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# The Forum

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## Local libraries reeling from 58 per cent budget cut

Sask. budget for 2017-18 cuts \$3.5M from regional libraries; Read-in protest planned for April 7

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Services at libraries in Vibank, Sedley and Montmartre will be put in danger if a \$3.5 million reduction in provincial funding to Saskatchewan's regional library system goes through as planned, according to James Richards, branch supervisor for Southeast Regional Library.

"Provincial funding has a direct impact on the regional headquarters operations and so anything that our headquarters staff coordinates will be in danger and will see impacts from this," said Richards.

"This will definitely mean a reduction in the services we offer but I can't comment on whether this may lead to branch closures or staff layoffs. It is still too early to know for sure."

The funding cut — amounting to 58 per cent of the libraries' previous \$6 million total — was announced in the Saskatchewan Party's 2017-18 budget on March 22.

Education minister Don Morgan explained to reporters afterward that "as a province we should be getting out of the bricks and mortar libraries and people should be focusing on electronic or alternate media."

Within the library system, the regional headquarters is responsible for the purchasing of new books, DVDs and magazines, transferring books between library branches, operating digital resources such as e-books, e-audio books, streaming music, streaming movies or downloadable newspapers and magazines, computer IT services to all branches, coordinating literacy programs, payroll and administrative support, and running special programs, such as book clubs.

Richards says all of these services will be at risk with this budget cut.

"The public library is about so much more than just providing e-books and a website. We provide a safe place for people of all ages. We provide space for third parties to conduct various meetings out of. A place for people to socialize," he said.

"It is about people and building community. It is about being the living room of the community that is what public libraries are all about. And e-books and our online services are definitely part of that but that is not all we provide."

The government's announcement has sparked a Weyburn woman to advocate for a "read-in" protest across the province at 12 noon on April 7, with library supporters encouraged to read a book in front of their local MLA office for 15 minutes as a show of support

for the library system.

The Village of Sedley is also promoting a petition being circulated by the Saskatchewan Library Trustees' Association with forms available to be signed at four locations on Broadway Street.

The alternative, Richards says, is that communities may be forced into a choice between reduced services or funding the difference themselves — which would require a \$5.77 per capita grant from municipalities within Southeast Regional Library's service area.

"At this point we are really just digesting this and then we will look into all of the implications of this and how to cope with them. Our AGM is planned for April 8 and will still be going ahead. So, that will be a time for us to gather with board members and get their thoughts and decisions," added Richards.

Richards encourages concerned residents to reach out to their local MLA to express opposition as well as their local municipal government to express support for their local branch.

"If anything is going to help we need to get the grassroots advocacy going. The more people that realize what this means and the implications of it, then the more we can start saying that this can't happen," said Richards.

## Budget leaves school divisions intact

'Minor' changes may still affect bedroom communities of Regina,

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After much speculation and public outcry, sighs of relief could be heard throughout Saskatchewan after the provincial government announced the school division structure will remain more or less status quo.

The March 22 provincial budget indicates Saskatchewan's school division boundaries as a whole will not be significantly altered, and that boards will also continue to be locally elected.

"We are really pleased to see there have been no changes to our current structure and boundaries," said Janet Kotylak, Prairie Valley School Division board chair.

Leading up to the release of the provincial budget, there had been discussion about the possibility of school board amalgamation and the

switch from locally elected board members to appointed board members.

"This is very much so on the minds of the residents in the community," said Montmartre councillor Tricia Taylor prior to the release of the budget. "I have been speaking to people in the community and if there were to be an amalgamation of the school board they are scared of losing the small town, farming community roots."

When delivering budget details, finance minister Kevin Doherty said the government's decision to avoid amalgamation was strongly influenced by the public's feedback.

"Our MLAs were literally swamped, unlike any other issue that they've ever experienced with people saying 'Do not touch the school division boundaries or elected school boards,'" said Doherty.

Kotylak believes

the public's response has much to do with the school division's concerted efforts to stay connected to the community and ensure they are properly representing residents.

"We have done a lot of work locally to ensure that as our system got bigger, we were still reflective of the community voice. I think that is why we had people step up and say that the board does reflect what they want and is committed to listening and staying connected to the public," said Kotylak.

"We are so grateful for the public support and we are also pleased that the minister did listen to the feedback."

During the budget announcement it was also indicated however that school boards should still expect to see some changes to the Education Act that will allow the minister more power to dictate spending.

"There are still a lot of pieces to this that are unknown and we await more details," said Kotylak. "There will be changes to the Education Act and right now we don't know what that will mean around the economy of boards or what our role in the system will be based on changes to the act. Those are pieces that are all too early to tell."

The minister also noted that while there are no major boundary changes, communities surrounding Regina and Saskatoon may see some minor changes but school boards and communities will be consulted.

"We don't know if that impact is on us but some of his comments make us believe that it might be. We are really apprehensive at this point because we don't really know what these changes mean. So we are trying to remain optimistic as we hold tight for more information," added Kotylak.

## Potash open houses in Vibank and Sedley scheduled for April

Two public information sessions have been scheduled regarding CanPac's proposed potash mine near Sedley — April 11 at the New Horizons Community Centre in Sedley and April 12 at the Vibank Community Hall.

Members of the public will have the opportunity to meet and ask questions of team leaders for the Albany Project, as well as share both support and concerns with an on-site questionnaire.

Company representatives will also be presenting a general update on the project, including information on studies that have already been conducted and those that are scheduled for future dates.

An email from Brad Schiele, public and indigenous engagement consultant with CanPac's consultation partner SNC-Lavalin, states that "all feedback gathered during the open houses will be considered during project planning."

Both open houses are scheduled to run from 4-8 p.m.

Members of the public seeking more information ahead of the events can contact Schiele directly at 306-242-2822 or brad.schiele@atlheritage.ca.

Further project information can be found online at www.projectalbany.ca.