

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
WORK SESSION HELD ON
TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2025**

A work session of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors was held on Tuesday, April 29, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room, 1415 Melody Lane, Building G, Bisbee, Arizona.

Present: Frank Antenori, Chairman; Tom Crosby, Vice-Chairman; Kathleen L. Gomez, Supervisor

Staff Present: Sharon Gilman, Interim County Administrator
Joe Casey, Interim Deputy County Administrator
Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board

Attendees: Amadee Ricketts, Library District Director
Stacy Fenhaus, Budget Manager

Chairman Antenori called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Board of Supervisors

1. Budget Work Session - Discussion of the County Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026, specifically: Library District

Amadee Ricketts, Library District Director, presented this item using a PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Ricketts stated that the Library District provides countywide services through five rural branches and support to seven municipal libraries. She stated the team, made up of around 10 full-time equivalent staff, offers digital collections, home deliveries, and public access to the internet and databases. She explained that the FY26 budget includes a 3% increase in property tax revenue due to valuation changes, with most of the budget growth tied to employee-related expenses. She also noted the importance of broadband at rural branches, where over 38,000 computer and Wi-Fi sessions were recorded last year, especially in rural areas lacking home internet access.

In response to the Board, Ms. Ricketts stated that broadband cable is directly connected to each library and is used to provide Wi-Fi access. She stated many surrounding residential areas still lack broadband due to the distance between homes, making infrastructure investment cost-prohibitive.

Ms. Ricketts shared plans to continue modest but meaningful improvements and specific projects include repainting the exteriors of the Bowie and Elfrida libraries, which haven't been painted in many years. She stated the updates won't involve bold new colors, the goal is to refresh the existing look and maintain a welcoming space.

Ms. Ricketts mentioned plans to update public computers and continue facility improvements alongside enhancements to digital collections. She noted significant progress in reducing wait times for eBooks, audiobooks, and digital magazines, and

aims to build on that. She stated the digital content landscape remains challenging due to licensing changes that affect availability and costs. She stated a key success has been the ability for patrons to access materials from ten other Arizona library systems through partnerships, expanding the selection at no added expense.

Ms. Ricketts shared that upcoming challenges include potential impacts from changes in federal library funding, which, while not directly tied to their budget, could affect key services provided by the state library. She stated the services include professional development tools like the Library Leadership Institute and the Summer Library Institute, which have historically been valuable and cost-effective for staff development. She also noted concerns around staffing, as the district has experienced several recent retirements and expects more, including from long-serving employees. Recruitment and retention are now a focus, particularly as it relates to salary and employee-related expenses.

Ms. Ricketts explained that in District 2, the Library District operates the Elfrida and Portal branches, while municipal libraries in Bisbee, Douglas, and Tombstone are independently run. She stated although the district doesn't manage or fund municipal libraries directly, it provides essential software services at no extra charge, which would be significantly more expensive for libraries to purchase on their own. She stated this shared system allows rural residents to access a much broader range of materials, both digitally and in person. She noted last year, rural patrons checked out over 40,000 items from rural branches and about 5,000 items from municipal libraries, highlighting the cooperative value of the shared services.

Ms. Ricketts clarified that the Library District doesn't accept money directly, but relies on support from Friends of the Library groups. She stated these nonprofit groups help fund programs like summer reading and early literacy initiatives.

The Board and staff discussed the idea of establishing a perpetual trust, similar to how some charities and endowments operate. Chairman Antenori stated the concept involves investing interest revenue into a trust that grows over time, eventually generating enough income to support services like the library without needing taxpayer funds. Ms. Gilman suggested that such a trust would likely need to be independently managed by a board of trustees to avoid conflicts with county regulations or the state's gift clause.

Ms. Ricketts stated the Library District has maintained a contingency fund for emergencies, which was significantly depleted after the last economic downturn but has since been rebuilt. She stated that with the contingency fund now replenished, staff is looking to the Board for guidance on using it strategically, possibly building toward an endowment that could one day sustain library operations without tax revenue.

Ms. Ricketts pointed out that the library tax levy only returned to its 2010 level in 2024. She stated to stay financially stable, the district had to take aggressive steps, including staff reductions, and now there are three fewer full-time positions than before the recession, yet services are still being maintained. She stated the current contingency fund reflects that lean but strategic approach.

Chairman Antenori adjourned the meeting at 2:35 p.m.

APPROVED:

Frank Antenori, Chairman

ATTEST:

Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board