

The Oakland Public Library states on its website that it emphasizes its dedication to accessibility, yet challenges can begin even before a visitor steps foot inside the building. Navigating to the wheelchair entrance can be cumbersome due to limited parking options, particularly in acquiring the single assessable spot on the street. This spot necessitates a backtrack and a slightly challenging 180-degree turn to reach the lengthy low slope ramp. Additionally, the absence of attached or underground parking forces patrons to rely solely on paid street parking, further exacerbating accessibility options. Once parked, additional challenges arise with a steady stream of shattered car windows littering the ground like freshly fallen hail while bystanders obstruct clear passages to the entrance of the library. An alternative entrance for patrons is accessible from Oak Street through the children's room located in the basement. While this entrance lacks a ramp or incline, patrons will have to navigate a longer route due to the absence of nearby assessable parking on that side of the building. Once inside, the path leads through the long hall to the elevator, where curious young minds may pose unfiltered questions to passersby.

At the main entrance on 14th Street, there are two adjacent doors, a single automatic door in front of the assesible ramp and an automatic double door by the stairs. When the double doors are opened outward, they partially block the pathway to the ramp, restricting wider access through the ramp, possibly a design flaw or to intentionally to deter shopping carts from entering the facility. In an ideal scenario with an abundance of funds, I would propose switching the doors, putting the double doors

at the assessable side to facilitate easier access. After entering the library, patrons may encounter further challenges if they need to use the elevator and it is out of service. In 2022, the elevator experienced a prolonged three-month period of malfunction, during which it broke down repeatedly, with a total of 10 previous malfunctions leading up to this incident. As a result, during these down times staff members were burdened with the task of using the stairs to carrying heavy items, patrons with limited mobility were required to navigate outside and around the corner to Oak Street's restroom in the basement, and on several occasions, the fire department had to be summoned to rescue individuals who were trapped inside the malfunctioning elevator.¹ On days when the elevator is operational, patrons may encounter another challenge upon reaching the second floor: accessing the restroom requires grappling with an exceedingly heavy manual wooden door. This cumbersome barrier poses a significant obstacle, particularly for those with limited strength or mobility and even those with fully functioning mobility attempting to enter the restroom.

Despite the bustling atmosphere, inside the library exudes a surprisingly calm ambiance, fostering an environment ideal for concentration and study. The windows are open to allow the flow of clean air while externally a consistent red and blue ambient melody slowly becomes white noise. Amidst the quiet hum of activity, there is the occasional snore from a patron needing a safe break and a visitor quietly paces up and down the same four rows of books without pausing to inspect any spines for over 20 minutes. A security guard patrols the premises, maintaining order and ensuring the

¹ Feroso, J. (2022, February 11). *Broken elevator at Oakland Main Library probably won't be fixed until summer*. The Oaklandside. <https://oaklandside.org/2022/02/10/broken-elevator-oakland-main-library/>

comfort and safety of patrons while kindly asking one patron to not sit in the middle of the aisle's floor. A woman passes by, softly announcing "free food" to specific tables, prompting more than half of the occupants to swiftly head outside and return a few minutes later with sandwiches. The library serves as a sanctuary for many, providing a safe and welcoming space for all members of the community while over one's shoulder big brother is still watching with the presence of a high-end and quite expensive Avigilon Video Surveillance System in every room.

Navigating through the library to find an ideal location to sit down can be difficult to some patrons with disabilities. Display cases are protruding at odd angles and self-checkout kiosks in the middle of hallways can be hard for persons with mobility or visual impairment to navigate around the narrow hallways. Slim aisles further restrict movement, posing obstacles for those using wheelchairs or walking aids. After finding your ideal spot, moving the stiff time-worn wooden thrones of discomfort will make a loud scraping noise along the floor as they're pulled back. These creaky relics of yesteryear potentially discourage patrons from getting comfortable and spending extended periods in the library.

The library offers a plethora of amenities tailored to meet the needs of its community. These include multiple port charging outlets equipped with Android cords and excessively secured by zip ties, water stations available at two heights, large font signage primarily in English, one large font keyboard, and the option to extend material borrowing periods to six weeks, rather than the standard three. Specifically tailored

services for individuals with disabilities also include extended material renewals, doubled holds capacity, and the convenience of having "ready reference" answers delivered to their homes via mail or fax.

The library boasts an extensive collection of resources in-house, ranging from traditional formats like audio books and CDs to large print books and e-books sections, ensuring accessibility to individuals with varying preferences and abilities. The computer lab, a bustling hub of activity, features multiple workstations with low dividers, providing privacy while still allowing surveillance cameras to monitor all movements. Adjacent to these workstations, a dedicated job application section offers resources and guidance for those seeking employment opportunities, thereby contributing to community support initiatives. However, certain benefits of the library may pose challenges for patrons with disabilities or mobility issues. For instance, catalog access is limited to standing-only stations, potentially excluding individuals who require seating or have difficulty standing for extended periods. High shelves with books and drawers present obstacles for wheelchair users or individuals of varying heights, as reaching materials on the top may prove challenging. Even individuals of taller height, such as myself at 5'8", may find accessing items on the highest levels requires additional assistance, especially in instances where no stool is readily available.

While efforts have been made to accommodate some patrons with disabilities at the Oakland Public Library, certain aspects of the facility still present obstacles. It makes one ask if the library genuinely striving to create these amenities in good faith, or are

they merely implementing the bare minimum to meet requirements while intentionally making the environment uncomfortable enough to deter certain usage?