

Kane libraries to be included in COVID-19 relief funds

Computer use, free internet – libraries detail how they serve communities

By **BRENDA SCHORY** [EmailFollow](#)

7:10 am

GENEVA – After two library directors pointed out their needs Monday, the Kane Coronavirus CARES Act Allocation Committee voted to include libraries among the taxing bodies that can apply for coronavirus relief funding.

The committee decided that \$250,000 would be provided from what they set aside as contingency money from the county's \$92.9 million COVID-19 relief funds.

Lauren Rosenthal, library director of the Fox River Valley Public Library and Carole Medal, executive director of the Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin, both asked for libraries inclusion.

Rosenthal said there are 12 public libraries in Kane County and 11 are library districts.

"And we have no access to CARES Act funding except directly through Kane County," Rosenthal said. "And like townships, park districts and forest preserve districts, we have been impacted by COVID-19 and incurred unanticipated expenses."

These include personal protective equipment and additional cleaning supplies, she said.

"But there are things that you don't know the library does," Rosenthal said. "The library provides free internet access. Illinois is at 11.3% unemployment right now. Can you imagine trying to apply for a job without internet access? How about applying for unemployment benefits? School District 300 is only holding remote classes to the middle of October. How do students attend class without internet access?"

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, her library has installed an upgraded wireless antenna so the whole parking lot has free high speed internet access.

"Anyone can stream content on our grounds in the parking lot. It's outside, providing safe social distancing. Every day in the parking lot, we see patrons taking advantage of this service," Rosenthal said. "And this was an unbudgeted expense."

The library also purchased hot spots that can be checked out so residents who cannot afford the internet can have free internet access inside their homes, she said.

“Right now, we have 50 of these hot spots, but we would like to purchase an additional 50 and have them check out for an entire semester to provide a break for families who are working from home and have their children attend school from home,” Rosenthal said. “Or for families who are, unfortunately, unable to work from home right now, and cannot afford a pricey internet bill.”

Rosenthal said if the library receives funding, they can order these immediately and pay for them in 2020.

“Will County has allocated \$15,000 for each library district,” Rosenthal said.

The Fox River Valley Public Library serves 70,000 residents in northeastern Kane County, covering East and West Dundee, Carpentersville, Sleepy Hollow, Gilberts and portions of Algonquin, Barrington Hills and Elgin, Rosenthal said.

Carole Medal, executive director of the Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin said the library has gone to great lengths to prepare their building and three bookmobiles for reopening to the public, which occurred in July.

“One of the things that was critical to us was the access to computers,” Medal said. “There are many people who do not have computers in our district ... We opened our computers before we opened the buildings to the public. Computers by appointment. People came in, they were able to come in, fill out government forms, apply for positions, census – you name it. And they were so very very grateful.”

But, Medal said preparing computers for the public, the plexiglass they had to buy and install to keep people safe also came at a price.

“To date, the Gail Borden Public Library has spent \$88,000 on covid-related expenses,” Medal said. “This is everything from PPE to plexiglass to all about basically making our building safe for the return of the public.”

The committee’s recommendations will be passed on to the full County Board at a special meeting scheduled for 3:45 p.m. Aug. 25 to authorize grant programs to distribute portions of the \$92.9 million coronavirus relief funds.

The committee also heard from Joe Jackson, the managing director at Hesed House in Aurora – the largest homeless shelter in Kane County and the second largest in Illinois – made another impassioned plea to be included in the Kane County’s distribution.

Jackson warned that after Sept. 11, they will not be able to operate their makeshift warehouse shelter at 680 S. River St. – across the street from Hesed House – which will put about 100 people out on the street without shelter.

“The last time I addressed the committee, I mentioned how desperately we needed this additional CARES Act funding to winterize that... temporary to provide shelter to individuals throughout the winter,” Jackson said. “I address you again, reiterating we desperately need that \$500,000 to winterize the shelter.”

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