

## **General Questions and Answers**

about the Watkins Glen Public Library and the E.B. Pert Memorial Library (Hector)  
2024 Budget Vote

### **Why is the Watkins Glen Public Library seeking additional financial support from school district residents?**

Many factors pose a strain on the operations of the Watkins Glen Public Library. Although the roof was replaced in 2022, the age of the building itself presents a challenge for upkeep. With two separate heating and cooling systems to maintain, the largest one near the end of its lifecycle, facility infrastructure is a priority. The costs associated with repairing or replacing these critical systems are significant but are essential for preserving the comfort and safety of patrons and staff.

Maintaining a qualified team of staff is crucial for the library to continue providing essential services to the community. The demand for library resources and programs has increased significantly. Without adequate funding, the library risks being understaffed, impacting the quality and extent of services it can offer. Based on the 2023 Strategic Planning Survey results, there is a need to grow parts of the collection and extend hours of operation, among other identified needs.

Additionally, there are frequent questions about what will happen if the library's tenant, the International Motor Racing Research Center, decides to relocate. There is no answer, and it is impossible to predict the economic climate in 2-3 years. The library may face significant change when that time comes, and by increasing the tax levy now, we can help mitigate the challenges posed if the tenant relocates.

Inflation further intensifies the financial strain. Costs for utilities, operational supplies, program needs, and the cost to provide services have risen over the last five years. The demand for modern technology continues to grow requiring updated computer systems, software, and digital resources. Securing additional tax funding is important to ensure the Watkins Glen Public Library remains a vibrant and functional community hub, capable of meeting the evolving needs of residents.

### **Why does the E.B. Pert Memorial Library seek financial support from school district residents?**

E. B. Pert Memorial Library has served the community for 52 years. During that time, it has been operated through 100% volunteer support. There has been little budget for library materials, resources, or paid staff.

The library is not presently chartered to serve a specified geographic area through the New York State Education Department. The library board of the E.B. Pert Memorial Library intends to apply for charter status in the summer of 2024 to serve residents in the Town of Hector and incorporate as a municipal public library. Upon incorporation, the library will then be entitled to the same benefits as other chartered public libraries such as access to New York State operating and construction aid for libraries.

In order to incorporate, E.B. Pert Memorial Library must demonstrate that it has secured adequate local funds to meet New York State Minimum Standards for Public Libraries as outlined in *90.2 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education*. Funding for the E.B Pert Memorial Library comes from the Town of Hector (roughly \$4,000 per year), along with monies derived from fundraising, donations, and volunteer time. None of these sources provide enough financial support to meet the required standards.

E.B. Pert Memorial Library proposes to secure adequate and sustainable funding through a school district funding referendum as allowed under *New York State Education Law 259*. This referendum would be placed on the ballot in partnership with the Watkins Glen Public Library, which is already incorporated and has an established school district ballot. The vote would take place on May 14, 2024, and a successful outcome would allow the library to incorporate, gain funding efficiencies across the school district, and ensure its long-time service to the community.

### **Why can't our libraries rely on New York State Aid?**

Public library funding in New York State is unlike School funding. Watkins Glen Public Library received \$2,460 in 2023 Local Library Services Aid (LLSA), which is New York State's contribution towards library operating costs. This funding represents one percent of the library's total annual operating expenses. E.B. Pert Memorial Library does not receive any operating aid from New York State because it is not yet chartered as a public library. Public libraries in New York State receive the majority of operating funds from local support. Most public libraries in the Southern Tier Library System receive local support through a public referendum that aligns with the school district boundaries of where the library or libraries are chartered to serve.

### **Why can't our libraries hold more fundraisers to maintain budgets?**

Both libraries hold fundraisers each year. However, fundraisers do not yield consistent income from one year to the next. Fundraisers account for a small fraction of the Watkins Glen Public Library's budget. The Watkins Glen Public Library hosts a book sale each year and relies on the Friends of Watkins Library for additional fundraising support. The COVID-19 Pandemic posed limitations for successful fundraising and caused a decrease in volunteers across many organizations.

The E.B Pert Memorial Library holds several fundraisers each year. These events include a large book sale, rummage sale, quilt raffle, and annual donation request letter. This fundraising represents a large percentage of the library's budget, and it demonstrates why fundraising is not a viable option for sustaining a public library for the long term. The library needs sustainable funding in order to keep its doors open.

### **Why can't our libraries secure grant funds?**

Watkins Glen Public Library has seen great success in grant funding over the last two years. These grant funds help subsidize programs, technology, and construction projects, such as replacing the library's roof in 2022. Program and technology grants from area foundations are minimal, but they do help extend the library's programmatic impacts. Construction grants that

are funded through New York State require matching funds up to 50%. It can be difficult to undertake costly projects because they require a substantial upfront investment.

E.B. Pert Memorial Library is ineligible for any New York State grants because the library is not incorporated through the New York State Education Department. A successful vote will demonstrate the library has secured sustainable local funds to meet New York State Minimum Standards, which will allow the library to incorporate and be eligible for future State grants.

The library does secure local grants each year through the Town of Hector, which allows the library to participate in the library system's delivery services and to purchase some books. The library also applies for grants from United Way of Schuyler County, Watkins Glen Rotary, and other organizations for program money and purchases.

### **Why can't our libraries charge fees for library cards and other services?**

Under *Commissioner's Regulation 90.3 (a)* of New York State Education Law, public libraries cannot charge fees for library cards to residents within their own library system. Both the Watkins Glen Public Library and the E.B. Pert Memorial Library are located in the Southern Tier Library System, which includes Allegany, Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, and Yates counties.

Watkins Glen Public Library and E.B. Pert Memorial Library both charge fees for making copies, printing, faxing, and damaged or lost books. These fees do generate revenue, but the revenue only offsets the cost of providing such services.

### **Why can't our libraries reduce operational costs?**

Due, in part, to the significant increase in utilities and maintenance costs, the Watkins Glen Public Library has struggled to balance budgets post-pandemic. Nearly all budget line items have been impacted by inflation. Salaries have also increased to remain competitive with minimum wage and keep up with the cost of living in New York State. The proposed budget reflects additional hours of operation, which require more staffing. Increased hours of operation were identified as a community need during the Watkins Glen Public Library's strategic planning process in 2023.

The E.B. Pert Memorial Library has maintained reduced operational costs since its inception. Most of the library's budget has relied on contributions from the Town of Hector to cover facility, technology, and delivery of library material costs to support access to library materials across the Southern Tier Library System for community members. This Town funding was increased in 2024 to enable the hiring of a part-time 10-hour-a-week director. That funding may not be renewed. Historically, the Town of Hector contributes \$4,000 annually towards the library's \$16,000 budget. Fundraising and donations cover the remainder of the library's costs.

### **Is it possible to reduce personnel costs?**

Watkins Glen Public Library employs one (1) full-time library director and additional part-time staff. The remainder of library support comes from volunteers. Part-time staff do not receive health benefits, and no staff members receive retirement options. The Watkins Glen Public

Library considers this the bare minimum of staffing needs in order to maintain current hours of operation and provide services to the community.

E.B. Pert Memorial Library has a 10-hour-per-week library director that is funded through the end of 2024. All other library hours are managed entirely by volunteers. The proposed budget would allow the library to indefinitely hire one (1) part-time director and one (1) part-time library aide.

**What is the total level of funding for public libraries in similar area school districts?**

School District	*Library or Libraries	2023 Library Tax Rates
Alfred-Almond	Alfred and Almond	1.0450
Hornell	Hornell	0.7711
Wayland-Cohocton	Atlanta, Cohocton, and Wayland	0.7709
Odessa-Montour	Montour Falls and Odessa	0.6649
Bath	Bath	0.4866
Prattsburgh	Prattsburg	0.4151
Corning-Painted Post	Southeast Steuben County Library	0.3256
Penn Yan	Branchport and Penn Yan	0.3203
Naples	Naples	0.2846
Dundee	Dundee	0.2600
Watkins Glen	Hector and Watkins Glen	0.1343

\*Libraries all receive tax support from residents of their school district through a public vote as established through *New York State Education Law 259*. The library tax rate for each school district is the total tax rate to support a single library or multiple libraries within a single school district.

37 of 44 libraries in the Southern Tier Library System receive their local funding through a school district funding referendum. 20 of 26 school districts in the library system have more than one public library in their geographic district.

The proposed Library Tax Rate for the Watkins Glen School District to support Watkins Glen Public Library and E.B. Pert Memorial Library would still be in the middle third of library tax rates when compared to similar area school districts.

**How does this vote align with the Tax Cap?**

In order to meet Public Library Minimum Standards set by the State Education Department, the library boards of the Watkins Glen Public Library and E.B. Pert Memorial Library voted unanimously to override the Tax Cap. This override is a one-time measure to meet the service needs for the community and ensure marginal future increases.

**What will future budget requests from our libraries look like?**

The 2024 budget request from both libraries is a one-time vote to place each library on equal footing with public libraries in our region. Library trustees believe this request will enable both

libraries to provide quality services far into the future. Once approved, future budget requests will better align with the New York State Tax Cap.

**How will the budget vote language read for school district voters on the day of the vote?**

BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education of the Watkins Glen Central School District is authorized and directed to levy a tax of (\$267,025) two-hundred sixty-seven thousand and twenty-five dollars for the Watkins Glen Public Library, and to levy a tax of (\$100,497) one-hundred thousand four-hundred and ninety-seven dollars for the E.B. Pert Memorial Library (Hector Reading Center), and pay over such funds to the Trustees of both libraries. The Trustees of the Watkins Glen Public Library, or E.B. Pert Memorial Library, respectively, are hereby authorized to expend the tax levy as set forth in the proposed budget for 2024-2025 to provide public library services.

**How will the proposed library budget impact my tax bill?**

<b>Current and Proposed Tax Impacts by Libraries Based on Proposed 2024/2025 Budgets</b>			
<b>Library</b>	<b>2023 Approved Tax Bill</b>	<b>2024 Proposed Tax Bill</b>	<b>\$ Change</b>
<b>E.B. Pert (Hector)</b>	\$ -	\$ 8.31	\$ 8.31
<b>Watkins Glen</b>	\$ 13.43	\$ 22.09	\$ 8.66
	\$ 13.43	\$ 30.40	\$ 16.97