

## **Proposed Local Option Levy which, if passed would provide funding for Countywide Library Services, Measure 34-297**

### Frequently Asked Questions about the 2020 Library Levy

#### **Q. If passed, what would be the cost of the proposed Library Levy that will be on the May 19th ballot?**

A. The cost and terms would be:

- Renewal of a five-year levy that is expiring in June 2021.
- The expiring levy provides 40% of total WCCLS funding. (The other 60% of funding comes from the County's General Fund.)
- If passed, this levy would run from July 2021 through June 2026. The proposed five-year levy would continue funding for library services at a fixed rate of \$0.22 per \$1,000 of assessed value, which is unchanged from the current rate.
- In 2021, typical homeowners with an assessed value (not market value) of \$300,000 would pay \$66 per year.
- Taxes for future years would depend upon changes in assessed value.
- Estimated revenues from the levy in FY 2021-22 would be \$16.3 million (estimated five-year total of \$88.8 million)

#### **Q. Why is the levy being proposed for voter consideration?**

A. If passed, the Library Levy would provide support for public library services countywide in five ways:

1. Support public library operations:

- Funding to maintain open hours for libraries that serve all county residents, including libraries in Aloha, Banks, Beaverton, Cedar Mill, Cornelius, Forest Grove, Garden Home, Hillsboro, North Plains, Sherwood, Tigard, Tualatin and West Slope.

2. Reading programs for children:

- Provide funding for children's reading events that average about 285,000 participants each year. This includes annual summer reading programs and literacy programs for preschoolers.
- Provide reading and learning programs for students, including online homework and tutoring services for all children in Washington County.

3. Book purchases:

- Continue to purchase books, e-books and other materials that are available to all library users.
- Continue to purchase additional copies of in-demand books in order to reduce wait times.
- Continue to provide funding for online access that allows users to reserve books that can be picked up at any library.

4. Resources for jobseekers:

- Continue to provide information and resources to assist those looking for jobs or career development. Resources include access to computers and the internet, and access to online courses for skill development.

5. Central support and services that link libraries together, which include the following:

- Central sorting of materials and daily deliveries of books and other materials between libraries
- WCCLS website, shared library catalog and library events calendar
- Mail delivery of books to residents who are homebound or living in care facilities.

**Q. What would happen to the current levy if the proposed levy is approved by voters?**

A. The current five-year levy expires in June 2021 regardless of whether the renewal levy is approved.

**Q. If the Library Levy is approved by voters, when would a property owner make the first payment? What about the last one?**

A. If it is approved, taxpayers would see the Library Levy on their property tax statement beginning in October 2021. The last payment would be on their property tax statement in October 2025.

**Q. How would the Library Renewal Levy funds get divided between the various service areas?**

A. If passed, Library Levy funds would be divided approximately as follows:

- Public library operations: 73%
- Central support and services: 27%

**Q. How much revenue would the Library Levy generate?**

A. If passed, the proposed Library Levy would generate approximately \$88.8 million over five fiscal years. The year-by-year totals would be:

- \$16.3 million in 2021-22
- \$17.0 million in 2022-23
- \$17.7 million in 2023-24
- \$18.5 million in 2024-25
- \$19.3 million in 2025-26

**Q. What would happen if the Library Levy is not approved?**

A. If the Levy does not pass, the tax assessment would not be made, and reductions in service levels would likely occur based on local library services, including:

- Reductions in hours, book purchases and programs such as storytimes and book clubs; and

- Reductions in central support such as the countywide online catalog, book delivery and other services.

## WCCLS Background

### **Q. How are library services currently provided in Washington County?**

A. For over 44 years, public library services in Washington County have been provided through a partnership between the County, cities and non-profit library associations called Washington County Cooperative Library Services, or WCCLS.

If passed, the proposed levy would provide funding for local public libraries in 13 communities, including: Aloha, Banks, Beaverton (2 libraries), Cedar Mill (2 libraries), Cornelius, Forest Grove, Garden Home, Hillsboro (2 libraries), North Plains, Sherwood, Tigard, Tualatin, and West Slope.

In this Cooperative Library Services partnership:

- The County provides centralized services for member libraries (for example libraries share a computer network managed and paid for centrally, rather than each library running its own library computer system). This allows residents to have access to all library collections through one shared catalog. The combined total collection size is about 1.6 million items.
- The County contracts with cities and non-profit associations that run libraries to provide free, public library services to all county residents.
- Prior to the formation of WCCLS in 1976, over half of the county population had no library service. This included residents of some cities and all the unincorporated areas of the county. WCCLS was formed to collect taxes from all county residents (in incorporated and unincorporated areas) and redistribute the funds to those cities and non-profits that ran public libraries in order to provide library services for all residents.

### **Q. What is the County's role in WCCLS?**

A. The County does three things:

- Funding: The County secures and distributes the primary funding for countywide public library services
- Infrastructure support: The County provides a shared online catalog, Internet access, and delivering books between libraries.
- Other centrally provided services: The County provides some services to the public at a county level, such as book delivery to homebound residents and countywide digital collections

### **Q. What are the roles of Member Libraries?**

A. Member Libraries do three things:

- Locally determine facility and service levels (fund, build, manage and maintain library buildings, supplement County funding based on locally determined community services),

- Locally determine operations (hours, programs, collections and staffing).
- Serve as the primary providers of public library services to all residents.

**Q. How are libraries used in Washington County?**

A. Libraries in Washington County saw 3.8 million visits in FY 2018-19, which is equivalent to over 10,000 visits each of the 360 days that a library was open in Washington County. Over 11 million books and other materials were checked out in FY 2018-19, of which over 1.4 million were digital checkouts (e-books, audiobooks and streaming video). Free wireless internet access was provided for 1 million hours to those who don't have access at home or prefer to work in a community space. Libraries offered nearly 8,500 events for children, youth and families, which saw over 280,000 visits.

**Q. What is the history of WCCLS funding?**

A. Between 1976 and 1997, WCCLS operated entirely on levies authorized by voters.

With the passage of Ballot Measure 50 in 1997, the WCCLS levy was rolled into the County's General Fund (funded through the County's permanent tax rate). The Cooperative Library Advisory Board (CLAB) and the County Board of Commissioners agreed to a five-year financial plan for WCCLS that included on-going funding from the General Fund.

In addition, the plan called for WCCLS to supplement General Fund revenues with money from a WCCLS reserve fund that had built up in the early 1990s due to unexpected growth in property values. Until the reserve fund was reduced, WCCLS was able to maintain public library funding without having to reduce library services. That interim funding plan ended in 2003-04, when approximately 90% of the reserve fund had been expended as planned.

Supplemental funding through a local option levy was authorized by voters in 2006 and renewed in 2010.

In November 2002, county residents were asked to consider a library operating levy for 2002 through 2008. That levy did not pass, with 49.8% voting "yes" and 50.2% voting "no".

A similar operating levy on the May 2004 ballot passed but did not receive the 50% voter turnout necessary to implement the measure. Countywide service reductions were implemented as a result, including reduced open hours, book purchases and programs for children and adults. As a result, WCCLS and member libraries reduced operational costs and adjusted spending, trying to limit the effect of service reductions on library users.

In November 2006, a four-year levy was approved by 57% of voters to provide funding for countywide library services. In November 2010, a five-year levy was approved by 66% of voters to continue funding for countywide library services. In November 2015, a replacement five-year levy was approved by 64% of voters to continue funding for countywide library services. That levy is expiring in June 2021.

**Q. Why are local option property tax levies frequently put on the ballot?**

A. Oregon voters approved Measure 50 in 1997, which prohibited local governments and special districts in Oregon from asking voters for increases in permanent property tax rates. When a permanent

rate of a local government does not provide enough revenue to maintain service levels, local governments may ask voters to raise additional revenues through approval of a “local option levy.” Voter-authorized local option levies for general purposes, such as public safety or library services, are temporary and can be requested for a maximum of five years at a time.

**Q. Where can more information be found?**

A. Ask staff at your local library or visit [wccls.org/levy](http://wccls.org/levy).

\* Unless otherwise noted, sources for the statistical data included in the FAQ can be found on [wccls.org](http://wccls.org)

**Q: Does the County have any other levies on the ballot?**

A: Yes. The Public Safety Replacement Levy is also on the ballot in May 2020. Learn more about that levy at: [www.co.washington.or.us/levies](http://www.co.washington.or.us/levies)

This information, except for the website link(s), was reviewed by the Oregon Secretary of State's Office for compliance with ORS 260.432.