

ELY PUBLIC LIBRARY

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March 16, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

As a past recipient of a library improvement grant from the state of Minnesota, I am writing to express my support of this funding program and give you some insight into how the program made a difference to the Ely community. The Ely Public Library received notice that we had been chosen to receive a Public Library Accessibility and Improvement Grant in January of 2014; we used the monies to help build a brand-new library building in the downtown area - construction ran from June until October of 2014 - and we have now spent just over a year in our new space.

Receiving this grant allowed the library to make a wide variety of improvements for individuals who use the library. The new building is accessible to individuals with disabilities; entry to the old space required steps or a trip up a ramp which opened directly into an alley and did not meet accessibility specifications. The previous location had the library in 5 separate rooms in a larger building (very hard for staff to monitor); the new space is designed specifically to allow one staff person to work alone if necessary. Lighting, electrical systems, bathrooms, temperature control ... all of these features greatly improved when we moved to the new building.

However, the new building was not just nuts and bolts improvements; the design committee members worked diligently to make the new building both beautiful and a good fit with the community while still incorporating suggestions from library users. Materials like native species of wood, paint colors that mimic those found in nature in our area, and a timeless exterior look have led to comments from visitors along the lines of "you can tell it's new inside, but we almost drove by since it fit in so well with the rest of the downtown buildings". The new building also allows the library to showcase local artists ... over 30 different individuals each have a piece in the collection - this is the most diverse permanent display of local artists open to the public in Ely.

The grant award allowed the City of Ely to construct a new public library building without raising local taxes. It covered approximately one third of our total construction costs; the city bonded for the capital to cover the rest of the project. One of the primary factors in choosing to build a new library was the cost of heating the previous space. The grant's emphasis on energy efficiency produced a building that cost about 67 cents per square foot to heat in our first calendar year; the total heating bill for 2015 was \$4460 (or approximately what the city had been paying to heat the previous building for three winter weeks). The savings in heat alone between the previous space and the new building is allowing the city to cover the ongoing bond payments for the project with no tax increases.

Finally, the new library building gave the community a sense of renewal and optimism. I heard many comments like "we are finally getting something new here" and "I am glad to see my tax dollars turned into something solid". We moved the library collection between buildings using volunteers and had so many people offer to help that we actually needed to put people on a waiting list to see if we would have jobs for them. One volunteer told me that he met new people in our small town (where he thought he knew everyone) during that move week because their paths normally never crossed. Another individual said that our grand opening of the new building felt like "a big day-long house party for the whole community". Another comment at the grand opening was "it's so good to have something go right for us".

I hope you support continued funding for the library improvement grant program. It made a huge difference to the library here in Ely - our usage numbers jumped significantly in this first year - and I hope to see other communities have the opportunity to benefit as well.

Sincerely,



Rachel Heinrich

Ely Public Library Director