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BEALS MEMORIAL LIBRARY
50 Pleasant Street
Winchendon, Massachusetts 01475

Julia White Cardinal
Director

- HOURS -
Mondays through Thursdays
1 P.M. - 3 P.M.
Fridays
10 A.M. - 5 P.M.
Saturdays
9 A.M. - 1 P.M.
Closed Saturdays
Memorial Day in Labor Day

Mr. Robert Maier, Director
Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners
98 No. Washington St.
Boston, MA 02114

RE: MBLC Budget Hearing Dear

Mr. Maier:

Unfortunately, I cannot attend Thursday's public hearing on the state budget for libraries because, with one staff member on vacation, and another out sick, there aren't enough people left to staff the library without me.

Allow me to explain that Winchendon has a very low equalized valuation compared to almost all other Massachusetts cities and towns. The property values are low, and the ability of the municipality to raise tax revenue is very limited. Winchendon's unemployment and poverty rates are higher than most other communities in the area, while the education level and median incomes are lower. This means the community really cannot get much money from local property owners. The average property tax on a single family home in the Commonwealth was reported as being about \$3700 last March. I called Winchendon's principal assessor, and learned that the average tax on a single family home in Winchendon is \$1800—**less than one-half the state average**. It is therefore no surprise that Winchendon's per capita appropriation for library services is among the very lowest for its population group. Winchendon is simply doing the best it can with the little it has. One might even wonder how the town manages to support any library at all.

Winchendon looks to the state to provide resources that we cannot obtain for ourselves, i.e. local aid. This can be for education, highways, public safety, special projects, and for the public library. Local aid that can be used for general government is useful, as it helps the whole of town government, including the library, to continue providing services.

The fact that local aid has not met expectations over the past few years has hurt Winchendon as much as any city or town. You will be very familiar with the limited resources available to the MBLC with which to help in the provision of local library services. This affects Winchendon in several ways.

The MBLC has less money with which to subsidize regional bibliographic networks such as C/W MARS, of which Winchendon is a member. Frankly, the cuts made in 2000 and 2001 have not been made up. With less state funding, C/W MARS has no choice but to increase charges to member libraries, leaving the local library with less money for other expenses, year after year, since that time.

The MBLC's State Aid Program has been most beneficial to Winchendon. It provides us the clout to get at least some of the local municipal fiscal pie, and thereby leverage \$ 14,000 - \$16,000 per year. These funds make up a substantial portion of our materials budget. Without it, our acquisitions would only be about one-half what they are now. If the state grant amounts were

greater, we would have the resources for increasing the number of Internet terminals available, or the staffing needed to put up a web page, keeping it updated, or to offer more morning hours.

The state's regional library systems have also suffered from reduced, or level, funding over the past several years. The Central Region has had to eliminate its collections of audio-visual materials, and books. We are fortunate that they have been able to maintain an active schedule of staff development offerings, delivery (discussed in more detail below), and provide some electronic databases, but we all know they could, and would do more with added resources. Since our local resources are so limited, we must look to the Region to help us when it comes to new technologies and media formats, such as e-books, downloadable video, and Playaway items. As explained above, we cannot expect much in the way of added resources from the municipality.

While there are more electronic opportunities to get information, the bulk of our business is serving the demand for books, tapes, CDs and DVDs. Many of our patrons have limited resources, and therefore could not fully utilize those electronic services mentioned above. They need to borrow the materials in a format they can use, such as in a book, or on VHS. This is made possible—with Regional delivery services. While libraries see increasing demand for e-materials, the demand for items to be delivered hasn't decreased one bit—just the opposite.

Though what Winchendon has to offer is limited, we try to serve our patrons as best we can. Our per capita annual expenditure is under \$ 15.00. With that sum, how many books could somebody buy, to last them for a whole year? Clearly, pooling resources for a public library makes good economic sense. Losing the public library would leave many residents with so much less.

For many years, our library was open 39 hours per week, while the standards called for a minimum of only 25. We were, and still are, open 4 evenings per week, and Saturday mornings—a schedule that provides our residents with plenty of opportunity to visit our facility. Now that our population group has changed, we are struggling to find just that one additional hour to meet the new requirements. We look around, and see there are many ways in which we might provide better services. Unfortunately, we just don't have the resources, and are hoping you, the Commissioners, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, will step up and help.

I understand the state has found the money to bring most segments of the budget back up to 2001-2002 levels. This has not been the case for libraries. Perhaps it is our fault for taking librarians' orders to "Shuuush." Continuing to minimally fund libraries and the organizations that help local libraries to function, such as the Central Region and C/W MARS, simply CANNOT result in any improvements to the public library services offered in Winchendon.

Thank you. Please feel free to call with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Julia White Cardinal