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Library sets meetings on system's future, branch closings

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(Dina Rudick/Globe Staff)

Hundreds protested proposed library closings in front of the Boston Public Library last March.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The Boston Public Library has set dates for nearly a dozen public meetings – seven on the library system’s overall future and one meeting in each of the four neighborhoods where branches are slated to close, the library said Thursday.

At the meetings for the four branches on the chopping block, library officials will include in the discussion details of the respective timelines of each branch’s closing, said library spokeswoman Mary Bender.

The seven “strategic planning” meetings are designed to layout a framework, which could be adopted by year’s end, for the future of the library system. That framework will guide the nation’s oldest public library in such decision-making as work and service plans and fund-raising initiatives.

[Plans emerged in the spring](#) to close at least four of the 26 neighborhood

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branches. State lawmakers have [threatened to cut off funding](#) to the library if even a single branch was closed. In June, the library system said it would [hold off on closing branches](#) through the winter.

Branches in Brighton's Oak Square, Lower Mills in Dorchester, Orient Heights in East Boston, and Washington Village in South Boston's Old Colony housing development are slated for closing.

Additionally, [40 library jobs were cut](#) last week.

As for the systemwide plans, "The goal is to create a public document that identifies core principles that build on the library's existing strengths and provides a framework for achieving excellence," the library said in a release.

The first phase of the process began a year ago when the library collected more than 1,000 comments in a three-month period from both public and staff meetings and blogs, staff and trustee committees, and in meetings with library affiliates and friends.

A trustee committee combined its work with the staff and public engagement comments to create a set of "draft principles," which will be shared publicly in order to collect additional feedback and comments, the release said.

The principles will then be refined after the feedback period and presented to the library trustee board for discussion and adoption by the end of 2010.

For phase two of the library's ongoing strategic planning process, "[the BPL Compass](#)," the library will gather feedback through an online survey, blog, focus groups, postcard campaign and in-person and online meetings.

The online survey launched on the first day of the month and has collected more than 4,000 responses in less than one week. Postcards with questions from that survey will be available at city library branches beginning this week, as well.

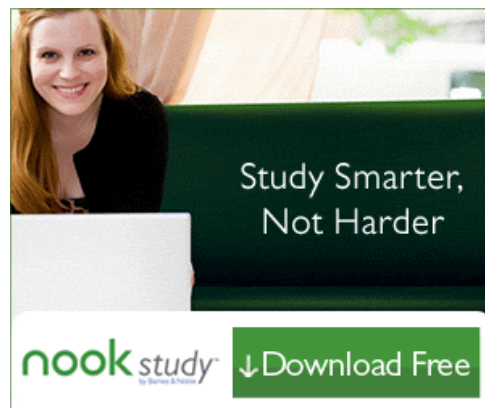
The community blog will launch on the library's website later this month.

At 162 years old, the city's library is the country's first publicly supported municipal library, the first public library to lend books, the first to have a branch library, and the first to have a children's room.

The 27-branch system, including the Central branch in Copley Square, serves millions of people, hosts nearly 12,000 programs and answers over one million reference questions annually, according to the release.

The schedule for strategic planning meetings on the library's systemwide future is as follows:

1. Saturday, Oct. 23, 1:00-3:00 p.m., Open House and Launch of Strategic Planning at the Central Library in Copley Square, 700 Boylston St.
2. Wednesday, Oct. 27, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m., Strategic Planning Session at the South End Branch, 685 Tremont St.
3. Saturday, Oct. 30, 10:00 – 11:00 a.m., Strategic Planning Session at the Grove Hall Branch, 41 Geneva Avenue, Dorchester
4. Wednesday, Nov. 3, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m., Online Strategic Planning Session at www.bpl.org
5. Thursday, Nov. 5, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m., Strategic Planning Session at the Charlestown Branch, 179 Main St.



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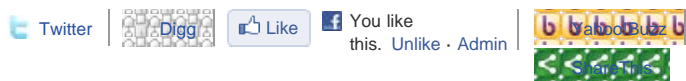
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- 6. Tuesday, Nov. 9, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m, Strategic Planning Session at the Roslindale Branch, 4238 Washington St.
- 7. Saturday, Nov. 13, 1:00-2:00 p.m, Strategic Planning Session at the Dudley Branch, 65 Warren St. in Roxbury.

The schedule for the “working sessions” for the four neighborhood branches slated to close:

- 1. Monday, Oct. 25, 6:30 – 7:30 pm at the Lower Mills Branch, 27 Richmond St., Dorchester
- 2. Thursday, Oct. 28, 6:30 – 7:30 pm at the Faneuil Branch, 419 Faneuil St., in Brighton
- 3. Wednesday, Nov. 10, 6:30 – 7:30 pm at the Washington Village Branch, 1226 Columbia Road, South Boston.
- 4. Thursday, November 18, 6:30-7:30 pm at the Orient Heights Branch, 18 Barnes Ave., East Boston.

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