

## County libraries' use up, but budget down

By Amy Smith, Union staff writer | Posted: Friday, September 12, 2014 8:47 am

JEFFERSON — Librarians and supporters of the Jefferson County Library System rallied behind new director Kelly TerKeurst in the final day of county departmental budget hearings Thursday.

The library system will face its second budget decrease in a row, even though use of the county's libraries is on the rise.

TerKeurst requested a tax levy of \$1,012,092, representing a decrease of \$3,686 from this year's \$1,015,7778.

The Jefferson County Board of Supervisors' Finance Committee is recommending an overall 2015 property tax levy of \$28,430,843, up from this year's \$27,004,367.

If adopted, the proposed budget would result in a countywide property tax rate of \$4.3955 per \$1,000 equalized valuation, resulting in a 13-cent hike from this year.

The Library Services Fund seeks to reimburse the county's municipal libraries for usage by rural residents who don't pay into the system through village or city property taxes. The amount requested of the county is calculated through a formula that takes into account the number of items circulated and the libraries' operational costs averaged over the entire county. However, it does not take into account electronic downloads or computer and Internet usage — some of the library system's most heavily used services.

“We live and die by the formula and recently, we have been living and dying by the formula, said Sue Hartwick, president of the Jefferson County Library Board. “Libraries do great things for our county, and we want to make sure you understand that we have been living and dying by the formula for last couple of years.”

A county librarian noted the importance of funding computer and Internet services that are not accounted for in the formula, as well as book and reference resources. She pointed out the people most using computer and Internet access at the library are those who otherwise would not be able to afford those services to search for jobs, create resumes or finish schoolwork.

However, “those are the people that don't check out books,” Hartwick added. “It's a lot of usage that's not counted. We are looking at ideas to rework the formula a bit to account for those usages a little differently.”

The budget not only provides funding to each of the county's libraries, but also to 33 libraries outside Jefferson County in neighboring communities that rural residents frequent. The largest single payment to an outside library is to the Oconomowoc Public Library, which many residents in the eastern part of the county consider their home library.

The library services budget does not include any capital requests as the department is in the middle of a four-year capital-improvement cycle.

“I would like you to trust that we are very supportive of the libraries, but there are limits imposed on us by the state,” Finance Chairman Richard Jones stated.

Meanwhile, the Finance Committee ended the hearing on a positive note after learning that the Fair Park will make a profit from the 2014 Jefferson County Fair, despite rainfall during Saturday's headliner Justin Moore. The department currently is ahead about \$110,000, though it still has bills to be paid.

Other department budgets preliminarily approved Thursday include those of the District Attorney, Veteran's Services, County Clerk, Register of Deeds, Land and Water Conservation, Finance and University of Wisconsin-Extension offices.