

Director's Report: Submitted by Patrick Pittman

December 2025

Director's Focus:

Pending Grants; Future Renovations; Year-End Assessment

Personnel: See Personnel Committee report.

Finance: See Finance Committee report.

Facilities: See Facilities report.

Policy: See Policies Committee report.

Library Function: The events and programs in December 2025 added a final boost to the year-end metrics, primarily for building usage. December 2025 had 5,285 patrons use the building over 216 open service hours. The patrons per hour (pph) came to 24, which correlates with the time of year for foot traffic. December 2024 had 4,763 patrons use the building, with 204 service hours and 23 pph. The month of December puts a final cap on trends seen throughout the year and helps put the general trajectory of library usage by the service population into a broader context.

In 2025, the library had a total of 76,165 patrons using the building over 2,673 total open service hours. In 2024, the library had 72,545 patrons over 2,675 service hours. 2025 served 28.5 patrons per hour and 2024 served 27.1 patrons per hour. In simple terms, it means the library saw an increase of about one and a half people per hour during open hours. The library hit the 5% building usage increase target in 2025, but those trends show no signs of changing or hitting a plateau. The community has recognized value within the library and continues to utilize its many resources. The library will need to begin updating its guidance around strategic staffing if these trends continue into 2026.

Circulation tells somewhat of a different story. The library saw a total increase for 2025 in circulation by 3%, over 2024. The 151,326 items circulated show borrowing trends placing the library well within the range of pre-Covid numbers. In a bubble, the board can celebrate patrons borrowing 4,137 more items as a return to literacy, as well as an appreciation of community assets. From an operations standpoint, Seymour fell short of the median increase across the county. Several reports generated have begun to look at analytics of borrowing patterns, popular sections of library materials, and the resurgence of interest in digital items. The library will need to make some small adjustments to purchasing and acquisitions. The data does not indicate poor performance as whole, but certainly not the standard to which the library aspires to meet.

Children's programming saw the largest increase in attendance year-over-year, with a 19% jump in attendance from 2024. Combined intergenerational or family programs had a similar pattern. Teen and Tween program numbers remained relatively flat, with slightly more attendance over fewer programs offered. Adult programming dropped off in a more noticeable manner in several areas, although it saw small gains in others. Gauging overall programming showed the same positive trends of attendance as building usage, with a total increase of attendance at 11%. However, like circulation, the overall number does not reflect the shifts that occurred in 2025 across library departments.

As with circulation, the numbers do not necessarily indicate an overall poor programming performance within the library. However, it does illustrate how the library must move and shift forward with the demands of the service population. Unfortunately, libraries align with almost every other industry in that stagnation results in fewer return visits. Forecasting trends help alleviate some potential stagnation but can fall flat with intended audiences.

Libraries must carefully balance introducing new concepts in programming with proven popular formats, and Seymour has proven no exception to that rule. Librarians planning programs, along with the board, must accept that some programs will fail. The key to successful programming rests on the library's mission of literacy and lifelong learning to frame its programs. The educational components then build out creative elements. It sounds easier in theory than many find in practice, hence the reason librarians have a professional degree.

The upside of this data, in addition to the raw numbers themselves, comes from the library's consistent and cohesive renovation of the building and grounds. The 2025 installation of program-friendly flooring in the Duryea Room opened some messier programs for children that previously had no area for use. The development and creation of an outdoor learning space will enhance future programs on the Seymour grounds. The continual development of the library space creates flexibility and options for the librarians, staff, as well as the public.

As the board considers future projects, prioritization of high-use areas will benefit all parties. 2023-2025 saw major improvements, which led to a happier patron base. 2026 and beyond has some real potential to capitalize on this goodwill in other parts of the library for the purpose of increasing user satisfaction, with a side-benefit of increasing the library's metrics.

The year-end financials should show no major surprises, aside from the major bequest received from the estate of Anne O'Toole. One major component of 2025 included an increase in seeking grants, gifts, and donations from the public from the office of the Library Director. Many grantors gave to the library in 2025, and the library used those funds for purchases outside municipal funding. The replacement of the server and outdated computers used this method effectively. Additional user-experience and library enhancement purchases will start in 2026, which will all feed into the mission and new Long-Range Plan.

As it pertains to the Long-Range Plan, the board will need to perform an evaluation of the previous plan (2023-2025). A goal of the new plan includes a community survey, which should

help assess the impact from a community perspective. Focus groups and post-program surveys also assist in a broader understanding of what the library does well, and where it can improve. The library will begin to put the survey materials together in early 2026 to create a complete picture of what the library has done well, how it has fallen short, and where the library will go in the future.

Looking Ahead: The library started off the year with a space analysis in January. Vargas Associates completed the beginning stages of the analysis, with results anticipated toward the end of February. The renderings provided should help guide the board toward creating a plan of action, fundraising goals, and a concept of the direction in the physical plant. The board should have a Vargas Associates representative present the plans in the February or March meeting.

Likewise, as stipulated in the agreement with the third-party CPA, the presentation of the 2025 financial results should take place at the February board meeting. The board can work with Yaeger Treviso in finding time during the meeting for a breakdown of the end-of-year financials. The presentation helps inform the board how well the prior year budget worked to determine best use of funds.

Pertaining to necessary projects in 2026, the library must comply with accessibility guidelines on its website by the end of the year. The library has identified several vendors to take on this project. The library should also perform a security evaluation with its video system. This looks like the next most likely technological upgrade. Finally, the library must finish an ADA-compliant walkway for its new Outdoor Learning Pavilion by summer reading. These items will come in addition to an audit of the 2025 finances, a space analysis, and other renovations. 2026 will remain quite active.

January typically represents a slower month in programming and building usage, so the library staff takes the time to reset and begin planning. Vacations typically occur in January, May, and September, and this year looks no different. The board should expect to see programming and attendance pick up around the school break in February, but major planning for the year has started. The work-study students will also return at the end of January for the semester, which helps delegate several labor-intensive tasks in children and family literacy. Several project, including a potential StoryWalk at the Sweden Town Park, will rely on their knowledge and labor.

In Closing: By all metrics, the library had a successful year in 2025. Room for improvement exists within certain areas and collections, but this does not detract from the success the library has seen since 2023. Rather than viewing Seymour as a library requiring large-scale changes, the operations require some tweaks and adjustments. Those shifts will start from the discretion of the Library Director and filter down. As with any changes, some will welcome them, while others feel frustrated. All changes come with purpose, enhancing the library, its mission, and its value to the community.