East Lake Community Library

Public Library Construction Grant

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A detailed written building program, prepared by a professional librarian, functioning as the building consultant. The building program must include:

1. **A brief overview of the library including a historical perspective, mission and goals (or roles) of the library;**

The East Lake Community Library (ELCL) was born from a grassroots community effort that began in 1989. After a failed referendum in 1990, dedicated residents came together to establish a volunteer-run library funded entirely by donations. The original ELCL opened its doors on May 1, 1993, in a rent-free space at the Shoppes at Boot Ranch, with a modest collection of 8,000 books.

Just six months later, the library lost its rent-free location and relocated to nearby Woodlands Square retail plaza. By 1996, the collection had grown to 25,000 books and videos. However, another lost lease forced the collection into storage while community advocates and local legislators - Senator Jack Latvala and Representative “Sandy” Safley worked to secure a permanent home for the library.

In April 1997, Pinellas County approved the purchase of nine acres of land for a future library site. This milestone was made possible through a $350,000 state library construction grant, matched by $350,000 from the County. The Pinellas Public Library Cooperative (PPLC) contributed an additional $100,000 for architectural fees and equipment, along with $150,000 to support the library’s first year of operations. An agreement was also made with the nearby Palm Harbor Library to provide oversight during the early stages. The Friends of East Lake Community Library pledged $100,000 to furnish the new facility and provide its opening day collection, cementing the dream of a permanent library for the East Lake community.

The East Lake Community Library officially opened its permanent home on November 1, 1999, at its current location. The original 4,500-square-foot building was undersized from the start, but it quickly became a vital part of the East Lake community. Since its opening, the library staff has maintained a continuous improvement program to adapt the interior layout and services to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Due to increasing demand on both the facility and staff, ELCL commissioned an expansion study conducted by Toppe Consultants, Inc., a highly respected library planning firm. In 2011, the library moved forward with its first expansion, adding 1,900 square feet and bringing the total facility size to 6,400 square feet, still significantly below the minimum state standards for public libraries. This expansion introduced a single, multi-purpose Community Room designed to accommodate programming for children, teens, and adults, as well as provide meeting space for local community groups. The expansion project was funded through a combination of sources: a $200,000 grant from the Pinellas Public Library Cooperative (PPLC), $60,000 raised by the Friends of East Lake Community Library, and $150,000 from the library's capital expansion fund.

In 2013, ELCL became an independent library with its own taxing district, creating a new and sustainable revenue stream to support professional staffing, operational expenses and facility enhancements. This transition led to expanded hours, increased staffing, and significant growth in programs, services, and collections. ELCL is one of four entities governed by the Palm Harbor Community Services Agency, Inc. (PHCSA) and remains a proud member of the Pinellas Public Library Cooperative (PPLC).

Despite this previous expansion, it soon became clear that additional space was again needed to meet growing community demand. In 2016, ELCL received a $1,000,000 state budget appropriation to fund a 2,500-square-foot expansion. Rising construction costs were offset by successful fundraising efforts and generous contributions from community donors. Groundbreaking took place on November 24, 2017, and after overcoming several delays, the library celebrated its Grand Reopening on January 20, 2019. A much-needed front parking lot was added in June 2019, funded through BP Settlement funds approved by Pinellas County. This expansion brought the library's total size to 8,900 square feet.

In 2019, ELCL unveiled a new four-year Strategic Plan to guide future growth and better serve the community. At the same time, library staff and board members advocated for a Phase II Expansion to be included in the Penny for Pinellas project list. "Penny for Pinellas" is a one-cent local sales tax approved by voters to fund capital improvement projects across the county. Funding for the library's next expansion was approved, with $4.5 million confirmed and allocated to support design and construction beginning in October 2025 (FY 2026).

Our Mission Statement

Strengthening our community through inspiration, enrichment, and education.

Our Vision Statement

The East Lake Community Library aspires to be the center of information and discovery in the community. Through innovative programming, relevant collections and responsive services, its goals are to support lifelong learning and the joy of reading, and to provide cultural and recreational opportunities for residents of all ages.

These guiding principles shape every aspect of the library's operations and future planning, ensuring that ELCL remains a dynamic and inclusive resource for all.

2. **A description of how library functions relate to each other in terms of space, including a description of patron use and workflow patterns; and**

The East Lake Community Library (ELCL) operates within an 8,900-square-foot facility, serving over 75,000 patrons annually. While the library is a vibrant and essential resource for the East Lake community, its physical space is significantly undersized relative to its usage and state standards for public libraries.

Space Relationships and Functional Zones

Main Entrance & Lobby: The main entrance and lobby area of the East Lake Community Library also hosts the Friends of the Library Bookstore, a vital fundraising initiative that supports library programs and services. However, the space is cramped and limited, which significantly impacts the visibility, accessibility, and overall effectiveness of the bookstore. The tight layout restricts browsing and display options, making it difficult to attract and engage patrons, ultimately hindering the fundraising efforts of the Friends of East Lake Community Library.

This area also serves as the central hub for directional flow, connecting patrons to the circulation desk, public collections, and programming spaces. Despite its importance, the lobby's small footprint limits its functionality and contributes to congestion during peak hours and events.

Member Services Desk: Located near the entrance, the Member Services Desk serves as the primary point of contact for patrons. It encompasses circulation, reference, and general inquiries, making it a central hub for both transactional and informational support. Staff at this desk manage high volumes of daily patron traffic, assisting with check-ins and check-outs, patron account services, research help, technology assistance and directional guidance. Its strategic placement ensures accessibility, but the limited space around the desk can contribute to congestion during peak hours.

Adult, Teen, and Children's Collections: These areas are arranged to support browsing and reading, but space constraints limit seating and quiet zones. The library's physical limitations prevent any meaningful growth of the collection. There is simply no available space to expand its offerings. Display space is also extremely limited, which hampers readers' advisory efforts and reduces opportunities to highlight new or

recommended titles. This stagnation directly impacts the library's mission to inspire, enrich, and educate the community through relevant and diverse resources. Without additional space, the library cannot grow its collections or fully support the informational and recreational needs of its patrons.

Community Room: The library has only one multi-purpose Community Room, which serves as the sole space for all programming, children's story times, teen activities, adult workshops, community meetings and staff meetings. This limitation prevents simultaneous programs and restricts scheduling flexibility.

Technology Access: Public computers are available but limited in number. They are located near the adult collection, often competing for space with study and reading areas.

Staff Work Areas: The East Lake Community Library lacks sufficient office space to adequately support its staff. One staff member currently has no access to a desk or cubicle, and overall workspace is extremely limited. Compounding these challenges, the library has no dedicated area for nursing mothers or private personal needs. The only space that offers any privacy is the indoor book drop room, which is not designed or intended for staff use. This lack of appropriate facilities not only affects staff comfort and well-being but also highlights the urgent need for expanded and thoughtfully designed staff areas in any future development plans.

Passport Acceptance Facility: This service is integrated into the library's operations and provides a valuable revenue stream. However, it further strains the limited space and requires careful coordination to maintain privacy and efficiency.

Patron Use and Workflow Patterns

Daily Flow: Patrons enter through the main entrance and typically move toward the member services desk or their area of interest. Families often head to the children's section, while students and adults seek out computers or seating for reading and study. The adult and children's collections are housed on shelving units that are not ADA-compliant. Aisles between stacks are too narrow to accommodate strollers or wheelchairs, severely limiting access for patrons with mobility needs. Additionally, due to space constraints, books are placed on the very top and bottom shelves, creating further accessibility issues for individuals with physical limitations or those using assistive devices.

These limitations not only affect patron experience but also hinder staff workflow, as navigating tight spaces and assisting patrons in hard-to-reach areas adds strain to daily operations. The lack of accessible shelving and adequate spacing underscores the urgent need for a facility expansion that prioritizes inclusivity and universal design.

Programming Flow: All programs, regardless of age group, must be scheduled in the single Community Room. This creates bottlenecks and limits the library's ability to host concurrent events or respond to spontaneous community needs.

Staff Workflow: Staff rotate between public service points and back-office tasks, but the lack of adequate workspace hampers efficiency. Shared workstations and limited privacy affect productivity and morale.

Peak Times: Afternoons, weekends, and school breaks bring heavy traffic. The library's layout struggles to accommodate large groups, and the lack of study rooms or breakout spaces limits its ability to serve students, job seekers and those seeking a place for reading and contemplation.

Summary of Challenges

Despite its critical role in the community, ELCL's current facility is much too small to meet demand. The lack of dedicated programming spaces, study rooms, staff offices, and private areas significantly impacts service delivery, staff workflow, and patron experience. A larger, more flexible facility is essential to support the library's continued growth and evolving role in the East Lake community.

3. **Projection of future needs based on anticipated future demographics.**

The East Lake Community Library currently operates within an 8,900-square-foot facility, serving a population of approximately 32,000 residents. In addition to local patrons, the library serves a growing number of reciprocal borrowers from neighboring Pasco County, due to its location along a major commuter corridor between Pinellas and Pasco counties. With over 75,000 annual visits, the library is already functioning well beyond its spatial capacity.

Anticipated Demographic and Regional Growth

- Population Growth: East Lake and surrounding areas are expected to experience continued residential development, particularly among families and retirees. This will increase demand for youth programming, adult education, and accessible services.
- Commuter Traffic: As a key stop along a busy commuter route, the library will continue to attract non-resident users, especially for services like passport processing and technology access.
- Digital and Remote Work Trends: With more residents working remotely or engaging in hybrid education, demand for quiet study rooms, collaborative workspaces, and reliable technology access will grow.

Space and Service Needs

To meet future demand, the library requires:

- Expanded Facility Size: Based on state standards and projected usage, the library needs to add as much square footage as possible to accommodate the needs of the community.
- Multiple Programming Rooms: Currently, the East Lake Community Library has only one multi-purpose Community Room, which must accommodate all library programming, community meetings, and staff gatherings. This single-room setup greatly limits scheduling flexibility and prevents the library from hosting simultaneous programs for different age groups or purposes. As a result, staff must carefully coordinate events, often turning away opportunities due to space constraints. The proposed expansion would include a smaller, dedicated children's programming area, which would allow the library to increase the number and variety of programs offered, especially for youth and families. Additionally, this new space would provide an extra meeting room that could be used for staff meetings, community group gatherings, and overflow programming, significantly enhancing the library's ability to serve its growing patron base.
- Study and Meeting Rooms: The absence of private study rooms restricts use by students, tutors, and remote workers. Small meeting rooms would also support local organizations and business users.
- ADA-Compliant Shelving and Layout: Current shelving is not accessible to patrons using wheelchairs or strollers. Future designs must prioritize universal access and inclusive design.
- Staff Workspaces: The library lacks sufficient office space, with one staff member currently, without a desk or cubicle. Future plans include adequate workstations, private areas for nursing mothers, and break spaces to support staff well-being.
- Expanded Technology Access: As digital services grow, the library will need more public computers, charging stations, and tech-enabled meeting rooms.

Conclusion

The East Lake Community Library is a vital and heavily utilized resource, but its current facility is insufficient to meet both present and future needs. Strategic expansion is essential to ensure the library can continue to serve its growing and diverse patron base with excellence, accessibility, and flexibility.