

Questions and Answers
Southeast Steuben County Library changes effective 3.01.14

Question: Why is the library making these cuts?

Answer: Due to the failed funding referendum last December, the Southeast Steuben County Library has amended its 2014 budget to absorb \$100,000 in necessary spending cuts. These cuts are only a “stop gap” measure and are not a solution to the long term funding needs of the library. We must still secure stable funding for the future.

Question: Why can't the library continue to use the existing funding model?

Answer: Currently, the library has contracts with six of the municipalities in our designated service area. We are now in the fourth year of those contracts. Understanding that the municipalities were impacted by the recession, the library offered to take a 10% cut in 2011 in order to sustain some level of municipal support. Reserve funds have been used to make up the resulting shortfall each year – and the library has now used up all but \$100,000 of its reserve funds in an effort to continue to provide the same level of service. Municipal funding is used for employee/benefit costs. It does not cover operational expenses.

Grants and fundraising enhance programming and facilities and help us to add books, movies, music and magazines and other materials to the library's collection. It is unrealistic to cover deficits in operational expenses with these types of revenue. As we have in the past, we will continue to actively continue to apply for grants and raise funds.

Question: Are you going to ask for community support again in the future?

Answer: We are in the process of analyzing future budget projections as well as possible New York State library funding models. A formal announcement will be made when the board has made a determination about the approach it believes will best meet the library's long term funding needs.

We believe strongly that an adequately funded library is essential to the future of the communities we serve. For example, today all job applications are on-line and work environments are technology-based. Workers must be life-long learners~ and libraries enable life-long learning. If we did not have libraries with adequate services individuals would be left to try and acquire these resources on their own, which would prove to be a significant disadvantage to many.

Additionally, many area residents borrow books, movies and music CDs from the library . Not everyone wants to purchase these items because they appreciate being able to have a constant stream of new titles to choose from. During the last year, more than 80,516 items were borrowed through our children's department alone.

Question: What types of programs and services will be impacted by these cuts?

Answer:The library board and staff are dedicated to delivering quality customer service and supporting lifelong learning. Unfortunately, our current financial situation has made it necessary to make the following changes:

- **As of March 2, the library will no longer be open on Sundays.**
Sunday closure impacts more than 63 programs and events, organized by the library or civic and cultural groups, that would have been held at the library in 2014.
- **25% reduction in library programming.**
Programs for children, teens and adults, including digital literacy programming for job-seekers and others will be markedly reduced.
- **One-on-one training sessions will be limited.**
Individualized training for those learning to use tablets, smartphones, e-Readers and other devices will be limited by reduced staff availability.
- **New books and other material acquisitions cut by 11%.**
The Southern Tier Library System's shared collection of downloadable e-books, audio books and other digital materials will continue to grow, but our library's acquisitions of books, DVDs, music CDs and other physical materials will be curtailed. Patrons will have to wait longer for newer titles and releases.
- **Technology upgrades slashed.**
A 14% reduction in technology spending will have a magnified impact on planned upgrades to public access computers. Aging library computers are adequate to run on outdated Windows XP, or Windows 7. Plans to upgrade all of our computers to Windows 8 compatible hard drives will be scaled back by half.
- **Staffing changes.**
Two positions have been eliminated. This leaves the library with 9 Full Time, 7 Part Time, and 1 - 2 student pages to staff the library, develop and deliver programming, and do all of the other "behind the scenes" work necessary for the library to serve the public.

Question: Why did you decide to close on Sundays?

Answer: Under its New York State Charter, the Southeast Steuben County Library is mandated to be open 55 hours each week. Consequently, staff reductions, coupled with minimum departmental coverage requirements, were the determining factors in the decision to reallocate Sunday hours to weekday mornings. The library will open one hour earlier (at 9 AM) Mondays through Fridays.

This was a difficult decision. Many families use Sunday as their day to visit the library together. Other patrons stop by after church to pick up books and movies. Many students and student groups use the library to do research using resources that school libraries may not have. And, a wide variety of community organizations use our meeting rooms on Sundays. We have already cancelled 27 programs scheduled to use the library from March to June. We are sorry for this loss of service.

Question: If you are going to be out of reserve funds by the end of this year, what other actions is the library planning to take now to save money?

Answer: In the short term, the focus continues to be to look for ways to save money without lowering the level of service to the public. These actions alone will not put the library on solid financial footing. Long term, the library must have a different funding model in order to operate at the level of service the community expects and deserves.

Question: Why can't you just charge those who use the library a fee, instead of trying to gain support through a tax or some other method?

Answer: The library is mandated under its charter to abide by New York State Education laws. Those laws do not allow libraries to charge a fee for core library services.

Question: Why did you not make these cuts sooner?

Answer: Had the referendum put before the public in December passed, these cuts would have been unnecessary. We have used the time since that vote to solicit ideas from the public as to what additional information we could provide to help clarify the library's funding situation. Knowing the library would have a budget shortfall, we have also used that time to very carefully determine what changes could be made that would impact services the least. This has been a difficult process, as we would have preferred to not make any of the cuts to services that we are announcing today.

Question: Why is it taking so long to decide the next step for a funding solution?

Answer: New York State has six different library funding models, each with varying levels of complexity in how they are implemented. For example, many libraries throughout the state use the school district model that was proposed last December, as it is widely viewed as a fair and equitable way to provide funding.

The library board has a fiduciary responsibility to make a carefully thought-out decision when considering these funding models and determining the best model for future funding of our library. Regardless of which model that is, we will continue to need community support.