

# **Marthasville residents pushing for local library**

**Residents pay same taxes, deserve same service, group says**



(<https://cdn5.creativecirclemedia.com/warren/original/20211104-104227-library%20interior%20110421.JPG>)

**COMMUNITY LIBRARY** — Residents of Marthasville are pushing to get a local branch of the Scenic Regional Library. Pictured here is a view of the interior of the library in Wright City, showing what can be offered in a smaller community.

ADAM ROLLINS PHOTO

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## Cindy Gladden and Adam Rollins

A committee of Marthasville-area residents committed to seeing a library in Marthasville met with the Scenic Regional Library's Board of Directors on Oct. 19 to appeal for a local branch.

Committee members, comprised of retired educators and community leaders, believe the time has come to benefit directly from library tax dollars paid by people in a 100-square-mile area of southern Warren County.

Members of the committee say representatives from the Scenic Regional Library system encouraged area taxpayers to vote yes for a tax increase proposed in 2014, saying there was a good chance Marthasville would get its own library.

Don Deeker, retired pastor and a member of the committee, said he took that information to heart.

“Even though I probably would have voted for it anyway, I then encouraged others to vote to pass the tax. It’s time to benefit from our tax dollars,” Deeker said.

Mayor David Lange said he believes Marthasville and southern Warren County needs to be at the “top of the list” for a library branch.

“We are a growing community,” said Lange. “We are looking to get a commitment that we will get a branch.”

There are nine branches in the surrounding area serving Franklin, Gasconade and Warren counties, including locations in Hermann, New Haven, Owensville, Pacific, St. Clair, Sullivan, Union, Warrenton and Wright City.

Angie Hilbert, chairman for the committee, said they can offer a unique way to help the library system get started in Marthasville. The Rusche Park Board in Marthasville manages property given to them by the estate of Helen Rusche. Her vision and wishes included using the designated property for a museum and library.

The museum exists as the Grabs Museum along Highway D in Marthasville. Separate lots in the park, which could be sold to the library district at an affordable cost, are directly across the street from the museum. The location would be central to the residents and within walking distance of Marthasville Elementary School.

“It’s our time,” said Hilbert. “We approached them in 2017 and they didn’t have the money for it. We are trying again.”

Committee member Diane Freese attended the meeting with the board and said Scenic Regional representatives were receptive to the request, but reported money was not available at this time, that they were “bonded out.”

The library district suggested that a library kiosk, essentially a vending machine for books, might be a good alternative that they are researching at this time. But committee members aren’t interested in this idea.

“A kiosk machine can’t have story time for the kids, or free Wi-Fi, or study rooms or meeting rooms,” said Mayor Lange.

“It’s about community,” Hilbert said. “Having a library can help make our community stronger.”

Hilbert said they are looking for a physical library location where programs, meeting rooms, activities for children and community gatherings might be possible. She said it would be similar to a story hour program recently begun at the local Charrette Baptist Church.

“We’re not looking for a branch just for the city of Marthasville,” said Lange. “We’re looking for a branch for the whole 63357 zip code. The population of Marthasville is 1,200, but there are 5,500 people in our zip code area.”

Hilbert said the committee will continue discussing the outcome of the meeting with the library district and make plans for the next step in bringing a Scenic Regional Library branch to the Marthasville area.

Steven Campbell, Director of the Scenic Regional Library District, said he was happy to see a group of people who are so enthusiastic to have a library in their community. He said the initial dialogue between the Marthasville committee and the board of directors was informative and positive.

Campbell explained that the library district had actually been doing some preliminary research for a future branch in Marthasville before the committee reached out to them. But he said expectations about when such a project would be feasible are where the two groups diverge.

"The bottom line is we would love to have a branch in Marthasville. I think it's a matter of 'when,' not 'if.' It's going to happen eventually," Campbell said. "I just think our timeline and their timeline are a little different."

The director said the main constraint to building a branch is ensuring that there's enough population and potential patrons in an area to warrant the expense of constructing and operating a facility. With new economic development interests in the region of Marthasville and Augusta, he said the necessary population growth could happen in the coming years. But the future is always uncertain, and Campbell said even once the district decides to build a library branch, it would still take several more years for the project to happen.

In the meantime, Campbell said he hopes area residents take advantage of an agreement that allows patrons to freely use the Washington Public Library, as well as books and media that can be sent by mail or provided digitally through Scenic Regional Library's website.

***Update 11/5/2021: This story was updated to add comments from Scenic Regional Library Director Steven Campbell***