

Cutting to the Bone?

Every village board has a responsibility to be careful with public funds, and not spend lavishly. The New Glarus library, too, has a responsibility to be fiscally responsible. In fact, the library has stayed within its budget every year within memory.

Despite this, the New Glarus Village Board is considering something new: not exempting the village from the county library tax, to slash the level of village support from \$150,703 in 2014 to \$58,393 in 2015. This would force devastating cuts to library, fundamentally changing how the library serves our community, and resulting in increased county taxes on village citizens.

This article will explain what the library tax is, and what impact the proposed change would have, not only on the library, but on the village residents.

What is the county library tax?

The county library tax is a minimum amount of money a municipality must allocate to its library for the privilege of having a library. For the Village of New Glarus in 2015, this amount is \$58,393, and is set by the equalized value of the village. If the municipality decides to support its library at a level greater than the minimum, as New Glarus always has, it is exempted from the county library tax. In 2014, the village allocated \$150,703 to the library, so the exemption was allowed.

What would be the consequences of this be?

A cut of this size would force the library to reduce hours of operation, lay off employees, and will result in severe cuts to programming and collection. For 2015 the library has budgeted \$174,707 for salary and benefits, \$80,143 for all other costs (collections & subscriptions, technology, programming, etc.) for a total budget of \$254,850. If the village adopted this proposal, the entire 2015 library budget would be reduced to around \$162,540, not enough to pay salary and benefits. To balance the cuts, hours of operation would be severely reduced to reduce salary and benefit costs, and punishing cuts would be needed to all other areas.

Can't the library just find another source of funding?

Donations and grants are about the only options available, and since the fiscal year starts January 1, 2015 mounting a substantive effort would be essentially impossible. A public library cannot implement its own taxes or add additional fees. It also does not determine how much neighboring communities pay for the services received from the library. State law mandates all of this. The only discretion is how much the village supports the library through its budgeting process – a village board decision.

Will taxes go down because of this?

Taxes would go down only if the village board reduces the total levy by the amount taken from the library's budget. Since part of the discussion on September 2 by the Village Board

included other ways to spend the money cut from the library's budget, the result will be increasing taxes while library services plummet.