

Kosciusko Leadership Academy 2022-2023

County of Libraries

Ensuring all Kosciusko County Residents Have a Public Library

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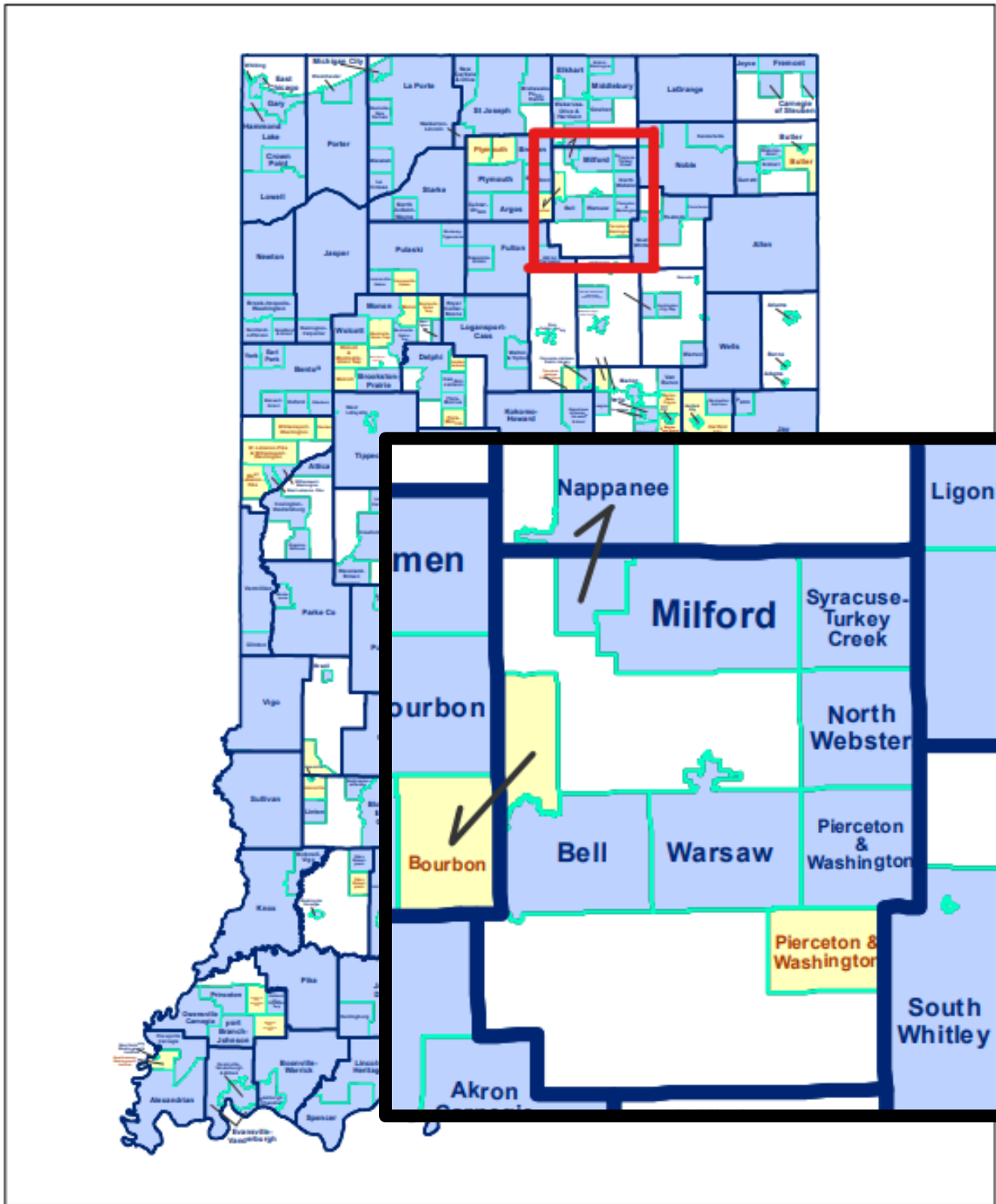
Ensuring All County Residents Have a Public Library

“A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never failing spring in a desert.” - Andrew Carnegie

At a library trustee conference in 2017 at the Indiana State Library, the Indiana Library Federation (ILF) gave a presentation on library deserts. The year prior, a new Trustee of the Warsaw Community Public Library had just been appointed. In order to serve in his role more effectively, he thought it prudent to attend the conference. So, there he was, sitting next to his director, bewildered and alarmed at the image presented on the screen. It was a map of the state of Indiana, with regions covered in blue, regions covered in yellow, and regions covered in white. The blue regions were covered by library districts, the yellow regions were regions that contracted with neighboring library districts, and the white areas had no regional library district coverage. They had no library to call home.

In 2023, there have been no changes to the map. 21.3% of residents in Kosciusko County (1) are unserved by a public library. This White Paper project presents a vision for the County and lays out several solutions for addressing the lack of public library coverage in our communities. Let’s start with why libraries matter.

Library Districts and Areas Under Contract, 2020



Creator: Indiana State Data Center
Data Source: Indiana State Library, November 2021

Why Libraries Matter

Public libraries matter because literacy matters. A community that supports and promotes literacy is a community focused on growth and advancing intellectual discourse. A public library is the physical embodiment of a community's commitment to literacy. While literacy is, in itself, a worthwhile pursuit, it can and has been shown to have significant economic benefits. In a 2020 Gallup analysis (2), adults who reach the minimum level of reading proficiency, level 3, have an average annual income potential of \$63,000. Those at level 1 (struggle to understand text beyond basic forms), have average annual income potential of \$34,000. The analysis suggested that getting all U.S. adults to at least a level 3 of literacy proficiency would generate an additional \$2.2 trillion in annual income for the country.

Libraries are not only repository for books. At your modern library, in addition to rows and rows of books of all shapes, sizes, and content, you'll find CDs, DVDs, computer labs, children's toys, newspaper archives, silent reading rooms, amongst so many other "things". Literally "things", as a large number of local libraries are also carrying Libraries of Things (LoT) which include banking pans, sewing machines, guitars, telescopes, shuffleboard sets, and various other practical items that patrons can check out and use at home. And that is precisely the point. Libraries are transforming themselves to meet a given community's needs where it's at. They get input from patrons on what they value and would like access to and do their best to get there.

Modern libraries are not defined by their physical locations. Most of our local libraries in Kosciusko County use multiple digital library resources, including Overdrive (ebooks and audiobooks) and Hoopla (ebooks, comic books, audiobooks, music). With Kosciusko County Connect being offered by Kosciusko REMC, there's no reason why a family in a rural part of the

county, not historically served by a public library, should be left out of highly useful digital library services.

Now that we have listed various reasons why libraries are important in Kosciusko County, let's look at how we can get more people to enjoy them

The Problem

There are 17,100 people (21.3% of the population) in Kosciusko County that are not served by a public library. Meaning, they cannot check out physical materials from a library and they cannot checkout e-materials from their library. This is due solely to the fact that they live in a township that does not have library services.

Three Paths Forward

Before diving into the three primary ways we can expand library services in Kosciusko County, it's important to note that at any of our six libraries, anyone can become a member by paying an out of district fee. While this is great and encouraged, it can also represent a significant barrier to entry for many individuals, both literally and figuratively. Literally, as the average annual fee for a single membership at our Kosciusko County libraries could be upwards of \$90, but also figuratively, as it is hard for some to rationalize spending up to \$90 for a membership while some get free membership, just because they live closer.

Another note is that all school aged children in Kosciusko County get free library memberships at their local library. That is a child only account, however, and not a family account. This set up unfortunately does not incentivize whole families to go to the library.

There are several ways for communities to expand their public library services. However, after speaking with Hayley Trefun, Public Library Services Consultant at the Indiana

State Library, and studying the Indiana Code, it appears for our community there are three primary methods that make sense.

County-Based System (Merger) (3):

The primary benefit to the effective merging of all existing libraries in the county would be to have a one county-wide library district. This would solve “the problem” rather quickly by immediately redefining the district so that all county residents are members. That would allow any resident in the county to go to any county library and participate, check out materials, and engage with library resources.

However, this method would likely take the most amount of work and coordination. According to Indiana Code IC 36-12-4 which governs the merging of Class 1 libraries, the merger process would begin with the majority of the membership of all merging library boards signing a resolution initiating the plan of a merger.

Once the plan is made, each board would need to appoint three individuals to serve on a planning committee to plan for the merger. The plan must include:

- A designation of the primary library that is one of the libraries being merged and will continue to exist as a legal entity following the merger
- A description of the library services moving forward
- Terms and conditions of the transfer of property
- A schedule for the merger process

The plan must be completed no later than one year from the date of the signed resolution. Once the plan is agreed upon, a majority of the membership of each library board will vote to adopt the written resolution.

The resolution adopting the merger would need to be filed with the county recorder and the Indiana state library. Afterward each merging library board would appoint four members to serve with the primary library on an interim board. The responsibilities of the interim board would be to merge the budgets. The interim board will dissolve on December 31 of the year the merger was initiated. The merged board will then establish the budget and new tax rate to the department of finance to receive a new tax levy for the merged library district.

Expansion (4):

Expansion of Class 1 libraries is just that, expanding the defined district of an existing library. To do so an existing library may propose an expansion with the township trustee and legislative body of the township. The proposal will state that the public library seeks to combine with the township and form a single library district. The township and legislative body may agree to the expansion by written resolution.

If the township isn't as agreeable initially, the library board can file a petition for acceptance of the expansion proposal. This will effectively force the issue with the township, who will then need to publish a notice for the proposal of the expansion. Within 60 days of this notice, registered voters in the township may sign a petition of acceptance of the proposal, or a remonstrance in opposition to the proposal. A petition for acceptance of the proposal must be signed by at least 20% of the registered voters of the township. If, after the certification of the petition/remonstrance, a greater number of voters have signed the petition for acceptance, the township shall agree to the expansion by a written resolution.

If the library seeks to expand into more than one township at a given time, the process is similar to that described above, however instead of going to the township and township

legislative body, the library would seek acceptance from the County itself. The process would involve a similar petition/remonstrance process.

If expansion is accepted, at least one of the appointments to the library board would need to be from the township that was added to the district.

Contracting (5):

Contracting is a way for a township that does not have library services to effectively team up with an existing public library. This is a good solution, but also an impermanent solution. A library board may contract with a township and the contract must outline the manner and extent of library service as well as the amount of compensation for the extension of the library service. The township can then levy the funds sufficient to meet the contract terms.

Recommendation

We started this project thinking that a county-based system would work best. If all our existing libraries merged and the new entity was governed at the county level, it would inevitably make things easier from a financial perspective, managerial perspective, and efficiency perspective. After discussing with several of the library directors, however, it seems like not everyone would be open to the idea. It's also notable that over the course of the KLA year, we, as cadets, have seen how large and varied our county is. As such, we have seen firsthand the unique subcultures, from the bustling downtown in Warsaw during the workweek, to the rural agricultural areas in the southern and middle parts of the county, to the lake culture in the northeastern part of the county.

Such an eclectic blend of cultures in one county is unique, especially compared to those counties with large metropolitan areas. Our libraries ought to reflect their respective regions, within reason. Having existing libraries expand into the unserved areas will allow those

unserved areas immediate access to library resources and services a little more nimbly and so long as though all of our libraries are making the effort, we can see meaningful change in short order.

Works Cited

- 1) Data set reference from Indiana State Library (attached)
- 2) Rothwell, Johathan. *Assessing the Economic Gains of Eradicating Illiteracy Nationally and Regionally in the United States*
- 3) Indiana Code IC 36-12-4
- 4) Indiana Code IC 36-12-5
- 5) Indiana Code IC 36 -12-3-7

Township Name	Population 2020	Served?
Scott	1,757	Maybe partial Nappanee in Elkhart County
Jefferson	1,963	Yes; Nappanee in Elkhart County and Milford
Van Buren	4,311	Yes; Milford
Turkey Creek	8,659	Yes; Syracuse-Turkey Creek
Etna	1,500	Contract with Bourbon in Marshall County
Prairie	1,774	No
Plain	8,819	Partial - Warsaw w/ Warsaw
Tippecanoe	6,576	Yes; North Webster
Harrison	3,786	Yes; Bell Memorial
Wayne	29,110	Yes; Warsaw
Washington	3,025	Yes; Pierceton & Washington
Franklin	1,121	Partial - Mentone w/ Bell Memorial
Seward	2,280	No
Clay	1,657	No
Monroe	1,120	Contract with Pierceton & Washington
Lake	1,549	No
Jackson	1,233	No
Total	80,240	

Kosciusko County unserved population

Township	Population
Clay	1657
Franklin	1121
Jackson	1233
Lake	1549
Mentone (town) is served by Bell PL in Franklin Township	215
Plain	8819
Prairie	1774
Seward	2280
Warsaw (town) is served by Warsaw PL in Plain Township	1118
Total pop unserved	17,100