

JEFFERSON COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT -OR- COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

This material was compiled at the direction of our members at our 2011 annual meeting. Information has been gathered to address the possibility of the Jefferson County Public Library becoming the Jefferson County Public Library District and to consider any implications for the citizens of Jefferson County.

LWV JEFFERSON COUNTY POSITION IN BRIEF (*Program & History Book / Government / Library page 13*)

Support of the property tax as the primary means of financing the Jefferson County Public Library. Grants and donations are also appropriate sources of funding.

HISTORY

In 1984, after many cuts in materials and services, the Jefferson County Public Library Board asked the County Commissioners to place a proposal for an increased mill levy for libraries on the ballot. League members felt a study should be done so that League could take a position on any similar proposal. Consensus was reached in March of 1986.

ACTION

The League supported an increase in the mill levy to 3.5 mills for Jefferson County Public Libraries in 1986, which then passed. There is a separate line item on taxpayers' bills for library use only. The commissioners have diverted some of that money for other uses in the past three years. The Library Law C.R.S.24-90-112 (2) (a) says that library taxes can be used only for library services.

In 2007, the League urged the County Commissioners to change the governance of the Jefferson County Library system from a county library district to an independent separate district. A new district was not created, and the Jefferson County Library remains a county library today.

JEFFERSON COUNTY LIBRARY (JCPL) SERVICES

In 2010 the trustees voted to close all library branches on Mondays to address some of the reduced revenue from the past 2 years and the very real outlook for continued reduction in this year's funds from Jefferson County Commissioners.

At the same time, library usage increased by 150,000 during 2009. The total usage for 2009 was close to 3 million visitors, including 100,000 children attending programs at the library.

One of the biggest needs among patrons is computer use. Often, public libraries are the only place for free computer and internet access and demand continues to grow.

JCPL is among the most leanly staffed and ranks as one of the more underfunded library systems in the metro area. Total expenditures per capita (\$46.58) are considerably less than 4 of 5 large metro area library systems, as well as staff expenditures per capita (\$29.75) for 2010.

WHY ANOTHER REQUEST TO BECOME A LIBRARY DISTRICT?

In late 2010, a grass-roots group of Jeffco Library patrons, including many former trustees, have come together to create "Save Jeffco Libraries". The library board of trustees has yet to take an official position on formation of a new district and is continuing to evaluate the situation.

However, some 3225 county residents have signed a petition in favor of a new district.

The primary reason to attempt to become a district during this past year has been the financial reductions by the Board of County Commissioners. The 3.5 mill levy that had been approved by voters in 1986 for the use of the library has been decreased by the commissioners in the past few years to a current level of 3.225 mills. This resulted in a shift of \$1.5 million during the past two fiscal years to another county agency. This year the same mill levy amount, 3.225 mills, may continue (with the resulting \$1.5 million decrease) and it is estimated that there would be an additional loss of \$1.6 million due to declining assessed property values. The closing of smaller library branches is among the cuts the Board of Trustees is considering.

The group, "Save Jeffco Libraries", represented by former trustee, Tom Atkins, had submitted a petition with 1300 signatures to the county commissioners on Jan.12, 2011. This petition asked the commissioners to change the structure of the current library to an independent district or to hold an election of the voters of Jefferson County for this purpose. The commissioners unanimously opposed this and said they would have the entire county "opt out" of this election, including all county voters.

The group has filed a lawsuit asking a judge for a "declaratory judgment" to decide the legality of the commissioners' actions. This has not yet been resolved because the matter is not scheduled on the Jefferson County court docket until Jan.31, 2012.

INTERVIEW WITH COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Questions asked of Faye Griffin, John Odom, and Don Rosier (Carole Lomond August, 2011)

1. *What are the main reasons the commissioners object to the JCPL becoming an independent district?*
It would create another layer of government.
It could become less transparent.
Human services need a portion of the 3.5 potential mill levy.
2. *Because library funding has been used for other purposes by the county commissioners for the past three years, how could the commissioners replace those funds if the library does become an independent district and will then have the authority to return to a 3.5 mill levy?*
No response from any of the three.
3. *Do you agree with Colorado Library Law (C.R.S. 24-90-109) that the library board of trustees has exclusive control and spending authority over the disbursement of library funds, including all assets of the public library fund?*
No response from any of the three.
4. *What library services do you, as Jefferson County citizens, use personally?*
No response from any of the three.

INTERVIEW WITH CHAIRMAN OF LIBRARY TRUSTEES

The trustees met with the county commissioners on August 18, 2011 and gave their budget details to the commissioners. The amount of funding that the Library will receive this coming year has not yet been determined so a zero-based budget as well as a budget based on a hoped for increased mill levy to greater than the 3.225 of the past year was proposed.

Linda Rockwell (chair) affirmed that the library is the best run of all the county agencies and has definitely been a valuable asset for the county. The library was an early adaptor of technology and is constantly being progressive with technology usage for library patrons.

There seem to be some options for the county to get some of the funding they are looking for by increasing the budget with the 1.6 mills that could be available and would not go against "TABOR" law. The county could use that increased millage to increase their budget and therefore not take funding from the library's approved mill levy.

There has been no firm decision on the amount of money available for the budget for this coming year, which makes the budget process quite challenging.

ADVANTAGES OF A LIBRARY DISTRICT

Colorado has 114 public libraries and 49 are library districts. Most large city and county public libraries in Colorado are independent districts. Douglas County, Arapahoe County, Pikes Peak and Fort Collins/Larimer County are some of the larger ones.

Advantages given by those who have become districts include the following:

Libraries that effectively meet community needs do so by focusing on their mission -- delivering quality library services. Since library districts operate independently, they are not bound by unnecessary organization requirements that sometimes compete with that mission.

Library districts operate efficiently by finding economies of scale to most effectively run operations.

Administrative staff members are charged with uncovering savings in operating costs, such as human resources, payroll, finances and information technology while maintaining a high level of services for patrons within a constrained budget.

Former executive director, Marcellus Turner (2008 – 2011) gave the following comments supporting a District.

- Library districts, allowable under Colorado Library Law, coexist outside other county departments and agencies without diverting attention and resources from one department/sector to another.
- Library districts are more financially stable and able to weather the vagaries of financial ups and downs through long-term planning and revenue projection, development and implementation.
- Library districts have complete control and authority over their direction and existence.
- Library districts operate with a direct relationship between the library and the citizens of that district. Agreements and promises of services exist between the library and the voters.

One disadvantage of becoming an independent district could be substantial start-up costs.

DUTIES OF THE TRUSTEES

Jefferson County Public Library Trustees are appointed by the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, in accordance with the "Colorado Library Law" (CO. Revised Statues, Title 24, article 90). Terms are for three years, and there are seven trustees. In addition to appointing the trustees, the county commissioners set the library tax levy and approve a library budget each year. The powers of the Library Board are defined in the Colorado Library Law. The executive director, (formerly known as the county librarian), reports on library issues to the Board of Trustees. Meeting agendas are prepared at the direction of the board chair and the executive director.

The board, among other duties:

- Is the sole spending authority for library funds;
- Hires the executive director (who directs library operations in accordance with policies developed by the Board of Trustees);
- Can enter into contracts and other agreements and can carry out all other activities necessary for the management and control of the library;
- Develops, approves and presents an annual budget request to the Board of County Commissioners after hearing staff recommendations and public input; and
- Serves without pay.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DISTRICT IF THE JCPL WERE TO BECOME AN INDEPENDENT DISTRICT

The mill levy could stay the same, 3.5 mills (any increase would have to be voted on). The library, as a district, would have three choices for the needs or services they require: provide "in house"; contract with the county; or contract with an outside contractor. Some examples of these would be:

- Archives of public records might be kept at the county level;
- "Contracting out" would be such services as grounds maintenance, snow removal and cleaning at libraries;
- Library employees would become employees of the district, not the county for HR services; and
- "In house" would probably include accounting, human resources, payroll, and information technology.

EVERY MEMBER MATERIAL REFERENCES

- The Jeffco LWV Library committee has used the website of the Jefferson County Library for some information in this EMM. <http://jefferson.lib.co.us>
- 24-90-109. Powers and duties of board of trustees: Colorado Library Laws <http://www.leg.state.co.us/>.
- www.savejeffcolibraries.org
- Denver Post Your Hub: Sept. 1, 2011 Entitled: Jeffco Libraries Needs to Establish a Library District www.yourhubdenverpost.com
- Columbine Courier articles: March 16, 2011; July 6, 2011; August 24, 2011 www.columbinecourier.com
- Meetings with county commissioners and library trustee chair.

LWV JEFFCO LIBRARY COMMITTEE

Carol Coppock, Carole Lomond, Chyrl Hofsetz, Linda Porter and Elaine Olson.