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Government

Plainfield Public Library Budget Reviewed with Council and CBAC Members

By JENNIFER POPPER

April 11, 2019 at 2:47 AM

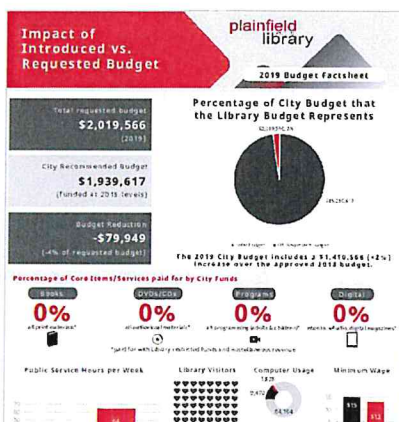


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PLAINFIELD, NJ - Budget deliberations for the Plainfield Public Library took place on Tuesday with its representatives, council members and residents serving on the CBAC, or Citizens' Budget Advisory Committee.

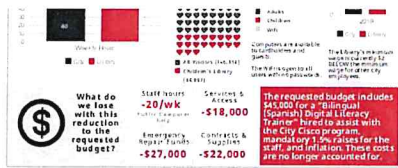
The session led off with Patricia Fleming, a member of the Board of Trustees, who summarized a list of services available at the library that are essential to the residents of Plainfield, including GED, English as a Second Language, and citizenship classes, and computer services that act as a bridge to the digital age for many who would otherwise not have access.



According to a [2019 Budget Factsheet](#), there were 146,134 visitors in 2018, with 34,997 visits to the Children's Library. There were 239 students in the ESL program in 2018; currently there are 140 students, but there are 200 on the waiting list. Computers at the library, available to cardholders and guests, were used 75,462 times last year; 85 percent of those involved the use of WiFi.

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Fleming reminded everyone that the library offers free meeting space, which, she said, has become scarce with the loss of the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield and the Plainfield YMCA. Sixty-seven outside groups held 246 meetings in 2018, including non-profits, sororities and fraternities, Union County, the school district, and the city itself. Groups are frequently turned



away due to a lack of availability.

She didn't wait long to address what she called the elephant in the room, and brought up the loss of a full-time position the city originally said they would fund.

The library's 2018 budget was \$1,939,617, and the city has recommended holding it at that same level for 2019, falling \$80K short from the \$2,019,566 request.

Fifty-six percent, or approximately \$45,000 of that loss was to be allocated to a full-time Bilingual (Spanish) Digital Literacy Trainer to assist with the city's Cisco program, along with a mandatory 1.5% raise for staff, and inflation.

The library received \$125,000 in grants in 2018 that went to the literacy department, computer training, ESL and GED training, and helped local youth get jobs.

"Part of the problem with grant funding," Mary Ellen Rogan, Director of the Plainfield Public Library, said, "is when we get grants, they will not support the infrastructure of our organization. So if we have a staff person, that staff person cannot be paid from the grant. The grant money for salaries has to be for new hires that will then go away."

Rogan noted that in order for the library to work with the city on the Cisco grant project, they needed to keep their Bilingual instructor. Otherwise, they would have to get rid of him because he was there for as long as he could be based on grant restrictions.

"So that was why we made the negotiation with the city. And when we asked the city what would we do at the end of the year, we were told to put him in the 2019 budget. And this is where we are."

Councilwoman Ashley Davis asked Rogan how the budget shortfall would affect residents.

Rogan said they will lose a part-time staff position that assists residents with computer help; some of the databases would go away, as well as services like hotspots; it would limit contracts; and there would be cutbacks on supplies. It would also eliminate one hundred percent of the repair fund.

Rogan added that the city pays nothing towards books, DVDs/CDs, adult and children programming, and digital services like ebooks, eAudio, and digital magazines. Those items are paid for with the library's restricted fund and miscellaneous revenue. Almost all of the money the library receives from the city, Rogan added, goes toward infrastructure, staff salaries, and benefits for full-time positions.

Rogan said they made the decision to close on Saturdays at 1 p.m. after studying the data; that day saw the least number of visits in 2018. She added that residents are already accustomed to the library closing at that time during the summer.

Finance Director Ron West said, "When we looked at the budget, we weren't looking at people or anything else. We were looking at dollars. What you're hearing is the impact from the library's perspective; we're trying to make a budget."

After additional commentary, Council President Mills-Ransome concluded the session by saying, "Knowing that you will probably not be fully restored, do you have a magic number?"

Rogan and Fleming said, almost in unison, "\$45,000."

See a list of upcoming budget sessions that are open to the public.

CORPORATION NOTICE CITY OF PLAINFIELD PUBLIC NOTICE

PLEASE BE ADVISED THAT THE PLAINFIELD CITY COUNCIL WILL CONDUCT 2019 BUDGET DELIBERATION SESSIONS AS INDICATED BELOW:

DEPARTMENT	DATE	TIME	LOCATION
Introduction of CY 2019 Municipal Operating Budget	Mon. April 8 th Regular Mtg.	7:00 p.m.	Municipal Court 325 Watchung Avenue
<u>Public Works & Urban Dev. and Library</u>	Tues. April 9 th	7:00 p.m.	City Hall Library 515 Watchung Avenue
<u>Communications, IT and Finance</u>	Mon. April 15 th	7:00 p.m.	City Hall Library 515 Watchung Avenue
<u>Economic Development and Health & Social Services</u>	Mon. April 22 nd	7:00 p.m.	City Hall Library 515 Watchung Avenue
<u>Police and Fire</u>	Wed. April 24 th	7:00 p.m.	City Hall Library 515 Watchung Avenue
CBAC Presentation/Recommendations	Mon. May 6 th AFS Mtg.	7:00 p.m.	Municipal Court 325 Watchung Avenue
Possible Adoption of Budget And/or Budget Amendments	Mon. May 13 th Regular Mtg.	7:00 p.m.	Municipal Court 325 Watchung Avenue
<i>Additional Date:</i> Possible Adoption of Budget (If Necessary)	Wed. May 22 nd	7:00 p.m.	City Hall Library 515 Watchung Avenue