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Wealthy Chicago Suburb Prepares To Cut One-Third of Library Budget

There's talk of outsourcing, but no moves until a consultant's report arrives in August

Norman Oder -- Library Journal, 7/29/2009

- Sales taxes from mall are down
- LAC hired to recommend \$300K in cuts
- Friends urge temporary cuts, not permanent ones

The affluent Chicago suburb of **Oak Brook** has long relied on significant tax revenues from its large mall in lieu of property taxes, and those revenues have supported library service at more than \$160 per capita for a community of about 8700. Sales taxes, however, are down, and city officials want to cut \$400,000—nearly one-third—from the library's \$1.35 million budget.

In fact, village leaders have even publicly mused about privatizing management of the **Oak Brook Public Library**. "The odds of outsourcing are low," Trustee Gerald Wolin **told the *Daily Herald***. "But it's not out of the question."

The only vendor that specializes in full outsourcing, **Library Systems & Services, LLC**, (LSSI), usually runs libraries that have shoestring budgets or are in significant transition. In Oak Brook, a one-third cut would still leave a library better supported than most of its peers.

Consultant's report coming

However, the town board has contracted with consultant **Library Associates Companies** (LAC) to study the staffing, organization, and work flow, **aiming** to find \$300,000 in permanent cuts to the library budget, in part through outsourcing.

The **DuPage Library System**, which **includes Oak Brook**, earlier this year contracted with LAC to provide staffing services and support for its 132 members. While LAC offers outsourcing services, it does not run libraries as a whole.

The notion of privatization—or even permanent cuts to the library budget—does not sit well with library supporters. "Privatizing is a Draconian solution which will destroy the library as a viable community resource," Barbara Benezra, president of Friends of the Oak Brook Public Library, according to the *Daily Herald*.

The Friends recommend temporary cuts in materials and hours, rather than in staff, so service can be restored when tax revenues increase. Library director Meg Klinkow-Hartmann confirmed to *LJ* that the budget cut was \$400,000—given the recent imposition of \$100,000 in additional cuts—but said she couldn't comment while the report from LAC was pending.

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