

SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM
of NEW JERSEY

BUDGET 2025

Approved by the
Somerset County Library Commission

April 2, 2025



SC
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BUDGET 2025

SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM *of* NEW JERSEY

Dear Library Commissioners —

I am honored to present my fifteenth and final budget proposal for the Somerset County Library System, one that builds on a decade and a half of transformative progress while addressing a critical challenge ahead. In that first budget, we outlined the serious issues we faced, including significant rises in health insurance and wage freezes. As priorities that year, we listed increasing both wages and the percentage of the operating budget we would expend on resources and programming for the public. We initiated a strategic planning process, scrutinized staffing levels and began a long process of consolidating and systematizing dispersed functions such as materials selection, marketing, training, and money handling. We committed to tightening financial controls and to the simplification of purchasing and reimbursements.

Since that original budget, SCLSNJ has overcome significant challenges while achieving remarkable growth. We've incorporated two borough libraries; opened a new branch; introduced many new and innovative services like museum passes and 24/7 holds lockers; we pioneered reciprocal borrowing in the county and beyond. We weathered floods and pandemics. Our accomplishments, too numerous to detail here, were consistently supported by your trust and have positioned us as a leader in the state. Our latest challenge, the sustained rise in inflation over the past few years, threatens to disrupt that legacy of excellence.

This budget proposal breaks from our tradition of maintaining tax levy increases below 2%, a decision we make with great deliberation. Without an increase to 3.4%, we face a significant shortfall in our fund balance starting in 2026, and risk severe cutbacks in services—such as reduced hours, fewer resources, and the inability to adapt to changing service expectations. These cuts would undermine the exceptional customer service you've helped us deliver and would jeopardize our community's access to vital resources.

I am deeply grateful for your unwavering support over the years, which has enabled our continued progress. I respectfully ask once again for your support in approving this budget proposal, including the necessary tax levy increase, to ensure we remain an exemplar of service and innovation in 2026 and beyond. As someone who has dedicated 15 years to this Library, I've seen firsthand how our services transform lives—from students to non-English speakers accessing resources; from children learning to read to disabled adults and seniors connecting through programs. I urge you to join me in protecting this legacy through your support of this budget proposal.



Brian K. Auger, Director



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SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM *of* NEW JERSEY



Somerset County Library System of New Jersey
partners with you to connect, to explore, to share, and to discover.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Providing activities and places that **FOSTER SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND CONNECTIONS.**



Connecting people to opportunities for **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION.**



Addressing the needs of **SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS.**



Exploring and enhancing the variety of ways **CUSTOMERS EXPERIENCE LIBRARY SERVICES.**

CORE SERVICES



Making **PERSONALIZED CONNECTIONS** between customers and materials.



Presenting programs that help community members **CONNECT, EXPLORE, SHARE, AND DISCOVER.**



Serving as a community **GATHERING SPACE.**



Promoting and supporting **LIFELONG LEARNING.**



Providing **TECHNOLOGY ACCESS AND EXPERTISE** that meet the needs of the community.



Creating opportunities that build Somerset County's **ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.**

2023

For more information: SCLSNJ.org/about/strategic-plan.



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2024 IN REVIEW

In 2024 we...

- We migrated e-communications, holds notification messaging, and other digital messages to Patron Point, a new marketing automation platform that will allow for more enhanced, targeted communications to our customers as it seamlessly integrates with our Integrated Library System (ILS). This is an important first step in building highly-personalized and responsive automated customer experiences.
- We closed the current Watchung branch in preparation for major renovation, and opened a temporary location for abbreviated service
- We closed the current Peapack & Gladstone branch in preparation for a major renovation and arranged for holds pick ups at the Clarence Dillon Library
- We redesigned our website, SCLSNJ.org (launching Q1 2025)
- We reorganized the space at our Hillsborough branch to make more room for youth services collections and activities and to create better spaces for quiet study and small group work (launching Q1 2025)
- We expanded our Passport Acceptance hours and availability
- We completely revised and redesigned our performance review process
- We recruited, hired and onboarded a new Manager of System Services and a new Director of Marketing
- Provided extensive outreach services to the Bound Brook community through October 2024
- We continue to expand our Home Borrowing program, lending 2,350 items to 83 folks countywide who cannot come into a branch



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BY THE NUMBERS: HOW RESIDENTS USE THEIR LIBRARY BRANCHES

BRANCH VISITS PER CAPITA: 3.86

To illustrate this number, imagine **every resident** of Bridgewater, Hillsborough, and North Plainfield coming in, then looping back with everyone from Somerville and Warren **three more times**—nearly four waves of those towns’ residents coming in for books, programs or other library services.

COMPUTER USE: 74,000

Imagine everyone in Bound Brook (10,000) and Montgomery (23,000) along with half of Bridgewater (22,500), using our computers. And branch WiFi use was the most ever. Our customers used **76 terabytes of data, that’s 38 billion pages of text!**

NEW LIBRARY CARDS: 12,630

It is the equivalent of giving new library cards to every resident of Manville, Rocky Hill and Millstone.

MEETING ROOM USE: 15,230

Our meeting rooms hosted the equivalent of the combined populations of Somerville, Watchung and North Plainfield.

RECIPROCAL BORROWING

We loaned 6,718 items to residents of non-SCLSNJ towns, of which 4,686 were children’s fiction books in Franklin. Our residents borrowed 3,205 items from non-SCLSNJ towns.

PROGRAM ATTENDANCE: 169,760

Our library programs — story times, crafts, lectures, etc. — drew the equivalent of **28 sell out crowds** at Somerset Patriots Stadium.



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Somerset County Library users borrowed 14.11 items per person in 2023, more than any other county library in New Jersey, and nearly double the state average of 7.1. Locally, only Bernards Township and Princeton residents borrowed more.

Of 261 New Jersey libraries in 2023, only 24 had lower overall costs per circulation than SCLSNJ, whose costs were less than a third of the state average.

Of the 14 county libraries in New Jersey with a service area population over 100,000, only Mercer purchased more books per capita than SCLSNJ.

No library in New Jersey can match the number of online resources SCLSNJ offers its users — 78.

No county library serving a population over 100,000 offers more computers per capita.

If you stacked all the books loaned in 2023, it would be about 42.5 miles high. For context, that's roughly 5 times the height of Mount Everest (29,029 feet or 5.5 miles) or well beyond the cruising altitude of a commercial airliner (around 35,000 feet or 6.6 miles).

Grok



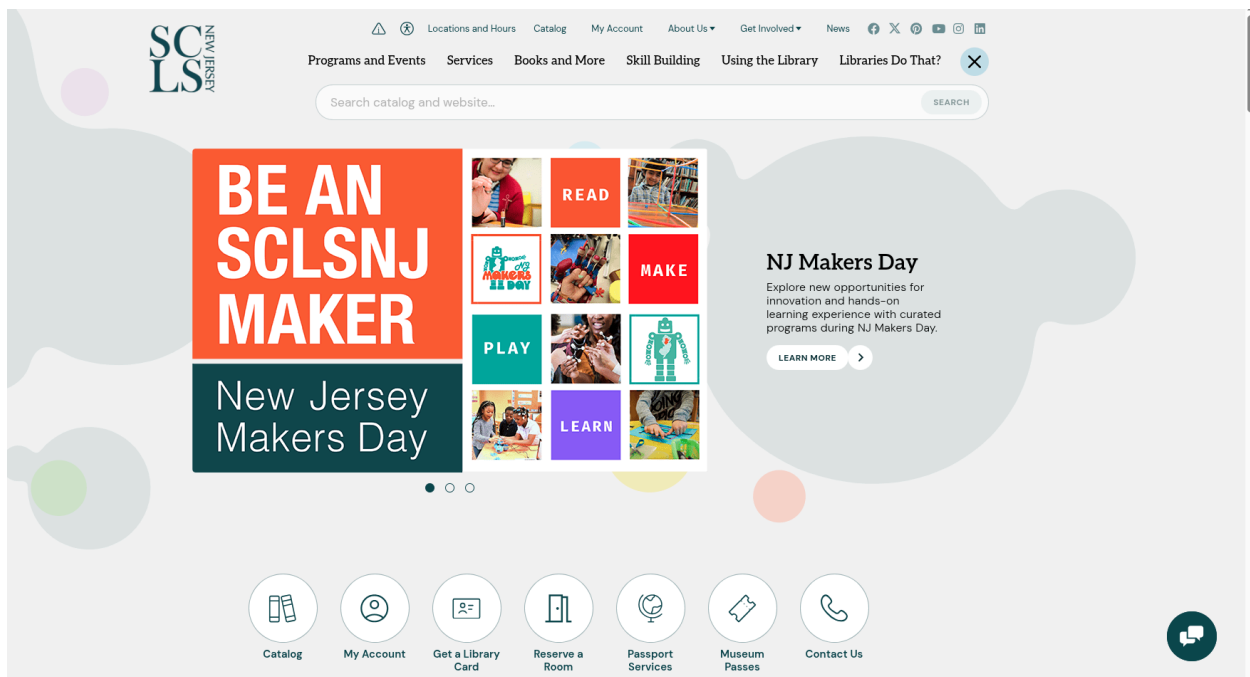
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2025: WHAT LIES AHEAD

In 2025 we will:

- Roll out an entirely new Library website with enhanced navigation and functionality
- Recruit and onboard a new library director
- Become an integral member of the Main Library Alliance and migrate to a new ILS
- Implement reciprocal borrowing throughout the Main Library Alliance
- Conclude renovations at Peapack & Gladstone and reopen in Q2
- Wind down operations at the Mary Jacobs Neighborhood Library
- Implement a new performance management system
- Migrate Chrome-based staff computers to Linux
- Publish a white paper on the challenges of how SCLSNJ and its hosting municipalities collectively fund and provide library services and facilities
- Add a holds locker at Warren
- Explore the application of artificial intelligence to library services
- Add a contract-based holds locker in Rocky Hill in partnership with the Foundation
- Revamp policy and procedures manuals and review processes
- Gather community and customer feedback data to refresh our current strategic planning framework in Q4
- Work with the Borough of Watchung to finalize furniture and fixture plans and prepare for reopening in 2026.



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REVENUES

| | 2024 | 2025 | DELTA |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------|
| Non-resident fees | \$2,500 | \$3,500 | 40.00% |
| Copier Fees | \$12,500 | \$15,000 | 20.00% |
| Passport Fees | \$85,001 | \$105,000 | 23.53% |
| Taxes | \$19,017,744 | \$19,664,347 | 3.40% |
| A & O Taxes | \$0 | \$20,000 | |
| State Aid | \$122,360 | \$119,995 | -1.93% |
| Interest | \$77,000 | \$105,000 | 36.36% |
| Mary Jacobs Foundation | \$70,000 | \$15,000 | |
| Use of Fund Balance | \$1,113,517 | \$1,067,794 | -4.11% |
| TOTALS | 20,500,622 | \$21,115,636 | |

NOTES

1. **General Reserves** is often referred to as “Fund Balance”. These are the aggregated unspent funds from prior years. They have two uses: they assist with cash flow and can be used as revenue in subsequent years.
2. **A & O Taxes** refers to added and omitted taxes which are collected during the year to account for revised property tax assessments on a given property (e.g., the owner adds a finished basement that increases the value of the property). In 2024 the county changed the due date for receipt of A & O taxes to February 15 from December 15. We did not anticipate receiving any A&O taxes until 2025, but in fact we received around \$30,000. We received a comparable amount this year.
3. **State Aid** is the amount of per capita funds received in the prior year from the NJ State Library. For information about how this is calculated, see the Appendix.
4. Anyone not otherwise eligible for a free card who wants full access to SCLSNJ services pays a **non-resident fee**.
5. **Mary Jacobs Foundation** refers to a fund maintained by the Library on behalf of the Mary Jacobs Foundation as outlined in the current branch agreement. While listed as “revenue” the funds belong to the Mary Jacobs Foundation. The inclusion of these funds here is to offset the expenses made on the behalf of the Mary Jacobs Foundation, which appear in the General Expenses section.



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WHY WE NEED MORE THAN A 2% TAX LEVY INCREASE

In prior budget years, where revenue increases generally matched overall inflation, these assumptions correlated with a highly stable fund balance. The comparatively higher inflation of the last several years is manifesting in an increasing gap between costs and revenue, which leads to projected pressures on the fund balance as we attempt to maintain a balanced budget at the current level of library service within a 2% tax cap on tax levy increases. That breaking point **will be reached in 2026**

without moderate tax increases for the next few years, or *drastic* increases and/or service cuts in the following years. **For additional information, please see the section on the projected use of the fund balance on page 11.**

| COUNTY VS LIBRARY TAX LEVY INCREASES | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|---------|
| | COUNTY | LIBRARY |
| 2019 | 3.13% | 1.95% |
| 2020 | 2.70% | 0.29% |
| 2021 | 2.45% | 2.00% |
| 2022 | 3.95% | 1.17% |
| 2023 | 4.41% | 1.93% |
| 2024 | 3.00% | 1.99% |

P.L. 2010, c.44¹, which enacted the general 2% cap on tax levies, allowed for some exceptions, such as health benefits, debt service, pension costs, or emergencies. It also provided for the ability to “bank” unused portions of the 2% cap for use in subsequent years. We have stayed at or below that target for many years.

Full funding of libraries in New Jersey is reckoned at 0.00050². While SCLSNJ in recent years has been funded at as high as 0.00047, our best estimate for the funding this budget would provide is 0.000396 representing a decline from that high mark.

The Library’s share of property taxes collected in the County varies between 2.4% (Peapack & Gladstone) and 1.42% of the property owner’s total tax bill, with the average being 1.87%.

Assuming an average home price of \$500,000, the net effect of a 3.4% tax increase in 2025 would be less than \$7.50, the cost of a Starbucks Grande Iced White Chocolate Mocha.



¹ Subsequently extended indefinitely by P.L. 2016, c.10.

² See appendix on how state aid is calculated



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EXPENSES – PERSONNEL

| | 2024 Budget | 2024 Actual | 2025 Proposed | Deltas to 2024 Budget | Percentage change |
|-------------------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Salaries | \$11,384,283 | \$10,699,000 | \$11,729,795 | \$345,512 | 3.03% |
| FSA Claims and Administration | \$5,000 | \$6,766 | \$5,000 | \$0 | 0.00% |
| Waivers in Lieu of Benefits | \$108,000 | \$110,438 | \$85,000 | -\$23,000 | -21.30% |
| Health Benefits | \$2,500,000 | \$2,500,620 | \$2,815,000 | \$315,000 | 12.60% |
| Social Security | \$879,160 | \$784,077 | \$903,832 | \$24,672 | 2.81% |
| Pension | \$1,431,519 | \$1,431,519 | \$1,424,050 | -\$7,469 | -0.52% |
| Dental Benefits | \$70,000 | \$68,999 | \$72,000 | \$2,000 | 2.86% |
| Voluntary Insurance | \$0 | -\$4 | \$0 | \$0 | |
| Staff development/conferences | \$150,000 | \$148,363 | \$155,000 | \$5,000 | |
| Total | \$16,527,962 | \$15,749,778 | \$17,189,677 | \$661,715 | 4.00% |

Notes

1. **2024 Actual** includes encumbered (or “certified”) funds subject to subsequent de-certification.
2. The **Salaries** line assumes a 1% Merit basis and a 2.75% GMI (Guaranteed Minimum Increase) and assumes performance evaluations are consistent with the experience from prior years.
3. **FSA Claims and Administration** is the cost to provide health and child care savings accounts using pre-taxed income.
4. **Waivers in Lieu of Benefits** is the cost to offer a consideration to those staff who elect *not* to have health insurance because they are able to use their spouse’s insurance coverage. The sum is based on the experience from prior years.
5. **Pension** is the assessment we get from the County for our share of the total assessment for the Public Employee Retirement System. See the Appendix for an explanation of how this amount is calculated.
6. **Staff Development** costs include training and conference costs. Industry standards call for a staff development budget of 1% – 3% of total personnel costs. Our staff development costs represent less than 1% of the personnel budget. This line includes all training costs, fees, software licenses, trainers, materials and the costs of sending staff to professional conferences.



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EXPENSES – RESOURCES

| | 2024 Budget | 2024 Actual | 2025 Proposed | Deltas to 2024 Budget | Percentage change |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Preservation | \$500 | \$0 | \$500 | \$0 | 0.00% |
| Programs | \$215,000 | \$202,323 | \$215,000 | \$0 | 0.00% |
| Materials | \$1,950,000 | \$1,902,463 | \$1,950,000 | \$0 | 0.00% |
| Digital Access | \$297,060 | \$215,406 | \$295,000 | -\$2,060 | -0.69% |
| Total | \$2,462,560 | \$2,320,191 | \$2,460,500 | -\$2,060 | -0.08% |

Notes

1. **2024 Actual** includes encumbered (or “certified”) funds subject to subsequent de-certification.
2. This budget grouping represents those expenses that place materials, online resources, or services directly “into the hands” of customers and total just under 12% of the overall budget.
3. **Preservation** covers any costs associated with rebinding or restoring historical materials of value.
4. **Materials** is books, media, periodical and newspaper subscriptions, downloadable content and online resources.
5. **Digital Access** is the cost to provide high speed internet access, i.e., equipment, software and broadband costs.



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EXPENSES – OPERATING

| | 2024 Budget | 2024 Actual | 2025 Proposed | Deltas to 2024 Budget | Percentage change |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Outside Contracts | \$40,000 | \$39,198 | \$40,000 | \$0 | 0.00% |
| Advertising | \$750 | \$826 | \$500 | -\$250 | -33.33% |
| Postage | \$35,000 | \$37,597 | \$35,000 | \$0 | 0.00% |
| Marketing & Public Relations | \$37,000 | \$36,859 | \$40,000 | \$3,000 | 8.11% |
| Printing | \$12,000 | \$3,512 | \$10,000 | -\$2,000 | -16.67% |
| Vehicle Expenses | \$4,000 | \$687 | \$4,000 | \$0 | 0.00% |
| Technology | \$330,000 | \$322,576 | \$330,000 | \$0 | 0.00% |
| Equipment Service/Repairs | \$22,000 | \$21,959 | \$23,000 | \$1,000 | 4.55% |
| Legal | \$50,000 | \$30,000 | \$70,000 | \$20,000 | 40.00% |
| Audit | \$5,850 | \$5,850 | \$6,150 | \$300 | 5.13% |
| Insurance/Bonding | \$126,000 | \$129,699 | \$133,809 | \$7,809 | 6.20% |
| Municipal subsidies + BWL | \$405,000 | \$344,728 | \$385,000 | -\$20,000 | -4.94% |
| Consultants | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | |
| Mary Jacobs Foundation | \$70,000 | \$81,430 | \$15,000 | -\$55,000 | -78.57% |
| Office Supplies | \$82,000 | \$57,478 | \$80,000 | -\$2,000 | -2.44% |
| Travel Expenses | \$24,000 | \$25,426 | \$25,000 | \$1,000 | 4.17% |
| New Vehicle | \$60,000 | \$0 | \$65,000 | \$5,000 | 8.33% |
| Equipment | \$114,000 | \$37,883 | \$100,000 | -\$14,000 | -12.28% |
| Furniture/Fixtures | \$50,000 | \$17,604 | \$60,000 | \$10,000 | 20.00% |
| Gasoline | \$7,500 | \$0 | \$8,000 | \$500 | 6.67% |
| Bibliographic/Resource sharing | \$35,000 | \$37,390 | \$35,000 | \$0 | 0.00% |
| Total | \$1,510,100 | \$1,230,703 | \$1,465,459 | -\$44,641 | -2.96% |

Notes

1. **2024 Actual** includes encumbered (or “certified”) funds subject to subsequent de-certification.
2. **Outside Contracts** includes expenses for collection agency fees, background checks, payroll and social media management.
3. **Advertising** is the cost to place legal notices and to advertise nationally for high-level vacancies.
4. **Technology Expenses** are split across OPERATING and RESOURCES. Those expenses used to provide customer-facing digital access are reflected in RESOURCES to better reflect their purpose as a direct service rather than as overhead.



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5. **Equipment** lease/purchase/repair is the public and staff access photocopier/printer/scanners.
6. **Legal** is higher in anticipation of bargaining unit negotiations..
7. **Municipal Payments** are a Library Commission initiative (not otherwise binding) to provide a token offset to hosting municipalities for their costs in providing the branches we operate. The Commission created a \$200,000 pool of funds which is distributed proportionately to the number of square feet of library space offered by each town (except Bridgewater) with a branch. The total includes \$178,608 in payments to Bridgewater for the Library's share of operating expenses, representing a "lease" payment of \$19.19 per square foot.
8. **Vehicles** is the amount needed to purchase a new truck.
9. **Equipment** includes the costs for a new 24/7 holds locker.
10. **Furniture/Fixtures** provides for office furniture and small modification projects.
11. **Bibliographic/Resource** sharing covers the cost of access to cataloging data.

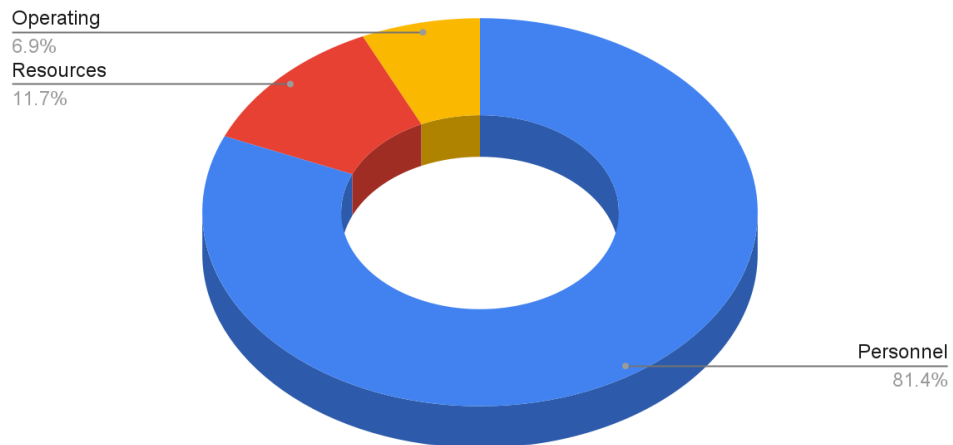


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TOTAL BUDGET

| | 2024 Budget | 2024 Actual | 2025 Proposed | Deltas to 2024 Budget | Percentage change |
|-----------|----------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Personnel | \$16,527,962 | \$15,749,778 | \$17,189,677 | \$661,715 | 4.00% |
| Resources | \$2,462,560 | \$2,320,191 | \$2,460,500 | -\$2,060 | -0.08% |
| Operating | \$1,510,100 | \$1,230,703 | \$1,465,459 | -\$44,641 | -2.96% |
| TOTAL | \$20,500,622 | \$19,300,673 | \$21,115,636 | \$615,014 | 3.00% |



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PROJECTED USE OF THE FUND BALANCE

We propose to continue using surplus funds (fund balance) from prior years in three ways:

- to ensure adequate cash flow,
- to act as revenue for succeeding years, and
- to fund one-time extraordinary planned purchases.

Assuming the following to be true:

- the tax increases for the years 2026 through 2027 will be 3.5%,
- other revenue increases between 2026 and 2027 will be 1.5%, and
- we will add on average 4.8% of the approved prior year's budget to each subsequent year's fund balance.

Based on the above assumptions, we project the following fund balances as of January 1 of each year:

| With 3.5% tax increases | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Fund Balance Available | \$1,630,735 | \$1,727,337 | \$1,211,483 |
| Fund Balance Required | \$1,073,786 | \$1,446,042 | \$1,209,930 |
| Fund Balance retained | \$556,949 | \$281,295 | \$1,553 |

| With 2% tax increases | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Fund Balance Available | \$1,630,735 | \$1,442,071 | \$330,153 |
| Fund Balance Required | \$1,359,052 | \$2,042,106 | \$2,133,837 |
| Fund Balance retained | \$271,683 | -\$600,035 | -\$1,803,684 |



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RESOLUTION SETTING THE 2025 BUDGET FOR THE SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

RESOLUTION 25-04-03

WHEREAS, the Somerset County Library Commission has carefully considered the budget requirements for providing library services to the fifteen member municipalities it serves;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission adopts an operating budget in the amount of **\$21,115,636** and sets the Library Tax Levy at a level to provide **\$19,664,347**;

AND REQUESTS that the Board of County Commissioners accept this budget and the tax rate it requires.

DATED: April 2, 2025

Roberta Karpinecz, Chair

I certify that the above is a true copy of a Resolution passed by the Somerset County Library Commission at the meeting held on April 2, 2025.

Brian K. Auger
Secretary to the Commission



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APPENDIX --

HOW STATE AID IS CALCULATED

The Per Capita State Aid (PCSA) program is the largest public library grant program administered by the State Library and is the foundation of state support for public libraries. The program is authorized pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:74-3 *et seq.*

In order to qualify for PCSA, libraries must meet minimum standards based on the population size of the community or communities they serve. There are standards for numbers of professional and other staff, operating hours, collections and other public service requirements. If the requirements are not met, the amount of PCSA is reduced. [Details can be found here](#)³.

A sliding scale is used to calculate PCSA that is based on how close a given library's funding is to "full funding". Full funding is one half mil (.00050); our 2024 tax rate was **.000396**. If this budget is approved, the tax rate will be **.037928** based on preliminary ratables.

All of this assumes that the PCSA program itself is fully-funded, which it has not been since 2009. Because the program is not fully-funded, annual awards are pro-rated so as to not overspend the total amount available for award. [The statute governing the apportionment of state aid can be found here](#)⁴.

HOW THE PERS COST IS CALCULATED

Equal to the PERS Contribution Rate published by the State of NJ multiplied by the annualized second quarter PERS pensionable wages from two years prior.

Therefore, for this year:

- PERS Contribution Rate: 17.11%
- 2023 annualized 2nd Quarter pensionable wages: \$8,322,908
- Result: rounded to \$1,424,050.

³ https://www.njstatelib.org/services_for_libraries/resources/library_law/page02-2/

⁴ https://www.njstatelib.org/services_for_libraries/resources/library_law/state_aid/

