

Silas Bronson Library Budget Report to the Board of Aldermen

May 15, 2018

Raechel Guest, Director

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk to you about the library's budget. I'd like to first provide some context, after which I will address the specifics.

I've been the director of the Silas Bronson Library for about two and a half years. In that time, I've learned that there are a lot of misconceptions about what public libraries do. We are more than just books, although books, including ebooks and audiobooks, are still our core service.

We have a large collection of movies, documentaries, and music. We have 130 different magazine titles and newspapers. We have online access to more than a decades' worth of articles in the Republican-American and various popular news magazines. We have free or reduced price admission passes to two dozen museums, zoos, and science centers.

Our online services include the Small Business Reference Center, a database of information for entrepreneurs, business owners, and managers. The Automobile and Small Engine Reference Centers contain repair manuals for cars, motorcycles, generators, boat motors, and lawnmowers.

If you want to learn a new language, our Mango Languages program can be used on any computer, tablet, or phone. Mango features 72 languages, including English for Spanish speakers.

We offer access to the Lynda.com database from any computer. Lynda is an online learning platform that helps anyone learn business, software, technology and creative skills to achieve personal and professional goals. The site features thousands of video tutorials letting you learn at your own pace. Subject matter includes Excel, Word, Photoshop, game design, animation, web design and coding. Lynda also offers business tutorials in customer service, management, data analysis, and sales. Practical tutorials are also available if you want to launch a career as a musician or just learn how to play guitar.

Libraries are not static repositories of information. We are actively engaged with our patrons, helping them with personalized assistance in finding books, using computers, researching their genealogy, and connecting with the social services they need. We have partnered with SCORE to offer one-on-one mentoring for people who want to start their own business. We have a full roster of public programs for all ages, including literacy programs, cultural programs, art exhibits, music performances, book signings, computer classes, and movie matinees.

Modern technology is designed to bring the world to your living room. Social interaction has become a rare commodity, but it is something that libraries excel at. We offer a variety of clubs to give people the opportunity to interact in person with people who share similar interests – book clubs, poetry, chess, anime, and gaming are all popular at the library.

I was at the Bunker Hill branch a few weeks ago when a young man stopped by to see what we offered. He has just moved to Waterbury and doesn't know anyone here. He came to the library looking for social interaction with people who love writing.

Our meeting rooms are almost always in use by either the library or local nonprofits. Our main library attracts more than 240,000 visitors to downtown every year. For comparison, the Mattatuck Museum, which has an annual operating budget that is comparable to ours, attracts about 40,000 visitors to downtown every year. The Bunker Hill branch has over 6,000 visitors every year.

National studies have shown that public libraries are important contributors to quality of life and economic development. Libraries are seen as contributing to stability, safety, and quality of life in neighborhoods. They bolster downtown cultural and commercial activity. They provide free literacy programs and offer access to skills training that contribute to long-term economic productivity.

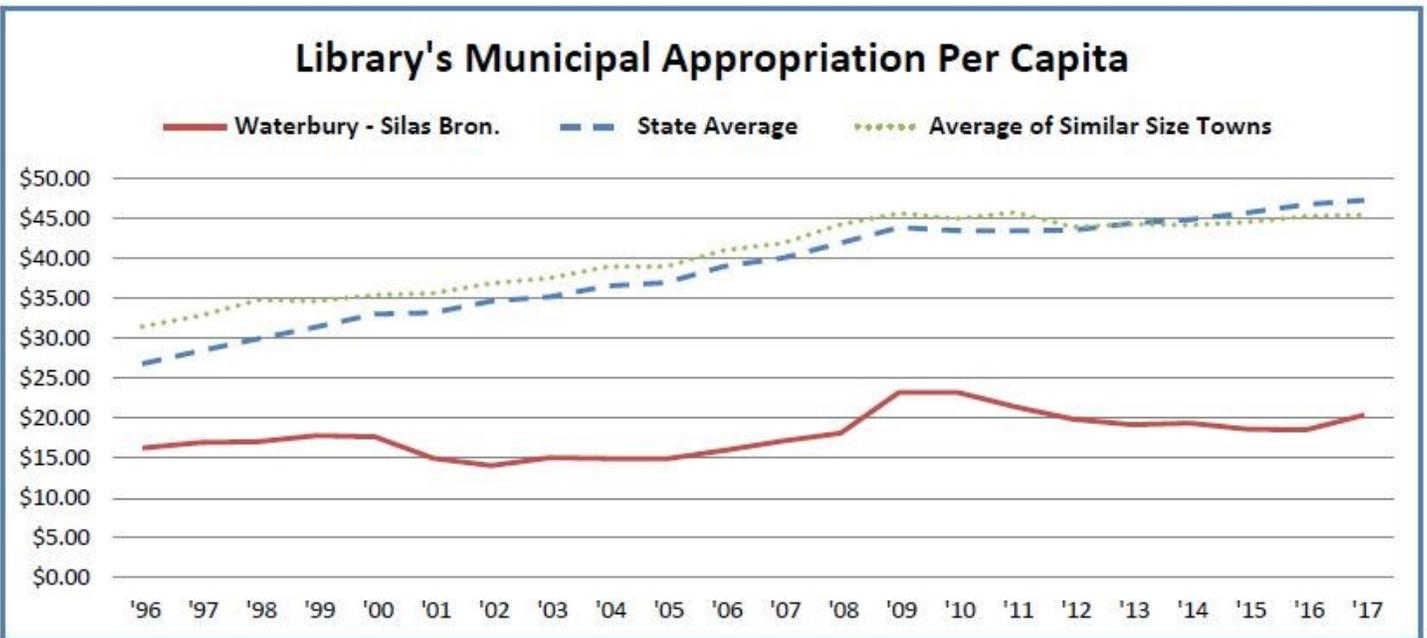
Public libraries are one of the most important educational and cultural resources in any community. Seniors, children, students, job seekers, and anyone living on a tight budget all benefit tremendously from having access to a public library.

Public libraries are a source of community pride, advancing education, and enhancing the quality of life in any community.

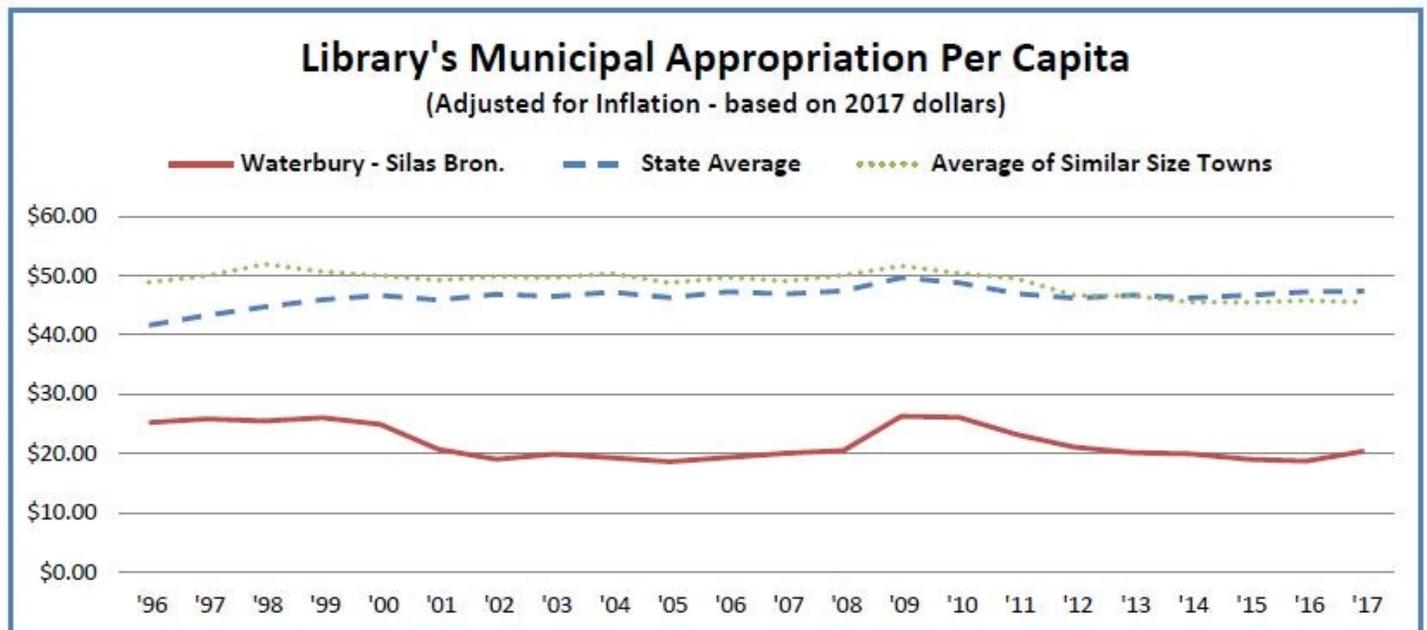
Overall Funding Levels

The City of Waterbury has done a terrible job of funding the library for decades. We are currently the worst in the state in terms of funding for our public library system and have been for quite a long time.

The only public library that comes close to being as poorly funded as Waterbury is Danbury, but even they are better funded than we are. Per capita, our funding hasn't changed significantly since at least the 1990s, even though our costs have gone up.



Data provided by the Connecticut State Library



Data provided by the Connecticut State Library

In FY17, Waterbury allocated just over half a percent of the total municipal revenue to the public library, equal to \$20.43, per capita. Danbury allocated three-quarters of a percent, equal to \$24.41, per capita. New Haven was slightly higher in terms of percentage, at \$32.09 per capita.

In Bridgeport, the public library received a full 1% of the total municipal revenue. In 2009, the Bridgeport Library Board took advantage of a state law which allows the voters of any municipality to force a referendum regarding the funding of their public library. The law allows for up to 3 mills to be levied for the operation of a free public library. The 2009 referendum in Bridgeport passed, setting the library funding at 1 mill. Last year, they forced another referendum to raise the levy to 1.3 mills and again the people of Bridgeport voted yes. Bridgeport’s voters have now shown us twice just how much people care about adequate funding for their public libraries.

City	Population	Library Locations	Municipal Contribution to Operating Budget	Percentage of municipal revenue	Municipal Appropriation per capita
Stamford	129,113	4 + bookmobile	\$7.9 million	1.42%	\$61.22
Hartford	123,243	7	\$7.9 million	1.39%	\$63.78
New Britain	72,558	2	\$3.1 million	1.25%	\$41.69
Bridgeport	145,936	5	\$5.8 million	1.03%	\$39.92
New Haven	129,934	5	\$4.2 million	0.77%	\$32.09
Danbury	84,992	1	\$2.1 million	0.75%	\$24.41
Waterbury	108,272	2	\$2.2 million	0.53%	\$20.43

Data from FY17 provided by the Connecticut State Library

Library Locations

Waterbury used to have six library branches: Bunker Hill, Waterville, East End, North End, Rose Hill on Baldwin Street, and Brooklyn. A city of this size should have at least five branches.

In 1974, a library consultant reported that Waterbury was one of the worst cities in Connecticut in terms of its public library. The consultant recommended expanded services, especially in branch libraries. Instead, we did the opposite and shut down five of our six branches. The library's leadership cited budget cuts and unruly children in its decisions to close branches.

Today, many Waterbury residents leave the City to use public libraries in surrounding towns. I've been told by the director of the Prospect public library that at least a quarter of their patrons are Waterbury residents. The Southbury public library also sees a significant number of Waterbury residents using their library, especially on Sundays when we are closed and on Saturdays in the summer when we are closed.

Waterbury has one main library downtown and one branch library in the Bunker Hill neighborhood. While both of these libraries are very much beloved by the people of Waterbury, they are not adequate to meet the needs of a city of this size.

Our main building is half the size it needs to be in order to meet the demands of the public and provide our staff with office space. We have only two meeting rooms, and one of them is not handicap-accessible. We can't host programs for more than 70 people at a time, which forces us to hold the Waterbury Hall of Fame ceremonies off-site each year.

Public libraries today are business incubators, making small meeting rooms available for entrepreneurs starting up a new business or self-employed people in need of a place to meet outside their homes. Those small meeting rooms are also great for students working on group projects. Our building is too small to offer this type of service.

Staffing Levels

Our staffing levels have been repeatedly cut over the past thirty years or so, leaving us with a bare bones skeleton staff, just enough people to keep our doors open. In the 1980s, we had 42 employees at the library; we now have 35 positions. As a result, we often have to leave public areas of the building unstaffed, inconveniencing our patrons who then have to walk the length of the building for service.

Due to our low staffing levels, we are unable to provide numerous services requested by the public, we are unable to properly care for our archival collections, and we frequently get new books on the shelves long after other libraries have them available.

We don't have enough employees to be fully staffed six days a week, so when we are open on Saturdays, we have the absolute minimum number of employees working on Saturdays and on Mondays, which can lead to a crisis if anyone calls out sick.

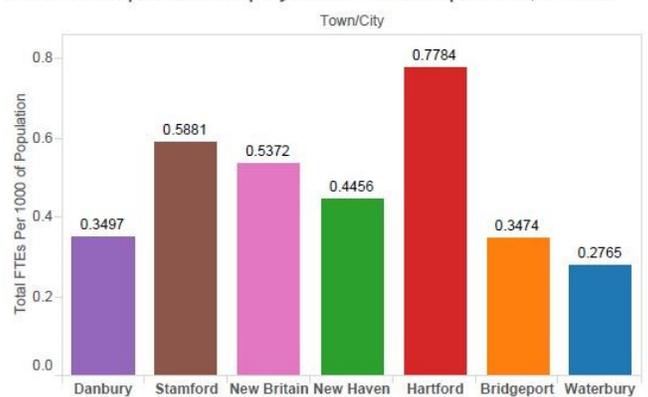
The downtown library is open 60 hours a week during most of the year, and 52 hours a week during the summer. Compared to other cities in Connecticut, we have the fewest number of employees, but we're open just as many hours every week. This is creating a tremendous strain on the library staff, lowering morale. I don't think it is advisable to continue to be open so many hours with so few employees, but it would be a great disservice to the public to be closed on Saturdays.

We also spend significantly less per capita on wages and salaries than other libraries. The Connecticut Library Association's recommended minimum salary for entry level librarians is \$27 per hour, or \$49,140 per year for a 35 hour work week. Our starting pay for librarians is \$23.12 per hour, \$42,000 per year. In short, our library staff are underpaid and overworked.

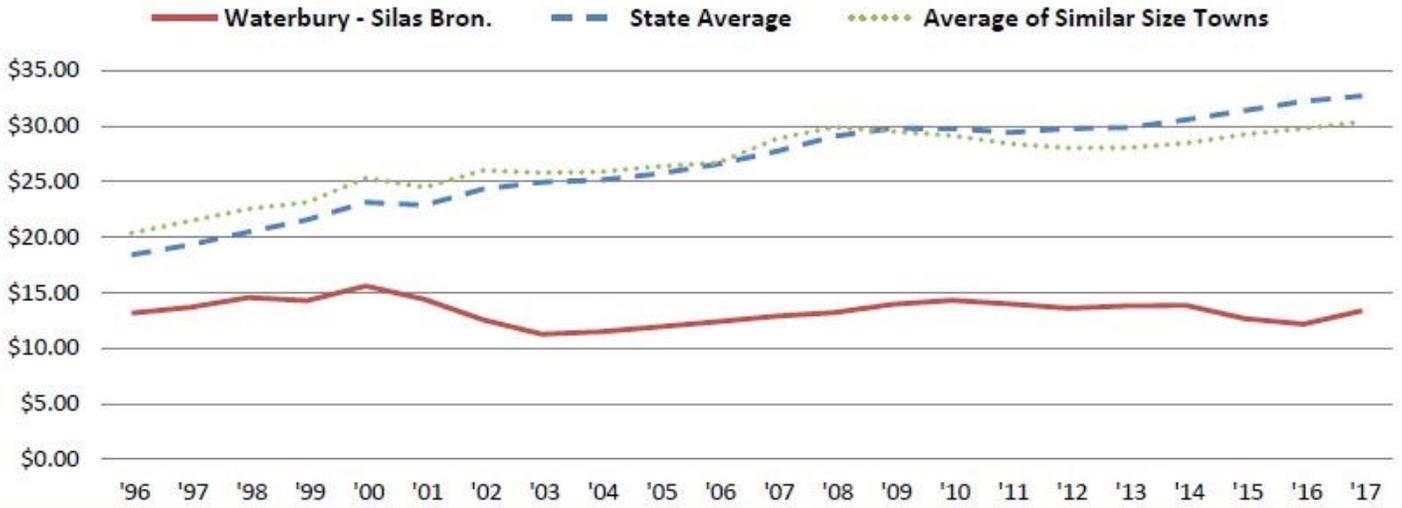
Wages & Salaries Per Capita, FY2017



Full-Time Equivalent Employees Per 1000 Population, FY2017

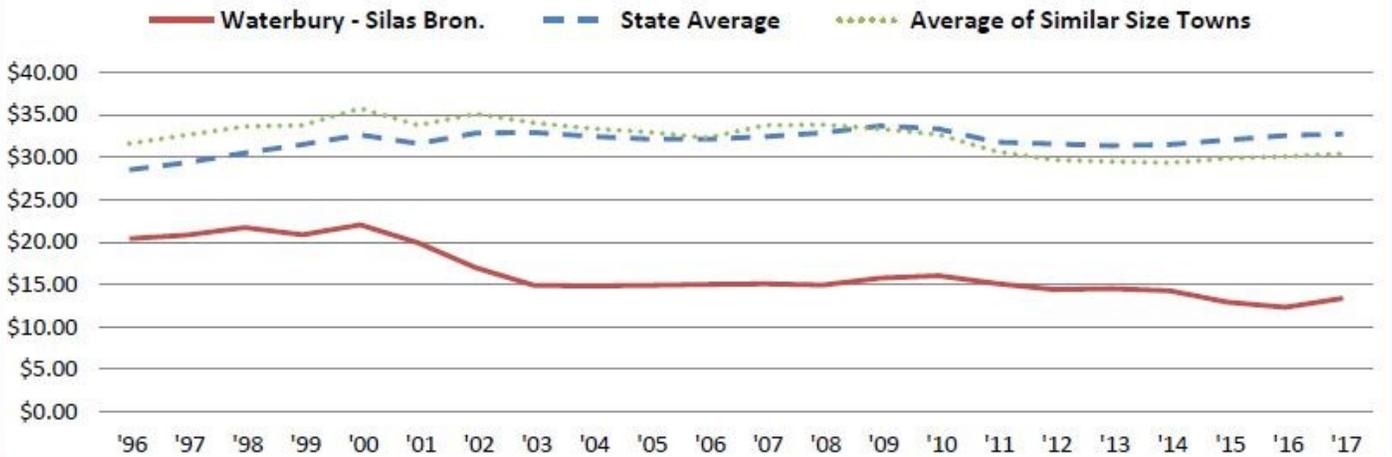


Staff Salaries Expenditures Per Capita



Staff Salaries Expenditures Per Capita

(Adjusted for Inflation - based on 2017 dollars)



Data provided by the Connecticut State Library

City	Hours Open in a Typical Week (main library)	Full-Time Equivalent Employees per 1000 Population	Wages & Salaries Per Capita FY17
Danbury	51	0.3497	\$18.65
New Haven	54	0.4456	\$21.94
Bridgeport	56	0.3474	\$19.96
Hartford	58	0.7784	\$42.19
Waterbury	60	0.2765	\$13.39
Stamford	63	0.5881	\$40.95
New Britain	64	0.5372	\$24.41

FY19 Budget Cuts

Moving on to the budget specifics: the proposed budget allocation for the library is \$60,000 less in FY19 than it was in FY18. It is \$268,000 less than what I requested for FY19.

Staffing: Librarian II positions

We have several vacancies at the library. Last August, one librarian left for a better-paying job and a second librarian retired. We filled one of those vacancies only last week. The proposed FY19 budget leaves the second vacancy open for the first nine months of the fiscal year, or March of 2019.

Both of those librarians were part of our adult services division. The vacancies stopped the momentum we had gained with outreach to the citizens of Waterbury and has led to the East Wing of the library being frequently unstaffed, which creates both an inconvenience to patrons who have to walk the entire length of the building for assistance and a safety risk as no one is present to monitor what is happening in that part of the building. The manager for our adult services division has had to spend more time on the public service desk making up for the vacancies, and less time actually managing his division.

Due to the vacancies, we were unable to implement plans to offer computer classes for seniors in Spanish. The librarian who left for a better paying job was our lead staff member on that project, and we have not yet been able to replace her. This is a grant-funded program that has been put on hold indefinitely.

This morning, I learned that a third librarian will be retiring in a few weeks, which will severely impact our ability to function, especially since we have staff vacations coming up.

Staffing: Page positions

We currently are allotted 5 Page positions, down from the 14 which we had until 2010 budget cuts went through. The Page position is a part-time job intended for high school students. Pages put the books back on the shelves, keep the books in order on the shelves, fetch books from storage as needed, and run errands for the library. Because we no longer have enough Pages, the Librarians are doing Page work; if a patron needs an item from storage, the Librarian on duty has to leave to go fetch the item, creating service delays for the other patrons.

Staffing: PR/Development position

Hiring someone to help with fundraising and publicity is essential. I am currently the only person on staff who is able to do these things, which means we aren't even remotely close to performing as we should. For example, in FY17, the Hartford Public Library was supported by \$380,000 in donations and \$1 million in grants.

Staffing: Future Expansion

Not included in my funding request are additional staff positions that are needed if we are to adequately serve the people of Waterbury.

We receive frequent requests from the public to reopen the neighborhood branch libraries and to be open seven days a week. Staffing levels will have to increase in order for either of these things to happen.

Many other libraries have Maker Spaces with 3D printers and other technology. Even if we secured a grant or sponsorship to add a Maker Space to our library, we wouldn't be able to operate it, because we don't have enough staff.

We need a full-time Teen Librarian and at least one full-time Circulation Librarian; currently we have one librarian who divides his time between Circulation and Teen.

We need at least one more Reference Librarian to oversee our Business & Career services.

We currently have 8 Admin positions; we need at least 10. The Admin position is intended to provide general clerical support and/or account keeping duties. What they actually do at the library is customer service, cash handling and sales transactions, billing and collections, public programs, and specialized library functions such as repairing books. None of these functions are covered under the Admin job description.

Following the discovery of embezzlement at the library several years ago, one of our Admin positions was replaced with an Accountant I position. While our Accountant does excellent work, she is often working above her pay grade due to the type of work needed.

Service & Maintenance Contracts

Our request was reduced by \$6,500. While the proposed amount may prove adequate, it does not leave us with a buffer in case there are any major problems with our HVAC system, elevators, fire alarm system, or security alarm system.

Postage

Our postage request was reduced by \$200. This may not seem like a lot, but we need every dollar we can get. We offer a limited postal delivery service for people who are homebound, and we also borrow books for our patrons from libraries in every state in the country through the postal service.

Operations: Interlibrary Loan Courier Service

For many years, the State Library has provided a free delivery service for interlibrary loan items. If our patrons need items that we don't have, we can request them from other libraries, and vice versa. Being able to provide this service saves hundreds of thousands of dollars a year – the alternative to interlibrary loans is to purchase every book, no matter how obscure it might be. Due to state budget cuts, the free delivery service is going away. At the moment, the service has been reduced, so that they pick up only a third of what generate every day. Bibliomation, the library consortium we belong to, is about to launch a supplemental service to help with the backlog. We estimate the cost to us to be about \$3,400 per year. This amount was cut from my request.

Operating Equipment

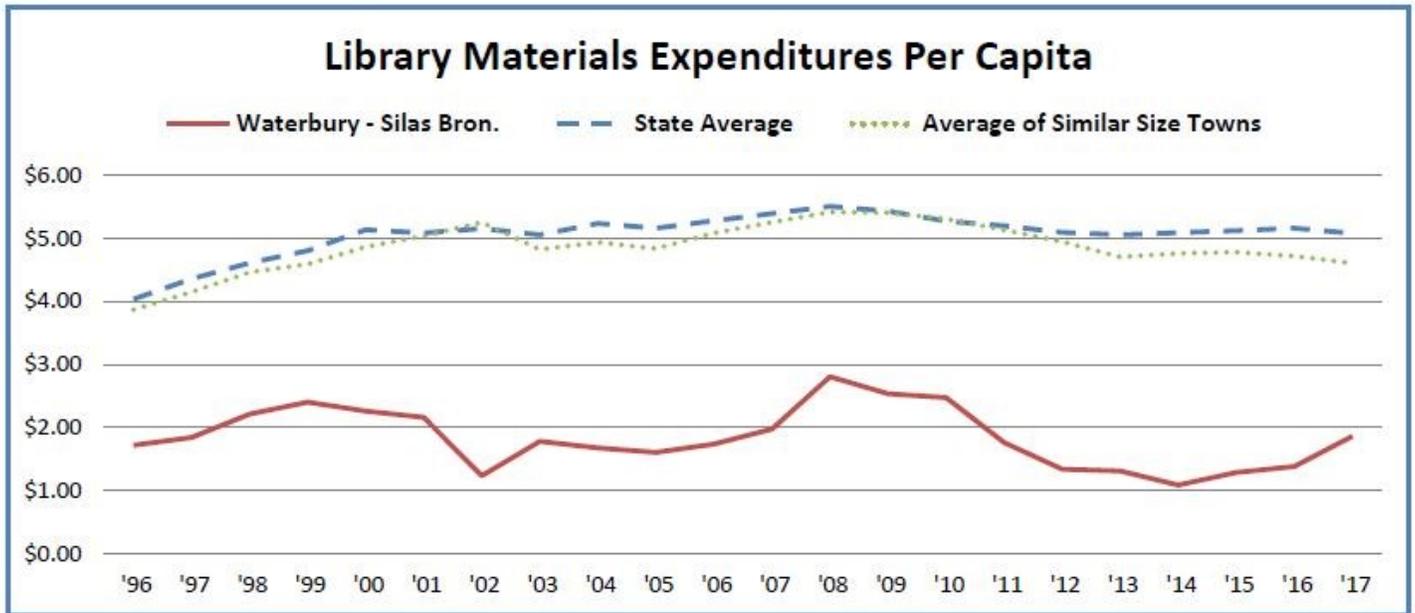
This is our "book budget" line. This includes our online catalog and the system for checking out books; our online databases; our eBooks and downloadable audiobooks; website hosting & support; newspaper and magazine subscriptions; museum passes; and, of course, books. As with other budget categories, we spend far less per capita on these item than other libraries in Connecticut. Our patrons rely on the Interlibrary Loan Service to get the materials we don't have.

\$64,000 for our online catalog and the checkout system; \$4,800 for website hosting /support;

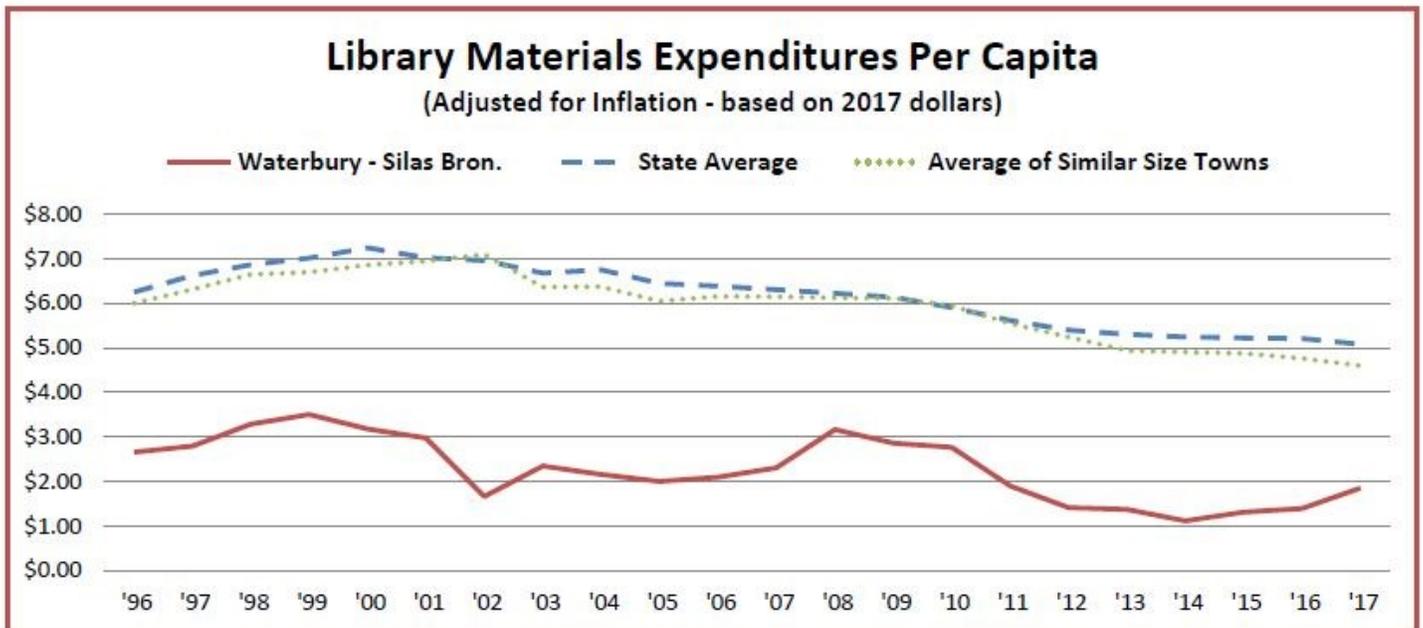
\$53,000 for online databases (WorldBook, NewsBank, Auto Repair Reference Center; Small Engine Repair Reference Center, NovelList Plus/Select; Lynda.com; Mango Languages);

\$20,000 for eMedia (eBooks, eAudio);

\$161,000 for books, movies, music, newspapers, magazines, and museum passes.



Data provided by the Connecticut State Library



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Capital Projects

The library has three servers for its computer networks. All three servers are 11 years old, far exceeding their industry standard life expectancy of 3 to 5 years. The replacement cost of each server is \$12,000.

Our 65 public computers also need to be replaced regularly. We were approved for \$30,000 last year, but the funding was delayed by the State.

The library does not have enough security cameras inside the building, and no security cameras outside the building. This is why the whale sculpture was vandalized – starting last fall, a thief spent had been stripping metal panels from the building exterior; because we were unable to capture him on camera, we weren't able to stop him, and the whale was vandalized as a result. We have requested additional capital project funds to supplement existing funds for the camera system expansion.

Bronson Fund

The Bronson Endowment Fund is currently at about \$1.4 million, of which about \$1.1 million, and related income generated, is restricted. In comparison, the Hartford Public Library has a total endowment of \$14 million; in FY17, they received \$800,000 in revenue from their endowment investments.

The fund was not properly managed for a very long time. It is, in fact, comprised of numerous funds that have come in over the decades, but they are not tracked separately. The library Board is currently working on finding solutions to this problem. In the meantime, annual spending from the fund is restricted to 4%, so long as that amount does not eat into the principle.

Beyond the restrictions placed by individual donors, the Bronson Fund is intended to be used only for special projects, not for routine operational expenses. The library Board of Agents policy states that the Fund may be used for supplemental purchase of books and other informational media, for Board projects and supplies (including Hall of Fame), as matching funds for grants, for collection agency fees, conferences and travel, planning and consultation, and for some security equipment when the City budget does not allow.

The proposed City budget keeps the book budget line at the same funding level as this year. In order to maintain service levels, we will have to once again use the Bronson Fund to make up the difference. This means spending \$59,000 out of the Bronson Fund for the purchase of books, just to maintain the current funding level. It does not allow us to increase our eBook collection, even though this has been requested repeatedly by our patrons.