

RANDOLPH

STATE AID SURVEY JANUARY 2008

This survey is worthwhile in some respects, but in others will elicit answers that for any realistic strategic planning will lead to false assumptions.

Number Two assumes that there will be “a safeguard for your library’s budget” and that is utterly false. Fifteen or twenty-five years ago it may have had some credibility but in today’s fiscal situation in the municipalities it has none.

If I can believe what I have been reading in the Patriot Ledger about the Bridgewater Library situation the only thing that is keeping that library open fifteen hours a week rather than having been completely closed is the town would have to pay back \$400,000 the library received as a building construction grant. I assume that given their proximate size to Randolph their state aid might be around \$40,000. Did that make the local powers cringe and exclaim the library must be kept open? It did not. The only dollar amounts that will make even the smallest blip on the local funding radar screens have to be minimal six figure.

Last spring I read in the Globe a comment by some Agency employee that communities get the libraries they deserve. What affluent suburb does she come from, and has she ever stood up at any town meeting and made a motion to fund the library by taking money from the schools, police, fire or d.p.w.? The motion would be soundly defeated and she would most likely have alienated whatever support she might have had in the local power structure.

The SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR in my success in restoring library funding in Randolph was the concern library users had that they would not be able to use other Old Colony Library Network libraries. Indeed (shades of Charlie Joyce for those of you who have been around a while), most people thought Randolph had been decertified not by the MBLC but by OCLN!

I strongly urge the Agency to talk to those directors who have experienced substantial budget reductions—and I fear we are only the crest of a wave that is rising—about their own local situations. In case you have forgotten, Tip O’Neill was right about all politics being local, and those of you at the state level need to understand a far from monolithic local situation.

Finally, the ONE THING I would do is to make state aid eligibility more flexible depending on the local situation. I’d also make certification restoration approval within a

shorter time after having received full funding and I would drop that requirement that you're decertified if you are not in compliance for part of the year. Local politics, again. Librarians can not call local Special Town Meetings, only Selectmen can, and they will do so only when they have a firm figure from the Commonwealth about their cherry sheet receipts. (And I'm still waiting to see that town that tries to fund the local library only for the last week in May to comply with state aid hours open requirement. It will never happen. Towns will be more willing to simply close libraries.)

So this is the word from the battlefield, and it is accurate, and the Agency should heed it. Faulty intelligence leads to faulty strategy, and what works in Deluxeberry does not work in a good number of other communities.

Field Memorial Library, Conway

Why We Apply for State Aid and How it Affects Us –

State Aid is relatively new to us at Field Memorial Library. Our first application for State Aid was in 2005 and was pursued because many of our patrons were being denied library materials in surrounding towns.

Conway is a bedroom community and is home to many professional people who work in the surrounding towns of Amherst, Northampton and as far away as Springfield. They had always used other libraries and were now suddenly told they could not do so. Conway was not part of the State Aid program.

The Field Memorial Library was a gift from Marshall Field; born in Conway, but was closely tied to Chicago as a successful merchant and donor of the Field Museum of Natural History and the University of Chicago. He built the Conway library as a memorial to his parents. The library is relatively large as compared to libraries in other surrounding towns Conway's size, and is architecturally spectacular as well appointed with imported marble, large fireplaces, and fine woodwork. Ceilings reach 24' in all the rooms except the rotunda, whose dome is over 30' high. Conway is very proud of its library.

Thankfully, Marshall Field also endowed the library so that the library's maintenance, staff and collection would not be a burden to the community. If that should ever happen, the charter states, the building is to become a museum.

The Bottom Line –

Our library is issued, on a quarterly basis, funds from the Field Endowment. It varies from year to year and is based on the interest accrued. When interest rates are high the yield is better than what the case is at present. Over the last 100 years, a modest reserve fund was established when times were better and they are used when emergencies dictate to maintain the physical plant and grounds (i.e., new sidewalks, furnaces, retaining walls). A large portion of this reserve was spent refurbishing for our centennial in 2001.

Interests rates have fallen steadily in the last few years and energy prices have skyrocketed. Utility and heating costs for the library are enormous. Repairs dictate searching out contractors with special experience and talent at great expenses.

Here's the Problem –

Whereas the intent of the State Aid regulations is to help libraries bargain for money from their towns, in our situation, it is a huge disadvantage. Because our total budget is high to support the physical building, spending the required 20% for materials gives us a materials budget that dwarfs those in surrounding towns with similar

populations. It also means we have to use reserve funds regularly. Not a good practice as there's no future in it.

I wish there was an alternate way to establish a materials budget for libraries in our situation that would be more in keeping with our peers. I would think other libraries would benefit as well. They're also paying higher utility costs.

**SURVEY: STATE AID TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES PROGRAM
RESPONSE TO QUESTION 6b.**

1/29/08

As our library budget grows and the role of the library expands in our community the 20% materials expenditure requirement has become problematic in several ways.

It has made it impossible to request appropriate increases for wages, and for additional open hours, as the 20% requirement drives the entire library municipal budget unacceptably high.

- As you know many small town library directors and their staff earn low hourly wages as well as have woefully few paid hours to perform necessary tasks. In reality many of us are actually ½ time underpaid library directors and ½ time volunteer library directors. The same goes for our library assistants. The 20% requirement works against remedying this situation.
- Libraries provide so much more to the the community than lending materials. Access to the internet, and programs are highly valued. The 20% materials requirement keeps us from offering additional open hours. Wendell is only required to be open 10-hours per week. For many years we have been open 15 hours a week. Now in our beautiful new building we have increased our open time to 18 hours by adding more "volunteer" time to director's position. 25 open hours a week would be valued by our community in our new facility but budgetary changes to support this are impossible due to the overall increase that would be caused by the 20% materials expenditure requirement.
- If our municipal budget did grow to support increased wages and increased open hours the accompanying 20% increase in materials expenditure, based on this budget, could soon overwhelm the shelving space. I would propose to reduce the requirement to 10% or create some other formula simply looking for a small materials budget increase over the previous year..... at least for the smallest libraries. This will allow us to increase spending in the above mentioned areas and still insure a base sum for lending material. We have discovered that there are numerous sources of non municipal funds available for collection development. In recent years we have been happy to apply for these funds as a way to enhance our collection. There is not however equivalent non municipal funding available for staff time or open hours. These seem to be areas of service that can only come through local funding.

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Wendell Library