

# The community supports the Grand Rapids Area Library

Over 300 residents filled the Itasca County Board Room Tuesday May 27, and spilled out to fill the entire hallway, and up the steps leading to both the front and back doors. They were there to show overwhelming support for the central role the Grand Rapids Area Library plays in the lives of children, families, individuals and seniors. Among the 52 programs offered by our area library are Children's programs, including Story Hour, Early Childhood Family Education book time, Book Clubs, STEM programs, school visits, and computer availability.

The early residents and community leaders of Itasca County recognized the value that a Library brings to the future economic and educational vitality of the area and thus began funding the Library through property taxes in 1895. That support has continued ever since. However, this funding mechanism is now out-of-balance.

The Library is facing a budget crisis, with the rising costs of books, on-line programming and staffing. There are no state or federal dollars supporting the Library. All funding is local, thus it's necessary to look at establishing ongoing, equitable local funding.

While the Library is located in the city of Grand Rapids, 65% of Library card holders live outside the city, yet County funding only provides 16% of the Library budget, with the City of Grand Rapids providing the rest. Grand Rapids Mayor Tasha Connelly proposed a Joint Powers Agreement between Grand Rapids and the County, building off existing County and City support, creating an active partnership in order to continue providing the excellent services and programming offered to all County residents.

The City of Grand Rapids is not proposing to cut the support from City taxpayers. Rather, the Library and the residents at this meeting are asking the County to step up and share in the funding of this service used by residents throughout the County. To assist the Commissioners in learning who was present and what communities/township were represented at the meeting, sign-in sheets were circulated. 299 signatures were collected! This did not even include all who were present as the sign-in sheets did not make it all the way through the room and hallways. Those who were able to sign included individuals from Arbo Township, Bigfork, Bovey, Cohasset, Coleraine, Deer River, Hill City, La Prairie, Jacobson, Keewatin, Marcel, Pengilly, Talmoon, and Warba. After the meeting, several home-schooled students expressed the importance of the library for both informational materials and as an opportunity to connect with other-home-schooled students. It was especially charming to see 6 youngsters also ask to have their names listed. Civic training at an early age.

If you were unable to attend the meeting, or did not get a chance to sign the sheet, please call your commissioner to ask them to support the programming and services our area's public library offers to all Itasca County residents.

*Kathleen Blake  
Grand Rapids, MN*

## HeraldReview

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