



May 6, 2025

To: Flathead County Commissioners
From: Flathead Library Foundation Board of Directors
Re: Support for Library's \$2.770M Sidebar Request

Summary

The Flathead Library Foundation urges the Flathead County Commissioners to approve the \$2.76 million request for land acquisition for a new Kalispell branch library, for which the Foundation will contribute the additional \$140,000 for purchase, to provide the crucial catalyst for a larger private fundraising effort to build the library with a vision of 100% literacy in Flathead County.

Public Comment:

On behalf of the Foundation Board, **we stand in strong support of the Library's \$2.76 million sidebar request for the acquisition of land for a future Kalispell branch library**, a project of vital importance to our county's growth and the evolving needs of our community.

For the past 35 years, the Foundation has been a dedicated philanthropic partner to the Library, investing over \$4 million in crucial facility upgrades, impactful early literacy, teen, and adult programming, essential service enhancements, and even a new branch library in Bigfork.

We are cognizant of the demands on the County budget and funding priorities and are **grateful to see the future replacement of the Kalispell branch library as a priority for County CIP investments**. While *construction* for this library branch needs to be complete within a nine year timeframe, when the lease runs out for the current location, it *can* be kicked down the road a bit.

What should *not* be kicked down the road is the opportunity to purchase ideal, central property along the Parkline Trail, currently being offered to the County for \$2.9 million.

If the Commissioners were to grant the full sidebar request, **the Foundation is prepared to pay the difference of \$140,000 from our own reserves.** Upfront purchase of the property by the County and Foundation will clear the path for a robust private philanthropic effort to build a new library in the next 3-5 years.

It is our firm belief that **without this foundational County investment in the land, securing the necessary level of private philanthropy and significant grants to make this project a reality, will be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible.**

The Foundation is aware and supportive of the County's priorities to first build a new Flathead County Detention Center. Similarly to the proposed new library site, the County needed to first purchase the land. But dissimilarly, **private dollars will be sought to their fullest capacity to build the library facility, while the Detention Center will require full public funding through bonding and levying.**

The Foundation is committed to working in close cooperation with the Library Board, and aligning our efforts with the County's overall timeline and strategic objectives. However, we must emphasize that **County support for the land acquisition is not merely beneficial; it is essential.**

Without it, we cannot confidently assure our donors and grantors that this will be the true public-private partnership they expect and that is necessary for the success of such a significant undertaking.

With your partnership, we envision a future where Flathead County, and specifically **our bold vision of 100% literacy for all of its residents,** is supported by a modern, well-equipped, and appropriately sized and staffed main branch library.