

Leaders Detail Challenges Suburban Libraries Face

By Eric Peterson - Daily Herald Staff Writer

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Legislators and library officials gathered in Buffalo Grove Monday morning to discuss the 21st-century challenges libraries face from funding concerns and the Patriot Act, which many feel violates privacy rights.

The 15th annual North Suburban Library System legislative breakfast brought more than 20 state legislators and U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky of Evanston face to face with about 150 local library officials.

The most pressing issue, however, was a bill proposed by state Rep. Sid Mathias of Buffalo Grove to make public libraries exempt - as schools recently became - to the municipal funneling of property taxes in tax-increment finance districts.

TIF districts - often used to spur redevelopment - work by freezing the property taxes generally available to all taxing bodies at the level of the district's first year.

As redevelopment occurs and property values in the district rise, the increase in property tax goes toward the cost of public improvements brought about by the redevelopment.

A TIF district expires when all costs are paid or after 23 years - whichever comes first.

The problem both libraries and schools have faced from TIF districts is that they've had to deal with increasing populations in the districts long before they see any extra money to pay their costs.

But Mathias' House bill, recently introduced in the state Senate as well, seeks to provide libraries with an exemption from this problem.

"I think the whole TIF area is ripe for readjustment," said state Rep. Paul Froehlich of Schaumburg, who intends to co-sponsor the bill in the House when he returns to Springfield Wednesday.

State Sen. Wendell Jones of Palatine was among the legislators who talked about Gov. Rod Blagojevich's plan to provide a book a month to Illinois children during their first five years of life. This plan, if used by all, would cost the state \$26 million in 2005 to promote literacy.

But Jones added his voice to those who believe this money would better serve the public by going to libraries.

Sarah Long, executive director of the Wheeling-based North Suburban Library System, said funding problems are becoming more severe for libraries because none of their traditional services are decreasing, but their number of new services - like Internet access and audiovisual materials - are gradually increasing.

"Let's remember how well libraries have adapted to 21st-century technology," Long said. "They've been leaders."

Nevertheless, state Rep. Mark Beaubien of Barrington Hills, who serves on the state's budget committee, cautioned library officials to not be too hopeful about an increase in state funding this year, despite his own personal support for libraries.

Schakowsky thanked librarians for sharing her concern about the Patriot Act's granting the right for the FBI to search library and book store records without a warrant during terrorism investigations.

"Thank you for passing the resolution that says Americans have a right to read what they want to read, and a right to privacy that libraries are protecting," Schakowsky said.