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BUREAU OF AUDIT

June 30, 2025

By Electronic Mail

Dennis M. Walcott
President & CEO
Queens Borough Public Library
89-11 Merrick Boulevard
Queens, NY 11432

Re: Audit of the Queens Borough Public Library's Emergency Preparedness, SR24-081A

Dear Mr. Walcott:

This Final Audit Letter Report concerns the New York City Comptroller's audit of the Queens Borough Public Library's Emergency Preparedness.

Background

The Queens Public Library (QPL) is an independent, non-profit organization which consists of 66 locations including its Central Library, branch libraries, adult learning centers, teen centers, a technology center, and a community learning center. QPL's mission is to "[transform] lives by cultivating personal and intellectual growth and by building strong communities," and its core values include providing "free information, programs, and services that are open to all." According to its website, the QPL served over 5.6 million visitors in Fiscal Year 2023.

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (the Stafford Act) is a federal law that allows libraries to receive disaster assistance if they provide critical services in the event of a major disaster. Both the Stafford Act and the American Library Association recognize the important role that libraries play in responding to disasters—in particular in providing information to the public.

Given its established role in the community and borough-wide locations, QPL is positioned to provide the public with information and to serve as an access point for services during emergencies. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, QPL expanded its digital materials collection, offered virtual programming, hosted an in-person education program, and provided to-go services. Some QPL branches also served as vaccination and testing sites and distributed free at-home test kits and masks.

The objective of this audit was to determine whether QPL is adequately prepared to plan for and

respond to emergencies, to ensure continuity of its operations, and to serve the public during major disasters and other events.

Findings

The audit found that QPL served the public in numerous ways during emergencies but needs to improve certain aspects of its emergency preparedness to ensure the continuity of operations.

Serving the Public

During the audit period, QPL assisted during extreme heat and cold weather events. When the National Weather Service issues a heat advisory with a forecasted heat index of 95 degrees or higher for two or more days, or 100 degrees for any period, New York City opens cooling centers located in air-conditioned facilities that are free and open to the public, such as libraries. From June through August 2024, heat emergencies were declared on 14 days. QPL branches that were open for business served as cooling centers on those days.

QPL branches also served as a warm place for people to go on extremely cold days. The audit team visited seven branches on days when the outside temperature was below freezing and tested the inside temperature at various locations within each branch. Each of the branches provided adequate heat with temperatures ranging from 68.9 to 79.8 degrees.

In addition, QPL branch sites have free Wi-Fi at all locations. QPL uses mesh Wi-Fi at all of its branches which supports communications in hard-to-reach areas and can be used in emergency response communications. For the seven above-mentioned branches, the audit team tested Wi-Fi connectivity and found it to be working.

QPL officials stated that QPL provided programming and resources to support asylum seekers and refugees on its own and in partnership with City agencies and private entities. This included expanding English for Speakers of Other Languages classes and Spanish, French, and Arabic collections, distributing library kits, and offering special programs for asylum seeker children. In addition, QPL provided programs for asylum seekers regarding their rights, immigration and legal resources, and IDNYC assistance. QPL also partnered with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to provide consultations and information sessions on employment authorization and offered job training programs.

Resiliency and Flood Protection and Mitigation Measures

QPL implemented flood protection and mitigation measures at two of the three branches located in the 100- and 500-year floodplains. As part of the current expansion of Arverne, QPL is incorporating resiliency measures to enhance protection against future storms and flooding. The annex will be elevated and contain flood vents.¹ In addition, the sidewalk around the library will

¹ Flood vents are permanent openings built into walls that allow water to pass into or out of a building's exterior foundation walls, which equalizes the water pressure inside and outside the walls during a flood event.

be regraded and new pavers will be installed.

Regarding Hunters Point, which was constructed after Hurricane Sandy, QPL reported that the elevation grade was increased to protect from flooding.

QPL did not provide information or documentation indicating it implemented any flood protection and mitigation measures for Seaside. QPL officials stated that QPL installed pumps at branches with a history of flooding and that they consider addressing flooding issues when designing new library spaces. Given Seaside's location within the floodplain, QPL should implement flood protections.

With regard to power resilience, QPL officials reported that QPL has backup generators at three locations—the Queens Central Library, Flushing, and Hunters Point. In addition, QPL officials stated that all locations are equipped with uninterruptable power supply (UPS) battery backup for their IT servers to protect them from power outages.

Emergency Preparedness

QPL has policies and procedures for both the Central Office and branch locations that address a range of emergency situations, including fire safety and evacuation plans, dealing with bomb threats or suspicious packages, and guidelines for dealing with patron-related emergencies such as sickness, injury, or disruptive behavior. The Crisis Emergency Management Plan applies to branch libraries and other QPL locations.

In addition, QPL officials stated that panic buttons are installed at branches and provided documentation to show that they were tested during Calendar Years 2023 and 2024 and repaired, as necessary.

QPL also participates in the NYPD Shield program, which keeps private sector partners informed of situations in the City and receives borough-specific alerts from New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM). QPL officials stated that alerts are then relayed to branches as needed. According to its Disaster Recovery Plan, in an emergency, QPL sends information and instructions to staff via email, phone, and "internal employee staff site when functional."

However, the audit revealed the following weaknesses regarding emergency preparedness detailed below.

Disaster Recovery Plan

QPL has a Disaster Recovery Plan which includes the roles and responsibilities of various teams, communication protocols, and recovery facilities, among other things. QPL officials provided documentation to show that the Plan was tested and updated in Calendar Years 2024 and 2025. Each of the three Disaster Recovery Test Reports validated that certain core restoration processes were successful but noted areas for improvement including documenting step-by-step recovery procedures.

The QPL Disaster Recovery Plan can be enhanced by formally requiring the Plan to be tested,

reviewed, and updated at least annually, and addressing areas for improvement. Without a specified requirement for testing, there is potential for the Plan to go untested even if there are changes to the QPL's procedures or communication structure.

Lack of Fire Drill Documentation for Calendar Year 2024

The QPL Emergency Evacuation Plan states that fire and evacuation drills must be conducted at least twice a year. QPL officials stated that the central Fire Safety Manager prepares a report each time a branch completes a fire drill. For 15 sampled branches, the audit team requested reports for drills conducted during Calendar Year 2024. QPL officials stated that they did not have any reports for drills conducted during Calendar Year 2024 but provided records to show that one drill was conducted for each sampled branch between April and June 2025. Without ensuring branches conduct fire drills at least twice a year, QPL runs the risk that some branches may be unprepared if there is an emergency event that would require an evacuation of the branch.

Potential Communication and Training Issues

The audit team surveyed QPL branch locations to determine whether the Central Office communicated existing policies and procedures to Branch Managers, provided training to staff, and ensured that key policies were implemented at the branch level. Of the 61 branches that are currently open, the vast majority—52 (85.2%)—did not respond to the survey.

Of the nine branches that did respond to the survey, one branch reported that they did not receive active shooter training, and four branches reported that they did not receive any other safety or emergency preparedness training.

In addition, three of the nine branches that responded to the survey stated that the Central Office did not inform them of emergency alerts in their area. During the discussion of findings meeting, QPL officials stated that branches are notified only of emergencies in their area that are expected to have a direct impact on their operations. If an emergency occurs in the general vicinity of a branch but is not anticipated to affect branch services or safety, an alert will not be sent.

Recommendations

To address the findings, the auditors recommend that QPL should:

1. Consider installing flood protection and mitigation measures at Seaside due to its floodplain location.

QPL's Response: QPL agreed with this recommendation.

2. Consider installing generators or other backup power systems in additional QPL branches to ensure continuity of operations and enable libraries to serve the public during emergencies.

QPL's Response: QPL agreed with this recommendation.

3. Request that the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) conduct an

Infrastructure Survey Tool assessment to identify and document QPL's overall security and resilience. The Infrastructure Survey Tool (IST) is an optional, web-based tool designed to assess and record a facility's overall security and resilience.

QPL's Response: QPL did not address this recommendation instead indicating that the Library already conducts its own independent cybersecurity assessment on a periodic basis using vendors certified in cybersecurity protocols. QPL also indicated it would welcome OTI's participation in additional cybersecurity testing.

Auditors' Comment: IST assessments are conducted by CISA (a component of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security) at no cost to identify and document the overall security and resilience of a facility. The IST assessment aligns with the 2013 National Infrastructure Protection Plan. QPL should consider requesting an IST assessment.

4. Ensure the Disaster Recovery Plan includes a requirement to test, review, and update the Plan at least annually.

QPL's Response: QPL agreed with this recommendation.

5. Address areas of improvement noted in Disaster Recovery Test Reports.

QPL's Response: QPL partially agreed with this recommendation, stating that it will address areas for improvement detected in a Disaster Recovery Test, but did not commit to addressing all identified issues. QPL indicated it was not feasible to make improvements in all instances.

Auditors' Comment: Some areas of improvement noted in the Disaster Recovery Test Reports have been left unaddressed over successive rounds of testing. We encourage the QPL to address all areas of improvement noted in the reports.

6. Ensure that biannual drills are conducted for all QPL branches and implement a centralized process for maintaining documentation for each completed drill.

QPL's Response: QPL agreed with this recommendation, but reiterated that the conduct of drills in FY2024 could be confirmed verbally. They also agreed to improve record keeping practices in future.

Auditors' Comment: We reiterate the recommendation that as part of its efforts to improve processes generally, QPL should implement a centralized process for maintaining documentation for each completed drill.

7. Implement a centralized notification system or platform to quickly relay information to all branch managers and staff, including local emergency updates and QPL instructions related to public health, weather conditions, or security situations.

QPL's Response: QPL agreed with this recommendation.

Recommendations Follow-up

Follow-up will be conducted periodically to determine the implementation status of each recommendation contained in this report. Agency reported status updates are included in the Audit Recommendations Tracker available here:

<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/services/for-the-public/audit/audit-recommendations-tracker/>

Scope and Methodology

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). GAGAS requires that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions within the context of our audit objectives. This audit was conducted in accordance with the audit responsibilities of the City Comptroller as set forth in Chapter 5, §93, of the New York City Charter.

As required under New York State law, the Comptroller sits on the QPL's Board of Trustees through a representative and is one of the Board's five ex-officio members. In conjunction with the appointed trustees, these ex-officio members comprise the Board of the QPL. Neither the Comptroller nor his representative on the Board were involved in the audit process.

The scope period of this audit was Calendar Year 2023 until June 4, 2025. The methodology for this audit consisted of the following steps; specifically, the auditors:

- Conducted an interview with QPL's Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and General Counsel to gain an understanding of how QPL prepares for emergencies at the branch and centralized level, how QPL develops emergency plans, and how information is shared with the branches, as well as how QPL assists the City in wider-scale emergency situations.
- Obtained QPL policies and procedures related to emergency preparedness, with regards to planning for and responding to emergencies, ensuring the continuity of operations, and serving the public during major disasters and other events.
- Developed a checklist of potential emergencies QPL may need to plan for at both the central library and branch locations. In addition, auditors reviewed existing QPL policies and procedures to assess whether they adequately address the identified areas of concern.
- Documented QPL branch sites that were used as cooling centers during heat emergencies, and checked against the QPL website to ensure locations that were closed according to the website were not included on the listing of cooling centers.
- Reviewed the CY 2025 fire drill documentation for a random sample of 15 QPL branch sites to determine whether the branches conducted fire drills as required.
- Visited sampled QPL branch sites during cold weather to determine whether the sites had adequate heat. Auditors also tested the Wi-Fi connections at these sampled sites.
- Developed and sent a survey to QPL branches to solicit feedback concerning policies at

the branch.

- Summarized results of the branch survey and shared with QPL Central.

The results of the above tests provide a reasonable basis for the audit team to determine whether QPL is adequately prepared to plan for and respond to emergencies, to ensure continuity of its operations, and to serve the public during major disasters and other events.

Preliminary results of this audit were discussed with QPL officials on June 4, 2025. On June 17, 2025, a Draft Audit Letter Report was submitted to QPL with a request for written comments. Our office received a written response from QPL dated June 25, 2025. In its response, QPL agreed with five of the audit's seven recommendations, partially agreed with one recommendation, and did not address one recommendation. The full response is attached to this report as an addendum.

Sincerely,



Maura Hayes-Chaffe

c: Sung Mo Kim, Esq., Chief Operating Officer, Senior Vice President
Vinel Liriano, Vice President of Finance
Justin Deabler, Esq., General Counsel, Senior Vice President
Jean-Claude Lebec, Director, Mayor's Office of Risk Management and Compliance
Douglas Giuliano, Deputy Director, Audit Management, Mayor's Office of Risk Management and Compliance



QUEENS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mr. Christopher Venute
Audit Supervisor
Office of the New York City Comptroller,
Bureau of Audit
1 Centre Street, Room 1100
New York, NY 10007

Re: Response to the Comptroller's Draft Audit Letter Report regarding Queens Public Library Emergency Preparedness, SR24-081A

Dear Mr. Venute:

This letter is being sent on behalf of the Queens Borough Public Library ("QPL" or "Library") in response to the Draft Audit Letter Report concerning the New York City Comptroller's audit of Queens Borough Public Library's Emergency Preparedness, dated June 17, 2025 (the "Draft Audit Letter").

The Draft Audit Letter addresses the Comptroller's audit findings and lists seven recommendations for the Library to address these findings ("Recommendations"). Below is the list of Recommendations, followed by the Library's responses to these Recommendations.

1. Consider installing flood protection and mitigation measures at Seaside due to its floodplain location.
2. Consider installing generators or other backup power systems in additional QPL branches to ensure continuity of operations and enable libraries to serve the public during emergencies.
3. Request that the Cybersecurity and infrastructure Security Agency conduct an infrastructure Survey Tool assessment to identify and document NYPL's [*sic*] overall security and resilience. The Infrastructure Survey Tool is an optional, web-based tool designed to assess and record a facility's overall security and resilience.
4. Ensure the Disaster Recovery Plan includes a requirement to test, review, and update the plan at least annually.
5. Address areas of improvement noted in Disaster Recovery Test Reports.



QUEENS PUBLIC LIBRARY

6. Ensure that biannual drills are conducted for all QPL branches and implement a centralized process for maintaining documentation for each completed drill.
7. Implement a centralized notification system or platform to quickly relay information to all branch managers and staff, including local emergency updates and QPL instructions related to public health, weather conditions, or security situations.

In response to Recommendation 1, the Library agrees that flood protection and mitigation measures are a priority for the Seaside Community Library due its floodplain location. The Library has previously sought and will continue to seek resiliency funding for Seaside in its New Needs requests to the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget ("OMB"), but to date the requests for said funding have not been approved by OMB.

In response to Recommendation 2, generator readiness (i.e. manual transfer switch and circuitry) is already included in the design of all substantial Library capital projects as a "cost neutral" feature.

In response to Recommendation 3, the Library conducts its own independent cybersecurity assessment on a periodic basis using vendors certified in cybersecurity protocols. The Library is currently working with the NYC Office of Technology and Innovation ("OTI") and their Cyber Command team to fortify the Library's email systems. Based on the Comptroller's recommendation, the Library would also welcome OTI's participation in additional cybersecurity testing. The next cybersecurity testing is currently scheduled for July 2025.

In response to Recommendation 4, the Library will update its Disaster Recovery Plan to include a requirement to test, review, and update the plan at least annually.

In response to Recommendation 5, the Library agrees to address areas for improvement detected in a Disaster Recovery Test in the related Disaster Recovery Test Report, noting which areas of improvement will be addressed in future tests, if feasible, and otherwise note why such improvements are not feasible.

In response to Recommendation 6, the Library has instituted a practice of biannual drills for all QPL branches. While it can be verbally confirmed that biannual drills were conducted in FY 2024, unfortunately the record keeping for them was compromised. Moving forward, the Library will improve its record keeping practices for these biannual drills.



QUEENS PUBLIC LIBRARY

In response to Recommendation 7, in addition to all-user email distribution lists, which the Library uses in the event of local emergency updates and QPL instructions related to public health, weather conditions, or security situations, the Library uses an application (Sendnow), which has the capability to send text messages, phone calls (both to office numbers and cell phones) to communicate information to the Library's leadership team and other key individuals in the event of an emergency.

If you have any questions about this response, please contact the Library's General Counsel, Justin Deabler, at justin.deabler@queenslibrary.org, or myself at sungmo.kim@queenslibrary.org

Sincerely,

Sung Mo Kim
Chief Operating Officer
Queens Borough Public Library