



Erie County Legislature – Finance, Management & Budget 2020
Committee Hearing
Tuesday, November 12, 2019
11:00 a.m.

**Alan Bedenko, Vice Chair, Buffalo & Erie County Public
Library Board of Trustees:**

Good morning. Thank you for having us here today. On behalf of the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library (B&ECPL) System Board of Trustees, please accept our sincerest appreciation for your time and support.

[Recognize any trustees in attendance]

Libraries continue to be vital to our communities. Currently there are nearly 380,000 library card holders in Erie County. Through the end of October this year, nearly 2.4 million patrons have visited our libraries with over 204 thousand attending on-site programs and nearly 39 thousand attending library programs held at off-site community locations. There have been over 443 thousand public access computer sessions and more than 509 thousand logins to our Wi-Fi. Borrowing of materials has surpassed 5.6 million items with eBook use rising by 25% and downloadable music increasing by 38% over the same period last year.

Our staff and Administration work very hard to meet the demands of your constituents. Along with the boards of trustees

from all of our libraries, we have reiterated our community focus – further developing partnerships and seeking new collaborations to advance library services and provide for the information, education and entertainment needs of the residents of Erie County.

I would like to express my gratitude to Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz for his support and recommendation of increased funds for our libraries in his proposed 2020 budget. I hope you will support this increase, which will allow us to continue to provide quality library services to Erie County's residents and taxpayers. Mary Jean.....

Mary Jean Jakubowski, System Director:

Good morning, everyone. Thank you Alan and thank you to the members of the Erie County Legislature for providing us this opportunity to comment on the 2020 proposed budget.

I would like to publicly express our thanks to each of you for your continued support and recognition of the importance of libraries to your/our communities.

I know you agree – our libraries are busy.

Libraries today are less about what they “have” for people and more about what they “do” for people. Quite simply, libraries transform lives. They are economic incubators, lifelong learning centers, gathering places, cultural institutions and, for many, the great equalizers – where all are welcome and where anyone can transform their life.

As of October, our weekly service hours equal 1,714.8, which is an increase of 4.2 service hours/week over the same period last year. The *Library on Wheels* continues to be in VERY HIGH demand – crisscrossing the County including providing services in rural areas as well as at senior centers, nursing homes, daycare centers, schools and towns/villages without a physical library building. In addition, the bookmobile can be found at festivals, parades and community events.

To thoroughly understand what our communities want and need in library services and when and where they want the services, we regularly ask through online, in-house and electronically distributed surveys. Subsequently, we adapt and we adjust – programs, services, hours of operation, resource access, etc. Change in libraries is evident throughout.

Thus far, in 2019 our libraries have hosted job fairs and training programs, technology programs, programs on resume writing, online job searching and literacy development. We have conducted programs for English language learners and new Americans. But that's not all....we have conducted and/or provided author talks, educational lectures, Comic Con, story hours, teen time, summer reading programs, knitting classes, art classes, health and wellness programs, holistic medicine programs....the list goes on and on. We actively reach out to underserved populations such as the homeless, refugees, and those living in economically deprived areas; AND, we regularly work to develop new partners and further our collaborations with educational institutions, cultural organizations, and local businesses.

2020 will bring a new adventure for the libraries in our System – participation in Census 2020. Why you might ask? For the first time in its history, the Census will be given online. We recognize the importance to get everyone counted, the digital divide still here in our own back yards, and the potential for services and resources to be lost if there is an undercount. With our more than 900 public access computers, free and secure high-speed Internet and Wi-Fi access, we will be – need to be, at the forefront of this historic count. Our staff is working hard, getting prepared to assist. Census job recruitments have been offered at several library locations. We are actively involved in a multitude of state, county and local Complete Count Committees and we are already working with our community partners to locate and prepare the hard-to-count populations. Our goal: to get everyone counted so that Erie County residents will have the representation and resources they deserve.

Let me say it again....we are busy! Every year, every month, and every day we receive requests for new services, new resources, new programs and new collaborations. Sincerely, it is a good problem to have; but, quite honestly, we are stretched. Stretched to the point that the increase proposed in the 2020 budget is critical in order for us to sustain current open hours and our high level of service – both at the libraries and in the community.

The 2020 budget proposed by County Executive Poloncarz contains an increase of 2 percent, \$498,219. We are grateful for the proposed increase and if approved, will use the funds to reduce the Library's anticipated use of \$1.3 million in fund balance to \$812k. These funds will support current service hours and all our services/programs/resources. We, therefore, kindly

ask your support of the County Executive's proposed 2020 budget.

For more specific budgetary details, I have asked Mr. Stone to prepare some remarks. Mr. Stone....

Kenneth Stone – Chief Financial Officer:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an overview of the 2020 budget request.

The 2020 Operating and Grants Budget sustains library operations and services, with a 2.6% increase in expenditures over 2019. Staffing counts are modestly lower.

Costs include 2.0 to 2.5% contracted 2020 COLAs for all bargaining units; a \$0.70 per hour (6.7%) increase in the New York State minimum wage; step increases; and up to 2.5% for managerial/confidential personnel.

It is important to note that the very much-appreciated 2.0% increase in County support helps sustain the Library in the face of these cost changes. Without the 2.0% increase, Library "use of fund balance" would have more than doubled, going from \$506,529 in the 2019's Adopted Budget to \$1,311,093 (4.5% of expenditures).

As that level is not sustainable over time, without the 2% increase, the Library would have had to undertake a comprehensive review of library operations potentially resulting in service cuts in order to return use of fund balance to a sustainable level. With the increase recommended by the County Executive, our 2019

budgeted use of fund balance would be \$812,874 (2.8% of expenditures), which is on the edge of sustainability.

Given that the property tax base is estimated to grow by 6.29%, the 2019 Library Tax rate will actually decrease modestly.

The Library's proposed budget is summarized in the 2020 Budget in Brief Charts handout.

The charts show 10+ year data and trends for major revenue, expenditures, personnel, and service levels. They also provide breakouts specific to 2020 Budget revenue and expenditures, a chart showing the property tax information for a sample property owner, peer group comparison data and a chart estimating the value of library services received in 2018. The latter showing an estimated \$4.80 return in service value per dollar of Library Tax funding.

These charts, along with budget narratives and additional detail, have been posted to the Library's website (www.BuffaloLib.org), accessible by Googling "B&ECPL Budget Information".

Erie County's Capital Budget includes funding to ensure assets function well into the future.

While not part of the Library's Operating Budget, Erie County Capital funds have been included in the County's 2020 Recommended Capital Budget for improvements to the County-owned Central Library building which include:

\$250,000 for Central Library Exterior Building Envelope & Site Improvements; and

\$250,000 for Central Library Mechanical, Electrical, & Plumbing Improvements.

Thank you for your interest and support.

Vice Chair Bedenko, Director Jakubowski and I would be happy to answer your questions.