

Cuts threaten survival of Michigan libraries

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Michigan Governor Rick Snyder's proposed budget for 2012 cuts library funding to \$3.4 million—a 40 percent reduction from last year. Combined with the loss of federal matching funds and declining local revenues, libraries are facing what Michigan Library Association (MLA) Board President Christine Berro describes as a “perfect storm of funding cuts.”

“Every source of funding available to libraries—state aid, renaissance zone reimbursements, tax capture of dedicated library millages, elimination of personal property taxes and federal funds—is being chopped off at the knees. There isn't much more we can take and be expected to survive,” Berro explained to the *Niles Star*, a local newspaper.

The “perfect storm” of cuts includes the loss of municipal property tax revenues as a result of plummeting of home values in Michigan. High unemployment and declining incomes have meant that millage elections, which increase local taxes for funding specific areas like schools and libraries, are less likely to pass despite their historic popularity.

In addition, revenues paid to libraries from local millages are being devoted to other purposes. “They're taking our dedicated, locally voted millages and redirecting and, in fact, diverting them to another form of government, whether it's park benches or whatever,” Gretchen Couraud, MLA executive director, told the *Detroit News*.

The budget cuts immediately threaten loss of services, such as the Michigan eLibrary (MeL), which is the basis for interlibrary lending and electronic databases. MeL users throughout the state access an extensive online database to share research resources and borrow books from other institutions.

The service has rapidly increased in popularity, especially in outlying areas of the state. In Niles, a small city of 12,000 people in southwestern Michigan, for example, Library Director Nancy Studebaker

reports a 40 percent increase in MeL use. “It's growing in popularity every week. Our patrons borrow 120 items a week from other libraries.”

In the metropolitan Detroit area, Troy Public Library, one of the busiest in the state, is closing down on May 1. Last year, a millage election in Troy failed, resulting in the shutdown plan of the 49-year-old, 40,000-square-foot facility.

Libraries in other cities around Troy offer reciprocal benefits to users with valid library cards from other cities. Nonresidents can obtain a library card at a cost of \$100 to \$170 per year.

The *Detroit News* interviewed the directors of the larger libraries near Troy, those in Southfield, Birmingham and Berkley. They all echoed the comments of Southfield library director Dave Ewick. “We can't take these people on as refugees. My heart goes out to Troy residents. But I can't give them for free what my people are paying for,” Ewick said.

The city of Southfield is campaigning for its own millage election on May 3.

A recent *Detroit News* article entitled, “Odds stacked against libraries as cities feel pinch,” pointed to the crisis created by library closures on the remaining facilities in the surrounding areas. “The cutbacks come as polls show public library usage is on the rise in Michigan. So when some communities shut the doors for good, where are patrons supposed to go?”

In response to the budget cuts, libraries in Canton Township, Clawson, Madison Heights and Royal Oak are restricting services and increasing fees for nonresidents. In Romulus, a small municipality in western Wayne County, a February millage vote to save the library failed to pass. The facility will close on the same day as the Troy library. And in Detroit, the largest city in the region, the public library system has lost \$5 million over the last two years and laid off 80 employees in the past several months.



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