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For Immediate Release

Budget Proposal to cut funding to Pickens County Library System

At the Pickens County Council Budget Workshop meeting held on May 11th, 2021 the following proposal was presented to decrease library funding by Councilman Saitta (District 3) and Councilman Wilson (District 6).

Reduce Library Budget by .6 mills (\$370,102.00)
Increase millage by .6 mills in the General Fund for road paving

Transfer Museum operations to Library Operations
Set aside Museum operation savings in the General Fund to Road Paving

Is the current proposal by Mr. Saitta and Mr. Wilson a cut to library funding?

Yes. Cutting the millage rate decreases the funding to the Pickens County Library System. The value of a mill is currently \$616,837.00 reducing the library system's millage from 5.9 to 5.3 means a reduction in funding of \$370,102.00.

Libraries singled out for cuts.

If the library experiences a \$370,102.00 cut and takes over operation of the Pickens County Museum, the total money lost will be approximately \$470,000.00. County administration has stated that no other county departments were being looked at for cuts.



Library Usage:

As justification for the funding cut, Mr. Saitta stated that library usage had gone down 50%. He was using door count statistics for this statement. While the door count statistic may have gone down during the pandemic, we served thousands in the community via curbside service, drive-thru service, and as a COVID testing site in the Captain Kimberly Hampton Memorial Library parking lot. Three library locations were used as voting sites for county elections.

Door count is only one indicator to measure how people are using the library and should not be used as a sole statistic to judge overall usage. We have made a concerted effort through outreach programming, the development of satellite library services in Dacusville, Pumpkintown, and Six Mile, our library website and databases, and eBook/eAudiobook collections to make library use more convenient. We have experienced a 53% increase in eBook and eAudiobook checkouts in the last 5 years and that is only expected to grow. Two of our libraries also have drive thru service. During the pandemic we served an additional 19,765 patrons via drive thru. Our librarians answered 29,822 inquiries during the pandemic via phone, website chat service, and email, providing accurate information to assist in keeping everyone safe. The library system's Housecalls program which delivers books and other items to homebound individuals and senior living facilities has more than doubled in the last 5 years. We offer many services to the community within the library buildings, in addition, we offer many ways to use the library without walking through the doors of a physical location.

The Library's Reserve Fund

Another item questioned during the budget discussion is the library's reserve fund. The library fund is a separate fund from the county's general fund. Library funding must adhere to separate state laws and mandates. Just like the county maintains a reserve in the general fund, the library was instructed to reserve 6 months of expenses to include library employee salaries, benefits, and all operating costs. This amounts to 1.8 million dollars. The library has worked over the years with the county CFO to maintain adequate funds in the library's reserve.

Anything over that reserve is earmarked for library projects directed toward improving the functionality of library facilities and collections to meet the changing and growing needs of library patrons. The money raised in the past several years was specifically reserved to finish areas of the Hampton Memorial Library in Easley. Currently the library board and administration staff are working with LS3P Architecture firm to complete a feasibility study for the completion of the 2 expansion spaces on the upper level of the library. Pickens County has grown in the 17 years since the building was completed and we are at a point where we need to finish the expansion spaces so that they are usable space for the public. This project will allow for approximately 10,000 square feet of additional space devoted to reservable community meeting spaces and flexible use library programming areas. The plan allows for



more restroom facilities on the upper level as well as a Friends of the Library Used Book store that will be open during library hours. The library will not need to ask council for an additional 1.2 million dollars to complete this project because the system has planned and saved for the project over the years. After the Easley project is underway, we hope to begin necessary studies on the branch libraries. Even though populations have grown and demand for services and spaces have increased—there have been no substantial updates to the library branches since the current facilities were established in the 1990s. The millage rate helps the library system to plan for the future and keep up with growth within the community.

The museum:

When we were first alerted that there may be a reduction to library funding, we were presented with the possibility of taking over the museum and the operating costs associated with that. At that point we were told the rise in the value of a mill would cover the cost of operating the museum. We were open to this proposal if there was no further cut to library funding. This would allow savings to the county equal to the museum operations budget (approximately \$100,000.00). The cost of running the museum would be absorbed into the library budget and the savings would be placed into the county’s general fund. The Board and Library Director felt that there could be great potential in housing the museum under the library system. The Museum would continue to operate as a museum, but the library would be able to provide additional historical resources, a research collection of books and other items, the establishment of a digital archive of museum artifacts, staffing assistance, and fresh ideas to help the museum continue to gain recognition as a county landmark and point of interest for visitors. The library system is still open to accepting the museum but cannot do so when faced with the additional cut in funding.

The Value of Libraries and the future of Pickens County

The Pickens County Library System is a community partner, a trusted space for information and lifelong learning--free, safe, and accessible to everyone. Our mission is to provide all county residents with access to information through the development of appropriate collections and services. These collections and services must cover the informational, educational, cultural, and entertainment needs of county residents. As the POPULATION grows, we help to sustain a COMMUNITY. We enhance the quality of life for Pickens County residents. Cutting our funding will make it incredibly difficult to continue to keep pace with our county’s growth. As expenses for services and collections go up and users multiply, we will no longer be able to update our facilities to functional library spaces, fulfill the increasing demand on popular collections, and will fall behind in our ability to deliver the quality and quantity of service that Pickens County is used to. We ask that council maintain the library’s millage rate and continue to support the community through the numerous, much needed--and relied upon, public library services.