

January 24, 2023

Hello,

I am writing to provide public comment/feedback regarding inclusivity and general importance of libraries in Vermont.

Let me begin with who I am. My husband and I are Vermonters by birth, and for many generations. We currently reside in White River Junction with our two children. A number of people in our immediate and extended families are living with various "disabilities"; Autism, epilepsy, ADHD, PTSD/veteran, etc.

We are so very lucky to have multiple fabulous libraries in our town. My parents are elderly, disabled veterans, living on a very limited income. The West Hartford library has been their lifeline...they get internet access there (with a SUPER friendly and knowledgeable Director, Sandy, to assist them), they utilize the free books there, they also access the books, movies and TV/media there as well. In addition to this, they have a free library outside, and many activities that my children and family attend. This last fall, my children tried fresh kale and other vegetables from the library community garden.

The libraries in our town (and elsewhere) are critical and safe meeting places. They also provide internet services to the most isolated and at risk Vermonters (including the homeless--who often could be qualified as disabled). They provide for in person community engagement and enrichment (hosting farmers markets, providing book clubs, online language learning and audio resources, library passes, play groups, community bulletin boards, hosting community events, etc).

I am not sure that I was fully able to explain the critical role that libraries have played in our lives...I am sure that I missed the part about being a child in the Sharon Baxter library and thinking it was the very best thing in the world and challenging myself to read every book in the tiny library!

I just want to emphasize that libraries are sometimes the only or last safe place for the most vulnerable in our communities and should be treated as a critical resource for all (and funded accordingly).

Thank you,

Janet Potter

White River Junction, Vermont