

JUNE 14, 2010  
MESSAGE TO ALL LIBRARY USERS  
FROM THE WPL BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
ABOUT FRIDAY CLOSINGS

There appears to be some misinformation circulating about how and why the Library Board made the decision to close on Fridays. The Board would like clarify, as best we can, why this decision was (1) necessary and (2) in our judgments, the option that made the most sense for all concerned; our patrons, our administration and our employees. We are optimistic that Friday closures will not be permanent and we continue to work with the Council to address this matter.

By law, the library's Board of Trustees is an independent governing body and it alone is empowered "to make and adopt such bylaws, rules and regulations, for their own guidance and for the government of the library" and it has the "exclusive control of the expenditure of all moneys collected for the library and deposited to the credit of the library fund." [75 ILCS 5/4-7 \(1\) and \(2\)](#). See also [75 ILCS 5/3-5](#). Unfortunately, at least from the Library Board's perspective, when Home Rule was adopted by the City of Wheaton back in the 1970's, the City chose to pool the library's tax assessment with the City's. So, rather than having a separate tax levy, each year the City Council determines the amount of tax dollars the library will receive. Our library has a voter approved tax rate of up to \$.023 (See [ballot](#) from the 1969 referendum (the rate was subsequently increased from \$0.20 to \$0.23)). For 2010-2011, the library's allocation is \$0.138.

The library has historically operated very cost effectively. Our record speaks for itself. The fact that we have gained national recognition as a Top Ten library, despite having fewer tax dollars to work with than any other area library (See [EAV Comparisons](#)<sup>1</sup>) illustrates that our Library Director and the Board have a very clear understanding of what the "core" functions of a modern library are and of how to meet the needs of our patrons. Since December 2009, when we learned that our budget would, for the second year in a row, likely be reduced by another \$300,000 (a 16% total reduction), the Board has been grappling with ways to meet our budget shortfall.

It has been suggested that staff could have been further reduced (reductions in staff were already made during the 2009-10 budget year. (See, Economies Made During 2009-2010)) to meet our budget shortfall. The Board seriously considered lay-offs. The library administration and the Board reviewed the specific job duties of each employee and the staffing levels and schedules of each department throughout the day. The fact is that the WPL has only 24 full time employees, (including 2 in maintenance) and 50 part time employees (including 19 student assistants) to staff a 124,518 sq. ft. library that provides a full range of services, 69 hours/7 days a week, to an average 50,000 people per month. The WPL already does more with less staff than any of our neighboring libraries. [Staffing Comparisons for 2009-2010](#).

For example, Des Plaines (population 56, 945) is comparable in size to Wheaton (population 55,416). Wheaton's library is physically 35% larger than the Des Plaines library (124,518 versus 82,000 sq. ft.) and its annual circulation is 18% more than Des Plaines' (1,340,820 versus 1,111,558 items). The Des Plaines library employs 44 full time and 76

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<sup>1</sup> The tax rate for the library according to Illinois law is for the **operation** of the library. [75 ILCS 5/3-6](#). Authorization for an additional tax for building related purposes is a separate tax. [75 ILCS 5/3-1](#). The library's survey shows the tax rates for our neighboring communities *for operating revenues only*. We have not included the \$0.0635 assessed for the Wheaton library's building bond issue or any additional taxes assessed for building expenditures by any of the other surveyed libraries. The average tax assessment for operation of the libraries surveyed is \$0.2787. Wheaton's rate is \$0.138. [Operating Budget Comparisons](#).

part-time employees compared to Wheaton's 24 full time and 50 part-time employees and is open only 3 hours more per week (72 versus 69 hours). Des Plaines' operating budget is 43% higher than Wheaton's (\$7,186,238 compared to \$4,097,237). Lisle is another example of how cost effectively Wheaton's library has historically been run. Wheaton's population is almost double the size of Lisle (55,416 versus 29,568). Lisle's library is less than a quarter of the size of Wheaton's (124,518 sq. ft. versus 29,500 sq. ft.) and its annual circulation is approximately a third of Wheaton's (428,316 versus 1,340,820). Lisle has 30 full time and 50 part time employees and an annual operating budget of \$4,261,427, 4% higher than Wheaton's. Of the 16 area libraries we surveyed, the average number of employees was 40 FT and 86 PT. Making additional staff cuts, in the Board's opinion, just was not a realistic option if we were to maintain services.

The Board also looked at library usage patterns (daily, weekly, times of day, and what services were most utilized). When we decided to close on Fridays, the City Council asked us to reconsider and explore the alternative of opening for one or two hours less every day. We gave serious consideration to this request in April ([4/23/10 letter to Council](#)) and again in May when, by a 6-3 vote, we reaffirmed the decision to close on Fridays.

The easiest way to explain our thought process is to think of the library as an appointment book each day of the week. Different patrons use the library at different times of the day. Generally speaking we have heavy usage during the day for pre-school programs, and by school children and non working people. Working people and students use our services in the evenings and on weekends. The Board had the option of reducing hours by taking a vertical or horizontal cut through our hours. If we took a horizontal cut through our hours and closed 2 hours earlier each week day, our working patrons would be severely affected and the day time users relatively unaffected. Opening 2 hours later would simply transfer the pain from the working patrons to the pre-school programs. Closing the library on Friday, our least busy day, affects all patrons, but generally equally, and leaves us the ability to continue all our services.

Ultimately, we concluded that even with a reduction in daily hours, Friday hours would still need to be significantly reduced. In the majority of the Board's opinion, it just did not make sense, administratively, to fully staff the library for only 3 or 4 hours on Fridays. We chose closing Fridays as the least disruptive option and probably the most fair to the majority of our patrons. This system also has the fewest adverse effects on the scheduling of our staff. For most of the year the library has been a 7-day operation and staff scheduling is a very complicated process. In addition, our patrons are not the only ones adversely affected by the library's reduced hours. All of our staff, but particularly the part-timers who lost what few employment benefits they had last year due to budgetary constraints, will have their hours, and thus their earnings, significantly reduced. As an employer, morale and fairness to our employees are issues the Board felt compelled to address. We have a phenomenal, dedicated staff that we greatly value and who have been instrumental in making Wheaton a nationally recognized Top Ten library. Most city employees will receive a raise this year, some as much as 9%. In contrast, our employees are facing a 10% reduction in their pay.

The WPL Board has a fiduciary duty to "render the use of the library of the greatest benefit to the greatest number of such residents and taxpayers" [75 ILCS 5/1-3](#). Every member of the Board takes that responsibility very seriously. Not everyone agrees with our decision and that is to be expected. But, the Board exercised its best judgment given the funding limitations placed upon us. We hope the above explanation of how and why our decision was made assures all our users that the WPL Board and staff are doing our very best to make sure the WPL remains "the jewel" of Wheaton. We know that the City Council shares our belief that that the library's operating hours should be reinstated as soon as possible and we are hopeful that we will be able to work together to come up with a way to reinstate Friday hours.