

Information on Scenic Regional Library Proposed 10-Cent Tax Levy

Letter to Editor

By Steve Campbell

Scenic Regional Library has a tax levy measure on the April 8 ballot and if the measure passes our first priority is a new facility in New Haven.

Most people find it almost unbelievable that the library hasn't had a single tax increase in its entire 55-year history; it's still operating with the same 10-cent levy it began with in 1959. It's no surprise that compared to other libraries, Scenic Regional is poorly funded.

Among 133 public libraries, its tax rate is the third-lowest in Missouri. And while schools also receive federal funds, 96% of the library's revenue is derived from local property tax. The library doesn't receive any federal funds and very little money from the state.

The [Library Proposition](#) is really an incredible opportunity for the residents of Franklin County. They can transform one of the most poorly-funded libraries in the state into a library system of which the community can be.

What's going to change if this measure passes? Frankly, the change in library service would be remarkable.

First, the library's new material budget would more than double. There would be enough materials to adequately serve the public; people wouldn't have to wait months to get a bestseller or e-book anymore. People who use the library would also have a much wider selection of authors and genres to choose from, along with more popular movies, and music.

Secondly, the library would have longer hours of operation. Branches would not be closed on Mondays and their evening and weekend hours would be extended to accommodate working families.

In addition, the library would be able to regularly visit and provide outreach services to all the daycares, preschools, nursing homes, and senior citizen centers throughout the county. These facilities would no longer be placed on waiting lists or wait a month to have someone from the library visit due to a lack of staffing, which is often the case now.

The library would be able to offer more and better-quality programming for children, adults, and teens at all our branches.

The [library would](#) also begin offering services that many other libraries offer. People would have access from home to downloadable digital magazines, music, and movies for check out. People who don't have high speed Internet at home would have access to e-book download stations at the library. Homebound people would be able to borrow material through a books-by-mail service. Genealogists and other researchers would have access to more online databases.

The new revenue generated from the proposition would also allow the library to replace, remodel, or expand all of its facilities and new locations would be added.

The public would finally have libraries with enough parking, plenty of comfortable seating, space for significantly more materials, and public meeting rooms for community organizations. The facilities would be handicapped accessible and have enough space to accommodate class visits from local schools and big turnouts for programs and events.

The residents of Franklin County can have all this for relatively little money. The average homeowner will only have to pay an extra \$2 a month. Residents already pay fewer taxes to the library than any other political subdivision in the county; and even if this measure passes, most people will still be paying the smallest portion of their tax bill to the library.

While library users certainly would benefit in many ways from the measure passing, why would people who never use the library vote for it?

Actually, there are a few good reasons.

People buying a home evaluate a community based on the quality of all its services—including libraries. It's especially true for families with children who are looking for a new home. As a result, a good library improves property values, just like good schools, parks, and other services. Most people want their property value to increase—even if they don't use the library.

Libraries also benefit everyone by contributing to the economy. People who don't have high-speed Internet access or a home computer use the library's public computers to update their resume, email employers, search job websites, and apply for jobs on line.

Many employers don't even accept paper applications any longer. Everyone in a community benefits from people having somewhere to go to search for, apply for, and find jobs.

Here's another good reason: we all benefit from a society of literate, productive people. Research shows that over the summer months children who don't read can lose up to eight months of their reading level.

When the new school year begins, they have to catch up before they can learn anything new. It's just like any skill—if you don't practice something for three months, you're going to get rusty.

The same research shows that children who participate in a library summer reading program don't experience the same decline in reading level. In many cases, their reading level actually increases.

Why should someone without children care? These children grow up to be our doctors, dentists, bankers, and engineers—people every society needs to operate successfully. Literacy and education are the keys to success.

Finally, if this measure passes, most of the money is going to go directly back into our local economy. When the library hires more staff for outreach and to extend its hours, those new employees are going to be people who live in our local community. When the library renovates, expands, and replaces its facilities, those construction projects are going to go to local contractors. We all benefit from money being pumped into local businesses.

Even people who don't use the library benefit from high-quality library service in their community. A better library means a better community.

For additional information you can visit www.scenicregional.org/levy.