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**Sioux Center Library sees high use, future growth**

Among Iowa libraries in towns of 5,000-10,000 people, the Sioux Center Public Library is the highest used.

Library Director Becky Bilby told the City Council that the library sees 195,839 check outs of physical books and other items a year, in addition to electronic checkouts like e-books and audiobooks, which have seen increased demand after COVID arrived. In all, the library saw 221,022 check outs of all materials - physical and digital, giving them numbers more comparable to large libraries like the Sioux City and Waterloo libraries.

“For our size of library, we are near or at the top in the state for number of checkouts,” Bilby said. “Our community really uses our library.”

Along with checkouts, the library is seeing growth in meeting room use and facility use. Community response to a library survey in 2019 also indicated a desire for added space at the library, and staff has seen requests for room use continue to grow. In the 2020-21 year, there were 1,216 public rentals of meeting rooms.

“Our smaller study room is the most-used meeting space. With business people working from home, we’re seeing people come in to use it for a conference call or to give a presentation.” Bilby said. “Also, in the survey responses, it came up again and again that people are seeking an indoor area for the cold months that is kid-friendly, a place that would give more opportunities for open play for toddlers and preschoolers.”

Responding to this growth in demand, library staff have met with a space needs planner to discuss options for consideration. She shared these ideas with the council for future consideration, including adding a hands-on STEM area to the west side of the library, sectioning off four personal study rooms inside the existing library, adding a raised meeting room to the east end of the library which would not obstruct the ground level water detention area. The cement area below could be designed to serve as an outdoor learning and gathering space, not obstructing the detention area.

Bilby noted that the number of library programs also grew in 2020 and again in 2021, when a total of 544 programs were offered.

“It’s incredible the programs you are offering there; sewing, cooking, computer programming,” Councilmember Eric Moerman said.

Bilby credited her staff with identifying and creating programs that draw people in.

“The people who work at our library just love this community,” she said. “To me, they’re part of our best-kept secret. People who are willing to give over and above.”

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