

**NEW ROCHELLE PUBLIC LIBRARY
PUBLIC HEARING
Thursday, May 4, 2023**

Whitney Barrat, President, called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. The following members of the Board and Administration were present or excused.

BOARD MEMBERS

Whitney Barrat, President
Daniel Bonnet, Vice President
Sarah Langlois, Secretary
Beth Acocella
Corey Galloway
Lucille Renwick
Rhiannon Navin

ADMINISTRATION

Thomas Geoffino
Jean Manning
Yesika Torres
Elizabeth Joseph

WLS REPRESENTATIVE

Francis Okelo

FY 2023-2024 PROPOSED LIBRARY BUDGET PRESENTATION:

Board President and Budget Chair Whitney Barrat provided a detailed overview regarding the proposed FY 2023/2024 Library budget:

On Mar 23, 2023 the Board voted to approve the 6.87% increase - which is composed of the following elements, outlined in the summary below.

SUMMARY:

- The NRPL Budget Request for the 2023-24 fiscal year is a 6.87% increase in the average homeowners' annual tax burden, which amounts to a total tax levy of \$6,500,404.39
- The increase total is \$417,724.69
- The majority of this increase is due to non-discretionary budget line items, which amount to the majority (about 75%) of the overall budget increase - see below for more details.
- Other line items in this budget include only two requested increases, also detailed below:
 - A new Librarian I for the Children's department, an outcome of the success of our efforts (as outlined in our strategic plan - goal number 5) to engage more school-aged children and teens to our programs
 - A modest increase in the materials budget

Unavoidable and/or contractually mandated increases:

- **Salary increases:**
 - The Board approved a 2.5% increase in salaries which resulted in a 6.87% overall increase.
 - The salary increase amounts to approximately \$60,000.

- **Health insurance:**
 - Health insurance costs for full-time library staff increased by **12.2%**
 - The library contributes 82%, staff contributes 18%.
 - Last year, there was no provision for an increase. This year, the increase amounts to **\$173,873.29**.
- **PASNY:**
 - Increases in our PASNY (or electricity) account have been long delayed. Due to increasing costs over the past few years, they can no longer be ignored. The increase for this budget line item is **\$38,473.50**.
- **Contracted services:**
 - Increases in costs for contracted services in the amount of **\$48,056.34**, due primarily to the minimum wage increase for the library's security guards.
 - Rates have been raised in the past two years, but we did not previously budget for this in order to try and stay within the tax cap last year.

In addition to these unavoidable increases, the proposed 2023/24 budget includes only two other line item increases as mentioned above:

- One new full-time position, a Librarian I (School-Age Outreach Coordinator): **\$85,000.00 (includes salary and all benefits)**
 - A modest increase in library materials: **\$18,865.17**

Each year, we put into perspective what this means for residents. *The average taxpayer in New Rochelle will see an increase of approximately \$24.07 from last year's budget, or \$2/month.*

EXPLANATION:

As in the past, we've explored numerous possible budget scenarios with varying levels of increase. In the past we've tried to show a scenario that keeps the budget flat, but this was not possible this year due to unavoidable and contractually mandated increases in salaries, health insurance, PASNY utility costs, and increases in costs for contracted services.

In addition to these unavoidable increases, the proposed 2023/24 budget **includes only two other line item increases**, which includes the addition of a Librarian 1 position (school-age outreach coordinator) and a modest increase in library materials. As a reminder, outreach to school-age children was a priority described in our most recent strategic plan. Our success with this type of programming has led to the need for an additional staff member to work with school-age children, and our NRPL staff have identified this position as the most critical. We declined adding another position requested by staff in order to reduce the budget increase. **We also reduced the library materials amount by over 50% in order to further reduce the budget increase.**

It is the Budget Committee's opinion that the two additional line item increases are absolutely essential to ensure the NRPL can maintain our increased outreach to school aged children via enhanced class visits as well as the many recently introduced (and popular) school age

programming and to fully function as the people's library, a place for civic, intellectual and cultural discussion and exchange.

Children's Head Bobby Simic created a well-reasoned document that calls for the creation of a Librarian I (School-Age Outreach Coordinator,) which is attached to this email. In it, he outlines that the Westchester Library System recently published a document providing comparisons between the 38 public libraries in the system.

- The NRPL's FTE staffing per capita (for every 2,000 residents) is the 2nd lowest (our library is ranked 37 out of 38 libraries) in the county at 0.80. The NRPL is staffed very lightly given our population size, square footage for two facilities and the long opening hours. We believe adding this new position is appropriate in the context of the NRPL's staffing situation, and to remain in alignment with the community's stated goals per our strategic plan.

The Budget Committee is firmly in favor of increasing the library's materials budget by the modest proposed amount. As Elizabeth Joseph, our new Assistant Director explains, while print books are our mainstay, books have taken on new shapes and platforms. We must introduce and normalize these new and emerging formats into the learning practice of our constituents. In our competitive world, it is critical that we are in lock step with cultural and technological shifts. In order to do so, we must invest in resources that not only alleviate academic gaps and abridge the digital divide, we must also diversify our offerings to pique and stimulate the interests and talents of our community members. In order to do so, we must increase what we lend to include things like STEAM kits, literacy tablets, maker hardware and software, accessibility resources and multicultural media, to name a few.

Regarding materials, **the NRPL is again ranked as the 2nd lowest (our library is ranked 37 out of 38 libraries) in the county with \$5.18 spent per resident on library materials.** The attached information sheet, which is a part of the previously referenced publication providing comparative Westchester public library information, details our woeful status relative to per capita library materials spending. We must enhance our spending in order to provide equity in access to library materials for our residents and to provide fair value for taxpayers.

Despite the overall budget increase, you will find that the proposed 2023/24 is in fact (and as always) a very frugal budget. We are confident that we can explain the increased tax burden to the public in a way that makes it palatable to them. ***Again, the average taxpayer in New Rochelle will see an increase of approximately \$24.07 from last year's budget.*** Given that the survey conducted to inform the strategic plan suggested that the community is willing to support the library through taxes, we hope our voting public will support this budget.

He declared that this budget, according to the City Finance Commissioner, calls for an annual increase of \$14.59 per household for the "average" taxpayer. Chuck summarized the elements that called for an increase of 4.19% (\$244,509 is the actual proposed increase) in the tax levy. The vast majority of this budget increases tie to non-discretionary salary increases for staff, as well as mandatory increases in payments to other salary expenses and staff medical and retirement payments.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION:

No individuals spoke during this time.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Langlois
Secretary