience wherever it occurs, the new library structure will include the following:

- Seven full-service areas divided primarily by geography and infrastructure that most Houstonians recognize (bayous and freeways). They will include north, northeast, southwest, south central, southwest, northwest, and central. Within each of these boundaries, there will be a full-service library with services similar to those at HPL’s Central Library. The plan calls for building one of these full-service libraries in the north where there is not currently a library to meet the full-service model.
- Twenty-three neighborhood libraries, some the same size as a full-service library. The neighborhood libraries will include two new ones: replacement libraries in the central part of town and in South Central, where a partnership with the city’s Health and Parks Departments is designing a new multimodal facility to serve that community.
- Sixteen TECHLink libraries. The TECHLink libraries are a new forward-leaning library model that provides the most up-to-date technology, access to skilled training, and an emphasis on users creating with the technology. Some TECHLink libraries will be renovations to existing smaller libraries and others will incorporate a TECHLink component in full service or neighborhood libraries.

- Seven Express Libraries (three existing, four new). Two express libraries will be located in the city's airports, one at each airport.
- Four Special Collections Libraries. Houston Public Library currently operates three special collections libraries: the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, located in the Julia Ideson Building, contains the city's archive and historical content; the African-American Library at the Gregory School preserves African-American history in the city; and the Clayton Library, which focuses on genealogy. The plan proposes a fourth special collection that will focus on Houston's Hispanic heritage.

HPL leadership is also working closely with the leadership of the Harris County Public Library to identify gaps and provide a seamless experience for residents of Houston and the surrounding county. For all of this work, HPL is looking to work with partners in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to expand its reach, impact, and outcomes.



HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY'S SERVICE PRIORITIES

Nicole Robinson, Deputy Director, Houston Public Library, provided an overview of the library's service priorities in her opening night presentation. These service priorities guide the development and implementation of the library's strategy, programs, and services in the community. Referred to as the A-C-E service priorities, the acronym stands for Access-Connect-Educate.

- **ACCESS!** The goal of the Access service priority is to provide convenient and efficient ways for Houstonians to access a wide array of information and resources to connect to city of Houston services.
- **EDUCATE!** The goal of the Educate service priority is to enhance educational opportunity for youth, families and adults through programs and services that support and prepare them for success in school and/or work.
- **CONNECT!** The goal of the Connect service priority is to help bridge the digital divide in Houston through the expansion of Internet broadband connectivity and access to state of the art technology, especially in high need communities.

The Houston Public Library A-C-E service priorities are core to the library and fundamental to its community success. An important aspect of the A-C-E priorities is that they align well with priorities and goals of the city government, including the Complete Communities initiative of the Turner Administration. Under the Complete Communities banner, the city is working in partnership with community-based organizations and developing stakeholder-driven pilot programs that focus on ensuring access to good schools, parks, infrastructure, and public safety. The library's priorities also align with city priorities to connect students and their families to broadband internet and to address connectivity deserts in the city. Participants noted that there is great potential for collaborations with the library to eliminate the digital divide in Houston.