

LOCAL NEWS

Levy would keep library funding

By Jon Pompia
The Pueblo Chieftain

Since 1999, most Pueblo County property owners home have been paying a few dollars a year to support the growth of the Pueblo City-County Library District.

Now, with that general construction bond set to expire at the year's end, the library district's board of trustees plans to ask voters in November to renew that funding so programs and services library users have come to expect will continue.

The bond currently in place adds 0.6 mills per \$100,000 of assessed property value to a tax bill. In dollars and cents, a homeowner with a residence assessed at \$100,000 has been paying an extra \$4.30 per year, with that amount increasing with a property's value.

The proposed measure renews the 0.6 mills as an addition to the general mill levy rather than a bond. This will allow the money to be used to provide library services and programs, buy new books and other materials, and refresh

library buildings, furniture, fixtures and equipment.

And, as no debt will be incurred, there will be no interest payments, ensuring that all generated funds are spent on the designated purposes. Unlike the 20-year bond, however, the mill levy addition would not expire.

The library district says there is a pressing need for the funding stream to continue.

"I feel a great deal of confidence in the people that they will renew the funding," said Jon Walker, executive director

of the library district. "But in the event that it isn't, our financials go upside down by 2021, and we would be in the red.

"And what that means is the library services, programs, activities and facilities that we've known for the last several years are not sustainable."

"We're not asking for more money," added Doreen Martinez, president of the library board of trustees. "It's simply a continuation of what people have been seeing on their

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tax bills for the past 20 years. And we don't feel like it's a lot.

"So voting 'yes' means the continuation of special programs for children's education and entertainment, the free and open gathering place we offer, and the books, technology and movies that we are continually adding. We serve every population, from young children to the elderly."

The board also points out that

based on the state's Gallagher Amendment, an increase in Denver metro area property values has translated to a loss of more than \$800,000 for the local library district since 2017.

In order to gauge the public's interest in renewing the funding, a recently formed Vote Pueblo Library Proud collective hosted a series of community engagement forums throughout the county. Based on the positive response from those who participated, the board of trustees feel confident in placing the measure on the ballot.

"We talked with hundreds

of people over three months," Walker said. "Most people don't even realize that they are paying that tax and certainly didn't realize it is going away. And everybody that we engaged with said we should continue with it."

Walker also pointed out that a live interview telephone poll conducted in February revealed that 85% of respondents would vote to continue the library tax.

"In the last few years, we have been very proud that the Pueblo library has received all the accolades, including the best library in America,"

Walker said. "We have literally thousands of people who walk through our doors every day: on the average, 4,600 a day at all seven of our libraries, who check out more than 8,000 books and other library materials. Every day, 3,500 people are logging onto library computers.

"And about 900 people a day are attending library-sponsored cultural and educational programs."

Those numbers, Walker said, show the extensive bond that exists between the community and its libraries.

"It's important to me that

the investment that the public makes in its libraries has a good return. We've worked very hard to make that so," he said. "But the risk is that unless we continue this modest tax, that will change."

On July 25, the board of trustees is expected to meet and formally approve placement of the tax question on the November ballot.

For more information, visit pueblolibrary.org/pueblolibraryproud.

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