TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL
FROM: CITY MANAGER
DEPARTMENT: LIBRARY
DATE: MARCH 17, 2008
SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE LINK+
RESOURCE SHARING LIBRARY CONSORTIUM AND
AUTHORIZATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A TWENTY-FOUR MONTH
PILOT PROJECT IN A TOTAL AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED $220,000,
WITH THE FRIENDS OF THE PALO ALTO LIBRARY
CONTRIBUTING UP TO $110,000

RECOMMENDATIONS
Staff recommends that Council authorize the City Manager or his designee to apply for
membership in the LINK+ resource sharing library consortium and participate in a twenty-four
month pilot project totaling up to $220,000 that will allow customers of the Palo Alto City
Library (Library) to borrow books from other member libraries.

BACKGROUND
LINK+ is a consortium of academic and public libraries in California and Nevada that maintains
a unified catalog of the holdings of the member libraries for the purpose of facilitating borrowing
across the system. In contrast to traditional interlibrary loan service, library users who have
access to LINK+ initiate their own requests through the online catalog, and the books are
delivered via a contracted courier to the customers’ local libraries within a few days. There is no
charge to an individual to request or borrow a book through the LINK+ system. Currently, there
are 50 member libraries – 12 public and 38 academic. Local public libraries that participate in
LINK+ include San Francisco, Berkeley, San Jose, Mountain View, and Sunnyvale. Bay Area
LINK+ academic libraries include San Jose State, San Francisco State, and Santa Clara
University.

LINK+ is a service frequently requested by Palo Alto residents who have used it at other
libraries. In recognition of this, the Library Advisory Commission (LAC) recommended in the
Library Services Model Analysis and Recommendations (LSMAR) report that Palo Alto join
LINK+ or a similar resource sharing system to provide access to a wider range of books.
Additionally, the Friends of the Palo Alto Library (Friends) have strongly supported the
Library’s participation in LINK+.
Staff completed a LINK+ feasibility study (Attachment A) and presented it to the LAC in June 2007. Based on the cost for Palo Alto to offer LINK+ service, the unknown impact on library staff workload, and the City’s budget challenges, staff recommended entering into a two-year pilot project. A two-year pilot project will enable staff to assess the benefits and costs of the service without committing the City’s General Fund to an ongoing service. It will also allow staff to better gauge the impacts on other services now provided or recommended in the LSMAR report. The Board of the Friends of the Palo Alto Library has agreed to commit up to $110,000 to partner with the City in funding the cost of a pilot project (Attachment B).

**DISCUSSION**

Joining the LINK+ system will provide four major benefits to the City’s library customers:

- Access to millions of books not owned in the Palo Alto City Library
- No charge to the person who borrows an item
- Direct and quick delivery between member libraries
- Ability for customers to place their own requests through a web catalog

The LINK+ resource sharing system uses the INN-Reach product of Innovative Interfaces, Inc. (Innovative), a company headquartered in Emeryville, California that provides technology products and services to libraries. There are other library consortia around the county that use the INN-Reach product to facilitate resource sharing among their members. The INN-Reach software provides the capability to build a single database from the records of many libraries and allows patrons to easily request items not available in their libraries using an online catalog. The LINK+ system is managed by staff at Innovative at the direction and with the financial contributions of its members.

Non-member institutions may apply for membership in LINK+ at any time by submitting a letter of intent, signed by the City Manager or designee, to join the consortium. Applications are reviewed and voted on by the Executive Committee of LINK+ and if approved, taken to the membership for the final approval. Staff has obtained a price quote from Innovative to join LINK+ (Attachment C). Innovative has estimated that the earliest date for the start of the implementation for Palo Alto is fall 2008, with service available to the public beginning in January 2009. Following a minimum participation period of twelve months, members may withdraw from LINK+ at any time upon written notification.

Currently, all the libraries participating in LINK+ are using the same Innovative software to operate their local catalogs and manage their bibliographic and patron databases. This enables a seamless interface with the INN-Reach resource sharing software, streamlining use of LINK+ for the library customers. However, Palo Alto uses software from SirsiDynix to manage its library systems. As a non-Innovative library, Palo Alto would incur additional expense for the direct consortial borrowing (DCB) software and server needed to manage the transactions between the INN-Reach system and the SirsiDynix system. While the server would be hosted and managed at Innovative’s offices, this requirement adds $30,000 annually to the cost of providing LINK+ service to Palo Alto customers. This is not a cost that can be recovered by charging for use of the service since the LINK+ consortium does not permit this practice.
As a non-Innovative library, Palo Alto’s experience with LINK+ would be different from that of other libraries in the consortium. Library customers searching for books not available in Palo Alto will need to rekey their searches in the LINK+ catalog. The borrowing records for LINK+ items cannot be combined into customers’ records on Palo Alto’s SirsiDynix system, requiring library users to keep track of two separate accounts. Because the INN-Reach software cannot be fully integrated with the SirsiDynix system, Palo Alto staff will need to process loans to other libraries on both systems. This means that each LINK+ transaction will require more staff time in Palo Alto than at other LINK+ libraries.

The Library currently offers traditional interlibrary loan service (ILL) at a charge of $7.50 per item. Staff conducts the search for a library owning the requested item, places the request, and handles the receipt and return of the item. In the LINK+ system, the customer conducts the search against the joint holdings of the member libraries and submits the loan request through the online catalog. Staff has estimated that about one third of the items borrowed through interlibrary loan would be available through LINK+, thereby reducing the staff workload now spend on the current ILL service. However, since the LINK+ service is limited to the loan of books and some governmental documents, it would be necessary to continue ILL service to obtain the other types of materials now requested, such as microfilm and periodical articles.

A significant portion of the cost of LINK+ service is associated with the loan of books to other libraries in the consortium. Many LINK+ public libraries have loaned as many or more books from their collections as their customers have requested from other libraries. A commitment of member libraries is to provide adequate staffing to meet the system’s goal of a 24-hour turnaround to fill loans. The Library will also be responsible for contracted courier service charges to deliver books to other member libraries. This cost, estimated at approximately $16,000 for a year, is based on the weight and number of items shipped. Loans made through the LINK+ system qualify for the State Library’s Transaction Based Reimbursement Program that authorizes the payment of $5.29 per eligible transaction to the lending library. However, the total appropriation for this program has been cut and, in the last several years, the funding has not been sufficient to reimburse all participants at the approved rate. While the City will not receive full reimbursement for loaning library materials to other libraries through the LINK+ system, many libraries report that this reimbursement covers the majority of the LINK+ delivery charges. This is one of the many items that will be evaluated during the two-year pilot program.

**RESOURCE IMPACT**

Staff has estimated the total cost for a 24-month pilot project will be in the range of $200,000 - $220,000. The Friends has agreed to fund up to $110,000 of this total. Depending on the number of books loaned to other libraries and the State Library’s funding formula for its transaction based reimbursement program, potential revenue over the length of the pilot is estimated to range from $20,000 to $45,000.

Since the proposed pilot will be conducted from January 2009 through December 2010, the City’s share of the cost of the two-year pilot will be spread over three fiscal years beginning with FY 2008-09. An additional appropriation of approximately $30,000 will be requested with the Library’s proposed 2008-09 operating budget. This will cover the cost of system training, the
first year’s membership in Link+, anticipated delivery charges, and hourly staff (.32 FTE) to support the workload to provide the service. The Friends will pay Innovative directly for the additional charges for the first twelve months of service. In FY 2009-10, the City funding required is estimated at $60,000, including a minimum of .64 FTE of hourly staff. The Friends will contribute the remaining charges from Innovative Interfaces. An additional appropriation of approximately $17,000 will be required for the Library’s 2010-11 operating budget to complete the last six months of the pilot program.

Before the end of the two-year pilot project, staff will evaluate the cost of providing this service relative to its benefit and use to determine if ongoing funding of the service is recommended.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**
This recommendation is consistent with Council’s approval on December 11, 2006 of the highest level of recommendations in the LAC’s *LSMAR* report, including the recommendation to use technology to “join the LINK+ or similar resource sharing system to provide access to a wide range of books.”

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**
This is not a project requiring environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

**ATTACHMENTS**
Attachment A: LINK+ Feasibility Study for the Palo Alto City Library
Attachment B: Letter from the Friends of the Palo Alto Library, dated October 1, 2007, committing funds for a two-year pilot project to provide Link+ service
Attachment C: Innovative Interfaces, Inc. price quotations for LINK+ membership dues and management fees; INN-Reach License; and Hosted DCB License

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