

Library Board of Trustees Annual Report, 2016/2017

Since there are three new county commissioners, this year's report includes some brief historical background and significant events that have occurred during the past 15 years. We will also update key data relative to the library's operation and how it stands vis a vis State standards and neighboring library systems.

The main library on Palm Coast Parkway opened in 2000 at a time when the population of Flagler County was approximately 49,000 people. Today, the county population is 105,000 and is expected to grow to as much as 150,000 by the year 2025.

Historically, the library has been underfunded relative to neighboring counties. When the main library opened in 2000, library spending per capita was approximately \$11.52, and included a significant State Aid component. Per capita spending in St. John's, Volusia and Putnam Counties was \$18.30, \$19.18 and \$6.48, respectively.

In the wake of the spectacular growth Flagler experienced in 2006 and 2007, the criteria for which State Aid was determined caused our aid to be permanently reduced by \$225,000 annually. That represented a reduction of almost 20% of the library's overall budget and place our funding in an even greater discrepancy compared to neighboring counties.

The 2008 collapse of the real estate market and construction industry severely impacted Flagler County's tax revenues. For the next several years, budget cuts for virtually all county departments were the order of the day. The library endured staff cuts and the materials budget was reduced. During this period, the library was able to provide a reasonable level of service to patrons, but not to the standards that library administration and the trustees would deem appropriate. It should be noted that during these difficult times, the county was able to fund certain high priority capital items. One such item was the just in time replacement of the library's automation system which was about to crash and was no longer being supported by the developing vendor.

One bright spot during this period was the establishment of the library as a passport acceptance center. Patrons can now apply for a passport and obtain a passport approved photo in the comfort of the library. The library receives a portion of the application fee from the State Department, and during the recent fiscal year the library earned \$80,000 for offering this service.

The past three to four years saw a recovery in the local economy and real estate valuations resulting in some improved funding for the library. The library's materials budget was restored and certain maintenance projects were completed including the repair of the leaking roof, painting of the interior and exterior of the building and replacement of carpeting and other floor covering. This year the Bunnell Branch had its operating hours restored to five days a week from three.

Given the improving economic climate and resurgent population growth, the trustees and library director are now able to focus on a long term strategy for library service in Flagler County. There are two major projects under consideration.

First is the construction of a library branch in the southern part of the county. Toward that end, a parcel of land has been identified and negotiations are ongoing to purchase the property. Funds have been budgeted for a building design with the intent of proceeding with the project once the land is acquired, realizing that it may take two to three years to complete the project.

The second project involves the expansion of the main library and is triggered by an anonymous donor's pledge of up to \$1 million toward the expansion. A state grant in the amount of \$500,000 was applied for and the priority of our grant request was ranked number one, assuming that the legislature approves the funding for the grants in their budget. If it is determined not to go forward with this project, we must withdraw our grant request prior to the legislature's authorization of the funds. If we fail to do so we will be penalized in the next request by being placed at the back of the line.

To round out the longer term library service needs in the county, we need to consider a library branch location in the Hammock. That area is in a major growth mode, a substantial distance from the main library and separated by a toll bridge. There are no specific plans or timeline for bringing library service to the Hammock.

The board of trustees and library administration are deeply concerned about the impact the ongoing costs of Hurricane Matthew recovery will have on the present and future of library service to the county. It is apparent that the costs of Matthew recovery could result in a substantial delay or even elimination of parts of the above projects.

We have already seen evidence of resources (both human and financial) being diverted from ongoing library improvements that were already approved. First is the relocation of the fire lane in front of the library to the western side of the building. This would free up about twelve premium parking spots, which would have come in handy in October when more than 40,000 people came to the library to use its services, apply for FEMA assistance and other disaster relief, or to vote. Second is the renovation of the library restrooms which are in serious need of repair.

Attached are two tables. Table 1 titled New State Recommended Minimum Standards indicates that Flagler County falls below (and in some areas substantially) the State recommended service levels in the areas of Materials Budget, Staffing, Facility Space, Computers, Public Seating and Parking. Although these standards have a library advocacy flavor to them, the shortfalls in service standards are noteworthy.

For a sanity check on these standards, please review Table 2 which shows how Flagler County compares to neighboring counties. There are differences in population among the counties, but the data on expenditures per capita is striking. Flagler County falls way below its neighbors in this category. Staffing levels are substantially lower than the other

counties and is readily apparent when the FTEs are reviewed in relation to the population served. For example, St. Johns County serves twice the population as Flagler but has 4 times as many employees. Numerous other disparities are evident and they are here on display.

What does this all mean? One can make a case that the citizens of Flagler County are getting an outstanding return on the modest amount of taxes that go to support the library. Another view is that the county could provide a much higher level of service if financial support for the library was anywhere near what is in neighboring counties. In reality, both views have an element of truth.

In closing, the Flagler Library System has essentially been static for the past 10 years with regard to planning for and accommodating the growth of the county. Much of this has to do with the reasons cited above. The time has come to implement a plan to address library needs for the next 10 to 15 years. With your support and commitment we stand ready to develop such a plan.

Sincerely,

James Ulsamer, Chairman
Library Board of Trustees