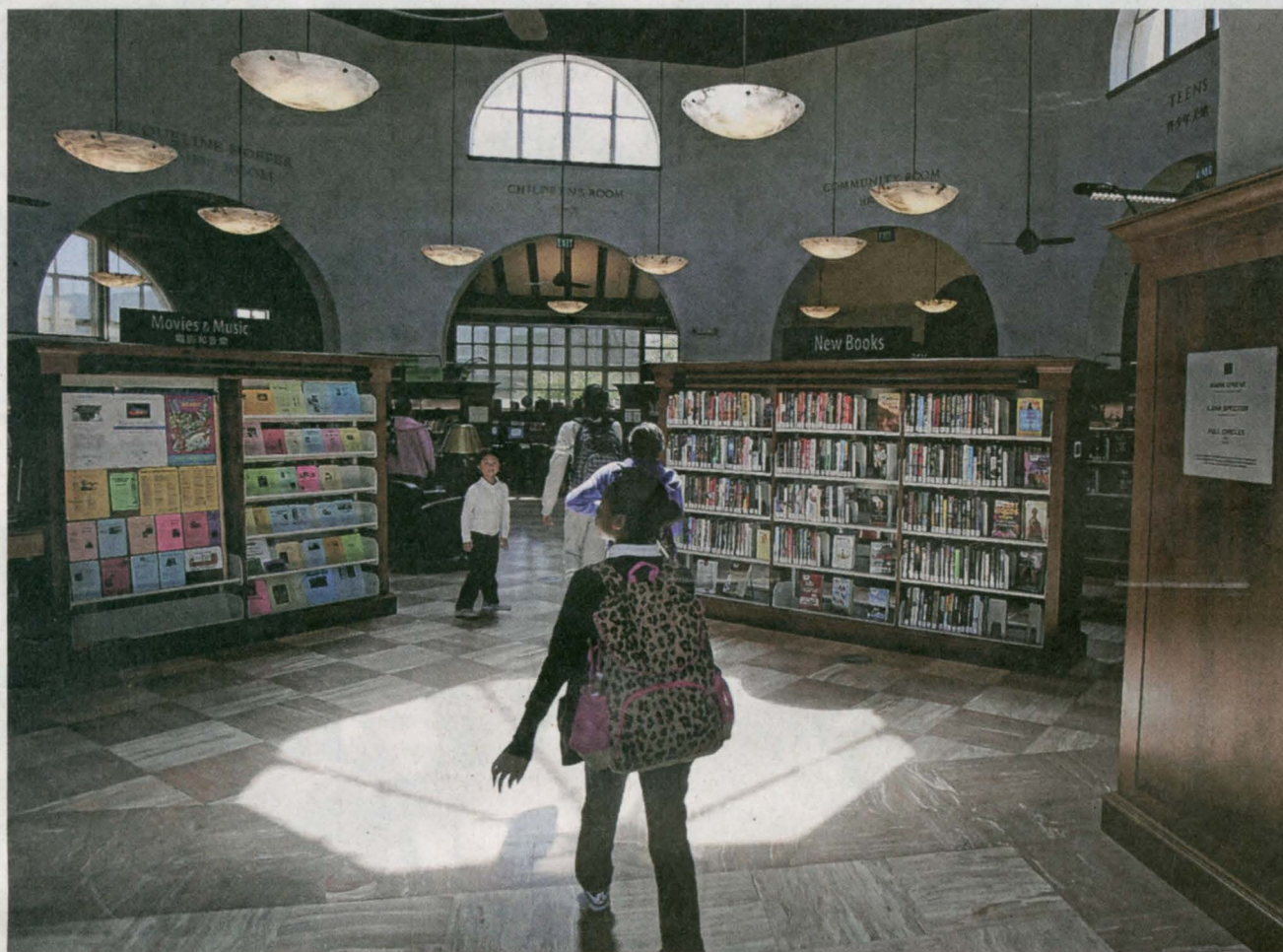


Bay Area

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Photos by Brant Ward / The Chronicle

Students visit the Visitacion Valley library after school. It is one of three San Francisco Public Library branches that will be open for patrons seven days a week beginning Sunday.

LIBRARIES

Expanded hours for S.F. branches

7-day-a-week schedule will begin Sunday at 3 locations

By Neal J. Riley

At a time when patrons can download electronic books and stream videos from the library's website without leaving home, the San Francisco Public Library is looking to spend \$1 million a year on something old-fashioned — keeping libraries open longer.

Starting Sunday, the Visitacion Valley, Mission Bay and Portola branches will add an additional day of service to be open seven days a week, at a cost of \$194,000.

The Library Commission is also expected to vote on a proposal next month to add 56 weekly hours to its 28 locations, increasing the number of seven-day-a-week libraries from 13 to 19, including the Main Library.

"As libraries across our state are reducing library hours and closing their libraries, San Francisco continues to invest in libraries and expanding library access," said Mayor Ed Lee in a statement.

"Extending access to our libraries is vital to ensuring that youth maintain their reading and learning skills over the summer months."

The proposal comes after the li-
Libraries continues on D3



The magazine and newspaper area of the Visitacion Valley branch is popular for its foreign-language publications.



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S.F. branches will be open longer hours

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library surveyed more than 2,500 users and held public hearings in each of the 11 supervisorial districts last fall, as required by law every five years.

The results showed that 73 percent of respondents were happy with the current level of hours, but 64 percent said they'd use their branch more if it were open longer.

The new plans call for branches to be open 45, 50 or 55 hours a week.

Confusing schedules

"There was such an inconsistent level of hours across the city and it was confusing," said City Librarian Luis Herrera, who added that San Francisco is one of the few cities adding hours in tough economic times.

"In a perfect world, we'd love to have our libraries open seven days a week, and we're inching our way toward that goal."

But while overall weekly hours will increase, some branches will still see cuts on certain days to balance out the additions.

For example, the proposal would add service on Mondays for the Noe Valley branch, but the library there would close at 6 p.m. on Tuesdays instead of 9 p.m. No branch would be open past 8 p.m. under the new plans.

"I think this goes

strictly to convenience of administration," said Peter Warfield, director of the independent local Library Users Association, at a recent commission meeting.

"It represents massive cuts to evening hours, which is what the public has for years told you is the most wanted and most desirable time."

Night visitors

But Herrera points to data that show branches similar to Noe Valley average fewer than 30 visitors after 8 p.m., the slowest time of day.

"There are trade-offs," Herrera said. "But the overall thing is that we're adjusting to meet the needs of users."

Another concern is whether the 10 full-time employees the library seeks to hire will be enough to cover the expanded hours. The changes won't happen until additional staffing is in place, ideally by the fall, library officials said. "It probably will take quite a long time for us to understand whether the plans to open more hours will actually enhance service," said Melissa Riley, a West Portal branch librarian and representative of the Librarians Guild. "The quality of service is just as important as having more hours."

And while the Main Library will stay open 60 hours a week, library staff are also proposing a



Photos by Brant Ward / The Chronicle

Above: Librarian Tom Duffy helps patrons at the front desk of the S.F. Public Library in Visitacion Valley.

Left: The Visitacion Valley branch will expand its hours, opening seven days a week to meet demand.



big increase in hours for Main Library centers like Deaf Services, the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled, and the San Francisco History Center and Book Arts &

Special Collections.

Entire library

"When people are interested in coming to the Main Library they'll know that the entire

Main Library is available to them and they won't have to know about our hours within the main hours," said Karen Strauss, acting chief of the Main Library, at a

recent commission meeting.

The proposed hours are not final yet. The library has been surveying public reaction to new hours for each branch, and is encouraging people to attend Thursday's Library Commission meeting to weigh in.

Neal J. Riley is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. E-mail: nriley@sfgate.com Twitter: [@realdealneal](https://twitter.com/realdealneal)