

# Library trades users' privacy for slick search capability

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"They specifically say they're not planning on selling any data," Lent said. BiblioCommons' privacy policy, furthermore, says the company "will not share, gift, sell, rent or trade your personal information," though it includes an exception for "enforceable governmental request."

"It's a two-way street," Lent added, in discussing the ownership of Shared Content, in that users can also access and repost material from the site.

Perhaps BiblioCommons' most important feature, however, is its enhanced search capacity.

"You can create these beautiful subsets without having to understand advanced searching techniques," Lent said. "A lot of them are more nuanced than what we have in our current catalog. It's just really cool, so great and easy to do."

Titles can be parsed by format — books, ebooks, movies, for example — by how long they've been in the collection, whether they circulate, are online or reference-only, how many copies the library has and what languages they're in. "It goes on and on. There's just all kinds of fun you can have looking for things here," Lent said.

BiblioCommons' critics insist, however, that that increased functionality comes at a steep price: Some aspects of the site open the door to users' personal data being turned over to a foreign firm to do with as it chooses, they say.

The Library Commission encouraged this jaundiced view when it killed one three-letter word from its privacy policy that had been in place since 2004.

Where the policy once read, "Any future enhancements to the Library's online system that may impact user confidentiality will not be activated



LENNY LIMJOCO, 2011

**An upgrade to the Library's Website.** BiblioCommons, rolls out this month.

by the Library," 10 years later the word "not" was crossed out and the following underlined words added:

"Enhancements to the Library's online catalog system that offer greater functionality and customized features that may impact user confidentiality will be activated by the Library only if such enhancements are optional to the user. Use of enhancements is governed by privacy statements and terms and conditions of the vendor," the revised policy says.

The topic first came up for discussion at the Library Commission's meeting in November 2014. The deletion was no longer visible when the privacy policy was presented for further discussion a month later at the Dec. 4 meet-

ing, a point Warfield in particular found alarming. Lent suggested it was simply a matter of the new documents reflecting the new changes as they were made from meeting to meeting.

The urge to upgrade the city's catalog system was first raised at Library Commission hearings during budget presentations in early 2012, according to commission records. Web services manager Joan Lefkowitz and Lent's presentation on Jan. 15 included references to a study done by San Francisco State University for the library's information technology department that found widespread dissatisfaction with the library's catalog and Website.

In a conversation with The Extra, Lent explained the library's attraction

to BiblioCommons. The current catalog system, she said, known as an ILS, an Integrated Library System, is supplied by an Emeryville firm, Innovative Interfaces. Unfortunately, none of the four or five companies that provide ILS systems, Lent said, "have kept up with the times."

"BiblioCommons shouldn't be necessary," she said. But "the search is just so much better than our existing catalog. That was the library's original motivation." ILS vendors, she said, are trying to improve, but it's a case of "too little, too late."

"That's why libraries are willing to pay extra to have this," Lent said.

The new catalog system will also be available to San Francisco users in professionally translated Spanish and traditional Chinese, she said, with the expectation of adding more languages in the future. Lent said that the price per language drops as more are added. The firm currently offers Japanese, Russian and simplified Chinese, which she hopes to add at the earliest opportunity. Adding all three would cost \$8,020 at today's prices, she said.

The library entered into a sole-source contract with BiblioCommons on April 1, 2014, for \$469,940 over three years. It's renewable for three more years, should the library seek to do so, before it would have to go through the entire city contract process again.

The subscription fee is based on a U.S. census-calculated San Francisco population of 812,826, at a rate of 8 cents for the first 700,000 potential users and 4.5 cents each thereafter.

Included in the contract is a provision that the city can, at any time and for any reason, or for no reason at all, cancel it, although BiblioCommons would not have to refund the city's money paid that year.

Lent said the library Website got 51,394,089 page views last year and that 86% of them were concerned with library materials and users' accounts, indicating, she said, the software is "really worthwhile in terms of how many people are affected."

Not everyone is convinced. "I'm concerned that nobody will

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# Big art is on its way

By MARJORIE BEGGS

By the end of the year, a huge mural will grace the west wall of the 94-unit Windsor Hotel, 238 Eddy St., rising behind the new Boeddeker Park Clubhouse and covering most of the hotel's six stories. Its theme: "Everyone Deserves a Home."

Delivering Innovation in Supportive Housing — DISH — got a \$40,000 matching grant from the city to manage the creation of the mural by Daniel Pan and other artists at IAM Gallery. DISH, which manages services at six supportive housing sites, including the Windsor, is one of 31 organizations — and the only one from the Tenderloin — to get an award this year from the Community Challenge Grant program.

The \$1.2 million in grants comes from S.F. businesses that designate 1% of their business tax to help beautify neighborhoods citywide. Depending on the scale of the project, a grantee must match 25% to 50% of the award with cash, volunteer labor, donated materials or services.

"We're just starting to look at sources for our 25% match," says DISH Director Lauren Hall. "No commitments yet, but DISH's staff time will be in-kind and the artists' too."

The draft drawing of the mural, she adds, will be adjusted when neighbors weigh in during three community meetings planned for spring. Also, because the mural is city-funded, it must be approved by the Arts Commission. ■



PHOTO: MARJORIE BEGGS. DIGITAL COMPOSITE FOR ART OVERLAY: LISE STAMPPLE

**Draft sketch** by artists at 1AM Gallery for a five-story mural — "Everyone Deserves a Home" — that will fill the west wall of the Windsor Hotel, which faces Boeddeker Park.

## MY TAKE

# Library evicts community newspapers from longtime site

By PETER WARFIELD

Gone. Gone are the shelves. With no input from the public and no presentation to, or approval by, the library's policy-setting commission, City Librarian Luis Herrera's senior management removed all community publications and the shelving for them that for many years was at the Main Library north entrance.

Library records show that 36 linear feet of shelving, 12 feet wide and three shelves high, were removed Dec. 5 and wound up at the Adult Probation Department.

Now an outcry from newspaper editors and a writer appears to have forced the library to reverse course and promise a future replacement space — and in the meantime, provide a "temporary" spot on the fifth floor that is one-sixth the size, consisting of just 6 linear feet: two 3-foot-wide shelves.

The public no longer will be able to pop in and out quickly and conveniently to get newspapers. To get to the new location from the old one, people must traverse the block-square building six times to get there and back out, in addition to taking the elevator five stories up and five stories down.

One traverse gets you from the entrance to the security gates near Grove Street. Then a second trip back to the elevators. A ride to the fifth floor, and then across the building to the Newspaper and Magazine section. Then the whole three traverses in reverse, plus an elevator ride to get back out. How convenient is that?

According to library records obtained by our public records request, the only explanation was a brief, curt sign: "On Friday, December 5th, these

shelves will be removed and will not be replaced.

"All remaining flyers and pamphlets will be recycled.

"Please keep this area clear in order to provide a welcoming entrance to the Main Library."

There it is in a nutshell. The library believes that the absence of books or other reading material — here and in other instances — is "welcoming." And there were clearly no plans to replace — anything.

Was the Library's newspaper eviction legal? James Chaffee, former president of the Sunshine Ordinance Task Force and longtime library critic, says that a public forum like the library space for newspaper distribution cannot be removed without due process.

The writers' and editors' revolt started with blogger Marc Norton writing Karen Strauss, chief of the Main, about being told at the information desk that it was she who had "decided to remove these shelves and the community newspapers that used to be there." "This has been a place where I and other San Franciscans could get newspapers from all over San Francisco," he emailed her Dec. 17.

Norton asked Strauss three questions: "1. Is it correct that you made this decision? 2. Was there any attempt to involve the community in this decision? 3. Why were the shelves and the community newspapers removed?"

Norton was joined by Mary Ratcliff of S.F. Bay View newspaper: "This is very disturbing. Where ARE the newspapers?"

And Geoff Link, executive director of San Francisco Study Center, which publishes Central City Extra, wrote that the location was "the biggest drop point for The Extra and up to 800 peo-

ple monthly depend on finding it there. How can the library unilaterally decide to end its decades-long role as a dependable place to find information about all of the city's neighborhoods in one spot? It feels like a form of censorship and if that goes too far, it certainly is an abdication of the library's traditional role as communication center for community news."

At this point, the Bay Area Reporter picked up the story and reported the community concern.

Two days later, Norton asked Strauss: "When might we expect a response?" Strauss replied 5½ days after Norton's original question was posed. She euphemistically referred to the eviction of the publications as the "recent change to the Main Library's practice of providing a space at the Fulton Street entrance for giveaway publications." Change? It was a complete destruction. And "giveaway publications" sounds a bit denigratory. Would the library characterize its own service to the public as "giveaway library services"?

Strauss went on: "The Library subscribes to San Francisco neighborhood newspapers throughout the city for our collections in order to bring news and views from the neighborhoods to our users at the Main Library."

While some neighborhood newspapers are archived, that is no replacement for public access to copies that people can take home and study at their leisure.

Her main argument: The newspapers made a mess and didn't really reach actual readers. And, besides, there weren't that many of them.

She wrote: "Over the course of many years we have observed that the handful of publications and advertising

flyers that were dropped off, often outside the doors, were attractive primarily to people who were vandalizing them and/or using them for purposes other than reading, such as seat cushions. The papers were often rendered unusable by weather or vandalism — or both — and added debris to the neighborhood. Ultimately, it became apparent that the publications were not reaching the reading public as assumed and for whom they were intended."

As a regular library user, I have never seen any of the stated problems, have many times been glad to pick up papers there, and know it to be a reliable spot. Others have said the same, including David Baker, acting president of the North of Market Planning Coalition and a frequent Main Library user.

And who has never used a newspaper to sit on? Herb Caen used to refer to his own column as the "Friday fish-wrap." Caen surely did not mean that using a paper for fishwrap means it wasn't used as "intended." I have used newspapers for gift wrapping, as packing material, insulation on a cold stone bench, and the like — but that doesn't mean I didn't ALSO use them for reading.

Despite additional attempts by Norton, neither Strauss nor anyone else at the library gave him any answer to his first two questions, as of more than a month later.

And they aren't likely to — unless further public pressure makes them change their mind about that — and about evicting the newspapers that used to be there for the public, readily available in the entrance where they were located for years. ■

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# Concessions library fought for will apply nationwide

Before the library agreed to revise its privacy policy to accommodate BiblioCommons' software, the Canadian firm had to make numerous concessions and clarifications to its policies. All of the changes the library requested and received also apply to domestic users where BiblioCommons is already part of the public library system, whether they're as close by as San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, or as far off as New York, Boston or Chicago.

Topics covered include clarifying that parents can't snoop on their teens' library use, and modifying the rules for removing users' Shared Content if it draws objections, plus ways users are warned if BiblioCommons plans to change its underlying policies.

All this was accomplished amid concerns over the extent to which the library was jettisoning its longstanding policies protecting users from the prying eyes of commercial or governmental interests.

First of all, Laura Lent, library chief of collections and technical services, points out that for those who prefer the status quo, no one is required to use the new software. The changes to the library privacy policy apply only to certain aspects of BiblioCommons use, and anyone wary of those can simply continue to use the "Classic Catalog." That catalog forms the foundation upon which BiblioCommons is perched and

of necessity will continue to be maintained and updated as it always has, Lent said.

Users can also use BiblioCommons without registering for it, to take advantage of its enhanced search capacities, but won't be able to use it to reserve books or participate in the social media aspects of the software — comments, chats, ratings, reviews and such. That's what's called "Shared Content."

For those who choose to brave the new waters and register for the software, surrendering some personal data in the process — name, birthdate, an email address, and an alias or user name of their choosing — BiblioCommons has the right to share the Shared Content with its millions of other registered users in its social media network, or to promote the software to new users.

Users can delete any of their Shared Content except comments that form part of a conversation with other users. BiblioCommons also cautions that the reality of the World Wide Web is such that despite all efforts, some stuff attains Internet immortality, given the ways in which Google searches can find material that no longer exists in its original posting place.

"Lists of current loans, due dates, outstanding fines, etc. may be loaded from your library record during your sessions online," the contract reads. "but this information is not permanent-

ly stored on your BiblioCommons account, and is never shared with other users." Users can make their transactions public if they choose, but absent that, "no automatic record of your borrowing will be created."

Users are not required to provide contact information, but if they do, the contract specifies: "Your contact information will not be used by BiblioCommons for any other purpose without your consent, or shared with any party other than San Francisco Public Library without your direction to do so."

Another concern about BiblioCommons expressed at commission meetings had to do with a policy whereby three "flags" raised in objection — conceivably by anyone, even anonymously — were all it would take to get Shared Content removed.

BiblioCommons, responding to criticism that this potentially enabled censorship, says now it will individually review any thrice-flagged material and, if it decides said material does indeed violate its terms of use, it will offer the content's creator an opportunity to make a case for the content and an explanation for the company's ultimate decision.

Also, concerns over the level of supervision of teenagers using the site were answered by clarifying that the rules giving parents or guardians access to kids' accounts apply only to children

12 and younger, who are precluded by the U.S. Children's Online Privacy and Protection Act from agreeing to terms allowing them to post public comments. "It's kind of interesting that we were the first library to insist on that," Lent told The Extra.

And as to Library Commission and public concerns about the language stipulating that the terms of the privacy statement or terms of use could "change from time to time" and that the statement "We encourage you to review the privacy statement from time to time for changes" was woefully inadequate, BiblioCommons agreed to prominently post notification banners for eight weeks should there be any changes made. Lent added that there had been none since 2011.

"They came very far from their original position," Lent told the commission at the Jan. 15 meeting.

Changes BiblioCommons made to accommodate San Francisco's concerns will now apply to all its clients. "I'm proud of that," she told The Extra. "The city legal team is really good."

So add San Francisco to BiblioCommons' list of major urban library systems using its software. Others include New York, Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Austin, Portland and Seattle. ■

— Mark Hedin