

Kaitlin M. Burke submitted the following public comment on August 31 at 8:02 am:

Dear Mr Jones,

As a military family, veteran, community member, and parent whose community supported the Flour Bluff ISD bond earlier this year, I am writing to express deep concern regarding the decision to restrict public access to the Janet F. Harte Public Library during school hours. This action undermines the purpose of a public library, creates inequities, and raises legal and policy questions about fair access to publicly funded resources.

Texas Local Government Code Chapter 441 establishes municipal libraries for the general public's benefit. Limiting access during primary daytime hours conflicts with the intent of public library statutes and the City's obligation to provide equitable services. The American Library Association Bill of Rights and Texas Library Association guidelines emphasize that public libraries must remain free and accessible, serving all community members, regardless of schooling choice (homeschool, charter, or public), income, or age. Limiting daytime access may also present civil rights or ADA concerns if it disproportionately impacts residents with disabilities, low-income patrons, or those unable to access evening hours.

Public Libraries matter for a variety of reasons and is well supported by the literature which is demonstrated by a few examples below:

- A Pew Research Center study found that 91% of Americans have used a library, with 61% valuing quiet spaces for study and 42% relying on library technology for employment support.¹
- Libraries offer essential early literacy, ESL, GED, and citizenship programs and are demonstrated to increase community educational attainment.²
- Nearly 77 million Americans use libraries annually for job-seeking and employment-related activities.³
- According to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), public libraries provide crucial access to the Internet for job applications, resume building, and online training.⁴
- Library engagement helps reduce isolation, provides socialization opportunities, and promotes healthy aging.⁵
- Older adults benefit from technology classes, health workshops, and social programming that are often held during the day.

There has been and will continue to be an impact to local community members due to the limited hours, which has changed not only the time frame of library availability but also the total number of hours community members have access to these needed resources. Homeschoolers and Island Charter School students rely on this library during school hours for research, learning, and programs not otherwise accessible. Job seekers, veterans, and working adults lose critical access to technology and employment resources. Seniors and retirees are excluded from daytime activities that support health and social engagement. Please remember these are the community members who pay taxes that go toward these resources, voted for the school bond which should be used to provide these needs for FBISD, and voted for our elected officials to look out for our community's best interest.

The stated reason for restricting access, campus safety, is not supported by the facility's layout. The Janet F. Harte Library is a standalone building with no direct interior access to the high school, and a separate, access-controlled student entrance already exists. Please see attached aerial view of the library and school. Additionally, other campus-adjacent libraries in Corpus Christi, such as the Garcia Library, maintain full public hours without compromising safety.

This issue is of such importance to me, my family, and many in our community that council members' willingness to engage in finding a fair, transparent solution will directly influence our future voting decisions. This is a direct reflection of how vital equitable public access is to the health of our community.

We require your support in attaining a solution that will work for ALL community members, not just FBISD. Some potential solutions may be:

- Split-Hour Scheduling: Designate public and school access windows so both have access during the day or split time by days during the week.
- Operational Realignment: Transfer full public services to a new location within the district while retaining school services onsite.
- Maintain Existing Security Measures: Continue controlled student access while allowing public entry.
- Pilot Reopening Program: Collect usage and safety data to assess the true impact.

The Janet F. Harte Library is more than a building, it is a hub for education, digital access, workforce development, and social wellbeing. The school's desire to use the library space for study halls, guidance counseling, and other non-library functions should not supersede the community's access to the vital resource. The FBISD bond to update and improve facilities is how the school's space and facility issues should be addressed. I urge the City to engage directly with the community to restore fair, legal, and inclusive access to this vital resource that will directly impact our district's wellbeing.

Thank you for your service and attention to this matter. I look forward to seeing the ways in which you support our community!

Sincerely,

Kaitlin M. Burke

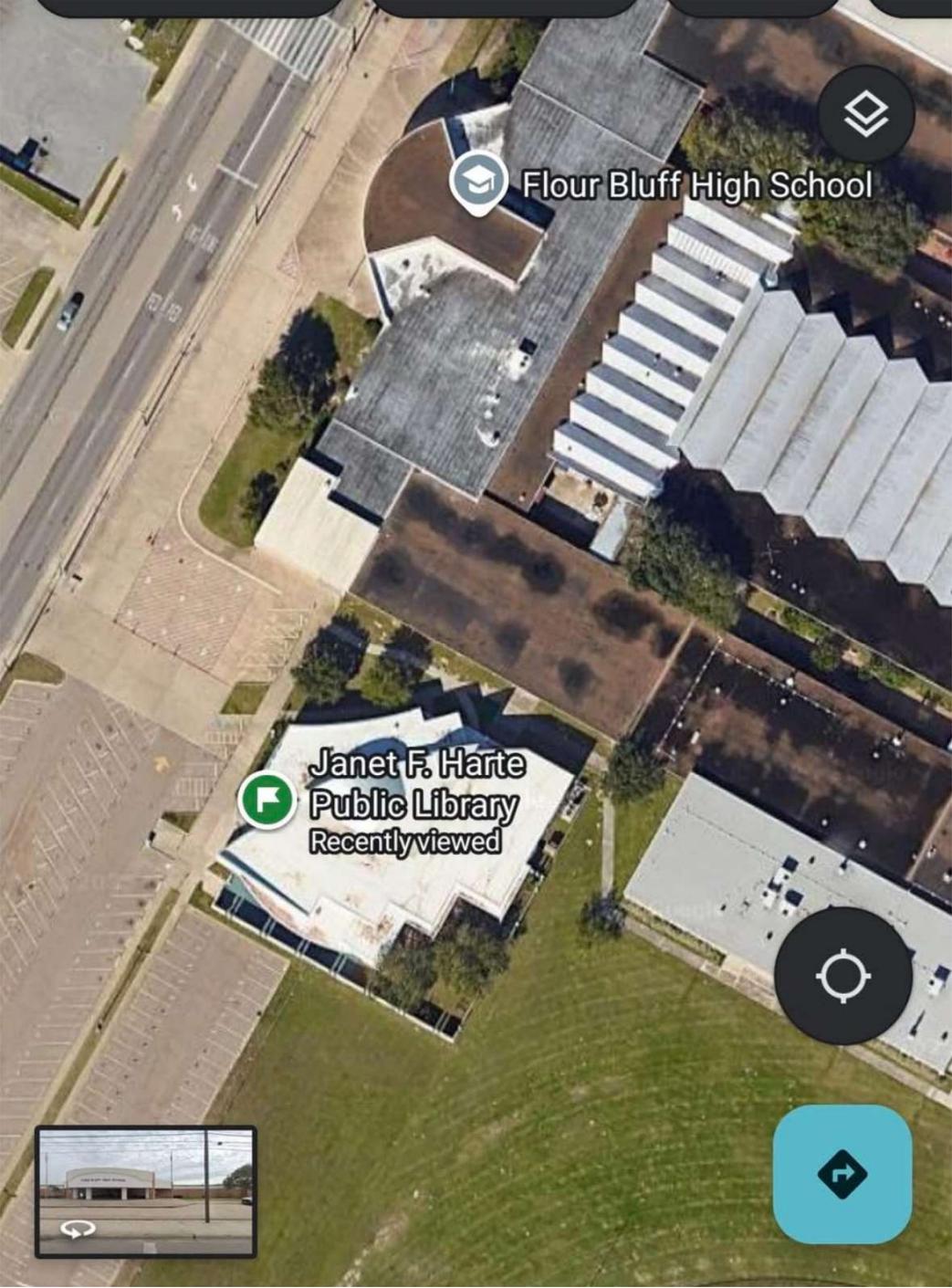
References

¹ Pew Research Center: Libraries in Communities.

² Public Libraries' Role in Community Education (PMC6329675).

³ Gates Foundation: Millions of People Rely on Library Computers for Employment, Health, and Education. ⁴ IMLS: Opportunity for All - How Americans Benefit from Internet Access in U.S. Libraries.

⁵ BMC Public Health: The role of public libraries in community well-being (2024).



Flour Bluff High School

Janet F. Harte
Public Library
Recently viewed