

TRANSFORMING THE COMMUNITY
AND DOWNTOWN ECONOMY

ONE BOOK AT A TIME

ECONOMIC
IMPACT ANALYSIS

FEB. 20, 2024

prepared by

Parker Philips
assess. analyze. assert!



BALTIMORE COUNTY
PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Executive Summary

TOWSON LIBRARY BY THE NUMBERS - OVERALL ECONOMIC IMPACT 2023

\$39.4 million generated in overall economic impact

\$17.6 million generated in economic impact from direct operations
\$21.8 million indirect and induced impact generated

328 total jobs supported and sustained

198 direct jobs | 130 indirect and induced jobs

\$2 million total state and local taxes contributed

\$859 thousand direct impact | \$1.2 million indirect and induced

216,600 annual customers

\$868.5 million in cumulative savings for current cardholders renting materials from the Towson Library



COMBINED OPERATIONAL AND CUSTOMER IMPACTS, 2023

Type of Impact	Employment Impact (Jobs)	Economic Impact (Output)	State and Local Taxes
Direct	198 jobs	\$17,626,242	\$859,096
Indirect	65 jobs	\$9,923,160	\$348,720
Induced	65 jobs	\$11,885,193	\$882,597
TOTAL	328 JOBS	\$39,434,595	\$2,090,413

Source: Parker Phillips using IMPLAN

Libraries hold a special place in any community; as one of the more recognizable buildings in Downtown Towson, the Towson Branch of the Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL) offers residents educational programs and enrichment through the hard work of their employees, and—of course—books to foster lifelong learning. Libraries are one of the last remaining public goods where people can come, free of charge, and interact with members of their community.



In Towson, Maryland, the library stands proud as a welcoming, thriving cornerstone of the downtown York Road corridor. In a community of over 60,000—with a larger suburban sprawl leading to the city of Baltimore, Towson is a growing Maryland community.¹ In addition to being a welcoming place for visitors of all backgrounds and identities, the location of the Towson Library in downtown Towson makes it a staple institution of a growing community. What is often discounted about public institutions like the Towson Library is the amount of economic activity that flows through peoples' relationship to the library. The ideal location of the Towson Library on the York Road corridor means that library customers are often customers of other businesses in the community. The economic impact of the Towson Library cannot be overstated.

The cultural and community impact of the Towson Library is immense. Unfortunately, when state and local communities go through rounds of budget cuts, libraries are often in the crosshairs. Recently, libraries have also become the center of culture wars. Books are taken off shelves, programming aimed at inclusion is questioned, and librarians are blamed. However, all community assets like the Towson Library require support and funding to maintain and grow their offerings to the community. Without support from donors, citizens, and local and state government, the full impact of Towson Library may not be realized in the future.

The Towson Library is home to the Baltimore County Public Library's administrative offices along with the library branch, and the number of employees and economic impact reflect it. Through its operational expenses, capital projects, wages, the spending of staff in the community, and the spending of visitors to the library, the Towson Library generates \$39.4 million in economic impact. This impact supports and sustains 328 jobs through direct employment and the jobs generated by the broader economy due to the supply chain and the impact of customer spending. Operations of Towson Library support \$2 million in local and state taxes.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/towsoncdmaryland>



Introduction

An 85,000 square foot building stands tall in downtown Towson, an anchor of the York Road corridor. A spiral ramp leads customers to the doors of the Towson Library where an 85-foot dragon mural is ready to greet them. This is not just any dragon. Instead of scales, the dragon is adorned by books – a total of 654 painted in a rainbow of colors. Customers see *The Scarlet Letter* painted as a red scale; *Peter Pan* is in the green section of the tail as is *Anne of Green Gables*. The tip of the tail is holding one book – *A Dragon's Tale*. The dragon mural and the spiral lamp leading to the library's door is one of the many things that customers love about the Towson Library.

*"I've been visiting the Towson Branch off and on for probably over 20 years. My kids used to play outside on the big circle with the dragon painted on it, and they loved the big spiral ramp."
- Middle-aged female customer who visits the library each month*

Imagine, the dragon mural reads.

Imagine a place for all to enter.

On any given day, the library will fill with a cacophony of customers, as varied as the dragon's multicolored tail, a place for multi-generations to converge.

Imagine a place for all to find a book, newspaper, or other resource.

*"It has a larger selection of books than most other libraries near me," one young female customer wrote.
"I love the large variety of adult, young adult, and children's books."*



Imagine a place offering free computers and Wi-Fi.

Imagine a place with free activities that build community and spread joy.

"My children and I love attending story time two times per week," one young, female Hispanic customer wrote. "Just walking through the doors of the library always gave me such a sense of peace. It's definitely one of my happy places."

Imagine a happy place that has shaped downtown Towson for decades.

Since 1936, the Towson Library has been an integral part of the community. The Woman's Club of Towson opened the library, operating it out of the home of one of its members and its first librarian, Mary Osborne Odell. The small library grew over the next 12 years and became one of Baltimore County Public Library's initial branches in 1948.

In 1974, under the guidance of head librarian Charles Robinson, the Towson Library opened at its current location, which also houses the administrative offices for the Baltimore County Library System.

A mural titled Elements of Development, added to the outside of the building in 2020, was commissioned by the Towson Chamber of Commerce and the Friends of Towson Library. The six panels of the multi-colored mural each contain a hidden word – explore, learn, create, connect, read, and grow. The mural, like the library, invites individuals walking along York Road to the library's doors. "The mural outside is so vibrant," one customer noted.

Imagine a desired asset that has been providing the community with the resources it needs to explore, learn, create, connect, read, and grow for close to 90 years.

This is the Towson Library – a place that has been transforming the community one book at a time and offering the community so much to love.

*"I love that I used to come to the Towson branch as a kid and now I bring my own children. I love the art on the winding walk up to the library. I love that the branch validates parking. I love how helpful the library staff are. I love the curated collection of books on the end-caps and seasonal displays."
-A college-educated, female customer.*

Imagine a library that is an integral part of the community and a driver of the local economy.

The Towson Library is a vibrant community asset. In addition to contributing to the vitality of the community, the library provides tangible benefits that can be translated into a direct economic impact. The Towson Library generates \$39.4 million in annual economic impact, supports and sustains 328 jobs, and contribute \$2 million to the local and state tax base.

Imagine a library that both generates economic impact *and* saves customers money.

When customers visit the Towson Library to check out and use materials, there are significant cost savings that result from people renting out these items rather than buying the item themselves. Current cardholders have saved a cumulative total of more than \$868.5 million at the Towson Library by renting their materials. The money saved at the Towson Library allows customers to spend their disposable income at local businesses and further contribute the local economy during their trip to the library.

Imagine a library that is modernized for the future.

The Towson Library requires investment to modernize and update its aging facilities and technologies. A combination of investment from public and private entities is required to ensure that the library continues to flourish well into the future. A \$150 million capital investment in remodeling the current structure will ensure that the library remains at the center of thriving downtown Towson.





About the Study

In August 2023, the Towson Library engaged Parker Philips Inc. to measure the economic contribution of Towson Library to the city, county, and surrounding communities. The goal of this analysis is to tell Towson Library's story from a numbers and narrative perspective. To develop this report, Parker Philips gathered financial and employment data about Towson Library, interviewed key stakeholders and members of the community, surveyed library customers members, and researched secondary data and information to inform the writing and key messages.

Financial and Data Gathering

Key Stakeholder Interviews

Customer Intercept and Online Surveys

Analysis and Reporting

The primary tool used in the performance of this study is the Input-Output model and data set developed by IMPLAN Group LLC. Financial data used in this study was obtained from the Towson Library and included the following data points: operational expenditures, capital expenditures, and payroll and benefits for employees for FY 23. Secondary data was used to estimate spending by customers (day and overnight). Additional information on the methodology and assumptions used to complete this study can be found in Appendix B.

The impact presented in this analysis is broken down into three categories: direct impact, indirect impact, and induced impact. The indirect and induced impacts are commonly referred to as the "multiplier effect." The following graphic provides an overview of the types of impact detailed in this report.



Direct

Operating and capital expenditures of the Towson Library

Indirect

Purchases from the local supply chain

Induced

Household spending impacts generated from spending by the Towson Library and local suppliers

The Towson Library Study Profile

TITLE

DATA SOURCE

The Towson Library

METHODOLOGY

IMPLAN

STUDY TYPE

Economic Contribution Analysis

GEOGRAPHY

Towson, Baltimore County, and Maryland

STUDY YEAR

Fiscal Year 2023



Towson Library Drives Impact Locally and Statewide

The Towson Library contributes to the local and statewide economies through its expenditures on operations, capital projects, wages, the spending of staff in the community, and the spending of customers to the library. The direct, day-to-day expenditures of the Towson Library, combined with the staff, and customer spending, cause a ripple effect throughout the regional economy. While Baltimore County Public Library does not have an official central branch, the Towson Library houses the administrative offices of the county system and therefore operates as the flagship library of BCPL.

Since the Baltimore County Public Library administrative offices are located in the Towson Library building, administrative staff also frequent downtown locations, contributing the local economy and overall economic impact. The total economic impact of the Towson Library in FY 23 totaled \$39.4 million. This contribution to the local and statewide economies is a point-in-time snapshot depicting how the expenditures of Towson Library and its staff and customers make an impact.

OPERATIONS CONTRIBUTION

The Towson Library operations and capital spending in FY 23 contributed a total of \$30.4 million as a result of operational and capital spending. The Towson Library’s operations generated \$12.5 million in direct economic impact, \$7.9 million in indirect economic impact, and \$10 million in induced economic impact. This amount of operational impact is significant and indicative of the library’s strong position in the community as a cornerstone of downtown Towson.

CUSTOMER SPENDING CONTRIBUTION

Customer spending contributed a total of \$9 million. Customers of the Towson Library and other downtown Towson establishments generated \$5.1 million in direct economic impact, \$2 million in indirect economic impact, and \$1.9 million in induced economic impact.

THE TOWSON LIBRARY ECONOMIC IMPACT, FY 23

Type of Impact	Operations Spending	Customer Spending	Total
Direct	\$12,519,520	\$5,106,722	\$17,626,242
Indirect	\$7,888,133	\$2,035,027	\$9,923,160
Induced	\$9,966,278	\$1,918,915	\$11,885,193
TOTAL	\$30,373,931	\$9,060,664	\$39,434,595

Source: Parker Philips customer survey and analysis using IMPLAN

Towson Library Creates and Sustains Jobs in Downtown Towson

The Towson Library has 137 employees at its downtown branch. As the headquarters of the Baltimore County Public Library system, the Towson Library is the size of a mid-sized company in terms of employment. The total employment impact of the Towson Library in FY 23 totaled 328 jobs. This contribution to the local and statewide economies is a point-in-time snapshot depicting how the expenditures of Towson Library and its staff and customers make an impact. This includes both the people directly employed at the Towson Library—both branch employees and administrative staff—and the jobs supported and sustained by the economic activity generated by the library staff and customers.

As of June of 2022, the Bureau of Labor Statistics calculated that the average new business “birth rate,” or the number of jobs a new business opening creates, was just under 3 jobs (2.92).³ If a new business were to establish itself in downtown Towson, any business boasting a total job creation of over 300 jobs would be heralded as a huge community victory with a headline-grabbing press conference. The Towson Library is not only a community mainstay but also a job creator.

OPERATIONS EMPLOYMENT IMPACT

The Towson Library operations and capital spending in FY 23 supported and sustained a total of 247 jobs. The Towson Library’s directly employed 137 people, which contributed to 55 indirect jobs and 55 induced jobs.

CUSTOMER SPENDING EMPLOYMENT IMPACT

Customer spending supported and sustained a total of 81 jobs. Customers of the Towson Library and other downtown Towson establishments supported and sustained 61 direct jobs, 10 indirect jobs, and 10 induced jobs.

TOWSON LIBRARY EMPLOYMENT IMPACT, FY 23 (JOBS)

Type of Impact	Operations Employment	Customer Spending Employment	Total
Direct	137 jobs	61 jobs	198 jobs
Indirect	55 jobs	10 jobs	65 jobs
Induced	55 jobs	10 jobs	65 jobs
TOTAL	247 jobs	81 jobs	328 jobs

Source: Parker Philips using Towson Library data in IMPLAN

³ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-12/the-decline-of-job-creation-at-new-establishments.htm>

Generating Local and State Tax Revenues

Towson Library's staff, suppliers, customers, and related constituencies contribute to the local and statewide tax bases through their spending. In FY 23, the library contributed an estimated \$2 million (\$855 thousand direct and \$1.1 million indirect and induced) through local spending (operational, capital, staff, and customers) as well as direct and indirect support of jobs. At the state and local levels, Towson Library contributes to the tax bases through its purchasing. Specific taxes include employee and employer contributions to state and local social-insurance funds, sales and use taxes, personal property taxes, taxes paid on motor-vehicle licenses, and payments of fines and fees.

TOTAL LOCAL AND STATE TAXES

Type of Impact	Sub County General (city and township taxes)	Sub County Special Districts (School, Police, Fire, EMS, and Other)	County	State	Total
Direct	\$43,785	\$148	\$314,660	\$496,237	\$854,830
Indirect	\$18,959	\$72	\$128,554	\$199,400	\$346,985
Induced	\$58,301	\$273	\$283,736	\$475,905	\$818,215
TOTAL	\$121,045	\$493	\$726,950	\$1,171,542	\$2,020,030

Source: Parker Philips using Towson Library data in IMPLAN

Opening Doors and Minds: Towson Library's Community Impact

Place matters. For decades, Towson Library has served as an anchor for the community, inviting individuals to downtown Towson and contributing to the cultural and economic vibrancy of the area. As one of few non-commercial amenities in downtown Towson, the library helps to define the city.

Towson is a growing community that harbors favorable economic factors compared to Maryland as a whole. 96% of people in Towson have a high school degree or equivalent, compared to 91% in the state of Maryland. The educational attainment increases when considering higher education; nearly 67% of Towson residents have a bachelor's degree or higher degree, compared to only 42% statewide.⁴ This has led to a higher average salary for Towson residents: the average income of Towson residents hovers around \$39,000 per year, which is markedly higher than the national average of \$28,500 per year.⁵

The Towson Library plays a crucial role in this high educational attainment and subsequent higher earning potential. In addition to the space it offers nearby college students to study, the Towson Library helps foster lifelong learning through educational programming and access to a wide variety of books.



⁴ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/towsoncdpmaryland#>;
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST045223>

⁵ <https://www.bestplaces.net/economy/city/maryland/towson>

An On-Ramp to Lifelong Learning

The Towson Library feeds curiosity. From story times for babies and toddlers to My Librarian programs, the library promotes a love of lifetime learning.

Family and Friends Story Time, held on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, invites infants and toddlers, as well as their caregivers, to the special wing of the library designed for the youngest customers.

"I love the programs they have for children – story times, crafts, etc.," said one customer. Another customer noted a connection between the growth of their children and library events. "We started the baby story time at 3 months old and have enjoyed watching our babies grow and continue to enjoy the program in different ways," the customer said.

Like many parents, Baltimore County Executive John "Johnny O" Olszewski, Jr. fondly remembers taking his daughter to storytime. "It was one of the go-to places for our family," he said.

Elisabeth Sachs, Baltimore County's deputy administrative officer for health and community services, said events like storytime are important resources that community members sometimes underrate. She recalled a time her local library (not Towson Library) was under renovation, which meant storytime was cancelled. Sachs said this "caused kind of a crisis." The cancellation of library storytime "kind of disrupted that connection with a public library," she said. As a county administrator, Sachs understands the financial requirement it takes to run a library and said "it's a resource that we take for granted sometimes, and we shouldn't. We definitely shouldn't."

Many Towson residents recognize the educational benefits of having a thriving public library in their community.

"My kids love the Towson branch because it's fun... It's a place you can go without spending a lot of money and outside of the park, there aren't many places to go with children that are practically free... and educational to boot. As a mother, I feel proud to take my children to the library as a regular outing and I enjoy interacting with other parents," observed one weekly female customer.

Learning goes beyond childhood years, and through library events, customers find a place for interaction and enrichment.

"I attend meetings of both the Towson Book Group and the History Book Group, and I've enjoyed speakers, presentations, and the book sale over the years," one customer noted. Another customer reflected on what they learned from library events. *"I have appreciated events they have done, namely their deep dive into the Negro Leagues a number of years ago."*

In addition to educational events, the Towson Library offers free access to technology, which provides opportunities for professional development. Two rows of computers in the middle of the library are often filled with customers conducting research, completing work, and searching for jobs. The library provides free computers, Chromebook hotspots, and public Wi-Fi.

"Towson Branch was a safe haven for me," one young, multiracial female customer noted. "I learned a lot. I am currently an IT Support specialist because of the help and assistance I received from librarians who were awesome at the Towson Branch."

Librarian Cody Brownson-Katz described this as a "critical" service offered to the community because of the "huge barrier to access." They describe services offered through My Librarian as essential for workforce development. The My Librarian program allows customers to reserve an hour of time where they can have a Towson Library staff member assist them with any need they may have. These needs range from a tough research topic that a student needs help with to questions on the latest iPhone features.

"We see that a lot with folks looking for jobs, and pretty much every job application is online. People may not necessarily have the technical skills to get started on that job application. And that's where we come in. A big part of that is our My Librarian service." Customers appreciate technical support from the librarians and access to technology. "The accessibility of computers at this branch gave me great support years back while on a job search," said one customer.

At its core, the Towson Library provides one of the most basic needs, access to information. The Towson Library has an extensive collection of books with new titles added daily and large print fiction and nonfiction books. "The Towson branch has so many collections of books and materials that are not available at the other branches," noted one customer. The library also offers current and back issues of magazines and newspapers, DVDs, and CDs. E-books, audio books, e-magazines, comics, and video games are also available to customers. "I love the access to books and reference materials, such as databases," said one customer. "The librarians are very helpful when seeking specialized material."

"Libraries are an indispensable resource," said Senator Chris West, (R-42nd district), whose district included the Towson Library prior to redistricting. "Educated citizens have always been regarded as something that is great to a republic. The best way to educate is to have books freely available."

The central location on York Road is fundamental to the library's impact on the community. Many customers, of all ages, walk to the library as a part of their activities of daily living.

"For me, as a senior who walks to 'downtown' Towson for exercise and pleasure, having the library on my route is a convenience and a draw," noted one weekly customer, who regularly uses the library to assist her writing career that she developed in retirement.

Customers also considered the library's location when purchasing homes.

One of the highlights of the Towson Library is how easily people can access the library. Many customers surveyed commented on the walkability of the location of the library in downtown Towson. The walkability of downtown Towson generally is extraordinary: according to Walk Score, Towson scores a 98 out of 100 points on walkability, making it a "walker's paradise."⁶

"We bought our house in Southland Hills because we could walk to the library," one customer said. "The Towson library is a treasure and one of the few remaining amenities in downtown Towson that continues to make Towson feel like a community that welcomes and supports families."

The Towson Loop, a free bus route making stops along important stops in downtown Towson, began in 2021 and has quickly enabled many customers to frequent the library. As of April of 2023, ridership averaged over 6,500 riders monthly, up 550% from its start two years prior.⁷

Accessibility to public transportation draws other customers to the Towson Library

"I really enjoy going to the Towson Branch! It is super convenient as I live along the free Towson Loop bus route which I take regularly to the library," recalled a Towson Library customer.

According to Baltimore County Executive Olszewski, access to public transportation uniquely positions the Towson Library to reach more individuals.

"Towson is the only community currently in Baltimore County with a fixed-route transit service so truly there is a much broader network of people who have access to the library where that just doesn't exist in the same way in other communities," he said.

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY: As a local destination, the Towson Library contributes to the stability, safety, and quality of life for the Towson area and surrounding neighborhoods while bolstering commercial activity through increased foot traffic.

From students at Towson University and Goucher College to retirees, many demographic groups flock to Towson Library's downtown location. Customers can go from the library to the many local businesses on York Road and to Towson Town Center.

Customer spending contributed a total of \$9 million. Customers of the Towson Library and other downtown Towson establishments generated \$5.1 million in direct economic impact, \$2 million in indirect economic impact, and \$1.9 million in induced economic impact.

Senator West spoke of how "robust public libraries" are crucial to attract businesses to an area. "If you are located in Baltimore County, the library is one of the big selling points for economic development," he said.

⁶ https://www.walkscore.com/score/Towson-Maryland/lat=39.3999290466309/long=-76.6053619384766/?utm_source=searchpoint.net&utm_medium=ws_api&utm_campaign=ws_api

⁷ **Walk Score's methodology uses hundreds of walking routes and attributes points based on distance to a variety of amenities. "Amenities within a 5 minute walk (.25 miles) are given maximum points. A decay function is used to give points to more distant amenities, with no points given after a 30 minute walk. Walk Score also measures pedestrian friendliness by analyzing population density and road metrics such as block length and intersection density. Data sources include Google, Factual, Great Schools, Open Street Map, the U.S. Census, Localeze, and places added by the Walk Score user community."*

⁷ <https://baltimorefishbowl.com/stories/officials-eye-expansion-of-towson-loop-free-circulator-bus-to-other-parts-of-baltimore-county/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20riders%20has,manager%20for%20the%20Towson%20Loop.>

That economic development has been robust for Towson in the recent years. According to Nancy Hafford, the executive director of the Towson Chamber of Commerce, Towson has seen “5 billion worth of development over the last 10 years. Towson went from a very suburban community to really an urban community, plus our demographics have totally changed.” That development and expansion has resulted in many changes, but one constant remains: the Towson Library.

Many library customers agree. “The convenience of being in walking distance of a variety of food and drink venues is a big plus,” noted one customer. As a result of the library’s central location, many customers indicate they often make additional purchases in downtown Towson when visiting the library.

These purchases during a trip to the library represent an important sector of Towson’s economic activity. That activity has fueled economic expansion in the recent years that continues to transform downtown Towson.

Downtown Towson is a hub of activity, and the spending habits of employees and customers that actively make the Towson Library a part of the trip are making an impact.



A Day in Towson



LET'S BREAK DOWN YOUR SPENDING: During this visit to the Towson branch, what else did you purchase from the following categories?

89.72%

Parking

81.98%

Gasoline

74.24%

Groceries and convenience stores
(e.g., food, snacks, and drink)

64.33%

Food and drink at full-service restaurants
(e.g. 7 West, Nacho Mama's, Towson Tavern, Kathmandu Kitchen)

64.93%

Food and drink at fast food restaurants
(e.g. Raising Cane's, Subway, etc.)

67.35%

Retail shopping
(merchandise, souvenirs, novelty items, etc.)

64.21%

Food and drink at fast casual restaurants
(e.g. Chiptole, BurgerFi, THB Bagelry & Deli)

58.77%

Local entertainment
(other than the Towson Library)

20.80%

Other





Towson
Branch



BALTIMORE
PUBLIC LIBRARY

TOWSON LIBRARY
329 YORK ROAD

ONE WAY

A Place for Everyone

Everyone is welcome at the Towson Library, and everyone can find a purpose in the building. For many customers, the library is home and one of the few places there all people can go and feel safe and welcome. From providing work spaces to offering places for community groups to gather, Towson Library invites all individuals to the table. This builds a sense of community belonging. It would be hard to imagine downtown Towson without this community asset.

"What I always appreciated about our library, and the library system, is that if there is a program that would help someone in the community, whether it's starting a business, making sure there's a meeting with the register wills to talk about planning your estate, or a Manga Club for teens, they will find a way to deliver those services."

-Delegate Catherine Forbes, Maryland House of Delegates (D-District 43B)

By offering a free public space and a busy calendar of events for all ages, the Towson Library enhances a sense of community and belonging.

"People really trust us in this space. There's a lot of need in our community and people know that this is where they can come."

Towson Librarian Cody Brownson-Katz.

"Diversity, equity, and inclusion are core values for Baltimore County Public Library. It is critical that the community sees itself reflected in the faces of the staff who work at the library, and in the services and resources offered at the library. Towson Library excels at providing culturally relevant programming that celebrates the rich diversity of the surrounding community and is meaningful to customers. Everyone is welcome at the library."

-Sonia Alcantara-Antoine, CEO of the Baltimore County Public Library

Spaces designed for children and teens are also popular among the youngest customers. Parents and children alike love the kids area, and kids make a beeline straight to the kid space as soon as they pass the library's front desk.

The physical space, with various areas designed for specific populations, allows the library to host a range of engaging, free activities. Craft activities for children, teens, and adults, book club discussions, game time for LGBTQ+ teens, and a "Paws to Read" program are all part of the library's monthly calendar. Through this

wide-ranging set of activities, the Towson Library shows that everyone has a place to belong at the library. The diversity of downtown Towson contributes to the diversity within the walls of library – it gives customers a place to imagine and learn.

“It’s important that the Baltimore County Public Library represents everybody – all races, all sexes, all religions, all nationalities,” said Senator Chris West, 42nd District.

One diverse community in Towson that the library has worked to be inclusive of is the neurodivergent community. In partnership with Towson University, the Towson Library helps facilitate “The Hangout,” an event that shows all individuals are welcome within the walls of the library. The program invites individuals with intellectual disabilities to gather for a social hour of activities, games, and crafts. The event fulfills a community need, as many of the customers who attend the Hangout have graduated from high school and seek opportunities to socialize with peers.



“We do The Hangout where we invite any adult with a disability, whatever disability, it doesn’t matter, to come in to socialize and have fun. We have activities like karaoke, we have a PlayStation 4 out, and it’s a growing and really fun program!”

-Nicole Ball, Towson Librarian

Through its services and activities, the Towson Library offers a unique urban space that invites everyone to enter. It is a safe, free public space that provides equitable access and promotes inclusion while fostering a sense of community belonging.

“Towson is a diverse and busy place because it’s so close to residences,” said Yara Cheikh. “The more diverse the atmosphere, the more we can meet people where they are and give them the resources they need to be successful.”



The Library Book Sale

One of the most impactful events—both to the community and to the library’s fundraising goals—is the library book sale. Taking place over the course of a week, the Friends of the Towson Library puts on a book sale that draws community members and book collectors alike. When Joni Gartner first moved to Towson to be closer to family, she wanted to find a good cause to volunteer for and lend her time. Walking around downtown Towson, she spotted the Towson Library book sale, and immediately thought “well, that’s something I want to work.” She began volunteering at the Towson Library and quickly began sorting donated books for the next year’s sale. Now a main organizer of the sale, Joni recognizes families and individuals who return to the sale every year. “The book sale does really well. I think it yields the library close to \$20,000.” Proceeds from the book sale go towards supporting programs and services at the Towson Library.

Librarians as Trusted First Responders to Community Needs

Towson Library has some of the nation's best and most dedicated librarians, and customers have noticed.

"I could never do without those librarians - they provide so much with such knowledge and professionalism. I'm so incredibly grateful. It's why I stay in Towson, honestly," said one customer. Another customer described the librarians as "literally the best humans on the planet."

Towson Librarians are dedicated to meeting customer needs, being inclusive of all individuals, and providing a range of vital community services.

"THE LIBRARIANS are the BEST! All you need to do is simply tell them what kind of book you're in the mood for and they can open an entirely new world to you in an entirely new genre! The librarians are also just very good-hearted, passionate, and delightfully knowledgeable people. They are what this society needs more of," reflected a customer.

Their welcoming nature is innate, as captured by one customer: "I have great appreciation for the welcome shown to people who may be homeless or differently abled and who use the lobby entrance on the 'bridge.' I have witnessed nothing but kindness and compassion coming from staff."

Customers appreciate the way librarians demonstrate empathy for all. "I appreciate that it has a social justice element as well including that homeless people are welcome," a customer wrote.

As a trusted public institution, the library offers resources for customers and access to social services. Librarians help individuals find information about social programs and connect customers with details about public assistance.

"For new Americans who are coming into Baltimore County, the library is an extraordinary resource for information about health, legal services, and social work. It provides our community with a lot of tools to navigate local government and infrastructure. And our staff advocates for every one of our customers," said Yara Cheikh.



Yara Cheikh is the daughter of Syrian and Irish immigrants who came to the United States in 1970. As a young student, she walked to Towson Library each afternoon to participate in the Homework Helpers program. Yara credits the free tutoring program with her academic success. “It was amazing to have an adult that was willing to help me find answers to questions I had,” she said. “It was a big part of feeding my curiosity and helping me remain curious because the answers could be found.” After graduating from Notre Dame Preparatory School, Yara attended Johns Hopkins University where she studied history. Her first job was at Johns Hopkins in the library where she “helped others find answers.” Yara credits the library with charting her on the right trajectory. She is a local girl with deep roots in Towson and is dedicated to giving back to the library that was so fundamental to her development. The Towson Library opened doors for Yara Cheikh. As the president of the library’s board of trustees, she ensures the library continues to open doors for students today.

“The Towson Library is the heart and soul of the county. Everyone finds purpose in that building, and the significance it gives to the downtown location surrounded by walkable neighborhoods is phenomenal because it says we are open as a community. People in downtown Towson walking on York Road have ownership and stake in this space, and they don’t have that in any of the commercial properties. The joy of the library being in the center of Towson is there is access for everyone.”

*Yara Cheikh
president of the Baltimore County Public Library Board of Trustees*

Diversity, equity, and inclusion is a consistent and important mission for everyone at the library. For Cody Brownson-Katz, D.E.I. is “at the heart of a lot of what we do. We look at programming through an equity lens. It’s in the literature; the idea that books reflect you and they reflect yourself back at you is really important for children, especially who don’t see themselves reflected in media and books. We like to have materials out that reflect the diversity of the community and not just offer a particular month or particular observance throughout the year. We want people to come in and see themselves reflected in our space.”

Checkout

Customer Service



Towson Customer Profile

Towson Library attracts an average of 216,600 each year. People flock to the library and make it a part of their day-to-day activities. While public libraries remain one of the last free places for people to visit in a neighborhood – customers of Towson Library are spending their dollars out in the community creating an economic impact in downtown. These customers are an integral part of creating and sustaining a vital and thriving downtown business district.

The data below includes demographic details about Towson Library customers and their use of the library².

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RACE/ETHNICITY?

73.65%

White

9.23%

Black or African American

4.13%

Asian or Asian American

3.56%

Hispanic or Latino

WHAT IS YOUR HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION?

53.19%

Post-graduate degree

29.58%

Bachelor's degree

7.60%

Some college, no degree

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR EMPLOYMENT STATUS

43.07%

Employed full-time

28.41%

Retired

11.45%

Employed part-time

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR GENDER?

73.79%

Female

21.66%

Male

² Parker Philips surveyed library customers through in-person intercept, digital outreach, and postcard takeaways left around the community to get the demographic data and build customer profiles. Parker Philips collected a total of 1,219 surveys.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING RANGES INCLUDES YOUR AGE?

16.66%
18-34

20.43%
35-44

14.53%
45-54

13.52%
55-64

22.56%
65-74

10.57%
75 and older

WHY DID YOU VISIT THE TOWSON BRANCH ON YOUR MOST RECENT VISIT?

58.50%
Checking out materials

14.75%
Use of library spaces

9.53%
Other (please specify)

7.20%
Use of technological services

6.04%
Attending a program event

2.54%
Seeking governmental services

HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT THE TOWSON BRANCH?

2.42%
Daily

20.04%
Weekly

34.37%
Monthly

24.56%
Occasionally

2.32%
This is my first time

6.29%
Other (please specify)



Conclusion

When people end their time at the Towson Library and walk back down the spiral ramp, whether they came to quickly return a book or to apply for a passport, the mural of the dragon bids them goodbye as they step out onto the sidewalk. For many residents of Towson and the surrounding communities, this is not a final goodbye; survey data shows these customers will most likely be back. Perhaps the next time they come back they meet a friend for dinner. Or they start some back-to-school shopping in nearby shops or go holiday shopping at the Towson Town Center. Regardless of the reason, people return to the Towson Library because they get the help they need from thoughtful librarians and the convenience of the library's location.

As with any public institution, providing funding for the library's numerous resources is essential. "I wish I were a millionaire," said one customer, "because I would give the Towson Library all of the funding it ever needed." Another customer highlighted how much money this valuable public service saves. "In the past, I would spend over a thousand dollars in books every year if I did not have the library. Without the Towson Library, now that I am disabled and on a tight budget, I would not be reading at all. I absolutely love my local library. Please keep this valuable community asset open."

This valuable community asset not only provides crucial social services to the community, it also has a significant economic impact, generating **\$39.4 million** in economic impact, which supports and sustains **328 jobs**, and generates **\$2 million** in local and state taxes.

A significant commitment of dollars to modernize and renovate the Towson Library is required to maintain its draw in the community. While the ramp was referenced as a novel part of the Towson Library, its presence and the lack of publicly accessible elevators on the ground floor makes access challenging for some. A key part of that modernization would begin with the building itself; including greater ADA accessibility that allows all customers to use the library with ease:

"It's just not designed well. That's the irony. It is a community pillar, but it really could have a much better function" observed Baltimore County Councilman Mike Ertel.

Customers who value the library and its numerous resources keep the library abuzz and the local economy thriving. With the added investment and development in downtown Towson, there are plenty of new buildings and renovated storefronts. What brings together people of all backgrounds, generations, and life experiences is not the newest restaurant or shop. That effect is the Towson Library's alone.

APPENDIX A: TERMS & DEFINITIONS

DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT – All direct expenditures made by an organization due to its operating expenditures. These include operating expenditures, capital expenditures, and pay and benefits expenditures.

DIRECT EMPLOYMENT – Total number of employees, both full-time and part-time, at the organization based on total jobs, not FTEs.

DOLLAR YEAR – Presented in 2023 dollars.

GOVERNMENT REVENUE/STATE AND LOCAL TAX IMPACT – Government revenue or tax revenue that is collected by governmental units at the state and local levels in addition to those paid directly by an organization. This impact includes taxes paid directly by the organization itself, employees of the organization and vendors who sell products to the organization, and at the household level.

IMPLAN DATA YEAR – 2021

INDIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT – The indirect impact includes the impact of local industries buying goods and services from other local industries. The cycle of spending works its way backward through the supply chain until all money is spent outside of the local economy, either through imports or by payments to value added (multiplier effect).

INDIRECT EMPLOYMENT – Additional jobs created as a result of an organization's economic impact. Local companies or vendors that provide goods and services to an organization increase their number of employees as purchasing increases, thus creating an employment multiplier.

INDUCED ECONOMIC IMPACT – The response by an economy to an initial change (direct effect) that occurs through re-spending of income received by a component of value added. IMPLAN's default multiplier recognizes that labor income (employee compensation and proprietor income components of value added) is not lost to the regional economy. This money is recirculated through household spending patterns causing further local economic activity (multiplier effect).

INDUCED EMPLOYMENT – Additional jobs created as a result of household spending by employees of an organization and the employees of vendors. This is another wave of the employment multiplier.

MULTIPLIER EFFECT – The multiplier effect is the additional economic impact created as a result of the organization's direct economic impact. Local companies that provide goods and services to an organization increase their purchasing by creating a multiplier (indirect/supply-chain impacts). Household spending generated by employees of the organization and the organization's suppliers create a third wave of multiplier impact (induced/household-spending impacts).

STUDY YEAR – FY 2023

TOTAL ECONOMIC OUTPUT/ECONOMIC IMPACT – Includes organizational spending on operations, capital expenditures, labor income expenditures and value added to the economy as a result of expenditures made by an organization. It is the combined impact of direct, indirect, and induced impacts.



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