Testimony on Facilities: Jeudevine Memorial Library

Lisa Sammet, Library Director

I became the Library Director at the Jeudevine Library in May 2000. From the start I knew we would need an addition because the library was in accessible. A wheelchair can’t get into the building. Our lone bathroom is down a winding staircase in an unheated basement. First, I had to make the library a place that people would use as in 2000 it had its worst statistics in its 106-year history. No one was using this library.

After many years and a few false starts we were ready to go to bid for a wonderful addition. We had raised over the $1.7 million estimate. Then COVIC struck and construction costs went up meteorically.

Bids for our project came in at $2.42 million. We have been promised $600,000 through an appropriation on the USDA Rural Development Fund 2022. Yet, we’ve been stymied once again because the Federal Government hasn’t passed it budget. The current continuing resolution is up on Feb 18, and it looks like as of this date, Feb. 9, 2022, that there will be another continuing resolution for them to vote on the entire budge on March 11, 2022.

We have two grants with deadlines on their grants and one large donor ($200,000) who wants the project to be built this year or he will take back his donation.

This addition is very necessary for the library and for the town. Concerning the area which need to be addressed in this testimony, following are our details.

(1) Library services for specific segments of the Vermont population, including senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, youths and children, immigrant and migrant communities, and people living in poverty.

As stated above, the Jeudevine Library is not accessible. Children and adults must share a very small space. We have no space for young adults, no place to do programming with seniors. Most programming has to happen in other buildings. We have only 900 square feet of usable space. It is difficult to include any disabled people and seniors have a difficult time using the building, especially the bathroom (as described above).

(2) The role that libraries play in emergency preparedness, cultural diversity and inclusion, public health and safety, community identity and resiliency, economic development, and access to public programs and services.

It is very difficult to enlarge on our role in these areas because we don’t have enough room. We imagine that once our addition is built that it will have a large positive effect on economic development. It will be a feature which will draw people into the town. We will be able to serve more people and serve them better.

(3) The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on library operations and services;…”

As stated above, the costs to our project have gone up 50%. We hope that the Federal Budget 2022 will pass, but what will we do if it doesn’t? It is a difficult thing to raise that much more money and it is an amazing thing that we have raised as much as we have, especially when the State of Vermont has no programs to support library facilities and the Federal Government also has no programs to aid library facilities.

We have great WiFi being part of the VT Fiber Network. We can get lots of grants for connectivity but few grants to help us have a building where we can provide services to the people of the town and area.

Vermont wants to keep its villages vital. Libraries are often one of the core institutions in any Vermont town, yet, many of Vermont library buildings, like the Jeudevine Library, are old and have problems with accessibility, adequate space, funding for facilities, and ongoing maintenance. Libraries are community centers in our towns. The State of Vermont should invest in them and in helping them thrive. They make our communities better in so many ways, but it is hard to get money to maintain them or improve them.