

Library Report

Compiled by Ian White

Budget puts fiscal squeeze on regional library

The recent provincial budget is putting the squeeze on the Western Counties Regional Library. The result will be cuts that affect the ability of the regional library to purchase books and materials such as audio books and DVDs. The long-term outlook is gloomier still as the population in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth counties continues to decline.

“We have an immediate funding problem,” says Trudy Amirault, Western Counties Regional Library Director.

“Our library is an important cultural and educational centre for our community. We need it!”

— *Freeport petitioner*

The problem stems from the fact costs are continuing to climb for the library but its funding remains the same as in 2006-2007.

“Increased costs of operation such as fuel, supplies, insurance, equipment and books

and cost-of-living wage increases for staff mean we are going to have to cut in other areas,” explains Gary Archibald, chairman of the board of the regional library. “We are probably going to lose even more funding in the coming years if our library continues to be funded on a per capita formula.”

The funding formula for libraries is based on population. The latest census figures, showing a drop of 2,000 people between 2001 and 2006, means the regional library could face a steady decline in funding. This shortfall will happen unless the funding formula is changed or the provincial government inserts much needed additional funding into the public library system.

Library funding is shared between the province, municipal units and regional library boards. The province provides 71 per cent of the funding, the municipalities 26 per cent and the board share is three per cent.

Total anticipated grant revenues is \$1,320,100 for the regional library based on last year’s population figures of 65,135. Cost increases for the regional library range from 2.27 per cent to 23 per cent for everything from books and insurance to audit and bank fees and medical benefits.

“Our regional library board is hopeful a new funding formula will come into play by 2008-2009,” says Archibald.

The regional library is hoping the public will come to its aid to help it maintain quality library services in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth counties. It has placed petitions in all 10 of its branches and is asking its users and supporters to contact provincial politicians to express their concerns.

Early results are positive as more than 1,500 people have signed the petitions.



Gary Archibald, left, and Trudy Amirault, right, go over library budget figures with Education Minister Karen Casey and Yarmouth MLA Richard Hurlburt during a meeting on Friday, May 11. Archibald and Amirault explained to the minister how important a small funding increase is to the viability of the regional library service.

“I’m pleased with the response,” Archibald says. “The support shows there is a definite need for library services in the rural areas.”

Weymouth area residents provided some of the strongest commentary on the petitions. The Weymouth area has been hit hard economically with the closure of several major businesses and employers such as Weymouth Motors.

“Please, Weymouth needs help,” summed it up for one petitioner while another wrote, “Our area needs this service.”

For one Bear River resident, the library is a key part of the community. She stated, “Our libraries are the lifeline of our communities. We depend on them as a source for so many things – recreational, educational, communication (especially the CAP site). Rural communities are the backbone of our country and are worth proper funding!”

From Lockeport around to Brier Island, library users and supporters added their names and comments to the petition to have provincial funding increased to meet the library’s budget needs.

One Shelburne resident wrote, “Libraries are the heart of a community. They provide equal access to literacy and should be adequately funded.”

One young petitioner from Meteghan called library funding a matter of life and death, writing: “I will die if it closes!”

Library partners with CMHA to provide materials

The Western Counties Regional Library is working the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) to ensure there is no shortage of material available on mental health issues.

The Yarmouth, Digby and Shelburne branch of the CMHA is seeking out regional organizations assisting people with mental health issues to create a collection of resource material to be housed at the branches of the regional library. The project, funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Health, Mental Health Services, allots \$13,000 to purchase resource materials.

Jim Stockman, president of the CMHA branch, says the library was the logical partner for the project. He says the library has the expertise to find and order the

materials and ensure they are easily available to the public.

Regional library director Trudy Amir-

ault adds the library can help put good material on the shelf and ensure the CMHA gets good value for its money.

Digby library gets breath of fresh air

Staff and patrons at the Digby branch of the Western Counties Regional Library are breathing a little easier as the weather warms up this spring. An extensive air conditioning system has been installed – a solution to heating problems that have plagued the library for close to a year.

“We are grateful to the Municipality and Town of Digby for moving ahead with solving this issue,” says Trudy Amirault, Western Counties Regional Library Director.

The problems of overheating in the library have existed for years, but they were heightened last spring following the installation of a new boiler. The issue resurfaced in the fall when the heat was turned back on. Programs had to be cancelled and the library received numerous complaints from patrons and staff which it forwarded to municipal officials.

The town and municipality are responsible for housing the library which is located in the Provincial Building, 84 Warwick St. in Digby. Officials from the two municipal units worked with Nova Scotia Transportation and Public Works, Western District to come to a solution in the form of the new air conditioning system.

Staffing Updates

March 24 was Marjo Belknap's last day of work as a Library Clerk at the Digby library after 2 3/4 years. Marjo wanted to devote more time to her career as a consultant with Mary Kay.

Sarah Fulde, Student Assistant at the Yarmouth library, finished work on March 23, so that she could dedicate more time to her acting.

After two years as a Library Clerk Reserve at the Lockeport library, Elizabeth MacKinnon left on March 27 to spend more time with her one-year-old baby.

After four years of service, Loreley Himmelman, Library Clerk at the McKay Memorial Library in Shelburne, left on April 14 to home-school her four children full-time.

Louise Aymar, Library Clerk Reserve at the Clare Branch Library, left on April 14.

Nikita Walker, Student Assistant at the Digby library, left on May 10.

Amy Campbell, Student Assistant at Headquarters, left on May 11 to dedicate more time to her school work.

Clark's Harbour branch finds temporary home

The Clark's Harbour Library has moved into the Seabreeze Rebekah #24 Lodge, 2822 Main St. in Clark's Harbour.

The branch of the Western Counties Regional Library will maintain its regular hours at the Rebekah Lodge and the contact information will stay the same.

The move is temporary while the new civic centre housing the new branch is being built. The new building is expected to be ready this fall.



Board profile

Donna LeBlanc-Messenger

Donna LeBlanc-Messenger brings a passion for reading and writing to her new post as the Municipality of the District of Barrington's representative on the Western Counties Regional Library board.

“I love to read,” she says. “It's nice to go in there (to the Barrington Municipal Library) and get what you need.”

She is the municipal councilor representing Dis-

trict 3, encompassing Barrington Passage and surrounding areas.

“It was very exciting to have a brand new library sitting in the middle of my district,” she says.

Depending on the economic climate, Donna LeBlanc-Messenger would like to “enhance the services provided or maintain what's there.”

As a grandmother, she is pleased to be able to go into the library and find a video for her grandchild when he is over visiting. It is those types of services and the variety of materials available that are important to her.

“I want to make sure we maintain those services and better serve the commu-

nity,” she says.

Recently retired, Donna has been an active member of the community for a long time. She worked at Wilson's Home Hardware Building Centre in Barrington for 30 years. She is a founder of *For Kids Sake*, a charity organization created by the Wilson's staff to give back to the community. The charity has been a big supporter of the library, providing \$500 worth of books to the new Barrington library and a bicycle and helmet as a prize for the children's Summer Reading Club.

Being new to the board, she wants to adjust to her surroundings on the board before she considers any new library projects.