



People & Operational Plan 2026 Budget Request

Department: Library
Submitted By: Ashley Thiem-Menning
Date: July 21, 2025
Position Title/Request: Local Historian

Background & Justification:

In 2024, a memo to Council outlined the option to gradually restructure Library staffing by converting five part-time positions to full-time over future budget cycles in an effort to ensure operational efficiency. The Library successfully converted two positions in 2025. In 2026, the Library is requesting to convert one part-time position to full-time.

Strategic Alignment:

Additional staffing enables the Library to maintain its current service levels more effectively. Offering free access to programs provides our community with more opportunities to engage with library services and events. We enhance the lives of community members by providing free access to a wide array of materials, programs, and services that cater to their lifelong learning, recreational, and informational needs.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, libraries in the state provide an impressive return of over \$4.00 for every dollar spent—a figure that is likely conservative. Our initiatives not only engage current residents, but also attract individuals from neighboring communities, stimulating local business support when they visit.

The Local History Room is the Library's most complex space, housing archives, databases, maps, photographs, books, microfilm, and more. While many visitors expect immediate help in the room, current staffing levels make this difficult to manage. Staff with the most knowledge of the room is only onsite four hours per day. Creating a Local Historian position would improve both the quality of the room and services provided, fulfilling our value in services rendered by the City.

Operational Benefit:

With the disbanding of the Kaukauna Historical Society, the Library is now one of the few institutions preserving the City's history. Kaukauna history is extremely extensive given our location as the first settlement in the state. Local history collections play a central role in our organization. We handled 163 research requests in 2023, 137 requests last year, and 83 so

far this year—including inquiries from universities and researchers beyond Wisconsin, positively raising the City's profile.

Local history is the Library's second most requested special service. Over ninety percent of the Local History Room use is drop-in, despite the website stating that appointments are required for those needing assistance in the room. In best practice, staff still assist walk-in visitors. However, the front desk staff cannot leave the desk, so another staff member must stop their off-desk work to assist in the room.

Due to the complexity of the room's special collections, most staff can only offer basic help, which has sometimes proved frustrating to users. Basic training in the room is part of all library onboarding. However, the scope of the collection in conjunction with the scope of the research request often exceeds the basic training provided. We currently house over 15,000 photographs and over 100 reels of microfilm, just two of the many collections housed in the room.

Creating a Local Historian position would allow the Library to promote scheduled, bookable time with the Local Historian. When not in appointments with patrons, the additional hours would be dedicated to pending research requests, as well as handling the backlog of items needing collection management, and assisting with general library operations.

The position would also continue to support other City departments, including Community Enrichment, Planning, and Legal with research requests, which have increased over the last two years.

Risk of Not Funding:

The Library was forced to close one evening in the fall of 2024 due to lack of staff. Increasing the number of staff in the building is critical to maintaining operations. All staff members are cross-trained to work all service points in the building, so any increase to staff hours assists in helping operationally.

Budget Impact:

The Library currently has one open part-time position. The funds from that position would be applied towards this conversion for an increased amount of \$54,500 for salary and benefits.

Alternatives Considered:

The Library continues to review current and future staffing levels. Converting part-time positions to fulltime offers the Library higher retention rates and increases employee morale. Our recommendation in 2024 was to move forward with conversions in an effort to increase fulltime opportunities within the organization and ensure operational standards be met.