



An Investment for Life

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Cumberland County Library System Requests Funding Increase in 2025 County Budget

Mechanicsburg, Pa. (Nov. 6, 2024) - At a public meeting of the Cumberland County commissioners today, the Cumberland County Library System made a case for a funding increase for the library system and its member libraries as part of the 2025 county budget.

Library system expenses have increased 29% since 2017, which was the last time a funding increase for the county's public libraries was included in the county's budget. If the funding request is adopted, it would be only the third increase in 38 years.

The library system presented that if a millage increase is included in the 2025 county budget, it will benefit Cumberland County residents by enabling the seven public libraries and one branch facility in the county to restore previous levels of hours and staffing; maintain current programs, services and technology; and maintain their physical and digital collections. The commissioners asked compelling questions and continue to examine the data.

Based on 2025 projections, member library expenses have increased 29% since 2017, in step with inflation. Member libraries and the library system have had to dip into diminishing reserves of funds donated by private contributors in seven of the past 10 years to balance annual budgets. Libraries have had to close nine hours a week so far, and are budgeting to close up to 26 additional hours if the requested funding increase is not adopted.

"Cumberland County Library System libraries were visited by over 917,000 people last year," said Carolyn Blatchley, executive director of the Cumberland County Library System. "The county's library system is among the most utilized library systems in the state. Our public libraries are essential centers of learning and connection in their communities, but it has become increasingly difficult to maintain the facilities, collections, programs, services and access that residents need and deserve due to increasing costs to operate."

The Cumberland County Library system has requested to increase the county library tax millage rate to a minimum of 0.249 from 0.166 for 2025. This lowest projection will increase funding by nearly \$2.29 million. This equates to \$17.02 annually, or about \$1.42 a month, for a property owner whose home in the county is assessed at \$200,000.

"Without this funding increase, the county library system could fall short of minimum state standards for public libraries and residents will experience further reductions in library hours, programs, services and collections," Blatchley said. "At the same time, demand for unique and

enriching library services is certain to continue to increase, as Cumberland County is one of the fastest growing counties in Pennsylvania.”

Blatchley also noted that underfunding presents challenges to staffing and upkeep of facilities. Library staff starting salaries are in the \$11-15 per hour range and provide no benefits, yet these positions require advanced degree-level skillsets. Library buildings are suffering from lack of maintenance, and outdated computer systems are being patched together to stay in service.

There is an economy of scale to being part of a federated County system, and the library system takes full advantage of cost savings with consolidated services. The county Geographic Information System (GIS) staff confirmed earlier this year that all residents have a public library within less than 12 road miles of their home. With programs and services for library users of all ages, there is something of value to every resident.

Over 917,000 people visited the system’s eight library locations in 2023, borrowing almost two million items from physical collections and accessing nearly 298,000 digital media items such as eBooks and eAudiobooks. The system’s libraries collectively had over 110,000 active library cardholders in 2023, and over 170,000 residents attended library children’s programs and adult programs. Additionally, the libraries logged over 51,000 public computer sessions and Wi-Fi hotspots were borrowed by residents to access the internet almost 1,500 times.

Many of these figures are being far exceeded in 2024, and demand for library services in the county is expected to continue to rise due to population growth. The county’s population was up 13.9% in 2022 from 2010, ahead of statewide population growth of 2.1%.

The Cumberland County Library System is an independent agency of county government that supports the seven independent public libraries and one branch facility. The system’s mission is to enhance the capacity of member libraries, encourage lifelong learning and facilitate access to information and technology, all to improve the quality of life in Cumberland County communities.

Based on data provided by Cumberland County Geographic Information System (GIS) staff, all residents in the county have a public library within less than 12 road miles of their home. The system’s libraries include Amelia S. Givin Free Library in Mt. Holly Springs; Bosler Memorial Library in Carlisle; Jeffrey W. & Jo Anne R. Coy Public Library of Shippensburg; East Pennsboro Branch Library in Enola; Cleve J. Fredrickson Library in Camp Hill; John Graham Library in Newville; New Cumberland Public Library; and Joseph T. Simpson Public Library in Mechanicsburg. Library cards are free to residents.

Information on Cumberland County Library System library hours, programs, services and events is available at cumberlandcountylibraries.org.

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