

Kitsap Regional Library to Pursue Levy Increase – Library Board of Trustees Approves Ballot Initiative for November Election

For immediate release

BREMERTON, Washington – Following Tuesday night's meeting of the Kitsap Regional Library Board of Trustees, the trustees announced their intention to place an 8-cent property tax levy increase on the November 7 general election ballot. The increase would be applied to the Library's operating budget for the purpose of providing sustainable funding for the continued operation of public libraries and library services in Kitsap County.

"Since 2012, the staff and leadership of Kitsap Regional Library have been thoughtfully preparing for a levy initiative," said Library Director Jill Jean. "We wanted to be cautious about what we asked voters for and we wanted to be absolutely sure it's what we need. This plan accomplishes that."

For the last 15 years, state law has limited the current library levy to an annual 1 percent increase. Because of this limitation, funding has not been able to keep pace with the basic needs of the Library and the growing needs of an increasing Kitsap population. This gap in funding has created a number of challenges for the Library, ultimately leading to a reduction in the number of books and other materials the Library offers, the inability to provide cost of living increase for Library staff since 2008 and the elimination of Sunday hours in 2011.

If approved by voters, Kitsap Regional Library would be authorized to raise its regular property tax levy by 8 cents per thousand dollars, an estimated increase of about \$24 for a house valued at \$300,000.

This would allow the Library to adequately fund the continued operations and maintenance of the nine locations of Kitsap Regional Library for at least 5-10 years.

"Currently, funding is not enough to update aging facilities, replace furnishings or upgrade technology," said Jean. "But, we also wanted to create a plan that would bridge the gap between the needs and goals of our community."

Beginning in 2016, the Library held conversations with over 65 groups of community members and another 180 community partners, such as educational organizations and social service providers, to discuss what the goals of the community were and which services the library could invest more in to accomplish those goals.

Out of those conversations, the need to continue growing opportunities in early learning programs for babies and toddlers, afterschool education for K-12 and technology learning for kids, teens and adults rose to the top. Additionally, the library seeks to increase access for all residents by restoring Sunday hours and restoring the investment in the collections of books, eBooks, audiobooks and online resources it offers.

Jean emphasized that levy funds will be used solely for maintenance and operations of the Library's nine locations and not to build a new Silverdale building, which will be funded entirely through private donations, as were the new Kingston facility and a major remodel of the Bainbridge Island location.

If the levy fails, the Library is preparing for more cutbacks as early as 2018. The budget can no longer sustain the current level of service the community receives. Reductions may include closing another day per week, the elimination of bookmobile service and the eventual closure of two locations.

"This would be a difficult decision and we understand the impact it would make on the community, the library system and staff. We will always do our best to provide the best service with the resources we have." Jean said.

In Kitsap, libraries are the heart of our communities. Our community is stronger when our libraries provide the best possible service to everyone.

"This plan supports our communities' priorities, providing access to information and educational opportunities for all." said Jean. "It will keep our libraries robust now and for future generations."

Kitsap Regional Library is 90 percent funded by a local property tax levy, and the remaining 10 percent is made up of private fundraising dollars and contributions from state and city government. The Library is governed by a 5-member Board of Trustees, each representing one of the five areas of Kitsap County – North, Central and South Kitsap, Bremerton and Bainbridge Island.

For more details on the proposed levy increase and the Library's plans for the future, visit levy.KRL.org

Kitsap Regional Library inspires the Kitsap community to dream more, learn more, do more and be more. To meet the needs of the over 260,000 people who reside here, Kitsap Regional Library provides information and inspiration with nine locations, a bookmobile, an outreach staff and a virtual library at KRL.org. Contact the Library on Facebook and Twitter.

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