SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR JOINT BOARD MEETINGS OF

LIBRARY FACILITIES FINANCING AUTHORITY BOARD (LFFA)
and
LIBRARY JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY (LJPA)

On Thursday November 5, 2026
9:00 AM CLOSED SESSION
9:15 AM JOINT REGULAR SESSION

All LFFA and LJPA Joint Board Meetings are held in-person and open to the public. Members of the public may also view the meeting via the alternative method provided below as a courtesy. Please note that if the teleconference connection malfunctions for any reason, and no Board Members are attending via teleconference, the meeting will continue in-person without remote access.

Public Viewing:

The meeting will be broadcast through the Santa Cruz Libraries YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/user/SantaCruzPL which you can access through the Santa Cruz Libraries website by scrolling to the bottom of the page and clicking on the YouTube icon. The meetings will be recorded and posted for viewing after the meetings on the Santa Cruz Public Libraries website.

Public Participation:

Members of the public may provide public comments to the Board in-person during the meeting for any item on the agenda or within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board. Any public comment for a specific item on the agenda must be received prior to the close of the public comment period for that item.

Any person who is not able to attend in-person may submit a written comment as indicated below.
Please be aware that the Board will not read aloud written comments during the meeting.

- **How to comment on agenda items via email before the meeting begins:**
  - Members of the public may provide public comment prior to the meeting by sending an email to the Library Board Clerk at clerk@santacruzpl.org.
  - Identify the agenda item number in the subject line of the email.
  - Emailed comments should be a maximum of 500 words, which corresponds to approximately 3 minutes of speaking time.

Submitted written public comments will be included as part of the record of the meeting, either in Written Correspondence or in the Minutes, depending on when received by staff. All written comments received prior to 12:00 p.m. on the Wednesday preceding a Board Meeting will be distributed to Board members to review prior to the meeting with the published Agenda packet. Written comments submitted after the Agenda and packet have been published will be distributed as Additional Materials at the commencement of the meeting.

Meeting Accommodations:

The Santa Cruz City-County Library System does not discriminate against persons with disabilities. Out of consideration for people with chemical sensitivities, we ask that you attend fragrance free. Upon request, the agenda can be provided in a format to accommodate special needs. Additionally, if you wish to attend this public meeting and will require assistance such as an interpreter for American Sign Language, Spanish, or other special equipment please call the Library Administration Office at (831) 427-7706 at least five days in advance so that we can arrange for such special assistance, or email library_admin@santacruzpl.org.

CHAIR NICOLE COBURN
VICE CHAIR MATT HUFFAKER
BOARD MEMBER STEPHANIE HILL
BOARD MEMBER RUDY ESCALANTE

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

SANTA CRUZ CITY & COUNTY LIBRARY JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY (LJPA)

CLOSED SESSION MEETING
November 5, 2026 9:00 AM

In-Person Location:
Downtown Branch Library
224 Church Street, Santa Cruz CA 95060

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Agenda and Agenda Packet Materials: The LJPA agenda and the complete agenda packet containing public records, which are not exempt from disclosure pursuant to the California Public Records Act, are available for review on the website: www.santacruzpl.org and at Library Headquarters, located at 117 Union Street, Santa Cruz, California, during normal business hours.

LIBRARY JOINT POWER'S AUTHORITY CLOSED SESSION

1. LIBRARY JOINT POWER'S AUTHORITY CLOSED SESSION MEETING INFORMATION

A. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL
Board Members Nicole Coburn, Matt Huffaker, Stephanie Hill, and Rudy Escalante.

B. PUBLIC COMMENT ON CLOSED SESSION ITEMS

Any member of the community may address the Board during this Public Comment period on any "Closed Session" item on today's agenda. In general, 3 minutes will be permitted per speaker during Public Comment; A MAXIMUM of 10 MINUTES is set aside for Public Comment of Closed Session items at this time.

2. CLOSED SESSION

A. Liability Claim Filed Against the Santa Cruz Public Libraries (Government Code § 54956.95)
Claimant: A.C. Anderson

3. RECONVENE IN OPEN SESSION / REPORT OUT OF CLOSED SESSION

A. Report of any action taken in closed session that is required to be disclosed pursuant to Government Code section 54957.1. (oral)

4. ADJOURNMENT

SANTA CRUZ CITY & COUNTY
LIBRARY FACILITIES FINANCING AUTHORITY (LFFA)
AND
LIBRARY JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY (LJPA)

JOINT REGULAR MEETING

November 5, 2026 9:15 AM

In-Person Location:
Downtown Branch Library
224 Church Street, Santa Cruz CA 95060

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Agenda and Agenda Packet Materials: The LFFA and LJPA agendas and the complete agenda packet containing public records, which are not exempt from disclosure pursuant to the California Public Records Act, are available for review on the website: www.santacruzpl.org and at Library Headquarters, located at 117 Union Street, Santa Cruz, California, during normal business hours.

Agenda Materials Submitted after Publication of the Agenda Packet: Pursuant to Government Code §54957.5, public records related to an open session agenda item submitted after distribution of the agenda packet are available at the time they are distributed or made available to the legislative body on the website at: www.santacruzpl.org and are also available for public inspection at Library Headquarters, 117 Union Street Santa Cruz, California, during normal business hours, and at the LJPA meeting.

Need more information? Contact clerk's office at 831-427-7700 ext. 5606.

1. GENERAL JOINT MEETING INFORMATION (For Both LFFA and LJPA)

A. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

Board Members Nicole Coburn, Matt Huffaker, Stephanie Hill, and Rudy Escalante.

B. ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Additional information submitted after distribution of the agenda packet.

C. ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS TO AGENDA

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

Any member of the community may address the Board during this Public Comment period on any "Consent Calendar" item on today's agenda or on any topic not on today's agenda but within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board. Please note, however, that for non-agendized items, the Board is not able to undertake extended discussion or take any action today without notice. Such items may be referred to staff for appropriate action, such as individual follow-up or placement on a future agenda. If you intend to address a subject or item that is on the Agenda, please hold your comments until that item is before the Board so that we may properly address all comments on that subject at the same time. In general, 3 minutes will be permitted per speaker during Public Comment; A MAXIMUM of 30 MINUTES is set aside for Public Comment at this time.

E. REPORT BY LIBRARY DIRECTOR

i. Library Director's Report – November 5, 2026 (p. 7-9)

F. REPORT BY FRIENDS OF THE SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES (FSCPL)

i. Friends of SCPL Report– (oral)

G. REPORT BY LIBRARY ADVISORY COMMISSION (LAC)

i. Commissioners' Report (oral)

2. LIBRARY FACILITIES FINANCING AUTHORITY BOARD (LFFA)

A. CONSENT CALENDAR

All items listed in the "Consent Calendar" will be enacted by one motion in the form listed below. There will be no separate discussion on these items prior to the time the Board votes on the action unless the Board request specific items to be discussed for separate review. Items pulled for separate discussion will be considered following General Business.

i. Consider the September 3, 2026 LFFA Board Meeting Minutes
Staff Recommendation: Approve the September 3, 2026 Board Meeting Minutes (p.10-12)

ii. Special Tax Bond Quarterly Financial Reports as of September 30, 2026
Staff Recommendation: Accept and file the attached financial reports of the Community Facilities District No. 2016-1 as of September 30, 2026. (p.13-15)

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

B. GENERAL BUSINESS

Other Business items are intended to provide an opportunity for public discussion of each item listed. The following procedure is followed for each Business item: 1) Staff explanation; 2) Board questions; 3) Public comment; 4) Board deliberation; 5) Decision.

i. Election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2027
Staff Recommendation: Elect the Calendar year 2027 Board Chair and Vice-Chair as Santa Cruz County and the City of Capitola respectively.

C. PROJECT UPDATES AND COMMENTS BY BOARD MEMBERS

3. LIBRARY JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY (LJPA)

A. CONSENT CALENDAR

All items listed in the "Consent Calendar" will be enacted by one motion in the form listed below. There will be no separate discussion on these items prior to the time the Board votes on the action unless the Board request specific items to be discussed for separate review. Items pulled for separate discussion will be considered following General Business.

i. Consider the September 3, 2026 Board Meeting Minutes
Staff Recommendation: Approve the September 3, 2026 Board Meeting Minutes (p.16-18)

ii. Library Financial Dashboard Report
Staff Recommendation: Accept and File Financial Dashboard Report (p.19)

iii. 2027 Library Closure Schedule
Staff Recommendation: Adopt the 2027 Library closure schedule. (p.20-21)

iv. Annual Meeting Schedule 2027
Staff Recommendation: Adopt the LFFA/LJPA Annual Meeting Schedule for 2027. (p.22-23)

v. Updated Commemorative Flag Policy #109
Staff Recommendation: Approve and file the updated Commemorative Flag Policy #109 as written and endorsed by the Library Advisory Commission on August 17, 2026. (p.24-25)

vi. Belonging in a Digital Age
Staff Recommendation: Accept and File. (p.26-57)

vii. Downtown Branch Staff Letter
Staff Recommendation: Accept and File. (p.58-60)

viii. Santa Cruz Public Libraries Media Packet for July 1, 2026- September 30, 2026
Staff Recommendation: Accept and File. (p.61-73)

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

B. GENERAL BUSINESS

Other Business items are intended to provide an opportunity for public discussion of each item listed. The following procedure is followed for each Business item: 1) Staff explanation; 2) Board questions; 3) Public comment; 4) Board deliberation; 5) Decision.

i. Print Management Presentation
Staff Recommendation: Information Only.

ii. Program Policy Update- Oral Report.
Staff Recommendation: Information Only.

iii. Election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2027
Staff Recommendation: Elect the Calendar year 2027 Board Chair and Vice-Chair as Santa Cruz County and the City of Capitola respectively.

C. COMMENTS BY BOARD MEMBERS

4. SCHEDULED UPCOMING JOINT MEETING

February 4, 2027 @ 9:00 AM	**Aptos Branch**	**7695 Soquel Dr, Aptos, CA 95003**

5. ADJOURNMENT

Adjourned to the next joint regular meeting of the LFFA & LJPA to be held on Thursday, February 4, 2027 at 9:00 am at the Aptos Branch Library**,** 7695 Soquel Dr, Aptos, CA 95003.

6. WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

Director's Report to the Library Joint Powers Authority Board

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL UPDATES:

September and early October have been active months at SCPL. Strategic plan work charter teams have kicked off for Collection Alignment and Optimization, Program Priorities & Alignment (which includes the new Program Policy work for which an update will be provided on this agenda), Future Downtown Teen Center Plan, Institutional Engagement with Spanish Speakers, Spanish-first Outreach Services, Outreach Programming Expansion Project, and the Vulnerable Patron Social Worker project. Other charters are in the process of starting.

Youth Program Manager Heather Norquist and Outreach Manager Jesse Silva presented about SCPL's services to the Foster Youth Services Executive Advisory Council on October 2nd. Collection Management Services Manager Sarah Harbison represented SCPL on a panel accompanying the screening of The Librarians documentary, coordinated by teen staff at Book Shop Santa Cruz for Banned Books Week on October 6th to a sold-out audience at the Colligan Theater in support of Santa Cruz area school libraries. CMS Librarian Hui-Lan Titangos and CMS LAII Katrina Reeves joined me at the 130th Anniversary celebration for the County Law Library on October 8th. CMS provides cataloging services to the Law Library. Bjorn Jones, DTN Librarian has been awarded a Technology and Innovation Grant from the Pacific Library Partnership to launch a Vintage Media Conversion Cart that will allow patrons to digitize personal photos, documents, VHS tapes, audio cassettes, CDs/DVDs and 8mm film through guided 1:1 technology appointments.

In addition to my regular duties chairing the quarterly MOBAC meeting and attending California Library Association board meetings, I met Dr Jen Capps, President of Cabrillo College and other county staff to tour the Felton Library & County Park in late August, served on a "meet the directors" panel for the California State Library's CATALYST Leadership program on October 15th, and attended the State Library Directors' Forum, California County Librarians' Annual Meeting , and CLA annual conference in Riverside during the third week of October. I will be serving on the State Library's California Libraries Learn professional development advisory council the third week of November.

I also participated in the County Elections Office' media day event on September 22nd and SCPL staff was an active partner in their new "Books and Ballots" awareness campaign alongside our pre-existing commitments as polling locations and ballot drop off points.

On top of all of this, and reflecting the most time invested by SCPL staff, the City of Santa Cruz which provides our HR and Finance support, began the transition from their legacy HR and Finance systems to a new Workday environment in September and into October. Staff at all levels have been in multiple trainings and 'office hours' over the last two months to learn new processes and procedures for completing time cards, entering invoices, processing credit card receipts, changing personnel information and more. This new environment represents a significant change for every SCPL staff member so these trainings have been a priority.

Finally, as an informational item, I am including in this packet a report that I reference in this month's Director's Message from our website: Belonging in a Digital Age: Teens, Tech, & Third Places. It explores and illuminates the importance of "third places", including libraries, in an era in which some

teens are reporting loneliness and opting to create connection with AI Chatbots in the absence of places and opportunity to meaningfully connect in person. It's a provocative read.

STAFFING:

Vacant Positions

Position Title	Library FTE
Librarian- Boulder Creek	1.0
Librarian- Life Literacy Center	1.0
Librarian (Youth)- Aptos	1.0
Building Maintenance Worker II	1.0
Bookmobile Library Assistant III (Overhire)	1.0
Library Assistant II- Scotts Valley	0.5
Library Assistant II- Garfield Park	0.5
Library Assistant II- Felton	0.75
Library Assistant III- Capitola Branch Manager	1.0
Library Assistant III- Downtown Asst. Branch Manager	1.0

New Hires & Home Position Changes
Chihiro Mather- Library Aide @ La Selva Beach to Library Assistant II @ Capitola. 10/10/2026
Alyssa Trinity- On-Call Library Assistant II to Library Assistant II @ Branciforte. 10/10/2026
Skyler Addison- New Hire Library Aide. 9/28/2026
Luca Kodish- Library Assistant II @ Felton to Bookmobile Library Assistant II. 9/14/2026
Emma Rozeboom- New Hire Library Aide. 8/31/2026

Resignations
Mary Pukenis- Library Assistant III Downtown Assistant Branch Manager. 8/31/2026
Brianna Gaffney- Library Assistant III Capitola Branch Manager. 10/22/2026
Sandi Imperio- Librarian (Youth) @ Aptos. Retiring 11/21/2026 after 29 years with SCPL.

OUTREACH SERVICES SPOTLIGHT FOR Q1 of FY 2027:

After more than a year hiatus, the bookmobile team resumed library services using the bookmobile at three low-income farmworker housing sites in South county and at Janus of SC, a substance use recovery center. They also reorganized the collection to prioritize Spanish-speaking patrons.

Outreach distributed over 100 bilingual children's books purchased by the La Selva Beach Friends to residents at Tierra Alta, a low-income farm working family housing site.

Outreach Librarian Susan Nilsson brought Cascada de Flores to the Downtown Library. Normally this is held at the Beach Flats Parks as part of Outreach's Summer Reading Programs, but was shifted this year due to local construction at the Park.

Outreach purchased a record player and records for Juvenile Hall library. The students especially enjoyed Miles Davis, Bob Marley, and Oldies Compilations.

Jesse Silva, Outreach Manager attended the first Bay Area Jail & Prison Librarian Conference at San Quentin. These mini conferences will take place quarterly at various public and carceral libraries and offer an opportunity to network and learn from other library staff working in carceral settings.

Librarian Laura Blasingame presented as part of a panel at the California Library Association on SCPL's work serving incarcerated youth at Juvenile Hall.

After 7 years, we resumed in-person library service to the West Wing of the Main Jail. Outreach staff served 6 units, and 55 people. This service will continue on a monthly basis. Library staff processed 401 book requests, up from 388 the previous quarter.

SELECTED FACILITIES UPDATES:

SCPL Facilities staff are meeting with County Real Property staff to review maintenance needs and responsibilities for the buildings under the County's jurisdiction.

Boulder Creek: We are working with the County plan for the generator install as well as a shingle replacement project.

Downtown: As a result of an incident last month, we are developing protocols for when a major plumbing incident that affects the entire building takes place, including criteria for temporarily closing the building if necessary.

Felton: Solar project is underway, project managed by the County. The contract with PG&E for a portable generator stationed in the parking lot is being renewed with the caveat that when the solar backup is fully installed, PG&E will remove the trailer, freeing up parking space.

La Selva Beach: A delay in roof panel shipments for the pergola is anticipated to be resolved by early November to allow for installation.

Live Oak: We are scheduling install of two large hanging light fixtures as well as getting estimates to replace a faulty motorized door system at the entrance.

Scotts Valley: We are gathering final quotes for replacing the lighting control system as well as a proposal to screen in the top of the garbage enclosure to mitigate messes created by wildlife (also at Capitola).

CHAIR MALI LAGOE
VICE CHAIR NICOLE COBURN
BOARD MEMBER JAMIE GOLDSTEIN
BOARD MEMBER MATT HUFFAKER

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

SANTA CRUZ LIBRARIES
LIBRARY FACILITIES FINANCING AUTHORITY BOARD (LFFA)
and
JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY (LJPA)
JOINT REGULAR BOARD MEETING

In person and online provided meeting
THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 3, 2026
9:15 A.M.

1. GENERAL JOINT MEETING INFORMATION

A. ROLL CALL
PRESENT: Mali LaGoe, Nicole Coburn, Jamie Goldstein, Matt Huffaker.
STAFF: Christopher Platt, Library Director

B. ADDITIONAL MATERIALS
None

C. ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS TO AGENDA
LJPA Consent Calendar Item viii. 2027 Library Closure Schedule

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

E. LIBRARY DIRECTOR REPORT

Library Director submitted his report highlighting the following items:

- Summer Reading Program participation was up almost 10%.
- Strategic Planning teams will start meeting soon.
- Library IT has moved the servers from Downtown to Headquarters.
- Heatmap data shows patrons are using the Libraries during the extended hours.

F. REPORT BY FRIENDS OF THE SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Sarah Beck, FSCPL Executive Director, highlighted the following items in her report:

- September marks the end of a decade of capital campaigns for the Friends of the Santa Cruz Public Libraries.
- First meeting of the Downtown Library Friends, which marks the first time the Downtown Library has had a Friends group.

G. REPORT BY the Library Advisory Commission (LAC)

None

2. LIBRARY FACILITIES FINANCING AUTHORITY BOARD (LFFA)

A. CONSENT CALENDAR

RESULT: APPROVED CONSENT CALENDAR
i. Approved the June 4, 2026 Board Meeting Minutes.
ii. Accepted & Filed the attached financial statements of the Community Facilities District No. 2016-1 as of June 30, 2026.

MOVER: Nicole Coburn
SECONDER: Matt Huffaker
AYES: Coburn, Huffaker, Goldstein and LaGoe

B. GENERAL BUSINESS

C. PROJECT UPDATES AND COMMENTS BY BOARD MEMBERS

3. LIBRARY JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY (LJPA)

A. CONSENT CALENDAR

RESULT: APPROVED CONSENT CALENDAR

i. **Approved the June 4, 2026 Board Meeting Minutes.**
ii. **Accepted & Filed Analysis of 4th Qtr. Patron Count Data for FY26.**
iii. **Accepted & Filed 4th Qtr. Community Impact Measures for FY26.**
iv. **Accepted & Filed 4th Qtr. Incident Report for FY26.**
v. **Accepted & Filed Financial Dashboard Report.**
vi. **Accepted funds and amended the FY 26 Library Operating Budget in the amount of $17,000 for funds received from the Capitola Library Building Campaign for Capitola Library Branch improvements.**
vii. **Approved and amended the FY 27 Library Operating Budget in the amount of $49,515 for the transfer of funds from the McCaskill Local History Trust for improvements made to the Live Oak Library Branch.**
viii. **2027 Library Closure Schedule- Pulled from Consent Calendar.**
ix. **Approved and amended the FY 27 Library Operating Budget to include the re-budgeting of $200K for the Library's Wireless Infrastructure Replacement Project.**
x. **Accepted and Filed SCPL Workplace Safety Actions taken since Summer 2024.**
xi. **Reject the liability claim of Michael Deuschel.**
xii. **Approved and amended the FY 27 Library Operating Budget to include the transfer of remaining trust funds from the Dorothy Hale Trust, in the amount of $54,412, to be used for the lighting upgrade project at the Scotts Valley Library Branch.**

MOVER: Matt Huffaker
SECONDER: Jamie Goldstein
AYES: Huffaker, Goldstein, Coburn and LaGoe

B. GENERAL BUSINESS

i. **Updated Public Technology and Internet Access Policy #317**

RESULT: Approved and filed the updated Public Technology and Internet Access Policy #317 as written and endorsed by the Library Advisory Commission on August 17, 2026.

MOVER: Nicole Coburn
SECONDER: Jamie Goldstein
AYES: Coburn, Goldstein, Huffaker, and LaGoe

ii. **Library Advisory Commission Recommendations**

RESULT: Approved the three recommendations from the Library Advisory Commission with provided feedback regarding Library liability and thresholds for different levels of security.

MOVER: Matt Huffaker
SECONDER: Nicole Coburn
AYES: Coburn, Goldstein, Huffaker, and LaGoe

C. COMMENTS BY BOARD MEMBERS

The board acknowledged that this is the final board meeting for Mali LaGoe, as she is leaving the City of Scotts Valley.

4. SCHEDULED UPCOMING MEETINGS

Next regularly scheduled joint meeting of the LFFA and LJPA is on November 5, 2026 at 9am at the Downtown Branch Library.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The joint regular meeting of the LFFA & LJPA adjourned at 9:45 am to the joint regular meeting on Thursday, November 5, 2026 at 9:00 am at the Downtown Branch Library**,** 224 Church Street, Santa Cruz CA 95060.

6. WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

None

ATTEST: Devin Schwarz, Clerk of the Board

All documents referred to in these minutes are available in the Santa Cruz Public Libraries –Library Headquarters Office, 117 Union Street, Santa Cruz.

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

STAFF REPORT

AGENDA: November 5, 2026

TO: Libraries Facilities Financing Authority Board

FROM: LFFA Treasurer-Controller

RE: Special Tax Bond Quarterly Financial Reports as of September 30, 2026

RECOMMENDATION

Accept and file the attached financial statements of the Community Facilities District No. 2016-1 as of September 30, 2026.

DISCUSSION

The attached statements provide your Board with a summary of the activity and balances for funds held in trust at Bank of New York as well as an accounting of bond and special tax distributions as of September 30, 2026.

The first attachment, Improvement Fund Activity and Balances of Member Accounts Held in Trust at Bank of New York as of September 30, 2026, provides your Board with an accounting of the funds received into member trust accounts and distributed to members from the 2017, 2020, and 2025 bond issuances. As of September 30, 2026, the total balance in trust accounts with Bank of New York for these funds is $ $11,621,554.67.

The 2017 Special Tax Bond was sold in September 2017. As of September 30, 2025, all 2017 bond funds have been drawn down to reimburse eligible expenditures. The remaining $0.89 is interest income.

The second attachment, Member Distribution Summary as of September 30, 2026, provides your Board with an accounting of the $59,794,942 bond proceeds received from the three bond issuances, excluding costs of issuance, as well as a reporting of the $23,995,481 special tax that has been allocated to each member. Authorized distribution amounts have been updated to reflect revised authorized amounts.

Note: The FY2627 Measure S Special Tax distribution, which were processed on October 5, 2026, will be included in the following quarter's report .

Attachment #1 – Improvement Fund Activity and Balances of Member Accounts Held in Trust of Bank of New York

Attachment #2 – Member Distribution Summary

SANTA CRUZ LIBRARIES FACILITIES FINANCING AUTHORITY
Community Facilities District No. 2016-1
2017, 2020, & 2025 Special Tax Bonds
Improvement Fund Activity & Balances of Member Accounts Held in Trust at Bank of New York
As of June 30, 2026

Summary of activity and account balances of bond funds held in trust at Bank of New York

Description	Santa Cruz Cnty	Santa Cruz City	Capitola	Scotts Valley	Total
2017 Bonds					
Proceeds	$ 13,100,000.00	$ 500,000.00	$ 7,526,447.00	$ 500,000.00	$ 21,626,447.00
Excess Cost of Issuance	11,756.08	448.70	6,754.33	448.70	19,407.81
Interest	465,064.78	22,723.24	263,490.15	23,524.55	774,802.72
Available funds	13,576,820.86	523,171.94	7,796,691.48	523,973.25	22,420,657.53
Drawdowns	(13,576,820.86)	(523,171.60)	(7,796,691.48)	(523,972.70)	(22,420,656.64)
2017 Bond fund balances:	-	0.34	-	0.55	0.89
2020 Bonds					
Proceeds	15,386,032.00	-	1,824,947.00	2,094,000.00	19,304,979.00
Excess Cost of Issuance	-	-	-	11,825.62	11,825.62
Interest	377,545.70	-	661.79	3,983.95	382,191.44
Available funds	15,763,577.70	-	1,825,608.79	2,109,809.57	19,698,996.06
Drawdowns	(15,129,778.19)	-	(1,825,608.79)	(2,109,808.04)	(19,065,195.02)
2020 Bond fund balances:	633,799.51	-	-	1.53	633,801.04
2025 Bonds					
Proceeds	-	18,831,395.96	-	-	18,831,395.96
Excess Cost of Issuance	-	3,886.33	-	-	3,886.33
Interest	-	799,497.10	-	-	799,497.10
Available funds	-	19,634,779.39	-	-	19,634,779.39
Drawdowns	-	(8,647,026.65)	-	-	(8,647,026.65)
2025 Bond fund balances:	-	10,987,752.74	-	-	10,987,752.74
June 30, 2026 Balance at BNY:	**$ 633,799.51**	**$ 10,987,753.08**	**$ -**	**$ 2.08**	**$ 11,621,554.67**

Santa Cruz Libraries Facilities Financing Authority
Community Facilities District No. 2016-1
Maximum Distribution Amounts & Member Distribution Summary
As of September 30, 2026

Modified authorized distribution amounts and member balances.

Object Code	Member	Original Distribution Percentage	Authorized Distribution Amount	Bond Proceeds Distributed*	Special Tax Distributions	Total Distributions	Remaining Authorized Distributions**
75236	City of Capitola	12.90%	$ 13,870,000	$ 9,358,148	$ 695,754	$ 10,053,902	$ 3,816,098
75237	City of Santa Cruz	40.32%	43,346,000	19,335,731	17,958,320	37,294,051	6,051,949
75238	City of Scotts Valley	4.84%	5,202,000	2,606,275	1,163,949	3,770,224	1,431,776
75239	County of Santa Cruz	41.94%	45,082,000	28,497,788	4,177,458	32,675,246	12,406,754
	Total	100.00%	$ 107,500,000	$ 59,797,942	$ 23,995,481	$ 83,793,423	$ 23,706,577

CHAIR MALI LAGOE
VICE CHAIR NICOLE COBURN
BOARD MEMBER JAMIE GOLDSTEIN
BOARD MEMBER MATT HUFFAKER

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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LIBRARY FACILITIES FINANCING AUTHORITY BOARD (LFFA)
and
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JOINT REGULAR BOARD MEETING

In person and online provided meeting
THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 3, 2026
9:15 A.M.

1. GENERAL JOINT MEETING INFORMATION

A. ROLL CALL
PRESENT: Mali LaGoe, Nicole Coburn, Jamie Goldstein, Matt Huffaker.
STAFF: Christopher Platt, Library Director

B. ADDITIONAL MATERIALS
None

C. ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS TO AGENDA
LJPA Consent Calendar Item viii. 2027 Library Closure Schedule

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

E. LIBRARY DIRECTOR REPORT

Library Director submitted his report highlighting the following items:

- Summer Reading Program participation was up almost 10%.
- Strategic Planning teams will start meeting soon.
- Library IT has moved the servers from Downtown to Headquarters.
- Heatmap data shows patrons are using the Libraries during the extended hours.

F. REPORT BY FRIENDS OF THE SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Sarah Beck, FSCPL Executive Director, highlighted the following items in her report:

- September marks the end of a decade of capital campaigns for the Friends of the Santa Cruz Public Libraries.
- First meeting of the Downtown Library Friends, which marks the first time the Downtown Library has had a Friends group.

G. REPORT BY the Library Advisory Commission (LAC)

None

2. LIBRARY FACILITIES FINANCING AUTHORITY BOARD (LFFA)

A. CONSENT CALENDAR

RESULT: APPROVED CONSENT CALENDAR
i. Approved the June 4, 2026 Board Meeting Minutes.
ii. Accepted & Filed the attached financial statements of the Community Facilities District No. 2016-1 as of June 30, 2026.

MOVER: Nicole Coburn
SECONDER: Matt Huffaker
AYES: Coburn, Huffaker, Goldstein and LaGoe

B. GENERAL BUSINESS

C. PROJECT UPDATES AND COMMENTS BY BOARD MEMBERS

3. LIBRARY JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY (LJPA)

A. CONSENT CALENDAR

RESULT: APPROVED CONSENT CALENDAR

i. **Approved the June 4, 2026 Board Meeting Minutes.**
ii. **Accepted & Filed Analysis of 4th Qtr. Patron Count Data for FY26.**
iii. **Accepted & Filed 4th Qtr. Community Impact Measures for FY26.**
iv. **Accepted & Filed 4th Qtr. Incident Report for FY26.**
v. **Accepted & Filed Financial Dashboard Report.**
vi. **Accepted funds and amended the FY 26 Library Operating Budget in the amount of $17,000 for funds received from the Capitola Library Building Campaign for Capitola Library Branch improvements.**
vii. **Approved and amended the FY 27 Library Operating Budget in the amount of $49,515 for the transfer of funds from the McCaskill Local History Trust for improvements made to the Live Oak Library Branch.**
viii. **2027 Library Closure Schedule- Pulled from Consent Calendar.**
ix. **Approved and amended the FY 27 Library Operating Budget to include the re-budgeting of $200K for the Library's Wireless Infrastructure Replacement Project.**
x. **Accepted and Filed SCPL Workplace Safety Actions taken since Summer 2024.**
xi. **Reject the liability claim of Michael Deuschel.**
xii. **Approved and amended the FY 27 Library Operating Budget to include the transfer of remaining trust funds from the Dorothy Hale Trust, in the amount of $54,412, to be used for the lighting upgrade project at the Scotts Valley Library Branch.**

MOVER: Matt Huffaker
SECONDER: Jamie Goldstein
AYES: Huffaker, Goldstein, Coburn and LaGoe

B. GENERAL BUSINESS

i. **Updated Public Technology and Internet Access Policy #317**

RESULT: Approved and filed the updated Public Technology and Internet Access Policy #317 as written and endorsed by the Library Advisory Commission on August 17, 2026.

MOVER: Nicole Coburn
SECONDER: Jamie Goldstein
AYES: Coburn, Goldstein, Huffaker, and LaGoe

ii. **Library Advisory Commission Recommendations**

RESULT: Approved the three recommendations from the Library Advisory Commission with provided feedback regarding Library liability and thresholds for different levels of security.

MOVER: Matt Huffaker
SECONDER: Nicole Coburn
AYES: Coburn, Goldstein, Huffaker, and LaGoe

C. COMMENTS BY BOARD MEMBERS

The board acknowledged that this is the final board meeting for Mali LaGoe, as she is leaving the City of Scotts Valley.

4. SCHEDULED UPCOMING MEETINGS

Next regularly scheduled joint meeting of the LFFA and LJPA is on November 5, 2026 at 9am at the Downtown Branch Library.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The joint regular meeting of the LFFA & LJPA adjourned at 9:45 am to the joint regular meeting on Thursday, November 5, 2026 at 9:00 am at the Downtown Branch Library**,** 224 Church Street, Santa Cruz CA 95060.

6. WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

None

ATTEST: Devin Schwarz, Clerk of the Board

All documents referred to in these minutes are available in the Santa Cruz Public Libraries –Library Headquarters Office, 117 Union Street, Santa Cruz.

TO: Library Joint Powers Authority Board

FROM: Noah Otts, City of Santa Cruz Accountant I 10/28/26

RE: Library Financial Dashboard Report for the Quarter ended June 2026

December Report FY26

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Preliminary, Unaudited

Contained herein is the preliminary, UNAUDITED Library Financial Dashboard summary report for the Quarter ending June 2026. At Quarter's end, the NET operating results were <$1,139,711> with year-to-date net operating results of <$1,752,513>. In general, preliminary revenues are ahead of the budget target by 0.0% and expenditures are under budget by 4.2%.

This "dashboard" summary includes only major revenue and expenditure lines items that are key to monitoring operating trends and allow us to provide a 1pg summary report. Items not reported individually but included in the "Other expenditures" line item below include contractually obligated accounts such as debt service, software licensing fees, and admin support (management, personnel, accounting, budgeting, payroll, etc.).

Net Operations *(major accounts)*	**4th Quarter (Apr-Jun)**	**Fiscal Year to Date**	Annual Adj. Budget FY 2025/26	Percent of Budget Comparison: YTD Actuals	12 Months Completed	Underspent / (Overspent)
Revenue:						
Sales Tax	$ 2,530,935	$ 10,704,307	$ 10,540,417	101.6%	100.0%	1.6%
MOE - Member Contributions	$ 2,413,198	$ 9,637,495	$ 9,653,267	99.8%	100.0%	(0.2%)
(1) Other Revenue	$ 1,594,115	$ 1,892,792	2,032,976	93.1%	100.0%	(6.9%)
Budgetary Financing Sources	$ -	$ -	-			
TOTAL REVENUES	**$ 6,538,249**	**$ 22,234,593**	$ 22,226,660	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Expenditures:						
Payroll	$ 3,814,898	$ 14,681,245	$ 14,712,289	99.8%	100.0%	0.2%
Books (w/Grants)	$ 1,258,158	$ 2,520,499	2,059,690	122.4%	100.0%	(22.4%)
Janitorial Services	$ 200,479	$ 612,017	550,180	111.2%	100.0%	(11.2%)
Building and Facility	$ 86,827	$ 273,928	271,785	100.8%	100.0%	(0.8%)
Rent (Equip, Building, Land)	$ 4,938	$ 240,430	240,484	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Utilities	$ 156,438	$ 720,951	961,813	75.0%	100.0%	25.0%
Other expenditures	2,156,221	4,938,037	6,240,327	79.1%	100.0%	20.9%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	**$ 7,677,959**	**$ 23,987,106**	**$ 25,036,568**	95.8%	100.0%	4.2%
Net Gain / (Loss)	$ (1,139,711)	$ (1,752,513)	$ (2,809,908)			
		Fiscal Year to Date	Annual Adj. Budget			

Key Balance Sheet items	**4th Quarter (Apr-Jun)**
Equipment Reserve	923,599
(2) 20% Reserve	3,985,566
Fund Balance-Beginning Available	8,490,340
Net Change in Fund Balance	(1,139,711)
(3) Fund Balance-Ending Available	7,350,629

Trust Balances as of 6/30/2026

Trust	Balance	Trust	Balance
McCaskill- Hist	250,256	Leet-Corday	114,658
Finkeldey	9,989	Morely	15,864
Carolyn Virginia Claey	20,709	Hale	55,006

Notes:

(1) The Other Revenue category budget to actuals saw a significant increase in the invested pooled cash which exceeded budgeted expectations in the current fiscal year.

(2) The Library's reserves were changed on September 1, 2016 to: (1) reduce from 2 months to 15% the primary reserve and (2) formally establish a capital reserve with a target balance of $400,000 (formally the informal reserve for fleet/equipment replacement). The Equipment Reserve includes fund balances from Library JPA - Technology, Felton Branch Reserve, Library JPA - Vehicle Replacement and Library JPA - Equipment. On November 2, 2017, the Library's reserves were increased from 15% to 20%.

(3) Beginning & Ending Available Fund Balance is unaudited and before consideration of remaining contractual encumbrances (administrative support, legal, janitorial, equip & material purchases, etc.).

print date: 4/30/2026

Chair	Jamie Goldstein
Vice Chair	Matt Huffaker
Board Member	Mali LaGoe
Board Member	Nicole Coburn

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

STAFF REPORT

DATE: September 3, 2026

TO: Library Joint Powers Authority Board

FROM: Christopher Platt, Library Director

RE: 2027 Library Closure Schedule

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt the 2027 Library closure schedule.

DISCUSSION

The Library is proposing the attached 2027 closure schedule. This closure schedule mimics the City's holiday closure schedule approved as part of the various employee MOUs. Per the MOUs, when a holiday falls on a Sunday, the following Monday shall be observed. When a holiday falls on a Saturday, the preceding Friday shall be observed.

Since the Library will be following the MOU holiday schedule as it pertains to observed holidays, the Library is proposing to close an additional day if the holiday falls on a Saturday or Sunday. This will ensure the Library adheres to the various employee MOUs holiday schedule but also honors the holiday itself. For 2027 there are 3 holidays that fall on a weekend day.

Attachment: 2027 Library closure schedule

Prepared by: Kira Henifin, Principal Management Analyst

Reviewed by: Christopher Platt, Library Director
Sara De Leon, Human Resources Director

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

2027 Library Closure Schedule for the Santa Cruz Public Library System

January	Friday, January 1st New Year's Day
	Monday, January 18th Martin Luther King Jr. Day
February	Monday, February 15th Presidents' Day
March	Wednesday, March 31st Farmworkers Day
May	Monday, May 31st Memorial Day
June	Friday, June 18th Juneteenth National Independence Day (Holiday Observed) Saturday, June 19th Juneteenth National Independence Day
July	Saturday, July 3rd Independence Day (Holiday Observed) Sunday, July 4th Independence Day
September	Monday, September 6th Labor Day
October	Thursday, October 28th Staff In-Service Day
November	Thursday, November 11th Veterans Day
	Thursday, November 25th Thanksgiving Day
	Friday, November 26th Day After Thanksgiving
December	Friday, December 24th Christmas Eve (Holiday Observed)
	Saturday, December 25th Christmas Day
	Friday, December 31st New Year's Eve (Holiday Observed)
January 2028	Saturday, January 1st New Year's Day

Chair	Nicole Coburn
Vice Chair	Matt Huffaker
Board Member	Stephanie Hill
Board Member	Rudy Escalante

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

STAFF REPORT

DATE: November 5, 2026

TO: Library Joint Powers Authority Board

FROM: Christopher Platt, Library Director

RE: Annual Meeting Schedule 2027

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt Annual Meeting Schedule 2027

DISCUSSION

The Library is proposing the attached meeting schedule for 2027.

Attachment: Annual Meeting Schedule



2027 Meeting Dates

LFFA (Libraries Facilities Financing Authority)
Immediately followed by the LJPA (Library Joint Powers Authority)

All meetings are held on
Thursdays at 9:00 am

Meeting Date	Time	Location
February 4	9:00 am	Aptos Branch Library
May 6	9:00 am	Scotts Valley Branch Library
June 3	9:00 am	Capitola Branch Library
September 2	9:00 am	Aptos Branch Library
November 4	9:00 am	Downtown Branch Library

Chair	Nicole Coburn
Vice Chair	Matt Huffaker
Board Member	Stephanie Hill
Board Member	Rudy Escalante

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

STAFF REPORT

DATE: November 5, 2026

TO: Library Joint Powers Board

FROM: Christopher Platt, Director of Libraries

RE: Updated Commemorative Flag Policy #109

STAFF RECOMMENDATION
Motion to approve and file the updated Commemorative Flag Policy #109 as written and endorsed by the Library Advisory Commission on August 17, 2026.

DISCUSSION
The Commemorative Flag Policy #109 was last reviewed and approved on June 2, 2022. The updated version contains minor word changes to improve readability.

Furthermore, the context of this policy remains unchanged. The Library has added clarifying information on how a request would be submitted and presented to the Library Advisory Commission for consideration.

Once approved by the Library Joint Powers Board, the updated Commemorative Flag Policy will renew the continued role of the Library Advisory Commission to recommend approval or denial of any request to fly a commemorative flag on library flagpoles at all branch locations for the next five years.

FISCAL IMPACT
None.

ATTACHMENT
Commemorative Flag Policy #109

Report Prepared by: Jennifer Yeung, Management Analyst

Reviewed and Approved by: Christopher Platt, Director of Libraries

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Commemorative Flag Policy

JPAB Policy # 109
Approved: 6/2022
Last Revised: 8/2026
Review Schedule: 8/2031

Purpose
This Policy guides the outdoor display of a commemorative flag on library flagpoles located at the branch locations for the Santa Cruz Public Libraries (the Library).

In adopting this Policy, the Library Joint Powers Board declares that the Library's flagpoles are not intended to serve as a forum for free expression of the public, but rather for the display of the United States of America and the State of California flags.

Commemorative flags are recommended by the Library and are endorsed by the Library Advisory Commission as an expression of the Library's official sentiments and must be consistent with the Library's mission and Strategic Plan.

Guidance
1. For purposes of this Policy, the term "commemorative flag" shall mean any flag that identifies with a specific date, historical event, cause, nation or group of people, whereby the Library honors or commemorates the date, event, cause, nation or people by displaying the flag.
2. The Library's flagpoles are not a forum for free expression for or by the public.
3. The Library shall display commemorative flags only if approved.
4. Commemorative flag displays are an expression of the Library's official sentiments and must be consistent with the Library's mission and Strategic Plan.
5. Commemorative flags shall be authorized for display for a set period of time that is reasonable or customary for the ceremony or the subject to be commemorated, but no longer than 31 continuous days, unless further specified at the time of approval.
6. Commemorative flags will be flown in accordance with all applicable provisions of federal and state laws.



Belonging in a Digital Age: Teens, Tech, & Third Places

California Partners PROJECT

AURA

BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE

FOSI Family Online Safety Institute

SOCIAL MEDIA LAB Stanford University

Credits

Special Thanks: Aura (sponsor), LSP Family Foundation

Project Lead: Jennifer Heifferon

Survey Development and Design: Karen Goetz, Jennifer Heifferon

Focus Group Development and Design: Alanna Powers-O'Brien, Jennifer Heifferon

Survey Data Collection: California Partners Project, California Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs

Survey Data Analysis: Aura, California Partners Project, Sunny Xun Liu

Focus Group Data Collection: California Partners Project, California Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, Pause 4 Peace, Breaking Barriers, Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

Focus Group Data Analysis: California Partners Project, Family Online Safety Institute, Stanford Social Media Lab

Designer: Kelly Stiles

Project Youth Co-Designers: Addya Agarwal, Aleeza Siddique, Alisa Ching, Andres Osorio, Ariya Kaushek, Connor Doherty, Emi Sakamoto, Glenn Brassington, Jalyssa Silva, Jazleen Cerda, Jessica Assaad, Karina Yue, Kaya Sparnicht, Leia Burlingham, Lucy Hohn, Lydia Pochueva, Maile Zeng, Malini Hill, Nina Krishnaiah, Setareh Harsamizadeh Tehrani, Simone Green, Timothy Leung, Tsukina Ohashi, Vihaan Bhardwaj



Jennifer Siebel Newsom
California First Partner

"Our kids don't just need protection from harm. They need meaningful places to belong."

In a world where technology is evolving by the hour, everything we do as parents and caregivers begins with our children—and their safety, health, and sense of belonging—in mind.

Across California, I hear from parents and teens trying to navigate this reality. Young people are growing up in a digital landscape that moves faster than any generation before them. While technology has expanded innovation and opportunity, it has also reshaped how young people spend their time, how they build relationships, and how they experience community.

As a mom of four, I've watched how quickly screens can crowd out real-world connection. In this digital age, being a parent can sometimes feel like an impossible task. The tug-of-war over devices. The pull of endless scrolling. The challenge of creating spaces where kids can just be kids in a culture that monetizes attention.

But here's what I also know: our kids don't just need protection from harm. They need meaningful places to belong.

That's why, in partnership with the California Partners Project, we launched Teens, Tech, & Third Places—to hear directly from young people and caregivers about the places beyond home and school where teens feel they can connect and relax together.

What we heard from young people was both sobering and hopeful.

Young people are not asking for more time online. They are asking for more opportunities to connect in real life. **In fact, more than half of teens surveyed say they wish they connected more with people in person.** They want places where they feel safe—places where, as one teen put it, they can just be themselves.

"The lesson is clear: When young people have welcoming places to gather, real-world relationships become easier to choose."

At the same time, many teens told us that real-world connection is not always easy to access—with factors like cost, transportation, overscheduling, and a lack of teen-friendly places creating barriers to gathering with their peers.

When those opportunities are missing, technology fills the gap. **Nearly half of teens who use AI chatbots (47.8%) say they would use them less if there were more opportunities to connect in person.**

The lesson is clear: When young people have welcoming places to gather, real-world relationships become easier to choose.

Parks, libraries, youth centers, sports programs, arts spaces, and cultural institutions—these "third places" are essential infrastructure for youth well-being. Every young person deserves access to environments that allow them to do the hard and beautiful work of growing up: building friendships, exploring their interests, and discovering who they are beyond a device.

> **Our children have a right to a childhood that belongs to them—not to the platforms competing for their time.**

They deserve vibrant places to gather—parks filled with movement and laughter, libraries buzzing with curiosity. They deserve places that remind them they matter, and communities that show up for them.

Investing in these spaces—and in the young people who need them—is how we put children and families first. In a digital world, that means investing not only in innovation, but also in the real-world places where young people connect, grow, and belong.

In partnership always,



California First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom
Co-founder, California Partners Project

About This Research

This brief draws on two complementary sources of data collected across California between September and November 2025. The youth survey gathered responses from 1,088 teens ages 13–18 on topics including social connection, loneliness, barriers to in-person interaction, and AI chatbot use. The caregiver findings come from six focus groups with 36 parents and caregivers, exploring family dynamics, safety perceptions, and the role of technology in teens' social lives. Together, these sources inform the five key findings and the Youth–Caregiver Disconnect insight boxes throughout this brief. For full methodology, see page 30.

Key Finding 1

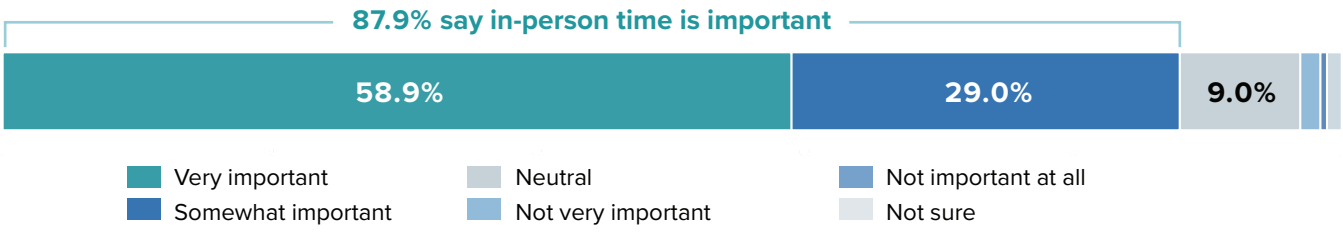
Teens Want More In-Person Connection — Even as Loneliness Persists

What Teens Told Us

- Nearly 9 in 10 teens (87.9%) say spending time with friends in person is important.
- More than half of teens (52.8%) wish they connected more in person with other people.
- Of teens surveyed, 69.9% prefer unstructured in-person hangouts—time spent together without a set plan or schedule—over organized activities (16.9%) or online interaction (11.5%).
- More than half of California teens (54.3%) report experiencing some degree of loneliness in the past month.
- Among teens who felt mostly lonely, more than half (52.8%) still hung out with friends in person doing something unstructured in the past week.

How important is it to you to spend time with friends in person?

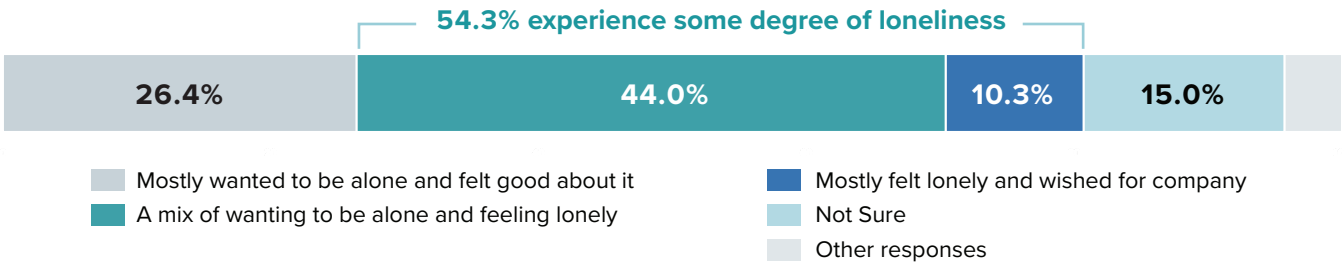
% of teens age 13-18



Note: n=1,035; excludes 53 blank entries and "No response."

In the past month, which have you felt more often?

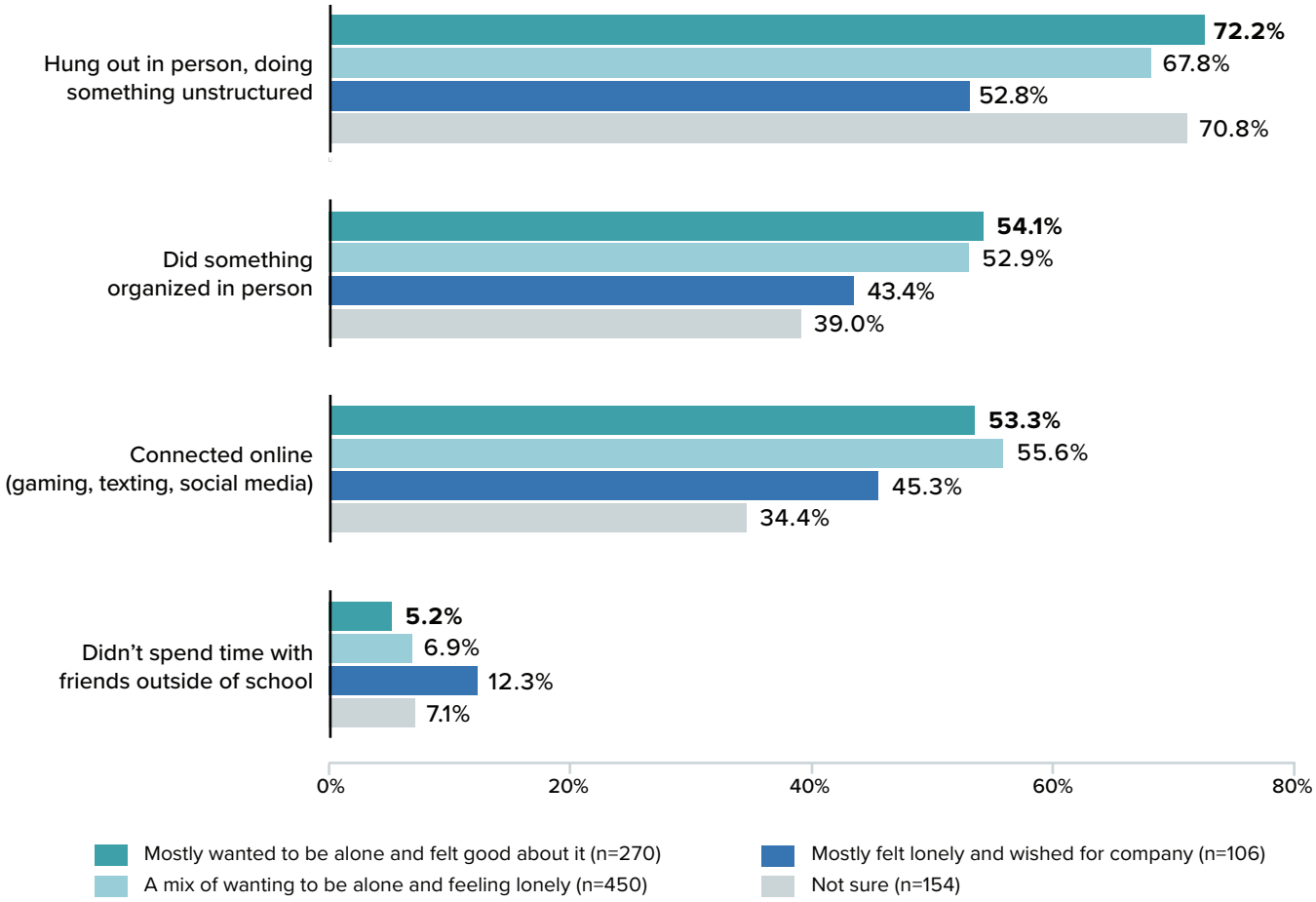
% of teens age 13-18



Note: n=1,030; excludes "No response" and other responses.

In the past week, how did you spend time with friends or peers outside of school?

% of teens age 13-18, by how they felt in the past month



Note: Select all that apply; percentages do not sum to 100%. Loneliness group responses include interpretable write-in entries in addition to the four core response options.

Voices From Teens

> ***I love people... When I'm alone... I wait for messages*** *and signs that people like to be around me. If there isn't any, I feel lonely. It's depressing and confusing to be by myself... Every step I take alone is ten I wish I could take with somebody else.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 14

> ***Sometimes after school I'm overstimulated*** *and my social battery is drained. So I like to be alone then, but on weekends if I don't see any of my friends I can feel alone.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 14

> ***I feel lonely because a lot of the time I'm by myself*** *and people are busy with their own stuff. I don't always get invited to hang out, so it feels like I'm on the outside looking in.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 18

> ***I think it's really important to have more safe and welcoming spaces*** *where teens can connect in person. Many of us spend a lot of time online, so having real-life places to hang out, talk, and build friendships would help us feel more connected and supported.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 15

> ***I have known my online friends for 8 years now...*** *I'd rather meet in person and do fun things than talk through the phone and play video games, but it is what it is I guess.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 17

What It Means

Teens' desire for in-person connection is strong and consistent across communities—rural, suburban, and urban. But loneliness persists even when teens are socially engaged—among teens who felt most lonely, more than half still spent time with friends in person in the past week. What's missing is not always contact, it's the quality and timing of connection: whether teens can gather when they need each other, not just on a schedule, and whether the environments available to them make them feel genuinely seen and included. Teens can be surrounded by peers and still feel lonely—presence is not the same as belonging.

Youth–Caregiver Disconnect

Loneliness Isn't Always Visible

Teens say	⟷	Caregivers tend to focus on
They can feel lonely, even when they're with friends.		What they can see, like safety risks, schedules, and screen time.

This gap can make loneliness difficult for adults to recognize or address. A teen may be showing up—at dinner, at a club, with friends—but still feel unseen. Checking in on how teens feel around others, not just whether they're participating, matters.

> "Because sometimes, I feel like although I have people around me, I still feel lonely."
>
> – Teen girl, age 16

Key Finding 2

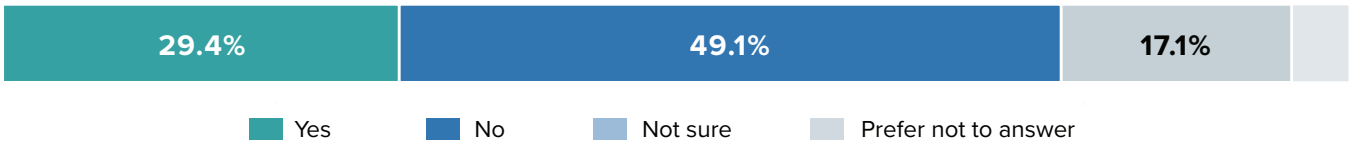
Belonging Matters More Than Buildings

What Teens Told Us

- Nearly 1 in 3 teens (29.4%) have stopped going somewhere because it didn't feel safe or welcoming.
- Teens who feel unwelcome are more likely to use AI chatbots, with 48.2% reporting usage.
- This trend is even stronger among teens who cite unsafe environments as a barrier, 57.3% of whom use AI chatbots.
- Of teens who say places aren't open when they're available, 47.1% use AI chatbots—above the overall baseline of 36.7%.
- By comparison, teens who say there are 'no places nearby' use AI chatbots at rates comparable to teens overall—34.0% versus a baseline of 36.7%.

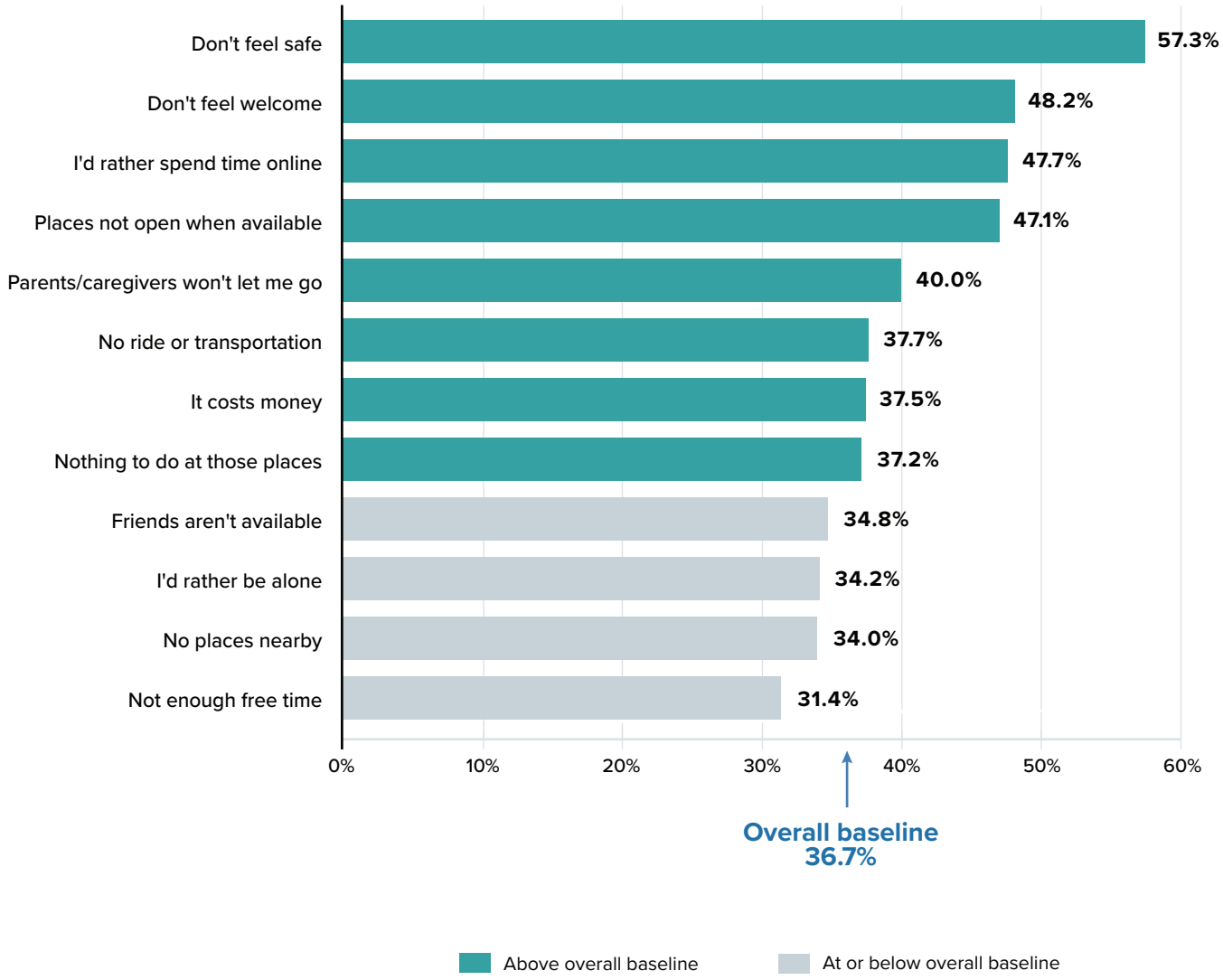
Have you ever stopped going to a place because it didn't feel safe or accepting of who you are?

% of teens age 13-18



Note: n=1,081; excludes 7 blank entries.

% of teens who use AI chatbots, by barrier to in-person connection



Note: Q: "What makes it hard for you to spend time in places in real life outside of home or school?" Select all that apply. Barrier group n values range from 114 to 477.

Voices From Teens

> ***Sometimes it feels like there's nowhere for teens to go, especially in the evenings.*** *More spaces that are open later and easy to get to would be awesome.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 18

> ***It [the ultimate hangout spot] would be free*** *and not give teens looks [of suspicion] when they walk in thinking they will mess around or ruin something.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 14

> ***A place feels like it's for teens when it's welcoming,*** *has fun things to do, and lets us hang out without feeling judged.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 15

> ***If places felt more welcoming and less strict,*** *more teens would actually show up and connect.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 18

> ***When it's welcoming to everyone,*** *no matter your vibe or friend group. Not just for popular kids.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 17

What It Means

Teens who report emotional barriers to in-person connection—feeling unsafe or unwelcome—also report AI chatbot use at notably higher rates than teens who cite a lack of nearby places. The gap between these groups is striking. It suggests that physical accessibility alone doesn't explain the pattern: belonging appears to play a larger role.

Youth–Caregiver Disconnect

Teens and Caregivers Define Safety Differently

Teens ask	⟷	Caregivers ask
Do I feel accepted and comfortable here?		Is this space physically safe and supervised?

A space can feel practically safe to a caregiver and unwelcoming to a teen at the same time. Places that feel physically secure but socially exclusive won't necessarily keep teens coming back, and teens who don't return are more likely to turn to digital alternatives instead.

> "[When I was growing up] I used to go outside and play for hours before coming home. But now, my children, I don't even allow them... we have so many horrible stories out there... safety [is a concern]."

— Mother of 3, Los Angeles area

> "I want to go out more, but my parents worry about safety and it limits where I can go."

– Teen boy, age 17

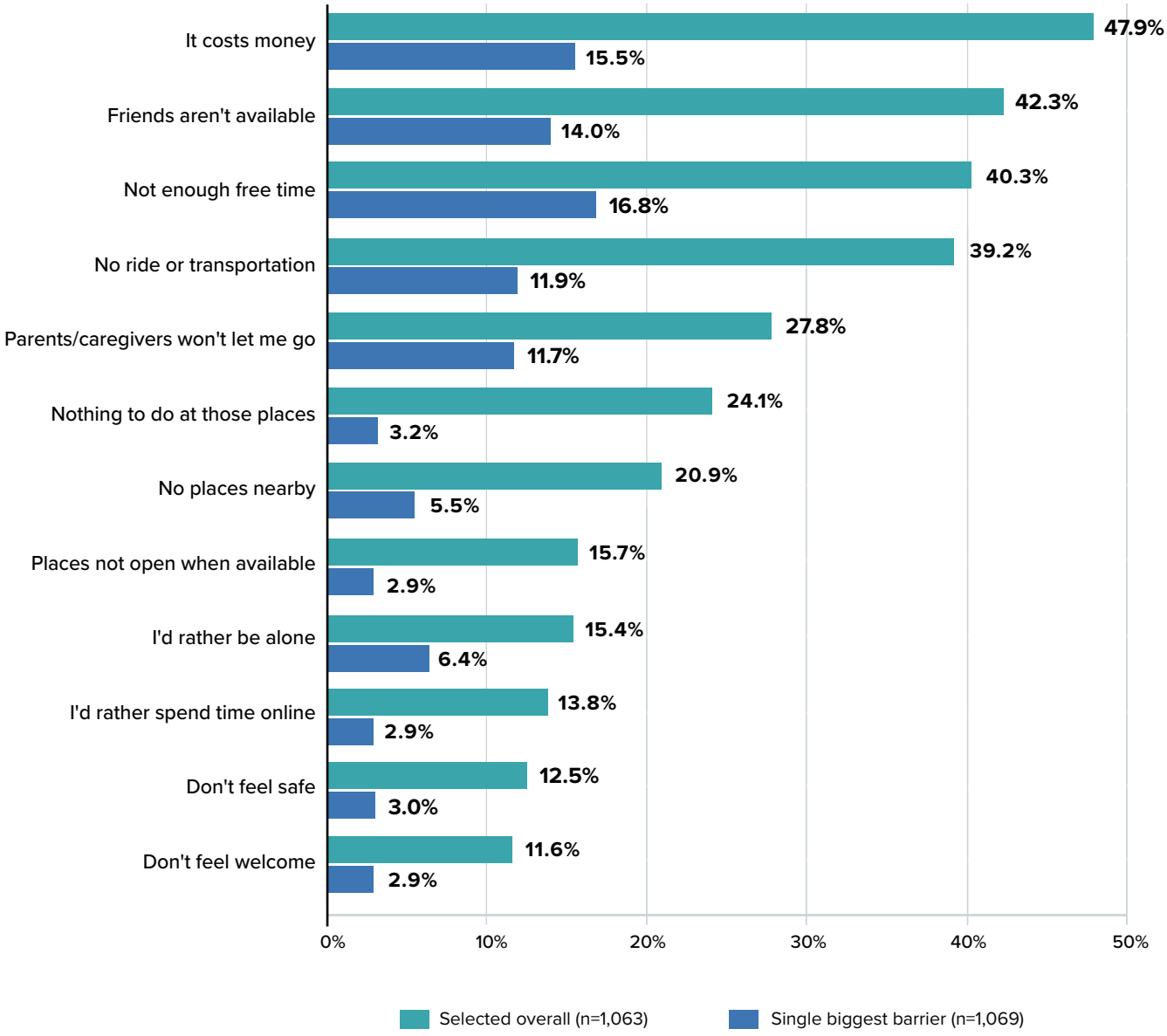
Key Finding 3

Everyday Barriers Shape When and Where Teens Can Connect

What Teens Told Us

- Cost is the most widely experienced barrier to spending time in person, cited by 47.9% of teens.
- Lack of free time (40.3%) and lack of transportation (39.2%) also limit teens' ability to connect in person.
- More than 1 in 4 teens (27.8%) say their parents or caregivers won't let them go out.
- When asked to name their single biggest barrier, no one obstacle dominates—the top response, 'not enough free time,' was cited by 16.8% of teens, followed by 'it costs money' at 15.4%.
- Suburban teens are twice as likely as their urban and rural peers to name not having enough free time as their single biggest barrier—26.3%, compared to 13.7% and 11.5% respectively.
- Among rural teens, feeling unwelcome is cited as the single biggest barrier at the same rate as parents/caregivers won't let me go (13.1% each)—and at six times the rate of urban and suburban teens (2.3% and 2.1%).

What makes it hard for you to spend time in places in real life outside of home or school?

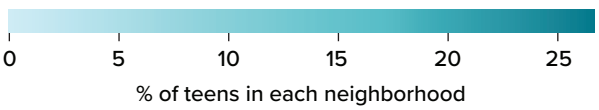


Note: Percentages for the multi-select question do not sum to 100%.

What is the single biggest barrier that stops you from spending time in places outside of home or school?

% of teens age 13-18 by neighborhood type

	Urban (n=432)	Suburban (n=334)	Rural* (n=61)
Not enough free time	13.7%	26.3%	11.5%
It costs money	21.3%	11.4%	9.8%
Friends aren't available	13.7%	16.2%	16.4%
No ride / transportation	13.4%	12.6%	11.5%
Parents won't let me go	10.6%	12.9%	13.1%
I'd rather be alone	5.6%	4.5%	3.3%
No places nearby	4.2%	5.1%	4.9%
I don't feel safe	4.9%	2.4%	1.6%
Nothing to do at those places	3.7%	3.6%	3.3%
I don't feel welcome	2.3%	2.1%	13.1%
Places aren't open	3.5%	1.8%	4.9%
I'd rather spend time online	3.2%	1.2%	6.6%



Note: Based on valid question responses. *Rural n is small; interpret with caution.

Voices From Teens

> ***I don't live very close to my friends,*** *which causes fewer hangouts because it's hard to find a place in between. There's also the fact that most of the places available for us to hang out cost money that we don't have or don't want to spend.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 16

> ***Sometimes it's hard to find a time everyone's free,*** *and transportation can be an issue too.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 15

> ***I think there need to be more safe and affordable places*** *where teens can hang out in person instead of always being online. Real-life connection is important, but sometimes there just aren't enough spaces made for us.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 17

> ***A lot of teens want to hang out in person,*** *but there aren't many places that actually feel made for us. Most spots either cost money, close early, or have rules that make it hard to just relax.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 16

> ***There aren't many safe or comfortable places*** *just for teens to hang out and be themselves.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 14

> ***I have had less time*** *for hanging out than I would like.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 17

> ***It's really hard when my friends can't drive,*** *and also because we have so much homework.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 17

What It Means

Teens' opportunities to connect in person are shaped by structural and cultural constraints. Cost, transportation, lack of free time, parental rules, and peers' availability each play a role. Several of these barriers reflect broader shifts in how young people's time and movement are organized, limiting not just access to places but also the everyday circumstances that make gathering possible. When barriers persist, teens don't describe giving up on connection—they describe finding it online instead.

Youth–Caregiver Disconnect

Independence Is Negotiated

Teen experience	⟷	Caregiver experience
Independence often depends on adult permission.		Rules, supervision, and monitoring are used to manage safety and risk.

These dynamics mean that even well-designed third places can go unused if families don't trust them or teens can't get there. Practitioners and policymakers need to address the full journey—not just whether a space exists, but whether families feel comfortable enough to say yes.

> "[With] iPhones and iPads, you track your kids' locations. So, if something's [wrong], we will know where they're at exactly, at all times."
>
> **— Parent of 5, Central Valley**

> "Sometimes... my parents won't let me hang out [with] my friends so I just hang out in my room alone."
>
> **– Teen girl, age 13**

Key Finding 4

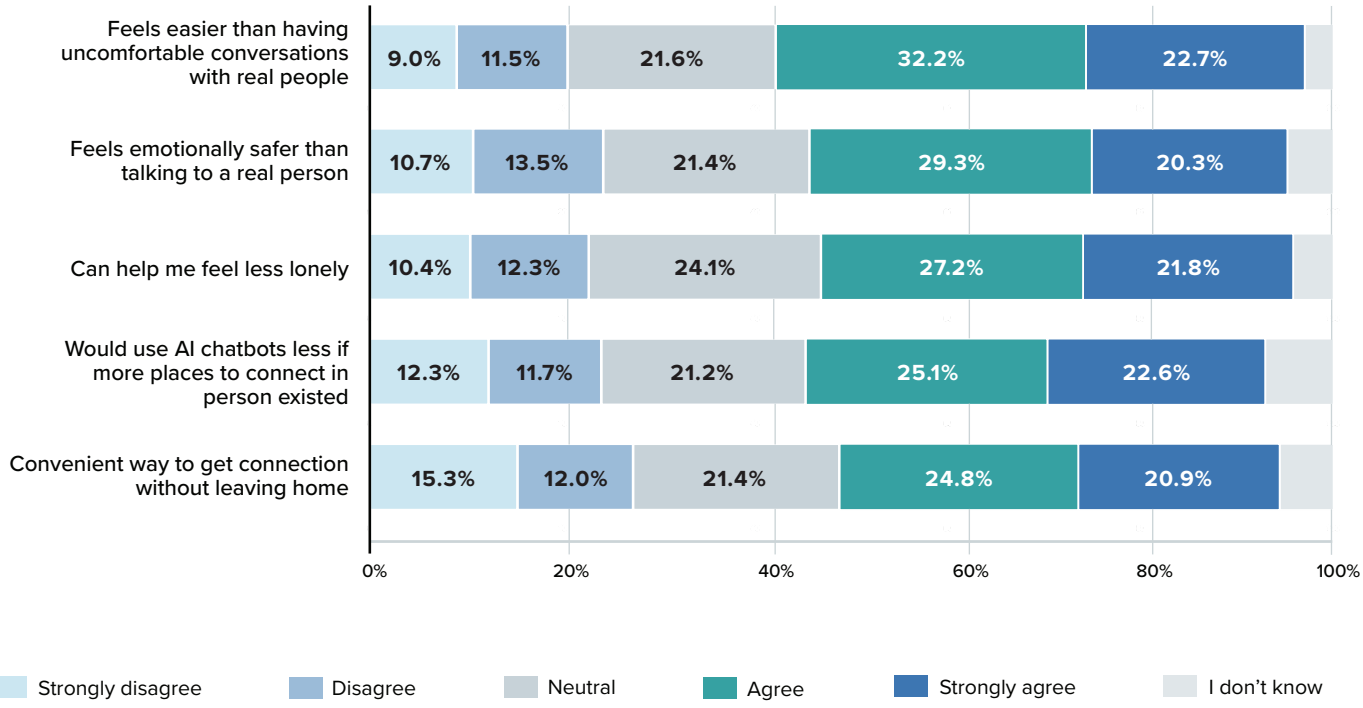
For Some Teens, Digital Alternatives Feel Safer Than People

What Teens Told Us

- Of teens who use AI chatbots, 49.6% say talking to an AI chatbot feels emotionally safer than talking to another person.
- This reliance isn't inevitable: nearly half of all teens who use AI chatbots (47.8%) say they would use them less if more opportunities to connect in person existed.
- Teens who feel mostly lonely are significantly more likely to use AI chatbots—48.1% compared to 36.7% of teens overall.
- Among mostly lonely teens who use AI chatbots, 41.2% say they turned to one because no one was available to talk to them.

Based on your personal experience, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about AI chatbots or companions?

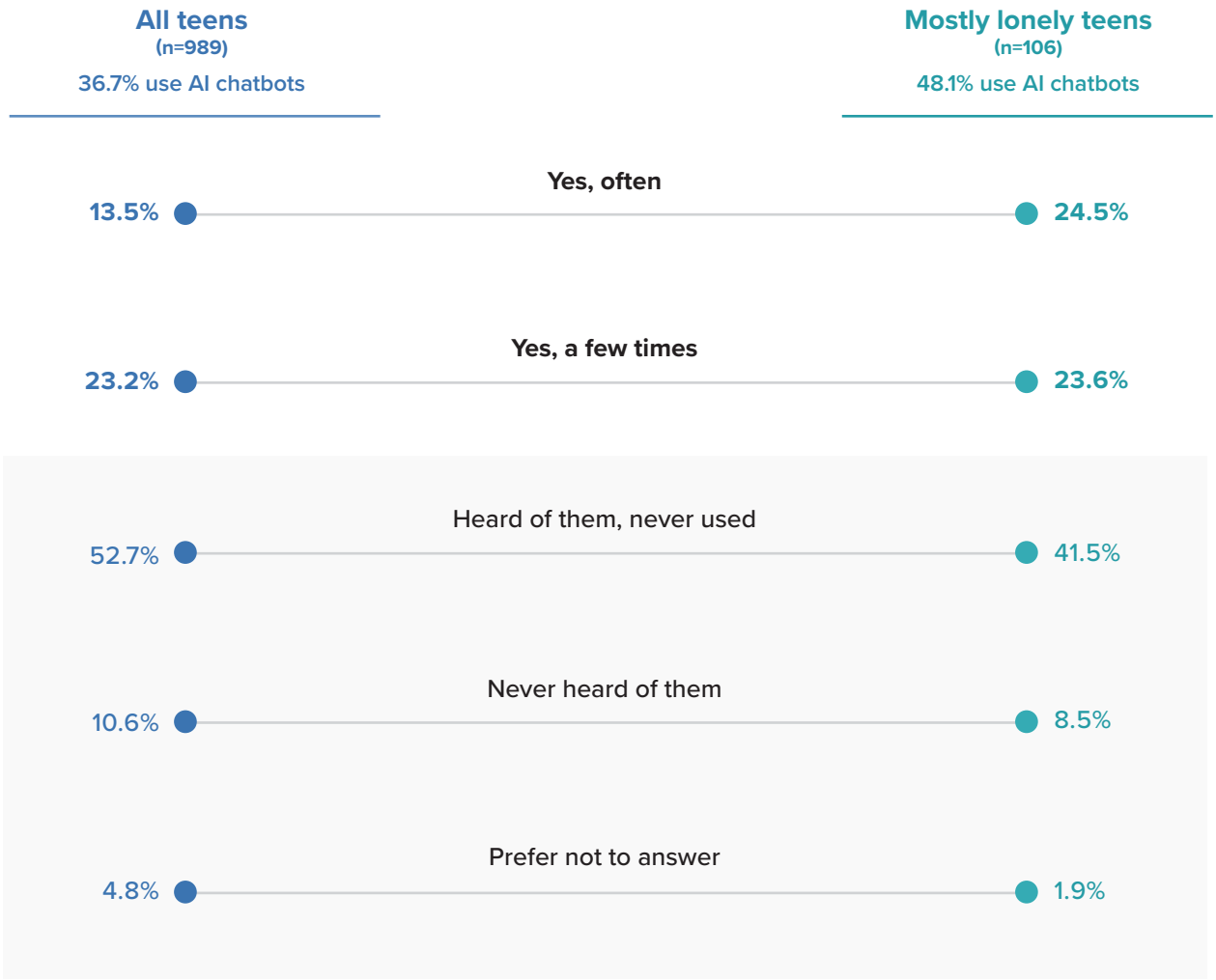
% of teens age 13-18 who have used an AI chatbot



Note: Based on valid responses among AI users (n=355-359). "I don't know" responses ranged from 3.1% to 7.0% across statements.

Have you ever used an AI chatbot or companion bot for friendship or to get social advice?

% of teens age 13-18, by loneliness experience in the past month



Note: n=989 (all teens, excludes blank entries and "No response"). n=106 (mostly lonely teens). Percentages based on valid responses.

Voices From Teens

> ***I think that every kid knows talking to AI is bad,*** *but the fact that it is so normalized makes it very easy to access, and in a world where it is harder and more unsafe to meet friends, as well as people being more judgmental online, AI is simply a way to release strong feelings.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 16

> ***Technology has impacted me*** *and I mostly get connected to my social media community, people see it as if [I] am not friendly with people because [I] am always online, so it scares [away] physical friendship.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 15

> ***Real-life connection is crucial for teens,*** *especially in an era where digital interactions often dominate.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 18

> ***Sometimes teens resort to being online out of fear of interacting with others*** *and possibly with the ease that pulling out a phone and scrolling gives.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 18

> ***It's hard to make connections with people*** *when you can just be on your phone.*
>
> – Teen, non-binary/non-conforming, age 16

What It Means

When teens turn to AI chatbots or companions, it is often because human connection itself feels like a risk—not simply because no one is around. For a significant share of teens, talking to an AI feels easier and emotionally safer than talking to a real person. This points to something loneliness statistics alone don't fully capture: some teens are not just isolated, they are guarded. Teens who describe in-person connection as emotionally out of reach, not just logistically unavailable, report higher rates of AI chatbot use. For these teens, technology appears to be serving a different role than simple convenience.

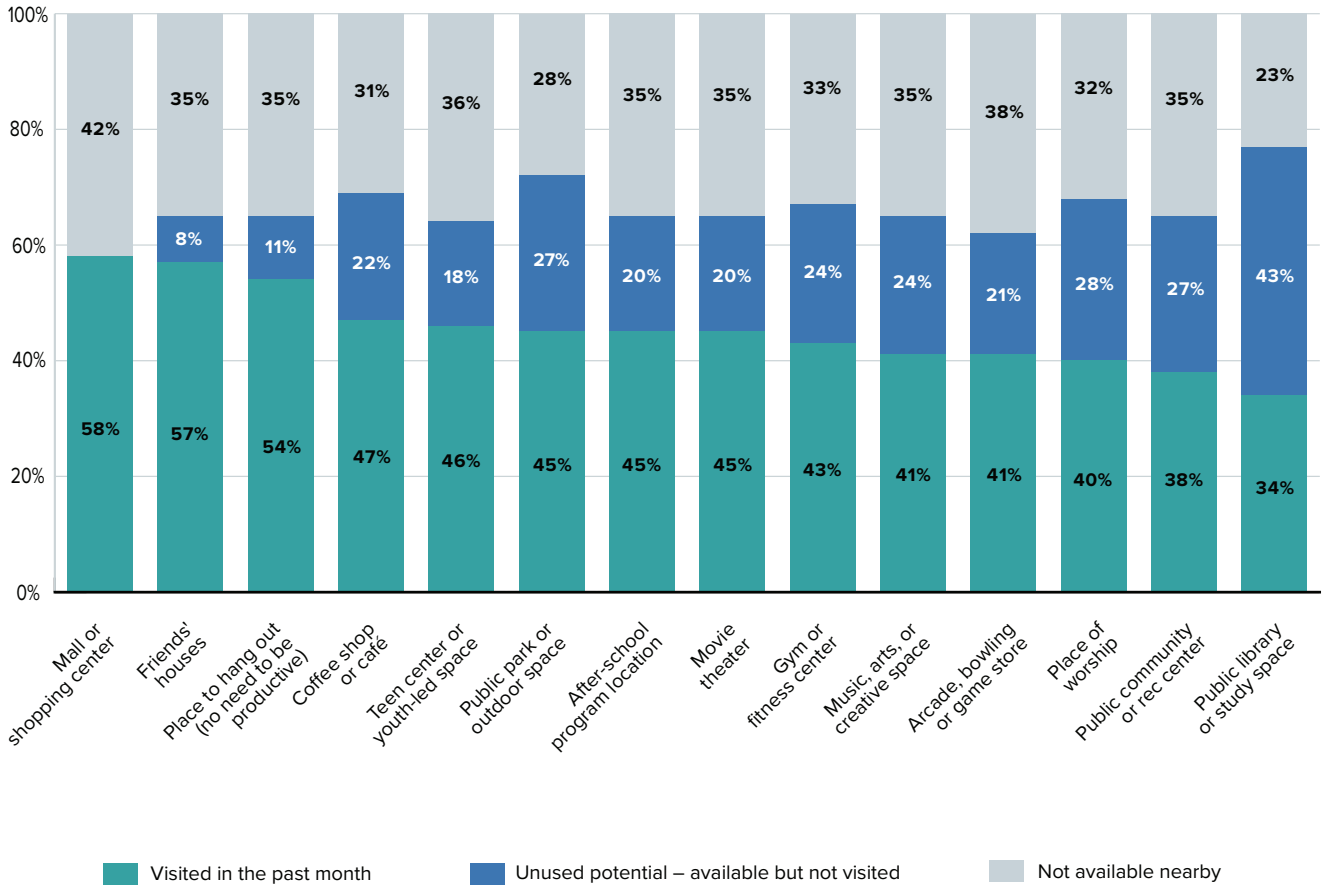
Key Finding 5

When Places Meet Teens' Needs, Teens Engage

What Teens Told Us

- Malls (58%), friends' houses (57%), and unstructured hangout spaces (54%) are the three most-visited place types—each visited by more than half of teens in the past month.
- Public libraries have the highest unused potential of any place type—43% of teens have one available but haven't visited in the past month.
- When asked what makes a place feel like it's for them, teens rank free or low-cost first (59.8%), followed by friends being there (56.1%) and feeling safe (54.7%).
- Nearly half of teens (49.2%) say food is an essential element of a teen-friendly place—a finding echoed consistently in teens' own descriptions of their ideal hangout spot.

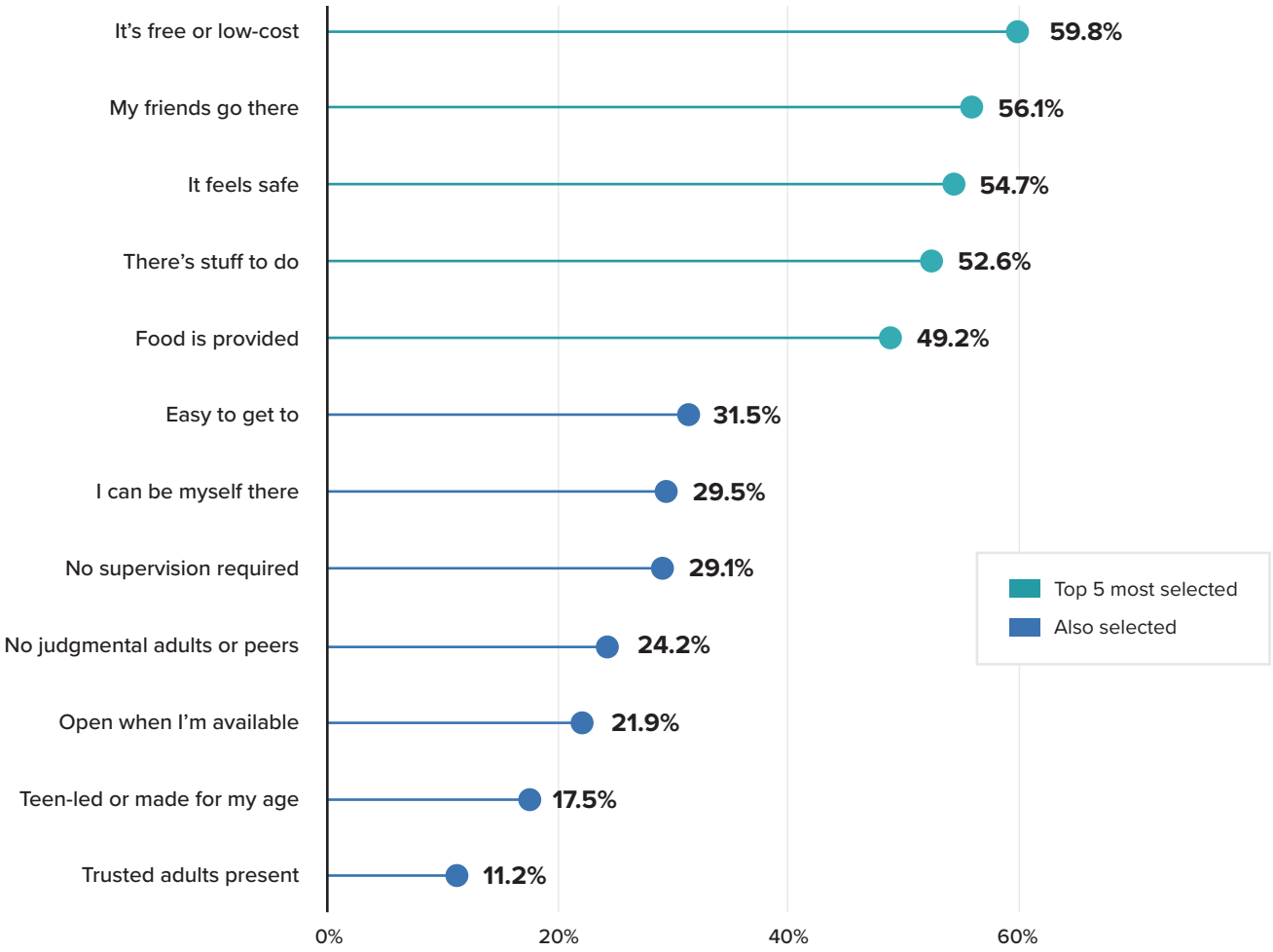
Which places are available near where you live — and which have you spent time at in the past month?



Note: "Not available nearby" includes teens who did not select either "places near me" or "places I've been in the past month" for a given place type (n=776-1,015). Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Which of the following are most important for making a place feel like it is for teens?

% of teens age 13-18 – select up to 5



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100%. n=1,077; excludes 11 blank entries.

Voices From Teens

> ***Teen spaces have a tendency to be unwelcoming*** *when they are too structured and adult-led—it shouldn't feel like summer camp. That's why malls are so appealing!*
>
> – Teen girl, age 18

> ***It would take a lot of work and funding,*** *but I think a designated teen center in every town would really change some core habits or social traits of us teenagers, and it fills a void of social connection that everyone craves but can't really seem to find.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 14

> ***There aren't many safe and fun spots for teens to meet up in my area.*** *Most places close early and are meant for adults, so I don't have many options.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 18

> ***Food is a must because we get hungry all the time after school,*** *and most teens don't eat a lot, so we are very hungry.*
>
> – Teen boy, age 13

> ***It feels like a teen space when adults respect our space*** *and trust us to hang out responsibly. Having fun activities and a relaxed vibe helps too."*
>
> – Teen girl, age 18

> ***[If I could design the ultimate hangout spot, it would have]*** *an area where you can just chill and talk without it being overwhelming.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 16

> ***Some teens feel left out because everything costs money.*** *Free or low cost spaces matter.*
>
> – Teen girl, age 17

What It Means

When third places are free or low-cost, informal, and welcoming, teens report using them. The presence of friends matters nearly as much as cost—a reminder that place and belonging are inseparable. Cost functions as both a practical and a cultural barrier—teens' own words suggest that even when it doesn't prevent teens from socializing, the expectation of spending money can make third places feel less accessible than they are. When cost is a barrier, teens can get the message that public spaces weren't designed for them, while low-cost spaces with food available send the opposite signal.

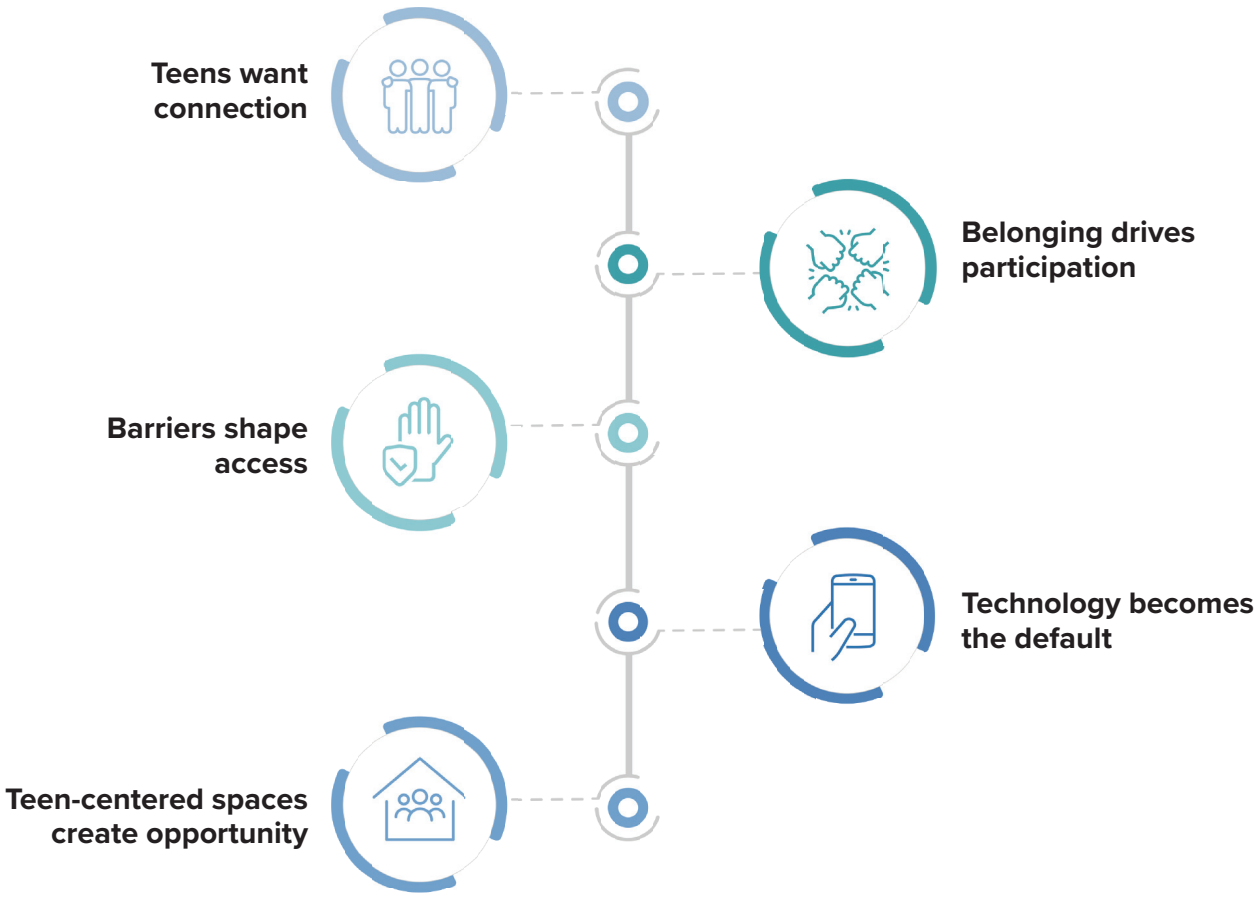
What the Findings Reveal

Teens want real-world connection—and the data show they're hungry for more. When casual, youth-centered spaces exist, teens tell us they use them enthusiastically, often socializing spontaneously. But those opportunities aren't evenly available. Cost, transportation, and places that feel unwelcoming or overly controlled can all limit when and where young people gather, a pattern teens describe as shaping whether they choose in-person connection or default to what's always available online.

Teens and caregivers are often responding rationally to the same constrained environment, but experiencing its tradeoffs differently. Caregivers are managing real concerns about safety and independence. Teens are navigating spaces that may not be designed with them in mind. Both are doing their best within systems that are ripe for reinvention in a digital age.

The question isn't whether teens want connection—they clearly do. The question is whether communities are providing the environments where **connection, safety,** and **independence** can coexist. When those conditions are in place, teens participate. Third places can offer something that devices and screens structurally cannot: genuine autonomy, unmediated social experience, and freedom from algorithmic curation and constant surveillance.

The following recommendations outline how leaders, investors, practitioners, and families can help build those conditions.



Recommendations

FOR POLICYMAKERS AND INVESTORS

- **Invest in social infrastructure as a public health strategy.** With growing concerns about youth mental health and technology, third places are not discretionary amenities—they are a meaningful alternative for teens who might otherwise turn to AI chatbots or experience isolation.
- **Prioritize transportation access and free programming.** Nearly 40% of teens cite transportation as a barrier and cost is the most widely reported constraint. Addressing both would reduce two of the barriers teens most commonly describe.
- **Fund belonging, not just buildings—and require youth co-design.** Teens who report not feeling safe or welcome use AI companions at significantly higher rates than teens whose main barrier is a lack of nearby options. Investment criteria should include standards for inclusive environments and meaningful youth collaboration at every stage—from planning through programming—not as an add-on, but as a condition of funding.

FOR PRACTITIONERS AND YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

- **Create drop-in, unstructured time—and provide food.** Nearly 70% of teens prefer informal hangouts over organized activities, and food consistently ranks among the top elements teens say make a space feel like it's for them. Over-scheduling, requiring registration, or expectations for teens to spend money may inadvertently reduce the connection teens value most.
- **Treat belonging as an operational priority.** Nearly 3 in 10 teens have stopped going somewhere because it didn't feel safe or welcoming. How staff engage and whether social dynamics feel inclusive matters as much as whether the place exists.
- **Build trust with families, not just teens.** More than 1 in 4 teens say a parent or caregiver won't let them go out. Consistent communication, introductory visits, and family engagement strategies can help caregivers feel confident enough to say yes, and keep saying yes.
- **Involve teens in shaping the places they use.** When teens help design programming, set norms, and have a voice in how a space operates, they are more likely to show up and more likely to bring others. Co-design isn't just good practice—it's what makes belonging possible.
- **Recognize AI chatbot use as a signal.** Teens who feel emotionally safer talking to an AI than a person are telling us something. Youth workers are well-positioned to offer the low-stakes, non-judgmental relationships that can help in-person connection feel less risky over time.

FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES

- **Make space for unstructured time with friends.** Casual time at home, outside, or in the community is how most teens prefer to build relationships. Saying yes to hangouts—even last-minute ones—is one of the most straightforward ways caregivers can support their teen's social life.
- **Know that loneliness can be hard to see.** More than half of teens report some loneliness in the past month, and most were still spending time with friends. Asking how teens feel in their social environments, not just whether they're getting out, opens more honest conversations.
- **Approach AI use with curiosity.** Many teens use AI chatbots when they feel emotionally safer or when no one is available. These moments are worth understanding—they can spark conversations about what teens need from the people in their lives.
- **Use your voice in the community.** Families have real influence over local decisions. Showing up to planning meetings, supporting library hours, and advocating for free youth programming helps build the kinds of places teens are asking for.

Methodology

YOUTH SURVEY

The youth survey was designed and analyzed in partnership with Aura, with data collection conducted from September to November 2025. The online survey was administered in English and included responses from 1,125 adolescents ages 13–18 across California. After removing incomplete or invalid responses, the final analytical sample consisted of 1,088 respondents.

Participants were recruited through California Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs (67%) and additional community organizations, schools, and youth networks (33%). An oversample ensured representation from diverse communities and geographic regions across the state.

The survey examined teens' experiences with community connection, third places, loneliness, barriers to in-person interaction, and AI chatbot use for social connection.

Sample demographics:

- **Age:** 13 (19%); 14 (13%); 15 (18%); 16 (22%); 17 (20%); 18 (7%); No response (1%)
- **Gender:** Girl/woman (51%); Boy/man (44%); Non-binary/other identities (4%)
- **Race/Ethnicity:** Hispanic/Latino/a/x (31%); White (22%); Multiracial (17%); Asian/Asian American (12%); Black/African American (12%); American Indian/Alaska Native (2%); Prefer not to say/Other (4%)
- **Location:** Urban (41%); Suburban (33%); Rural (6%); Prefer not to say/other (20%)
- **School type:** Public (76%); Private (9%); Charter (7%); Other (8%)
- **Identity characteristics:** LGBTQIA+ (12%); Bilingual/Multilingual (23%); Immigrant/First Generation (11.7%); Neurodivergent (6%)

YOUTH-ENGAGED RESEARCH DESIGN

Prior to fielding the survey, the research team collaborated with 24 youth advisors, ages 15–25, from 22 ZIP codes across California to co-design the survey instrument. These youth advisors provided feedback on question clarity, relevance, and emerging issues affecting teen life.

Following data collection, the same cohort participated in collaborative sessions to review early findings and help contextualize results, ensuring the analysis reflected teens' lived experiences and perspectives.

CAREGIVER FOCUS GROUPS

In October and November 2025, CPP hosted six virtual focus groups (60 minutes each) engaging 36 caregivers from 20 unique ZIP codes across California, including participants from the Bay Area, Central and South Los Angeles, East Fresno, Orange County, and the Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians in Northern California.

Participants were recruited through community partners including California Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing, Breaking Barriers, and Pause 4 Peace.

Discussions followed a semi-structured facilitation guide exploring parenting across generations, access to third places, barriers to in-person connection, family dynamics, and the role of technology. Data sources included audio recordings, transcripts, moderator notes, and optional post-session surveys.

DATA ANALYSIS NOTES

All survey questions were optional. Percentages for each question are based on teens who answered that question. Responses of 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to answer' are included as valid responses; blank entries are excluded. For the AI chatbot use question, 'Prefer not to answer' responses are excluded from the denominator, as this is a skip-logic question where non-substantive responses do not indicate AI use behavior. For analyses comparing subgroups, only teens who answered all relevant questions are included. Selected differences between subgroups were tested for statistical significance at $p < .05$. The survey and focus groups are part of a broader mixed-methods research initiative examining teens, technology, and third places across California.


California Partners
PROJECT

AURA


BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE


FOSI
Family Online Safety Institute


SOCIAL
MEDIA
LAB
Stanford University

The following is a message from Brandi Neuroth, Library Assistant II at the Downtown Library, to her colleagues across SCPL. With her permission, I am sharing it here as it encapsulates the simultaneous challenges and impacts of frontline library service with eloquence and compassion. - Christopher Platt

A Little Reminder of Why We Do What We Do — Thank You, Downtown

Hello, everyone,

As we all know, working at the downtown library can be particularly challenging, especially on the downstairs front end.

For a long time, our unhoused patrons had the Coral Street Day Shelter as a place to turn for basic necessities, including:

- Restrooms and showers
- Drinking water
- Device-charging stations and electrical outlets
- Mail services for receiving correspondence and managing public benefits
- A daytime welcome space where people could rest and find some relief from life on the streets

The shelter has been closed for several months, and in its absence, it feels as though the downtown library has become the community's new daytime refuge. We do what we can with the limited resources available to us, offering a safe, welcoming place where people can access technology, use the restroom, charge their devices, and experience some measure of comfort and dignity.

But we all know what that looks like on the ground.

Our days can be filled with the challenges of serving a constant influx of people who desperately need a place to go. We encounter patrons struggling with mental health issues, people who haven't had access to showers or clean clothes, individuals who need somewhere safe to sit for a while, and people who may not even have a pair of shoes to wear through our doors. We see people of all ages and circumstances, from young people newly experiencing homelessness to those who have spent decades living on the streets.

The library is traditionally a place of storytimes, technology assistance, books, learning, and community. And it still is. But some days, the reality of what we witness can be overwhelming. We see people at their most vulnerable, and we are often on the front lines of situations that extend far beyond what a library was ever designed to handle.

There are difficult days. There are frustrating days. There are days when the smells, the behaviors, the constant needs, and the emotional weight of it all can feel like too much.

But every once in a while, we get a win. And sometimes, those wins remind us exactly why what we do matters.

As library staff, we notice when our regular unhoused patrons stop coming in. We wonder where they went. Are they in the hospital? Have they been incarcerated? Have they passed away? Sadly, we sometimes see people leave on stretchers, injured and covered in blood, headed to the hospital. And sometimes, we never see them again.

We build relationships with people, often in the smallest ways: a familiar face, a friendly greeting, a conversation, or simply treating someone with kindness when the rest of the world may not. We may never know how much those little moments mean to them.

Today, though, I experienced two moments that reminded me just how powerful this work can be.

The first was a young, unhoused teenager who had been coming into the library over the past few months. He wore the same clothes day after day. The first time we encountered him, he was sleeping on the library steps in the morning, using his skateboard as a pillow.

I made it a point to greet him with a friendly face every day, hoping that eventually I might get a smile out of him.

He had been falling asleep in the library and was at risk of being suspended. I reached out to his caseworker, who was able to help move him more quickly toward housing.

After a while, he stopped coming in.

And I wondered: Where did he go? Was he okay?

When you work downtown, you learn that people can disappear from your daily routine without explanation. Sometimes, you never find out what happened to them.

But today, he came back.

He walked over to the tech desk, where I was working, to tell me that he had finally been housed.

And there it was: the smile I had been hoping to see.

He was happy. He was doing better. He had come into the library that day to get his birth certificate from Wings and perhaps get a library card.

He gave me a fist bump and thanked us for what we do.

Phew.

What a moment.

The second story involved a patron who had been living on the streets for 19 years.

She had been a familiar face at the library, coming in to use the restroom, rest, and find a little relief from life outside. At times, she spent so much time in the restroom that she was at risk of suspension. She frequently fell asleep in the library, and there were occasions when we had to address significant hygiene concerns.

Then, just like the teenager, she disappeared from our daily routine.

For quite some time, we hadn't seen her.

And again, we wondered: Where did she go? Was she in the hospital? Was she hurt? Was she still alive?

No.

She had finally been housed.

After 19 years on the streets, she now had a place of her own. For the first time in a long time, she could use her own bathroom. She could fall asleep in her own home and rest for as long as she needed without worrying about being asked to move along.

Just think about that for a moment.

After nearly two decades without a stable place to call home, she finally had one.

Powerful stuff.

These two stories are reminders that, even when we don't see the results of our efforts, our presence matters. Sometimes, the library is a place where people can find a little stability while they work toward something better. Sometimes, we are the familiar faces who greet them, the people who notice when they are missing, and the staff who continue to treat them with dignity when life has been anything but dignified.

We may not be able to solve homelessness. We cannot provide all the services people need, and we certainly cannot fix every situation that comes through our doors. But we can offer a safe place, a little kindness, a bit of patience, and a sense of belonging. Sometimes, we can help connect someone with the right person or resource at just the right time.

And sometimes, we get to see the outcome.

Sometimes, the person who used to sleep on our steps comes back to tell us they have a home. Sometimes, the woman who spent 19 years on the streets finally has a bathroom of her own.

The library helped hold them up until they were able to begin standing on their own.

So, thank you to all of us.

Thank you for showing up through the good, the bad, the difficult, the heartbreaking, the smelly, and the downright ugly. Thank you for continuing to serve people who are often overlooked, misunderstood, or forgotten. Thank you for your patience, your compassion, your boundaries, your humor, and your resilience.

What we do is not always easy, and it is not always pretty. But it matters.

And today, we got two beautiful reminders of just how much.

Thank you, Downtown.

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARIES
Access • Information • Connection • Inclusion

Library Advisory Commission

Media Packet

(Jul 1st – Sep 30th, 2026)

In the News and Media

Santa Cruz Sentinel

July 9, 2026: Coastlines

■ SANTA CRUZ

LUCHA LIBRO TAKES OVER LIVE OAK LIBRARY ANNEX

It's lucha time! Santa Cruz Public Libraries is thrilled to welcome Lucha Libro to the Community Room of the Live Oak Library Annex, July 18 from 1-2:30 p.m., as part of the 2026 Summer Reading Program celebrations. The Live Oak Library Annex is located at the Simpkins Family Swim Center at 979 17th Ave.

This free event for all ages brings the excitement of a pro-wrestling extravaganza for the first time to Santa Cruz, in the most unexpected venue — the library!

Founded in 2024 by Jerry Rocha and Victor Dwight, Lucha Libro brings theatrical, Mexican-style wrestling performances to public libraries, while engaging attendees and promoting reading. "Libro" is the Spanish word for "book," so in addition to physical performances, wrestlers share reading recommendations with attendees while dressed in colorful masks. After reading, the masked performers act out short, family-friendly wrestling matches complete with acrobatic flips and body slams to thrill the audience.

For more information, visit santacruzpl.libnet.info/event/16280787.

August 26, 2026: We fought over it. Now what will we make of our new library in downtown Santa Cruz?

By Don Lane

If you've been in downtown Santa Cruz lately, you've certainly noticed the ongoing progress in the construction of the new downtown library and affordable housing project. I realize not everyone has been on board with this effort, but it is coming to fruition, and our community will soon have an amazing new, first-class library and 120 new publicly owned, rent-restricted apartments for lower-income households in a great location.

I've been involved in the creation of this project for about 10 years — and I initially got interested because of the opportunity to build community-owned affordable housing. However, I became more and more excited about the new library as I learned more about its possibility as a community hub.

First of all, great libraries bring people together.

Meetings, events, book talks, story time for little ones, student collaborations and more. A strong library serves as a vital resource for those who don't have access to the full range of media and technology that many of us now have in our homes or on our phones. They also provide a place to get research assistance, including historical and genealogical work. And they are – as they have always been – a place to check out books for free.

And, they offer connection.

I recently learned that an important function of our current library – and one that will grow much bigger in our new building – is that it offers a space for the Life Literacies Center. This center, which I first tuned into as part of my work to address the needs of unhoused people in Santa Cruz, works with folks to navigate the challenging path to obtaining rental housing in this housing-stressed community.

It currently operates out of a modest conference room in our current library, and it has grown to encompass other volunteer-based projects assisting people with basic needs, including the following groups and services:

Friends Outside

Homeless Garden Project

County benefits outreach

Encompass Downtown Outreach

Santa Cruz Poetry Project

WINGS (help with acquiring new ID and other vital documents)

Housing Matters

People First shelter programs

English language classes

With the opening of the new library, the Life Literacies Center will expand and have additional facilities and resources, including smaller one-on-one meeting spaces and better technology tools. With this new understanding of the possibilities of the Life Literacies Center, I became a cheerleader for this piece of the library and have helped raise nearly $250,000 to build it out and equip it once the outside structure is complete. You, too, can help put the finishing pieces together in our new library if this sort of work interests you. Perhaps this bringing together is the larger role this new library can play in downtown Santa Cruz.

There has been plenty of disagreement about this project, including the opposition expressed through Measure O. Those disagreements are part of our community's story, and they shouldn't be erased. But as the building takes shape, the question before us is no longer simply whether we agreed with the project. It is what we want this new piece of downtown to become.

I hope the library becomes one of the places that helps us answer that question.

A downtown needs more than buildings, businesses and housing. It needs places where people can come together without having to buy anything. Places where a child can hear a story, a student can find a quiet place to work, a newcomer can learn English, a resident can get help navigating our complicated affordable housing system, a poet can share their work, or someone who is struggling can sit down with another person and figure out what comes next.

That is what libraries do. They create a kind of civic center – not because everyone comes there for the same reason, but because people from very different parts of a community can find a place there.

Santa Cruz is changing, and our downtown is changing with it. The new library won't solve all of the challenges facing downtown, and it shouldn't be expected to. But it can help give the new downtown something it will need: a center of gravity, a place of connection, learning and welcome.

For me, that might ultimately be the most important thing about the building now rising downtown. It isn't simply a new library. It is an opportunity to create a place where Santa Cruz can continue to find itself – and where we can find one another.

Don Lane is an affordable housing advocate, an ice cream lover and the former mayor of Santa Cruz.

Link to story: https://lookout.co/we-fought-over-it-now-what-will-we-make-of-our-new-library-in-downtown-santa-cruz/story

Santa Cruz Sentinel

August 29, 2026: Downtown Santa Cruz - Work continues on library project

By Caroline Hemphill

SANTA CRUZ — The $179 million downtown library and affordable housing development in Santa Cruz is gearing up for its second phase of construction, which has a tentative start date of spring 2027. The entire project should wrap up in summer 2028.

The new library and affordable housing project is being built on a city-owned downtown parking lot bound by Cathcart, Cedar and Lincoln streets. When complete, the project will include 124 units of very low income housing, including studios and one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments. The Santa Cruz Public Libraries' new flagship branch will also be built on the site. The 41,000-plus-square-foot facility will include sustainable design, a rooftop deck and large community room. In addition to housing and the library, the site will have about 240 parking spaces, including 25 Level 2 electric vehicle charging stations, 203 bicycle parking spaces and a childcare facility.

In August 2025, the mixed-use development broke ground. Since then, much of the structural concrete work has been completed. Once that wraps up, framing work for the housing portion of the project can begin. Construction crews are also working on utilities including plumbing and electrical.

All of this work has been part of the first phase of construction, which involves finishing the parking structure, childcare, housing and the shell of the library. This phase has been spearheaded by two developers, Eden Housing and For The Future Housing, who have partnered with the city for the project.

The expected budget for Phase 1 is about $153.9 million. The funding comes from a diverse array of sources, including federal, state and local grants and tax measures. The city plans to release a bid for the second phase of construction, which involves finishing the library's interior, in the coming weeks. That work is expected to start in spring 2027 with a budget of about $25.33 million.

About $20 million for the library project comes from Measure S revenue, a tax measure passed in 2016 to raise money for upgrades at all nine branches of the Santa Cruz Public Library system. Since the measure was passed, all of the branches except the Downtown Santa Cruz Branch have been improved, renovated or rebuilt thanks in part to Measure S funds. According to Sarah Beck, executive director of the Friends of the Santa Cruz Libraries, those branches have seen significant boosts in use and attendance after the renovations.

"They're just thriving, and being loved and appreciated by community members," Beck said. "This last one … is just such a meaningful moment, and exciting to see."

An additional $3 million for Phase 2 will come from a capital campaign run by the Friends of the Santa Cruz Libraries. The campaign began in summer 2024, and has received donations from around 400 individuals and families in addition to several local foundations and businesses. According to Beck, the organization is only about $55,000 away from achieving its $3 million goal. "It's a really broad coalition of support," Beck said. "It's amazing. This is what you hope for."

Phase 1 of construction is scheduled to finish by the end of 2027, and Phase 2 of construction by summer 2028. It's possible that the affordable housing will begin leasing to tenants before the library portion is complete. An interest list, managed by Eden Housing, is already available for the studio-size to three-bedroom units.

There have been some impacts on traffic and parking since construction began, which will likely continue in the coming months. Parking meters on Cathcart, Lincoln and Cedar streets next to the construction sites are unavailable, and Lot 8 at the corner of Lincoln Street and Pearl Alley is closed for staging.

There will continue to be intermittent closures of Lincoln Street between Cedar and Pacific streets. Cedar and Cathcart streets are expected to remain open, though there may be flaggers or traffic control as needed on Cathcart Street. The street will never be fully closed, as emergency vehicles need access, the city noted. Contractors are working to have minimal impacts on downtown traffic.

Link to story: https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2026/08/28/downtown-santa-cruz-library-and-housing-construction-continues/

September 4, 2026: Our Community Reads is Celebrating 10 Years

By Denise Ward

The Friends of the Santa Cruz Public Libraries will soon be celebrating 10 years of a very successful program — Our Community Reads.

Our Community Reads has fulfilled its mission of bringing community members together through an array of events such as films, talks, music, book discussions, art workshops, field trips, author talks and much more. Every year events are designed around various themes from a particular book selected by members of the community. A history of past seasons of Our Community Reads is available at www.friendsofsantacruzlibraries.org/ocr-history/.

Through all the past seasons, participants have given terrific feedback about the events, about the people they've met, and about the particular enjoyment of sharing these experiences. All events take place from late January to early March, and all are free and open to the public.

Be sure to mark your calendars for the Voting Party for the 2027 Season of Our Community Reads! On Oct. 8 Santa Cruz County residents are invited to attend a presentation of this year's contenders to select the book they believe will resonate best with our community.

Presentations will take place simultaneously at three convenient locations in the county. At each location, doors will open at 6 p.m. with presentations beginning at 6:30. The Voting Party allows our guests to make the tough decision of selecting the "best" book for the coming season of Our Community Reads.

Candidates for the 2027 Season of Our Community Reads

The Music of Bees, by Eileen Garvin, is just the book to lift your spirits and let you in on the secrets of bee colonies, and the secrets of being human!

This is a hopeful and touching novel that revolves around three people whose lives intersect quite unexpectedly.

Each protagonist brings particular talents and challenges as they become interdependent while beekeeping on a farm in Oregon.

You'll learn a lot about the value of friendship, collaboration and the miraculous lessons of bees!

Shade: The Promise of a Forgotten Natural Resource by Sam Bloch, an environmental journalist, investigates how shade, once ubiquitous in societies, became a scarcer resource.

Trees were removed for road-widening; air conditioning brought people indoors; investments in planting trees in public spaces dwindled in vulnerable communities.

This book examines shade from many perspectives and sheds light on how shade can greatly improve urban life.

The Tree Collectors: Tales of Arboreal Obsession by Amy Stewart is a must- read book that is a feast for the eyes and for the soul. Traveling the world, Stewart met extraordinary horticulturalists and hobbyists who have collected trees of all types.

In fifty vignettes, her book describes each collection, and the significance each one holds in the lives of their collectors.

The author has illustrated the entire book with her own hand-drawn watercolors of the people and their trees. Positively beautiful and engaging!

California Against the Sea: Visions for Our Vanishing Coastline by Rosanna Xia is a fascinating investigation of the impacts of engineered landscapes, the market pressures of development, and the ecological activism along California's 1,200 miles of coastline told through visits through many communities affected by changing conditions.

Mark Your Calendars!

We hope you will join us for the Voting Party on October 8 at one of the following locations:

Aptos Library 7695 Soquel Dr, Aptos

Scotts Valley Library 251 Kings Village Rd, Scotts Valley

Live Oak Library Annex 979 17th Ave, Santa Cruz

Looking forward to seeing you join us!

Link to story: https://tpgonlinedaily.com/our-community-reads-is-celebrating-10-years/

Lookout SANTA CRUZ

September 8, 2026: Heat advisory in Santa Cruz County: Temperatures to reach 90s through Thursday

By Hillary Ojeda

Santa Cruz County is under a heat advisory through Thursday as warmer-than-normal conditions are expected throughout California.

The Santa Cruz and Watsonville areas are forecast to see highs in the lower 90s, while the areas around Ben Lomond and Boulder Creek will see peak temperatures in the mid-to-upper 90s.

"This is definitely going to be an impactful heat event for a lot of people," National Weather Service Meteorologist Dial Hoang told Lookout.

He added that low temperatures won't provide much relief overnight, as most of the county will be in the upper 60s and the mountain areas will be in the 70s. To stay safe during the heat, Santa Cruz County officials encourage people to limit arduous activity during the hottest part of the day, taking rests in the shade or air conditioning and staying hydrated. They also advise that people check on community members, children and animals that are vulnerable to heat.

For relief from the heat, officials also encourage people to visit the Santa Cruz Public Libraries.

The region will also be under a coastal flood advisory from 8 p.m. Tuesday through around 1 a.m. Thursday. The National Weather Service forecasts up to 1.2 feet of inundation above ground level in low-lying areas near shorelines and tidal waterways.

The NWS advises that people don't drive around barricades or through water of unknown depths and to take necessary precautions to protect property that could be at risk of flood damages.

Link to story: https://lookout.co/heat-advisory-in-santa-cruz-county-temperatures-to-reach-90s-through-thursday/story

PRESS BANNER

September 10, 2026: Felton, Santa Cruz meetings planned on invasive shothole borer

By Staff Report

The County of Santa Cruz and UC Cooperative Extension will host two community meetings this month to provide information about monitoring and mitigating the invasive shothole borer and protecting trees throughout Santa Cruz County.

Residents may attend either meeting: Felton — 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesday, Sept. 15, Felton Branch Library, Community Room, 6121 Gushee St.; or Santa Cruz — 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 18, London Nelson Community Center, Room 4, 301 Center St.

The invasive shothole borer was first detected along Zayante Creek near Felton in 2024 and was later identified as Euwallacea interjectus, a species native to Southeast Asia that had not previously been documented along the West Coast.

The beetle can cause tree dieback in urban, wildland and agricultural areas. Locally, it has primarily affected box elders, though California sycamore, coast live oak, willow and black cottonwood trees also have been attacked.

Signs of infestation may include small, round entry holes, wet staining, gumming, boring dust or sugary buildup on trees. Suspected damage can be reported to the Santa Cruz County Department of Agriculture at 831-763-8080.

Additional information is available at ISHB.org.

Link to story: https://pressbanner.com/felton-santa-cruz-meetings-planned-on-invasive-shothole-borer/

Santa Cruz Sentinel

September 14, 2026: Santa Cruz County - Tree-killing beetles prompt meetings

By Caroline Hemphill

FELTON — As an invasive tree-killing beetle species appears to be spreading in Santa Cruz County, county officials and the UC Cooperative Extension will be holding two community meetings next week to explain mitigation strategies to protect native trees.

Invasive shothole borer beetles burrow into trees, leaving tiny, perfectly round holes — hence, the name. The beetles don't attack trees directly, but they have a symbiotic relationship with a fungus on their bodies. When a beetle drills into a new tree, it introduces the fungus to the tree tissue, causing upper branches to die off. Over time, the fungus can prevent the tree from transporting nutrients and water, resulting in the death of the entire plant.

There are a few species of invasive shothole borers in California. Before 2024, the polyphagous shothole borer and Kuroshio shothole borer had been spotted in Southern California and in San Jose. Then, in October 2024, the greater shothole borer, commonly seen in the Deep South, was found along Zayante Creek in Felton. It was the first time the species, which is larger than its cousins in other parts of the state, was seen

in western North America, according to Brian Woodward, regional forest advisor for the Santa Cruz Mountains with the UC Cooperative Extension.

Since the beetle was found in Felton, the Santa Cruz County Department of Agriculture and the UC Cooperative Extension have been monitoring its spread. About six months ago, Woodward said, the state provided resources to expand the program. Now, the agriculture department has a full-time seasonal staff member working solely on monitoring and outreach.

Data collection is ongoing. So far, observations indicate that the beetle has spread up and down the San Lorenzo watershed, toward Highlands County Park in the Ben Lomond area and near the Tannery Arts Center in Santa Cruz, Woodward said.

So far, box elder trees seem to be the primary host for greater shothole borers. But other trees, both native and nonnative, are susceptible, including California sycamores, coast live oaks and willows. Much of the beetle infestation and resulting fungal infection of trees is occurring in wildland areas, especially near rivers. Large-scale tree mortality in these areas could cause a number of issues, affecting water quality and wildlife habitat.

But, Woodward noted, there is also a fairly quick rate of spread heading toward more urban areas such as the city of Santa Cruz. That could lead to the beetles infesting legacy trees on streets or in parks.

The county has set up meetings for next week to explain the invasive shothole borer's biology, signs of infestation in trees and ways to mitigate the spread. In Santa Cruz County, the invasive shothole borer is now considered established. Fully eradicating the beetle is unlikely. Now, the focus is on stopping the beetle from spreading further.

The primary way of mitigating the spread is to stop infested wood from traveling too far. Woodward said that anybody handling wood should inspect it carefully for signs of infestation. Those signs include characteristic round holes, which are about 3.78 millimeters across, sugary or gummy material on the tree's bark and staining on the wood. Infested wood shouldn't be put in general green waste bins, or turned into firewood that may move across Santa Cruz County or into other parts of the state. Instead, infested wood can be chipped into very small pieces, left on site and then burned or composted.

The UC Agriculture and Natural Resources has means for diagnosis and management of invasive shothole borer infestations and fungal disease on its website. While beetle infestation can be deadly for many trees, there are options to treat the fungal disease, especially for trees that are particularly valuable or sentimental, Woodward said. Those options range from pruning infested branches to chemical treatments.

At this time, general advice is to selectively treat what are known as amplified trees. Because greater shothole borers don't fly well or move quickly, they tend to build up high populations in individual trees. Removing trees with large infestations can help reduce local numbers of the pests.

Community meetings will be held Sept. 15 at 10 a.m. in the Community Room at the Felton Branch Library, and Sept. 18 at 9:30 a.m. in the London Nelson Community Center in Santa Cruz. A 45-minute presentation will be followed by a Q&A session.

Suspected contamination of the invasive species may be reported to the Santa Cruz County Department of Agriculture at 831-763-8080.

Link to story: https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2026/09/13/santa-cruz-county-tree-killing-invasive-beetles-prompt-community-meetings/'

Santa Cruz Sentinel

September 23, 2026: Santa Cruz County - 'Everything is as goes': clerk eases voter distrust

By Gabrielle Gillette

SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz County voters can expect "business as usual," for the upcoming Nov. 3 general election, as Santa Cruz County Clerk Tricia Webber works to combat misinformation and distrust in the voting system.

This year's election cycle has seen a slew of election-related noise from the federal government, Webber said, prompting concerns about ballot security from voters across the country, including in Santa Cruz County. In March, President Donald Trump signed an executive order, which was rejected by the Supreme Court Sept. 14, attempting to restrict mail-in ballots for the upcoming midterm election.

Though the Supreme Court voted to allow states to continue sending out mail-in ballots under the same processes they have used for years, Webber said she began receiving calls from Santa Cruz County voters concerned that they would not receive their ballots in the mail or that they would not be able to send their mail-in ballots without a postage stamp. All of these concerns, Webber said, have been debunked.

"There's such distrust based off everything that has trickled down over the past several months with vote-by-mail, that we're not sure that voters are hearing us as well as they have in the past," Webber said. "Everything is as goes."

The 19-inch vote-by-mail ballot will look exactly the same and be delivered in the exact same manner that they have been in the past, Webber said. No postage is required, she added.

A Santa Cruz County voter information guide will be mailed to county registered voters Sept. 25 and the county will begin mailing out 172,000 ballots Oct. 2. Voters should wait one week before requesting a replacement ballot to give adequate time for their ballots to arrive, as mailing transit times can vary, Webber said. In-person voting will open at three locations Oct. 5, with more voting centers opening throughout the month until Election Day.

To help combat election distrust and anxieties, the Santa Cruz County Elections Department is also hosting community outreach voting events during the election season. The department is teaming up with Santa Cruz Public Libraries for its "Ballots and Books" initiative, a family-friendly event for voters to register to vote, drop off their ballots, request a replacement ballot, vote on an accessible ballot and participate in kids activities. Ballots and Books will be happening at Aptos, Boulder Creek, Branciforte, Capitola, Freedom, Live Oak, Downtown Santa Cruz and Watsonville libraries for three weeks leading up to the election.

Santa Cruz County Family Democracy Day will be held Oct. 17 at the Watsonville Public Library, Simpkins Swim Center and a library in San Lorenzo Valley to be determined. There, kids and parents can experience the process of how and what it means to vote at the family-friendly voting education event, said Christopher Platt, Santa Cruz Public Libraries director.

Voters can also drop off their ballots at drop boxes at the Aptos, Capitola and Downtown Santa Cruz library branches, as well as polling locations at the Scotts Valley, Live Oak Library Annex at Simpkins Swim Center and Felton libraries, Platt said.

"Libraries want to support people voting and their ability to vote and that's why we're here and that's why we do what we do," Platt said.

Webber also encouraged people to "vote naked." Clothing is not optional when naked voting, however, as the term instead refers to voters returning their ballots they received at home to an in-person voting location outside of the envelope — also known as a "naked ballot."

Naked ballots help speed up voting tabulation, Webber said, as all ballots that are outside an envelope are guaranteed to be included in initial election night results. Ballots returned inside an envelope take about 48 hours to process, as election workers go through the signature verification process, extract the ballot, flatten them out and get them ready for tabulation.

"If you want your voice heard at 8:01 p.m., or sometime up to midnight on election night, a naked ballot is the best way to go, because those are guaranteed to be in the count by the end of election night," Webber said.

Mail-in ballots must be postmarked on or before Nov. 3 — Election Day — and received by Nov. 10 to be counted.

The last day to register to vote to receive a ballot and voter guide in the mail is Oct. 19. However, just because people receive a mail-in ballot does not mean they have to vote by mail, Webber added. People can register to vote and turn in ballots at an in-person voting location until election night.

Accessibility measures can also be accessed at in-person voting locations, Webber said, including ballot marking devices, physical and audio ballots in English, Spanish, Japanese or Thai, and large-print voter guides. The county also provides voter assistance services for those who cannot access a voting location, including pre-arranged rides to a voting center.

The county's ballot-mobile will also be rolling through neighborhoods throughout Santa Cruz County, where people can access the same services provided at an in-person voting location.

Santa Cruz County also received $196,000 in state funding to prioritize the speed of vote-counting, with 75% of the money to be used for equipment, staffing, technology or space, and 25% for outreach. There was not much guidance for specific uses of the money, Webber said, and as Santa Cruz County does not need things like a new space or vote-by-mail sorter, much of the money will be put toward heightened staffing.

In the 28 days post-election, the county's election department will audit every piece of the puzzle, Webber said, trying to ease any post-election distrust. Election workers continue working through mail-in ballots, conduct manual tallies, write-in tallies, check for precinct correct precinct totals and more, making sure they can account for every single thing.

"There is nothing we do that is secret, everything we do is out there for all of us to watch and observe," Webber said. "We just want to make sure that the election is run transparently, accurately and safely, and that everybody who chooses to participate will have their voice heard."

Link to story: https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2026/09/22/everything-is-as-goes-santa-cruz-county-clerk-eases-voter-misinformation-distrust-ahead-of-nov-3-election/

Santa Cruz Sentinel

September 30, 2026: Banned Books Week - Teens organize benefit screening - 'The Librarians' will be screened at the Colligan Theater Oct. 6

By Nick Sestanovich

SANTA CRUZ — From literary classics like "The Grapes of Wrath" and "The Great Gatsby" to children's staples like "James and the Giant Peach" and "Bridge to Terabithia," many of the favorite books of bibliophiles and casual readers alike have one thing in common: at one point in time, somebody somewhere did not want others to read them.

Various books have been challenged at different times for different reasons — ranging from inappropriate content to depictions of supernatural elements to discussions of topics considered taboo — leading to books being removed from school libraries and even librarians being threatened. These efforts resulted in the American Library Association establishing its first Banned Books Week in 1982.

Held every fall, Banned Books Week is an effort to raise awareness of books that have been challenged or banned and celebrate free and open access to information. These issues are still prevalent in 2026, with the American Library Association citing the top reasons for books being removed from school libraries as "false claims of illegal obscenity for minors; inclusion of LGBTQIA+ characters or themes; and covering topics of race, racism, equity, and social justice."

Locally, three Santa Cruz High School seniors are recognizing Banned Books Week with a screening of "The Librarians," a documentary chronicling the issues librarians face in a climate where organizations seek to restrict access to books based on content, at the Colligan Theater Oct. 6. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion with local librarians and youth advocates, and proceeds will go toward purchasing banned and challenged books for libraries at Santa Cruz City Schools campuses.

Laird Bowser, Devin Protti and Alec Thomsen are all passionate about books. They are employees at Bookshop Santa Cruz, which Protti's mother Casey Coonerty Protti owns.

"Being exposed to books my entire life, hearing about how books are being banned across the country, made me want to show this community — which doesn't experience that — what is happening," Protti said.

Thomsen said books being banned is not as frequent in California, but "The Librarians" provides a window to what other parts of the country have experienced.

"We just wanted to spread awareness of book bans and make sure we don't take it for granted in a place like Santa Cruz," he said.

"The Librarians," directed by Kim A. Snyder, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2025 and debuted on the PBS independent film series "Independent Lens" a year later. The film chronicles librarians in states like Florida, Louisiana and Texas who unexpectedly found themselves on the front lines of the culture wars, going from tense board meetings to receiving threats, harassment and laws attempting to criminalize their work.

Barbara Lawrence, a 17-year librarian at Gault Elementary School who will be part of the post-screening panel, said the documentary dives into librarians who are thrust into a debate they have nothing to do with.

"They're trying to get beautiful books out to their students — diverse books, books that reflect their students — and they're just being persecuted by the powers that be, an organized group of people," she said. "It's ruining their lives. They're dedicated, average, everyday school librarians, and their lives are being turned upside down because of people who have an agenda." Lawrence said school libraries are places where students can find topics on any issue they are interested in as well as what she referred to as "windows and mirrors" for readers

"You get to look in at other people, and then you get to see books about yourself," she said. Lawrence said school libraries are major promoters of choice. "School librarians support parent choice about what books their own children read, but one parent should not determine what is available to everyone else's children," she said. "Librarians and libraries support the right for our students to read, question and think for themselves."

Bowser said "The Librarians," and the stories of those being threatened for doing their jobs, made him think about his own school librarian. "I use her as a resource a lot," he said. "I go to her probably once a week at lunch, and the thought of her losing her job just to fight to help keep banned books on the shelves made me want to raise awareness even more." Thomsen said his mother is an elementary school teacher who buys books for her classroom, and he wanted to highlight how vital books are. "The librarians are trying to address complex issues like racism and things in these books that people need to learn about but are being stopped by bans," he said.

In recognition of Banned Books Week, which is Oct. 4 to 10 this year, Bookshop Santa Cruz has a display of books that have been challenged over the years, including books on the American Library Association's list of the 11 most challenged books in 2025. Topping the list is "Sold," Patricia McCormick's 2006 young adult novel about a Nepalese girl who is sold into human trafficking, which has been challenged for its graphic depictions of sexual assault but defended for educating young adult readers on the matter. Other books on display include Stephen Chbosky's "The Perks of Being a Wallflower," Juno Dawson's "This Book is Gay," George Orwell's "1984," Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale," Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" and J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

Bowser, Protti and Thomsen said several of the books on display were formative for them growing up, including Suzanne Collins' "The Hunger Games," Douglas Adams' "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" and Angie Thomas' "The Hate U Give," the story of a Black teen who speaks out after a white police officer shoots and kills her childhood friend. "It's just a very complex topic for someone to come across, but it's best conveyed in a book," said Thomsen. "It's an issue that people need to learn about, and I think it's important that people read that book. I think that book is very popular and it needs to stay on shelves for the issues that it has in it."At a time when reading levels are in decline, Protti said books are vital for the amount of information they have in them. "They can teach you how to do things, they can teach you about things in the past, they can give you ideas of how to live your life," he said. "Reading a wide variety of books, especially in the historical sense, can open up your eyes to what's happening around the world."

The screening will be introduced by Faris Sabbah, Santa Cruz County superintendent of schools, and will be followed by a panel featuring Lawrence; Sarah Harbison, collections manager for Santa Cruz Public Libraries; and local youth advocates organized by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. The panelists will discuss topics ranging from freedom of choice to having representation in books. In addition to the proceeds from ticket sales, attendees of the event have the opportunity to donate between $5 and $500 to support the purchase of books for local schools. As of Monday, Coonerty Protti said more than $3,500 had been raised. Bowser hopes the film is a reminder of the importance of librarians and having access to a variety of books. "The more books you're able to read, the more educated a person you'll be able to become," he said.

The event is 7-9 p.m. Oct. 6 at the Colligan Theater in the Tannery Arts Center, 1010 River St., Santa Cruz. Tickets range from $5 to $500 for different tiers of book purchases and can be bought at TicketTailor.com. Sponsors include The Humanities Institute at UC Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz Public Libraries and the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. Go to BookshopSantaCruz.com for information.

Link to story: https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2026/09/29/teens-organize-benefit-screening-in-recognition-of-banned-books-week/