

## Library system seeks town, village backing

Written by Mark Jaeger

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### Officials have mixed reaction to call for supporting resolution

As representatives of the Eastern Shores Library System made pitches for support last week, they received different reactions from officials from the town and village of Fredonia.

Eastern Shore Library System Director David Weinhold appeared before the Town Board on Wednesday and the Village Board Thursday, asking that both bodies endorse resolutions supporting the five-year plan prepared by the Joint County Library Planning Committee.

The plan details how library services should be funded in the non-librariated communities of Ozaukee and Sheboygan counties. The village and town are among the seven communities in Ozaukee County that do not provide their own library services.

It is only the taxpayers in those seven communities that pay the county's library tax.

According to the most recent statistics, village residents borrowed 23,777 items from the system in 2008 and town residents borrowed 27,825 items.

The system report shows that in 2008, county residents without local libraries were responsible for 30% of the circulation of Saukville's Oscar Grady Library, 26% of the Cedar Grove circulation and 21% of the circulation of the Niederkorn Library in Port Washington.

Overall, borrowing in non-librariated communities in Ozaukee County rose by 26% from 2003 to 2008, to 138,884 items.

The five-year plan calls for the reimbursement to local libraries that provide services to residents from non-librariated be gradually increased, eventually covering 100% of costs.

The reimbursement level is currently at 90%, and the plan asks that reimbursement be increased by an additional 1% each year from 2013 through 2015.

Weinhold said even at the increased reimbursement level, the tax impact would be minimal. Based on an average home valued at \$237,000, the county library tax

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would rise from \$61 to \$66 if the reimbursement level was 100%.

Another section of the joint plan details the need to create a reserve fund for the eventual replacement of the bookmobile, which makes scheduled stops in most of the non-librariated communities of the two counties. Every other week, three stops are made in the village, and two in the township.

Weinhold said the current bookmobile is 19 years old and in good condition, but repairs will eventually be needed. He said a new vehicle of comparable size would cost about \$200,000.

“If the vehicle breaks down, and that is not something we believe is going to happen, the counties will have to decide if they want to replace it. That is why we believe creating a reserve fund would be prudent,” Weinhold said.

“Having to replace the bookmobile would elevate the library tax significantly.”

Don Dohrwardt, a village trustee and a County Board supervisor who serves on the Joint Planning Committee, spoke in favor of setting money aside for replacement of the bookmobile.

“The bookmobile is very well-maintained. It is not like new, but in very good shape. It is not likely to break down in the next five year,” Dohrwardt said.

However, he said it is less clear how that reserve fund should be handled. The options being considered are to have each county set aside money, or have the system create its own fund.

“We on the County Board have convinced the representatives from the librariated communities to leave the bookmobile alone, because they don’t pay for it,” Dohrwardt said.

“There is no effort to get rid of the bookmobile, at least for a while.”

A county referendum held in 2008 showed equal support for the bookmobile, with 62% of voters in non-librariated areas saying the service should continue. Dohrwardt said he is not convinced increasing the reimbursement level will benefit the library system.

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To test that theory, he said the county is doing an analysis which should be completed before the village and town take votes on the proposed funding resolution.

As the Town Board discussed the issue, Town Chairman Richard Mueller said more library costs should be covered by users.

“I see no reason why the library shouldn’t start charging for its services. Government everywhere is charging more for everything,” Mueller said.

Weinhold said the concern is that charging for services would limit availability to those who most need it.

“Libraries are built on the premise that free services should be provided to all. It is the philosophy of public good,” he said.

The Town Board tabled action on the requested resolution until next month, while the Village Board referred the matter to its Finance Committee.

A county public meeting on the five-year library plan will be held at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 3, in the Ozaukee County Board Room, Room A-204, at the County Administration Center in Port Washington.