Public libraries are vitally important to their communities in times of calm and in times of crisis.

We ask you to recognize our essential role in communities by preserving the Public Library Fund at 1.7% of the GRF.

In its highly visible location at the corner of the busiest intersection in downtown Perrysburg, Way Public Library stands proudly. When we describe ourselves as the “hub” of the community, we mean it. We pride ourselves on being the place where each and every citizen is welcome and can find equitable access to information. Our community trusts its public library, and looks to us for an incredible variety of important services and counts on us to be available.

Here in Wood County, Way Public Library serves a legal population of approximately 25,000 in the city and an additional populace of nearly 30,000. We have over 30,000 registered borrowers and circulate roughly 770,000 items per year. Our budget is approximately $2.4 million with nearly half of that coming from the Public Library Fund.

Like other public libraries across Ohio, when the pandemic arrived one year ago we sprang into action to develop a plan for serving our patrons while our doors were closed. Our first decision was to immediately boost our WiFi signal to cover most of our parking lot, allowing patrons 24/7 access to internet connectivity, an act met with widespread appreciation and heavy use. Because it was primary voting season, we made absentee ballot request forms available to the public on our front doors—a heavily used service. Neither of these services were readily available to residents elsewhere in our community at the time.

With the Health Department’s issuance of a “stay at home” directive, we developed a comprehensive strategy for providing as many remote services to our patrons as possible. It included increasing inventories of our digital resources; purchasing additional mobile hot spots for checkout; staff availability seven days a week for answering questions and providing assistance via phone, social media, and the Ask-A-Librarian email service; filming story time sessions for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers;
recording Dial-a-Story tales for children who lacked internet at home; launching online book discussion groups; one-on-one technology assistance via phone; digital writing camp for teens; STEM challenges for young students at home; and much, much more.

A retired patron was especially grateful for the step-by-step instructional videos produced by our technology staff to demonstrate how to use our most popular digital services. She had never taken advantage of ereading, as she was intimidated by the software and apps required. During the pandemic, however, she happily reported that she watched our videos and set up her library Overdrive account at home “all by herself.” What a proud moment!

Amidst all the other service innovations taking place at Way Library during early summer 2020, our technology staff was responding to the critical PPE shortage by 3D printing hundreds of face shield visors for donation to healthcare workers in our area.

To help community members who needed a means to meet virtually, we began offering library-hosted Zoom Rooms. Once the stay-at-home order was lifted, we were ready to implement Curbside Pickup Service, a well-received service which we expect to make permanent. We also purchased daily access to the Tutor.com database to help parents and students navigate online school and to provide live resume assistance and career coaching to adults. Our virtual programming continues to expand as we offer educational and enriching content to our patrons, many of whom tell us they are boosted by a chance to feel connected while they are at home.

We were particularly gripped by the story from a patron who had the misfortune to contract COVID-19. One of her symptoms was an occasional racing heart. She told us that she had recently attended one of our virtual mindfulness programs and found that by utilizing the breathing exercises she had learned, she was able to reduce her heart rate to a less stressful level. We often get testimonials from patrons, but this one was out of the ordinary!

On July 1, our doors reopened to the public and have remained open ever since. We are currently operating 54 of our normal 67 hours per week. Patrons have been ecstatic to be able to come and have their needs met in person. Many have sent notes and gifts expressing their gratitude to us for our services and for being open.

An email writer just this week expressed her appreciation for the library by saying that it is such a “fabulous community resource” that it makes her “happy to live in Perrysburg”.

We have recently begun assisting patrons with setting COVID-19 vaccination appointments, and we are now distributing At-Home Rapid Tests through the Ohio Department of Health.

Without the funding through the Public Library Fund, we would not be able to offer these and other valuable, much-needed services to our citizens. The PLF represents nearly one half of our funding. Losing it would be a heavy blow to the library, and, more importantly, to our patrons. We feel a great responsibility to be here for our patrons in times of calm and in times of crisis, providing the outstanding services that are core to our profession and a hallmark of Ohio libraries.