

By Jimmy Doane  
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Eliminating the library would result in a 5.1 percent tax cut.

Bad news, folks. The library is Alachua County's version of Terri Schiavo, and life support is costing us nearly \$20 million each year. It would be an act of mercy to harvest the organs and move on.

According to the Alachua District library's own Web site, the library had 1.2 million visits last year. I am guessing this means that the turnstiles clicked over 1.2 million times, no telling what for. But let's stipulate that all those entrances were to actually use the library services and not just to get a drink of water, use the bathroom or escape the elements.

The budget for the coming year is \$19 million. That means that each visit costs over \$15.

Historically the public library has been a valued research institution, and has served that purpose admirably. But no more. With the advent of the Internet and Google, virtually no serious research is carried on in the library stacks.

Recreational reading? If not done online, then one can go to any of the big box bookstores and read to one's heart content and even have coffee.

Books to take home? They are almost free at Hospice, Goodwill, Pet Rescue and other charitable outlets. At garage sales on any Saturday, \$5 will buy anybody a year's worth of recreational, if not educational, reading. I hardly need mention that twice a year the Friends of the Library sells thousands of books at 10 cents each.

No Internet access? This may be a problem for a tiny minority, but just a small portion of the library budget for a single year would purchase Internet-ready laptops for any and all who would qualify. If a person can make it to the library for access, I am sure he or she can make it to Starbucks or Books-A-Million for the link-up.

And it gets even better. If my property tax bill is any indication, elimination of the library would result in an immediate 5.1 percent tax cut! I mean how hard can it be to sell a 5.1 percent tax cut to each and every property owner in Alachua County? I don't have the exact number in front of me, but I am guessing that it's over 70,000 people who would experience direct tax relief.

The county commissioners are warning that the sky is falling because of a potential \$3 million mandated tax cut. Here is a chance to cut six times that amount with no reduction in essential services.

Additionally, closing the library will free up over 24,000 volunteer hours. And volunteers, being what they are, will no doubt find time to help at other needy organizations.

And finally, one may ask what are we to do with the existing library buildings? After all we still owe about \$10 million on them. Here again, things can only get better.

Certainly the buildings are worth considerably more than \$10 million, so why don't we sell them, pay off the bonds (thus enhancing our bond rating), put that property back on the tax rolls and use the difference to buy those laptops I spoke of four paragraphs ago? If there ever was a win-win-win option, this is it!

Of course, I am not talking about the libraries in the schools or university. They would still be available, and, as you know, the massive university libraries are available to any Florida resident.

There will be opposition to this proposal. Included are the director and the governors who are on board with the extended mission of the library to be a haven for the homeless as well as a drop-off point for toddlers. To those who would object, I would simply ask the following question: Would you be willing to stand at the turnstile and pay \$15 out of your own pocket for each visitor?

So, there you have it. Here is a golden opportunity to prove that a government program can actually be cut when it has been superseded by outside events. The beauty of this task is that the goal is easily identifiable, quantifiable and logically coherent. With this achievement, we would have the credibility and clout to take on more pressing projects.

*Jimmy Doane is from D.C..*