



HIMMEL & WILSON

LIBRARY CONSULTANTS

September 2, 2009

Charles Wohlforth
Anchorage Library Foundation
P.O. Box 244714
Anchorage, AK 99524

Dear Charles,

By now you've received the "Prospectus" document representing an interim report in the effort to develop a Community Plan for public library service in Anchorage. The report outlines areas of great hope for the future. The report also sheds light on the significant challenges the Anchorage Public Library must confront to transform itself into a 21st century public library relevant to all Anchorage residents.

Our consulting team has discovered a Library Administration that is knowledgeable and more than willing to move the institution into the future. However, the assessment portion of the work we have completed to date documents the fact that the act of transforming the Library will be an uphill battle.

The report shows that the Anchorage Public Library is struggling and/or underperforming in many important ways compared to public libraries in peer communities. The Anchorage Public Library spends less on books and other library materials and has far fewer staff than libraries in peer communities. This situation is made worse by the sharp increases in Intergovernmental Charges which are largely out of the Library's control.

Compared to peer libraries, Anchorage is lacking in books, non-print materials, electronic resources and staff. The report characterizes these materials, services and staff as the Library's "stock-in-trade." These measures are most closely related to the services provided directly to the public.

The assessment compared the Anchorage Public Library with 35 other public libraries serving populations between 250,000 and 350,000. Compared to peer libraries, the Anchorage Public Library spent 22 percent less per person on new library materials in Fiscal Year 2008, investing \$3.58 per capita to purchase new books and non-print resources instead of the \$4.58 per capita invested by peer libraries. The Anchorage Public Library employed 40 percent fewer full-time equivalent staff than the average for its peers during Fiscal Year 2008 with 86.0 full-time equivalent positions compared to an average of almost 143 positions for peers.

Furthermore, the assessment report shows that the percentage of the Library's budget allocated to stock-in-trade (materials and staff) has actually declined in recent years as Intergovernmental Charges assessed against the Library's budget have increased sharply.

The Library, in cooperation with the Municipality, must address the issue of diminishing “stock-in-trade” if it hopes to become the dynamic community asset that many people spoke of at the 21st Century Library Summit convened May 19.

Effectively engaging the community requires staff and resources that are currently lacking. In spite of these significant challenges, the future of Anchorage Public Libraries can be bright. The library can continue to play an important role in early childhood literacy. It can expand its role in building community through its role as a center of community life and through its efforts to collaborate with community organizations to address issues related to education, information literacy, job readiness and financial literacy among others issues.

The Library is now engaged in the next phase of the planning process and is working with the consultants and the citizen “Sounding Board” to develop strategies which set a future course for the Library. These strategies will be presented in a series of “Town Hall” style meetings that will be hosted in several locations in the Municipality in early November. The dates and locations for these events will be set in the next few weeks.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you or other Foundation Board members have any questions related to the Prospectus report or to the overall planning effort!

Sincerely,

Bill Wilson, Partner
Himmel & Wilson, Library Consultants