

LIBRARY, MUSEUM & ARTS & FINANCE JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

WESTPORT LIBRARY BUDGET

April 29, 2024 6:30 PM - Location: Room 201 – Town Hall

LMA COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Kristin Mott Purcell – Chair
Candace Banks
Brandi Briggs
Dick Lowenstein
Karen Kramer
Wendy Batteau
Julie Whamond
Michael Perry
Melissa Levy
David Rosenwaks

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Seth Braunstein, Chair
Ari Benmosche
Rachel Cohn
Nancy Kail
Melissa Levy
Lynn Hogan
Don O'Day
David Rosenwaks

REPRESENTING THE LIBRARY:

Bill Harmer, Westport Library Executive Director
Scott Bennewitz -- Chair Finance Committee, Board of Trustees

REPRESENTING THE ADMINISTRATION

Gary Conrad, Finance Director

Library Museum and Arts Committee met to review and vote on the Westport Public Library's Fiscal year 2024/2025 budget request of \$5,954,832 a 5.2% increase. The operating budget request is \$5,573,849, a 5% increase. The pension budget is \$380,983, a 8% increase.

Bill Harmer provided a brief update on the Westport Library:

Quick background from Bill. Bill has been at the library for 10 years. He oversaw the capital campaign for the transformation project back in 2019. That transformation was funded with \$5M from the town, 16M from donors and the Library took a \$1M loan. It was a complete transformation of every inch of the Library bringing it to the facility we have today.

The Library is thriving and continues to grow. The Westport Library is Five Star Library. One of 65 out of 9,000 libraries in the US. The success of the Library is really a tribute to the town, community, active volunteers and staff.

The Westport Library is committed to lifelong learning. Their mission is to be the people's university in Westport with the goal to serve everyone in our community.

The Library also expanded its programming, digital offerings and resources for the entire community including young children and their parents, to students, to seniors anyone in between.

Last year, the library hosted over 350,000 library visits and answered more reference questions than any library in Fairfield county.

Use of meeting rooms is now at 86% capacity. They had over 17,000 room reservations executed last year.

Verso University launched this year to provide significant education opportunities. This program is offered through a sizable grant received last year and has seen a tremendous uptake from the community.

The Library delivered \$21M in value on the \$5M investment from the Town.

This year has seen a significant shift in expenses:

FT staffing costs are up 3%

PT staffing costs are up 4%

Medical and dental costs are up 18%

Digital and print costs are up 15% and 11% respectively

The Library increased its funding by 15.3% this year bringing their contribution to the budget to \$1.65M.

Fiscal Year '24/25 Priorities:

- Return staffing to pre-pandemic levels
- Re-hire key staff role of COO
- Maintain competitive salaries & benefits for staff

Budget Review:

The Library's overall budget for FY 24/25 is

The operating budget request is for \$ 5,573,832 reflecting a 5% increase to last year's budget

The town provides approximately 80% of the annual operating budget and the Library raises the remaining through fundraising and operations including fines, rental fees and café revenue.

The Library increased its contribution to \$1.7M an increase of 15.3% to last year.

85% of the Library's spending is non-discretionary, 15% is discretionary

Key driver of expenses is people related expenses including salaries and the additional of the COO and healthcare expenses which are going up, but we understand it, café and programming supplies. Total increase of \$483k. The Library offset half of that increase with their incremental fundraising and revenue.

Questions:

Without healthcare, what would your increase be 3.5%? Does that include new additions to the staff? No, just the rate increase on existing staff.

How many people are working in the Verso Studios? 2 FT and 2 PT. The studio generated \$330k last year.

Can you add a donate button to Hoopla? Not on Hoopla directly, but can look to see if there is another place to add one that doesn't infringe on their IP.

What is the Library's reserve? \$1.4M or about 2 and half months operating budget.

Do you have health reserves as well? No, we have a health account that pre-saves money and floats up and down each month based on health care expenses submitted. The goal is to have that zeroed out at the end of the year.

Why was there a \$40k FOIA legal expense? We needed to retain a lawyer to help us with the FOIA process and legal proceedings and tapped into our legal reserves to do that. As of note, the Library won the hearing. The state FOIA commission found the Library not subject to FOIA because it is not a municipal agency.

For Finance, Nancy Kail motioned, and Melissa Levy seconded the motioned to approve the Library budget of \$5,954,832 for FY '24/25. The motion passed Finance unanimously.

For LMA, Brandi Briggs motioned, and Wendy Batteau seconded to approve the Library budget for \$5,954,832 for FY '24/25. The motion passed LMA nine in favor of the motion and one abstention from Dick Lowenstein.