

POSTED DATE: January 15, 2026  
Council Members - please RSVP your absence to this meeting ASAP to 920-846-4505  
or to Jfriedman@cityofocntofalls.wi.gov

**CITY OF OCONTO FALLS  
COMMON COUNCIL MEETING**  
Council Chambers – Municipal Building  
500 N. Chestnut Avenue - Oconto Falls, WI 54154  
**MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 2026 5:00 PM**  
**AGENDA**

**COUNCIL:**

**Mayor Clint Braun  
Cathy Strom  
Jeff McDonald  
Tim Holman**

**Ashley Bahrke (President)  
Marty Coopman  
Devin Wirtz**

**STAFF**

**Peter Wills, Administrator  
Brad Olsen, Police Chief  
Jenny Friedman, Deputy Clerk**

- 1. Meeting Called to Order**
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance**
- 3. Roll Call**
- 4. OPPORTUNITY FOR CITIZENS TO ADDRESS THE COUNCIL** - Citizen input will be limited to 3 minutes.

**DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON ANY OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING:**

**Old Business:**

- 5. Fire Truck Financing**  
Re: Administrator Wills/Fire Chief Magnin  
A. Purchase of used truck
- 6. Innovation Grant -Library Consolidation Study Results**  
Re: Administrator Wills /Library Director Pascoe

**NEW BUSINESS**

**None**

- 7. Adjournment**



\_\_\_\_\_  
City Administrator, Peter Wills/JF

Notice was given to the public at least 24 hours prior to this open meeting - agenda was forwarded to newspapers and any news media who have requested the same – agenda was posted at City Hall, Oconto Falls Community Library, and on the City website at: [cityofocntofalls.com](http://cityofocntofalls.com) . Copy of agenda packet is available for inspection at the Office of the City Clerk.

**Any person wishing to attend the meeting who requires special accommodation because of a disability should contact the Clerk's office at 920-846-4505 with adequate notice so appropriate accommodations can be made.**



## Description

2002 Pierce Saber

Bought new, 2120hrs 1000 water, 1500 Waterous pump, Harrison Generator (currently not working), current pump test (passed pumps to capacity) foam system working. NFPA equipment included (suction hoses, ladders pick polls). DOT inspection available. Available now \$40,000.00 o.b.o

## Seller

[Seller details](#)



**Gary Bogenschutz**

Joined Facebook in 2021

[Follow](#)

## Details

Exterior color      Yellow

## Location



Egg Harbor, WI

Location is approximate

[Mark as too far](#)

**Products related to this item**

[See more](#)

Ads



1 of 15

# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

Send

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



2 of 15

# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

👍 2

👍 Like

🔖 Save

➦ Share

💬 Message seller

Hi, is this available?

Send

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



3 of 15

# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

👍 2

👍 Like

🔖 Save

➦ Share

💬 Message seller

Hi, is this available?

Send

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



4 of 15

# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2 likes

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

Send

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



5 of 15

# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

Send

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



6 of 15

# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

Send

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

👍 2

👍 Like

🔖 Save

➦ Share

💬 Message seller

Hi, is this available?

Send

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



8 of 15

# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

**Send**

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



100%



9 of 15

## 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

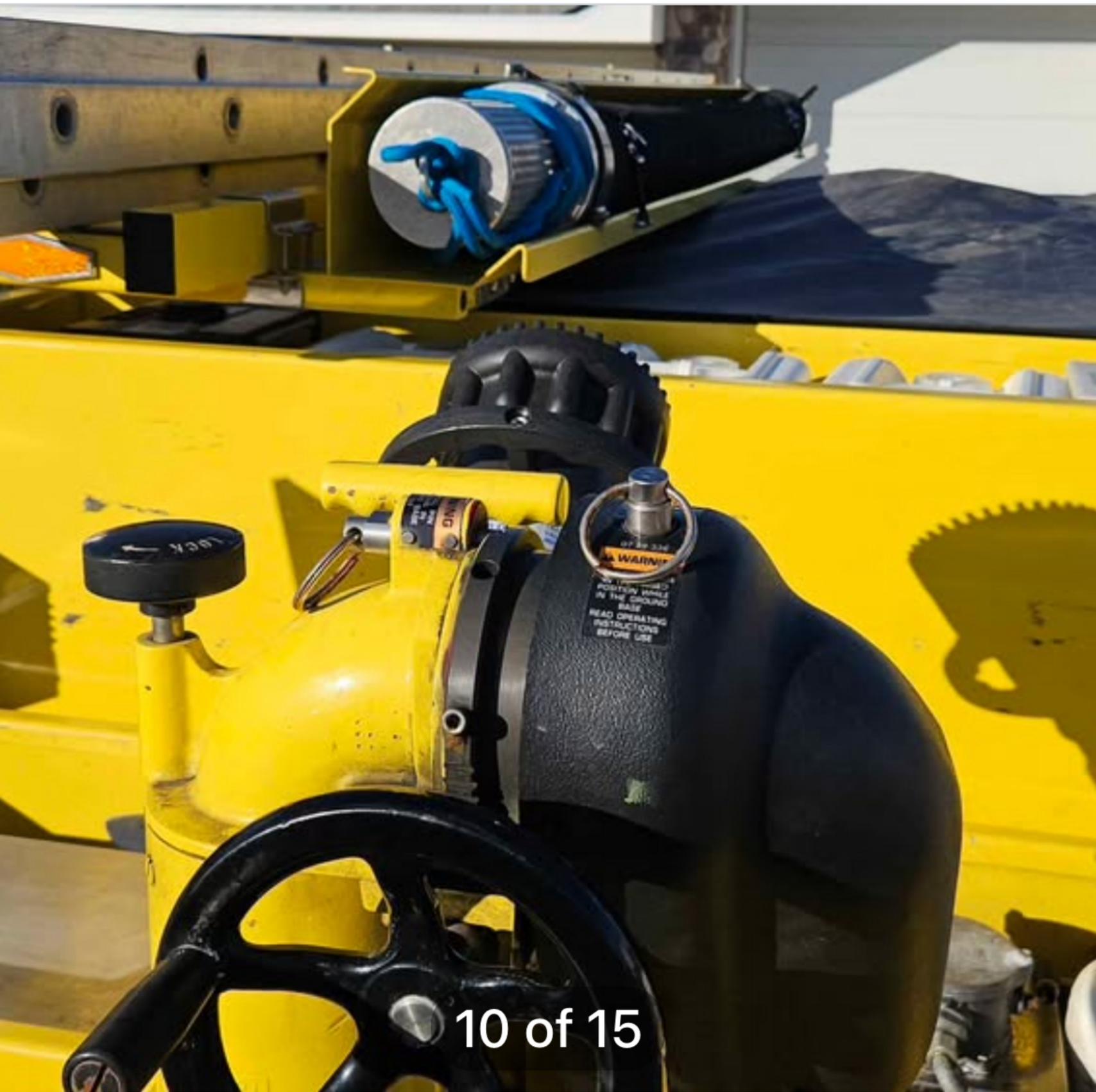
Send

### Description

2002 Pierce Saber



100%



## 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

Send

### Description

2002 Pierce Saber



11 of 15

# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

**Send**

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

**Send**

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

**Send**

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



100%



# 2002 Pierce saber

\$40,000

Listed 20 days ago · Egg Harbor, WI

2

Like

Save

Share

Message seller

Hi, is this available?

Send

## Description

2002 Pierce Saber



# Comprehensive Study to Establish the Oconto Falls Joint Library System

OCONTO FALLS  
COMMUNITY  
LIBRARY

**Innovative**  
Public Advisors

An Innovation Planning Grant Study

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Introduction and Study Purpose .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Existing Conditions .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. Financial Analysis .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Governance, Legal and Policy Framework .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>6. Options Analysis and Observations.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>7. Recommended Path Forward .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>8. Wisconsin Department of Revenue Innovation Grant .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>9. Implementation Plan .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>10. Performance Metrics and Evaluation .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>11. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>12. Appendix: Wisconsin Library Law (Chapter 43).....</b>	<b>28</b>



# 1. Executive Summary

The City of Oconto Falls Community Library plays a vital role in providing access to information, educational resources, and community programming for residents of the City and surrounding municipalities. Over time, however, the funding and service structure supporting library services in Oconto County has become increasingly complex and financially unstable. This study was commissioned by the City of Oconto Falls to evaluate the current library service model, examine alternative approaches for shared services or consolidation, and identify a sustainable and equitable path forward.

The need for this study was prompted by recent adjustments to the countywide library funding formula, which resulted in a reduction to Oconto Falls' county allocation beginning in 2025. While the City was able to offset this reduction on a short-term basis, the change highlighted broader structural challenges within the existing system—particularly the reliance on funding from unlibrariated towns, growing non-resident circulation costs associated with Brown County, and ongoing disparities between library service usage and tax responsibility. These conditions raise concerns about long-term financial sustainability for the City and the fairness of the current funding model for municipalities across Oconto County.

This study evaluates existing conditions related to library governance, service delivery, geographic coverage, and funding, and incorporates input from library directors, municipal officials, county leadership, and library board members. Several alternative service delivery models were analyzed, including maintaining the current structure, expanding joint library systems to include currently unlibrariated towns, establishing a countywide library system, and considering longer-term or legislative solutions. Each option was assessed based on financial sustainability, service equity, governance implications, political feasibility, and implementation complexity.

The analysis shows that maintaining the current structure carries increasing financial risk and uncertainty for the City of Oconto Falls and does not address underlying inequities in service access and cost allocation. A countywide library system would provide the greatest level of equity and funding uniformity. This study recommends a phased, regional approach to expanding coordinated joint library participation as the most practical and sustainable path forward for the City of Oconto Falls and surrounding municipalities. This approach preserves high-quality library services while addressing funding inequities, reducing exposure to escalating external costs, and allowing for voluntary participation within existing governance structures.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that the City of Oconto Falls pursue a leadership role in advancing a collaborative, coordinated, joint-library-based solution with all partner municipalities. This approach allows for incremental progress, minimizes disruption to existing library operations, and positions participating communities to respond more effectively to future financial and service demands.

The study also identifies the Wisconsin Department of Revenue's Innovation Grant as a potential tool to support implementation of the recommended approach. While the recommended path forward does not depend on grant funding, the Innovation Grant could help offset transition-related costs, support intergovernmental coordination, and accelerate implementation if pursued.

This report concludes with a recommended implementation framework, performance metrics, and next steps designed to guide informed decision-making and foster regional collaboration. Taken together, the findings and recommendations provide a practical roadmap for strengthening library services in Oconto Falls and surrounding communities while balancing financial responsibility, service equity, and local control.



## 2. Introduction and Study Purpose

### 2.1 Introduction

Public library services in Oconto County are delivered through a mix of municipal libraries, joint library systems, and county-administered funding mechanisms. This structure has evolved over time in response to population patterns, local governance preferences, previous partnerships, and statutory requirements. While this approach has allowed communities to retain local control over library operations, it has also resulted in a fragmented service landscape with varying levels of access, funding responsibility, and financial exposure across municipalities.

The City of Oconto Falls operates a municipal library that serves both city residents and a significant number of users from surrounding communities. As a result, decisions related to library funding and governance at the county and municipal levels have a direct and material impact on the City's ability to maintain service levels and plan for the future. Recent adjustments to the county library funding formula brought renewed attention to the underlying structure of library services in the region and highlighted the importance of evaluating whether the current model remains appropriate and sustainable.

To support this evaluation, the City of Oconto Falls retained Innovative Public Advisors (IPA) to conduct an independent and comprehensive analysis of library service delivery and funding options. IPA is a public-sector consulting firm with experience supporting municipalities in shared services studies, governance analysis, and long-term service planning. IPA's role in this study is to provide objective analysis, facilitate stakeholder engagement, and present findings and options to inform local decision-making.

### 2.2 Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the organization, funding, and delivery of library services affecting the City of Oconto Falls and surrounding municipalities, and to assess whether alternative models could better support sustainable, equitable, and efficient service provision. Specifically, this study seeks to:

- Document existing library service structures, funding mechanisms, and governance models within Oconto County.
- Examine the financial implications of the current library funding framework, including the allocation of costs among served and unserved municipalities.
- Analyze a range of alternative service delivery options, including joint library system expansion and broader consolidation models.
- Evaluate each option based on financial sustainability, service equity, governance impacts, and implementation feasibility.

- Identify a practical path forward that balances regional collaboration with local control.
- Outline potential next steps and implementation considerations to support informed decision-making.

This study is not intended to advocate for a predetermined outcome. Rather, it is designed to provide City officials, library leadership, and partner municipalities with the information needed to consider options thoughtfully, understand associated tradeoffs, and determine an appropriate course of action based on local priorities and conditions.

### 3. Existing Conditions

#### 3.1 Overview of the Current Library Service Structure

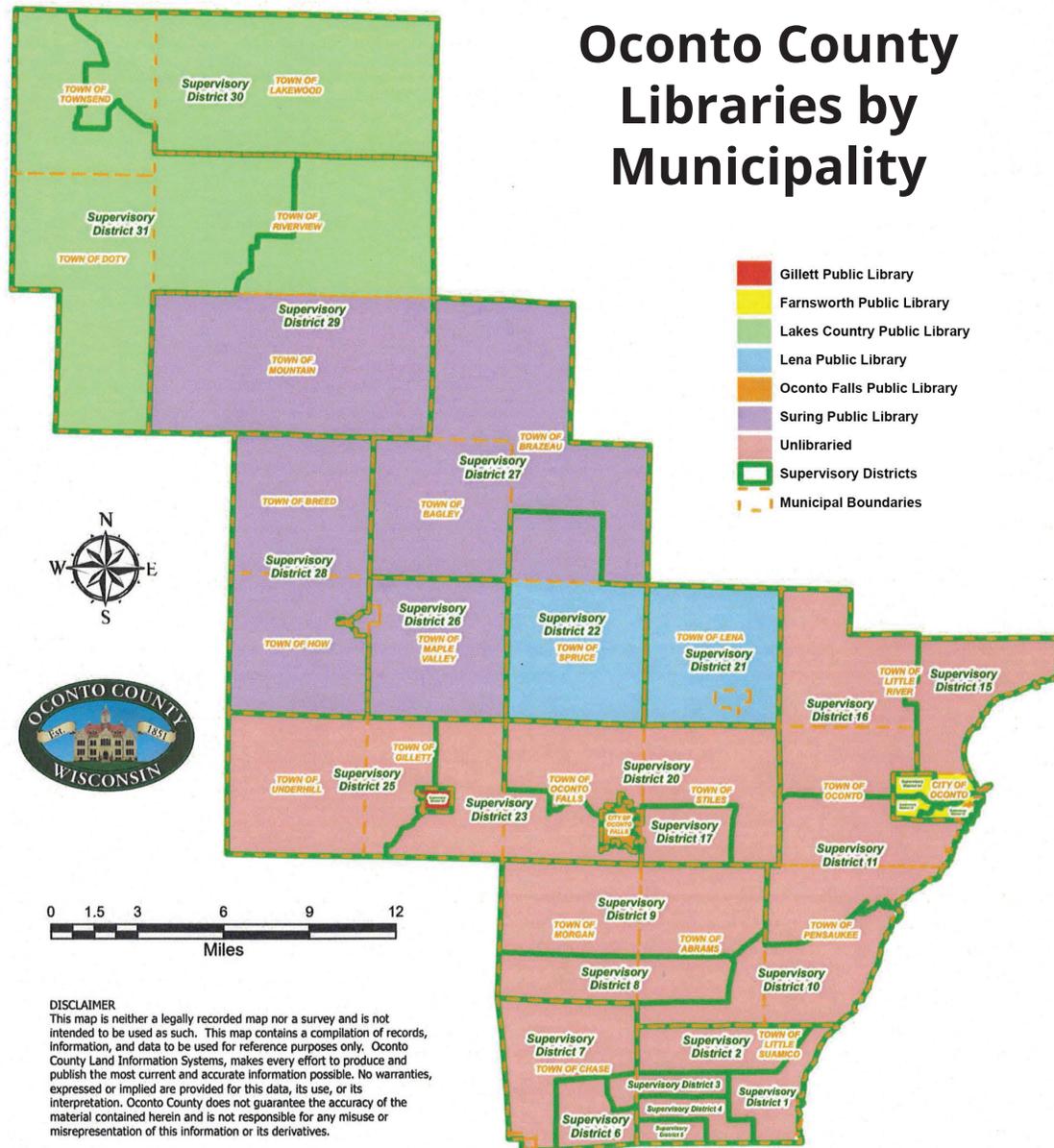
Library services in Oconto County are provided through a combination of municipal libraries, joint library systems, and county-administered funding mechanisms in unlibrariated towns. This hybrid structure reflects decades of locally driven decisions intended to preserve community identity and governance, but it has also resulted in varying service models and funding responsibilities across the county.

Currently, Oconto County includes:

- Three (3) municipal libraries operated by individual cities:
  - Oconto Falls Community Library (City of Oconto Falls)
  - Farnsworth Public Library (City of Oconto)
  - Gillett Public Library (City of Gillett)
- Three (3) existing joint library systems serving multiple municipalities under shared governance agreements:
  - Lena Public Library
  - Suring Area Public Library
  - Lakes Country Public Library
- Eleven (11) unlibrariated towns that do not operate a library but rely on county-administered funding mechanisms and payments to a neighboring county for use of library services.

The City of Oconto Falls operates the Oconto Falls Community Library as one of the county's municipal libraries. While governance and day-to-day operations are locally controlled, the library serves residents beyond city boundaries, including users from neighboring unlibrariated towns that do not operate their own library facilities. As a result, the Oconto Falls Community Library functions as both a local and de facto regional service provider.

# Oconto County Libraries by Municipality



**DISCLAIMER**  
 This map is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as such. This map contains a compilation of records, information, and data to be used for reference purposes only. Oconto County Land Information Systems, makes every effort to produce and publish the most current and accurate information possible. No warranties, expressed or implied are provided for this data, its use, or its interpretation. Oconto County does not guarantee the accuracy of the material contained herein and is not responsible for any misuse or misrepresentation of this information or its derivatives.

## 3.2 Geographic Service Areas and Coverage

Library service coverage in Oconto County does not align neatly with municipal boundaries. Some communities are fully served by municipal or joint libraries, others are partially served, and eleven municipalities remain unlibrared. The presence of three municipal libraries and three joint library systems contributes to a patchwork of service areas that vary by geography and governance model.

As illustrated above, library service areas vary by location and governance model. Several supervisory districts include a mix of served and unserved municipalities, while other areas—particularly in the southern portion of the county—remain largely unlibrared. This geographic fragmentation has direct implications for funding equity and service planning.

### **3.3 Municipal Libraries in Oconto County**

Oconto County currently includes three municipal libraries—Oconto Falls Community Library (City of Oconto Falls), Farnsworth Public Library (City of Oconto), and Gillett Public Library (City of Gillett)— each operated by an individual city and governed by a locally appointed library board. These libraries are funded primarily through municipal appropriations, supplemented by county library funding and other revenues as allowed under state statute.

Each municipal library maintains independent governance, staffing, and operational decision-making authority. While these libraries are municipally operated, they serve a broader population that extends beyond city boundaries, including residents of nearby towns and rural areas. As a result, municipal libraries play a significant regional role within the countywide library service network. The municipal library model allows for strong local control and responsiveness to community needs. However, because service demand extends beyond municipal borders, municipal libraries are particularly affected by county funding formulas, intergovernmental cost-sharing arrangements, and non-resident circulation patterns.

### **3.4 Existing Joint Library Systems**

Oconto County currently includes three (3) joint library systems— Lena Public Library, Suring Area Public Library, and Lakes Country Public Library—each established to provide shared library services across multiple municipalities while preserving a degree of local governance and operational control. These joint systems were formed at different times and under different local conditions, resulting in variations in governance structure, funding arrangements, and service areas.

Each of these joint library systems operates under an intergovernmental agreement among participating municipalities. Governance is typically provided through a joint library board with representation from member communities, and funding responsibilities are shared among participating jurisdictions based on agreed-upon formulas that reflect statutory requirements and local policy decisions. County funding of these joint systems plays a role in the overall picture of library organization.

The formation of these joint systems reflects prior efforts within Oconto County to:

- Improve access to library services in smaller or rural communities.
- Share operational and administrative costs.
- Reduce increases on town administered funding.
- Maintain local involvement in library governance.

While the joint library systems provide stable service delivery for participating municipalities, they also introduce additional complexity into the countywide library landscape. Differences in governance models, funding formulas, and service expectations among the three systems contribute to a varied approach to

library services across the county. Importantly, the presence of these existing joint systems influences the feasibility of future consolidation or partnership options, as participating municipalities have expressed interest in preserving local control and honoring existing agreements.

The existence of three established joint library systems demonstrates that shared-service models are both legally permissible and operationally viable within Oconto County. At the same time, their varied structures highlight the need for careful consideration of governance, equity, and financial impacts when evaluating opportunities to expand joint participation or pursue broader system changes.

### **3.5 Unlibrared Towns and Countywide Funding**

The eleven (11) unlibrared towns in Oconto County do not operate their own libraries but fund access to library services through a combination of: Oconto County library levies, and direct payments to Brown County for non-resident circulation and access to library services. These unlibrared municipalities include the Town of Abrams, Town of Chase, Town of Gillette, Town of Little River, Town of Little Suamico, Town of Morgan, Town of Oconto, Town of Oconto Falls, Town of Pensaukee, Town of Stiles, and Town of Underhill.

This dual funding structure results in residents of these municipalities effectively contributing to two library funding systems—one within Oconto County and one outside the county—without corresponding representation in library governance. While this approach ensures baseline access, it also creates several challenges:

- Taxpayers in unlibrared municipalities may be unaware of library-related costs embedded in county taxes and inter-county payments.
- Funding responsibility is not directly tied to where library services are used and costs continue to increase.
- Municipal libraries and joint systems serving large numbers of non-resident users experience disproportionate operational and financial impacts.

These dynamics are particularly relevant for the City of Oconto Falls, where a significant portion of library use originates outside city boundaries, without shared funding.

## 4. Financial Analysis

Library services in Oconto County are supported through a combination of municipal appropriations, county-administered library funding, and inter-county payments associated with non-resident library use. This layered funding structure reflects the county's mix of municipal libraries, joint library systems, and unlibrariated municipalities, but it also contributes to complexity and financial uncertainty.

At a high level:

- Municipal libraries are funded primarily by their host cities, with additional support from Oconto County.
- Joint library systems are funded by participating municipalities under intergovernmental agreements, supplemented by county funding.
- Unlibrariated municipalities contribute through county levies and, in some cases, direct payments to neighboring Brown County—to provide access to library services.

This structure results in multiple funding streams supporting a single service area, often without direct alignment between service usage, funding responsibility, and governance.



#### **4.1 Oconto Falls Community Library Budget**

The Oconto Falls Community Library operates with an annual budget of approximately \$204,000 (2025). Funding for the library is derived from several sources, with the two largest being the City of Oconto Falls and Oconto County. Key elements of the 2025 budget include:

- City of Oconto Falls appropriation: \$90,500
- Oconto County library funding: \$107,500
- Other revenues: grants, donations, fines, and miscellaneous income

County funding represents more than half of the library's total operating revenue, making the library particularly sensitive to changes in county funding policy and formulas. In 2025, adjustments to the county funding distribution resulted in a reduction to Oconto Falls' allocation, which the City offset on a short-term basis to maintain service levels.

Expenditures are primarily driven by staffing and operational costs, leaving limited flexibility to absorb ongoing funding reductions without service impacts. This reliance on external funding sources introduces financial risk and complicates long-term planning, programming, and service delivery.

#### **4.2 Countywide Library Funding Framework**

Oconto County administers library funding in accordance with state statute and county policy, using a levy-based approach to distribute funds among libraries serving county residents. Funding is derived in part from a countywide library levy and is allocated to municipal and joint libraries based on a formula intended to reflect service provision and statutory requirements.

A significant portion of county library funding is generated from unlibrariated municipalities, which do not operate libraries but are taxed to support access to library services. These funds are pooled and redistributed to libraries that serve residents of those municipalities. While this approach ensures access for all residents, it also creates tension:

- Libraries with higher in-county, non-resident use experience greater operational demand.
- Funding distributions may change year to year as formulas or usage patterns shift.
- Municipal libraries serving as regional hubs, such as Oconto Falls, bear disproportionate exposure to funding adjustments.

### 4.3 Brown County Non-Resident Library Costs

In addition to contributing to Oconto County’s library funding framework, several unlibrared municipalities also make direct payments to Brown County to provide library access for their residents. These payments are associated with non-resident circulation and are driven by proximity, service availability, and historical usage patterns. Towns in the southern portion of Oconto County—including some of the largest unlibrared municipalities—account for a substantial share of Brown County usage. Collectively, these payments total approximately \$160,000 annually, representing a significant ongoing cost that exists outside Oconto County’s library funding system.

This arrangement has several financial implications:

- Residents of some municipalities contribute to both Oconto County and Brown County library systems.
- Payments to Brown County do not provide governance representation, service delivery, or long-term cost control.
- Costs are expected to increase over time as usage and service demand grow.



#### 4.4 Financial Impacts on Unlibrariated Towns

For unlibrariated municipalities, the current funding structure results in layered financial obligations:

- County library levies collected by Oconto County.
- Inter-county payments to Brown County for library access.

These costs are often embedded within broader tax bills or intergovernmental charges may not be readily visible to residents or policymakers. However, from a fiscal perspective, they represent a material, increasing, and recurring expense with limited local control.

Importantly, state statute limits the ability of unlibrariated municipalities to reduce their library-related expenditures when transitioning to a joint library system. While immediate tax savings may be limited, participation in a joint system can offer improved cost predictability by limited future increases, governance representation, and long-term stability.

#### 4.5 Financial Sustainability and Risk Assessment

The current library funding structure in Oconto County presents several long-term financial risks:

- **Volatility:** Changes to county funding formulas can have immediate impacts on municipal library budgets.
- **Equity concerns:** Funding responsibility does not consistently align with service usage.
- **Escalating external costs:** Brown County payments represent an ongoing and growing financial exposure.
- **Limited flexibility:** Municipal libraries have constrained ability to absorb funding reductions without service impacts.

Absent structural changes, these risks are likely to intensify, particularly for libraries including Oconto Falls, serving as regional access points. These financial conditions underscore the importance of evaluating alternative service delivery and funding models that improve alignment between service use, cost responsibility, and governance.

The financial analysis highlights the strengths and limitations of the existing funding framework and provides a foundation for evaluating alternative models. Section 5 will examine the legal, governance, and policy considerations that shape the feasibility of shared services, joint library systems, and other structural options.

## 5. Governance, Legal, and Policy Framework

### 5.1 Statutory Framework for Library Services in Wisconsin

Public library services in Wisconsin are governed by Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 43 (Library Law), which establishes requirements related to library formation, funding, governance, and service access. These statutes provide flexibility for municipalities to determine how library services are delivered, while also setting minimum standards intended to ensure equitable access for residents. Under Wisconsin law, library services may be provided through:

- Municipal libraries, operated and governed by individual cities or villages.
- Joint libraries, formed through intergovernmental agreements among multiple municipalities.
- Countywide library system that is governed and approved by the county.

Statute also establishes requirements for county participation in funding libraries that serve county residents, including residents of unlibrared municipalities. As a result, counties play an important role in financing library services even when they do not operate libraries directly. Oconto County has a county-administered funding mechanism, which supports all joint and standalone libraries.



## **5.2 Municipal Library Governance**

Municipal libraries are governed by a locally appointed library board that holds statutory authority over library operations, including hiring, policy adoption, and oversight of services. The governing municipality is responsible for appropriating funds necessary to operate the library, subject to statutory requirements and available revenues.

This governance model provides a high degree of local control and responsiveness to community needs. However, when municipal libraries serve residents beyond municipal boundaries, governance authority does not necessarily align with the population being served. Non-resident users do not have direct representation on municipal library boards unless specifically provided through local agreements.

## **5.3 Joint Library Governance and Agreements**

Joint libraries are established through formal intergovernmental agreements among participating municipalities. These agreements define governance structures, board composition, funding responsibilities, and operational oversight. Joint library boards typically include representation from each participating jurisdiction, allowing for shared decision-making and accountability.

Joint library systems offer several governance-related advantages:

- Representation for participating municipalities.
- Shared responsibility for funding and oversight.
- Greater alignment between service usage and cost responsibility.

At the same time, joint libraries require participating municipalities to relinquish some degree of individual control in favor of shared governance. Library board composition is expanded from a singular municipal entity to multijurisdictional makeup. The terms of joint agreements are negotiated locally and can vary significantly in structure and complexity.

## **5.4 County Role and Policy Considerations**

Oconto County—specifically led by the County Clerk—plays an administrative role in library funding by levying and distributing funds to libraries that serve county residents. While the County does not currently operate a countywide library system, its policies and funding formulas directly affect municipal and joint libraries throughout the county. County policies must balance statutory funding obligations, equity among municipalities, financial constraints of the county levy, and differing service models across the county. Changes to county funding formulas or policies can have immediate impacts on municipal library budgets, particularly for libraries that serve a large number of non-resident users.

## **5.5 Cross-County Service and Intergovernmental Constraints**

Library service delivery across county boundaries is subject to additional statutory and policy constraints. While residents may access libraries in neighboring counties, formal cross-county joint library systems are limited under current law. As a result, inter-county service arrangements—such as payments to Brown County for non-resident circulation—often occur outside of shared governance structures. These arrangements provide access but offer limited cost predictability and no governance representation for contributing municipalities. Any long-term changes to cross-county service delivery would require careful coordination with state agencies and, potentially, legislative action.

## **5.6 Staffing and Credentialing Requirements**

State law establishes professional qualification requirements for library directors based on the population served by a library. As population thresholds increase, additional credentialing—such as a master’s degree in library and information science—may be required. Incumbents in their positions would be sufficient without having to secure advanced degrees. This potential change would apply to future director recruitments.

These requirements are an important consideration when evaluating consolidation or expansion options, as changes to service area or governance structure could trigger new staffing obligations. Transition planning must account for credentialing timelines, staffing continuity, and associated costs.

## **5.7 Governance Implications for Future Options**

The existing statutory and governance framework does not mandate a single approach to library service delivery in Oconto County. Rather, it provides a range of permissible models, each with distinct governance, financial, and operational implications.

Understanding these legal and policy considerations is essential for evaluating alternative service delivery options. The framework outlined above informs the feasibility of shared services, joint library expansion, and other structural changes explored in subsequent sections of this report.



## 6. Options Analysis and Observations

This section evaluates potential approaches to future library service delivery affecting the City of Oconto Falls and surrounding municipalities. Each option is assessed based on service impacts, financial sustainability, governance considerations, and overall feasibility. The analysis reflects current conditions, stakeholder input, and statutory constraints, and is intended to clarify tradeoffs rather than prescribe an outcome.

### 6.1 Service Levels and Community Expectations

Across Oconto County, there is broad consensus that library services should remain accessible, reliable, and responsive to community needs. Municipal and joint libraries currently provide a range of services beyond traditional circulation, including programming, technology access, and community space. Maintaining these service levels—particularly in rural and smaller communities—is a key consideration in evaluating any future service model.

Municipal libraries, including the Oconto Falls Community Library, function as regional service providers and experience service demand that extends beyond municipal boundaries. Joint library systems similarly balance local identity with broader service responsibilities. Any structural changes must account for service continuity, staffing capacity, and the ability to meet community expectations without disruption.

### 6.2 Option 1: Maintain the Current Structure (“Status Quo”)

Under this option, the existing mix of municipal libraries, joint library systems, and unlibrariated municipalities would remain in place, with continued reliance on county-administered funding and inter-county payments to Brown County. Observations:

- This option preserves existing governance arrangements and avoids near-term disruption.
- Funding volatility remains a significant concern, particularly for municipal libraries serving large numbers of non-resident users.
- Brown County payments continue without governance representation or long-term cost control.
- Equity concerns persist, as service use and funding responsibility remain misaligned.
- Unlibrariated towns would likely experience continued increases in library payments.

Maintaining the current structure does not address the underlying financial and governance challenges identified in this study and leaves the City of Oconto Falls exposed to future funding adjustments.

### **6.3 Option 2: Expansion of Joint Library Systems to Include Unlibrared Municipalities**

This option involves one or more of the eleven unlibrared municipalities joining an existing joint library system or forming a new joint arrangement with neighboring libraries. Participation would be voluntary and structured through intergovernmental agreements. Key observations:

- Joint systems provide governance representation and shared responsibility for participating municipalities.
- This approach has the potential to reduce or eliminate ongoing payments to Brown County for participating towns.
- Immediate tax savings for unlibrared municipalities may be limited due to statutory constraints; however, cost predictability and long-term stability may improve in a joint library system.
- Existing joint systems have expressed interest in preserving local control, indicating that expansion would require careful negotiation.
- Ideally all eleven unlibrared towns join a joint library system. This would eliminate future payments to Brown County.

This option builds upon existing models already in place within Oconto County and aligns service responsibility more closely with governance and funding.

### **6.4 Option 3: Countywide Library System**

Under a countywide model, library services would be consolidated into a single system serving all municipalities within Oconto County, with county-level governance and uniform funding. Key observations:

- A countywide system offers the greatest potential for equity, with uniform access and consistent funding responsibility.
- The creation of a countywide library could eliminate the need for inter-county payments to Brown County.
- Significant governance changes would be required, including potential impacts to staffing, employee location, and credentialing requirements.
- Stakeholder input and prior efforts suggest limited political feasibility at this time, particularly among municipalities with recently established or well-functioning library systems.
- The current county funding formula also prevents existing joint library systems from supporting a countywide system.

While equitable in theory, this option faces substantial governance and implementation barriers.

## **6.5 Option 4: Long-Term or Legislative Alternatives**

This option includes approaches that are not currently feasible under existing law or policy but may warrant future consideration. Key observations:

- Cross-county joint library systems would require statutory changes and coordination beyond the local level.
- Negotiated agreements with Brown County could potentially modify cost structures but would not address governance representation.

These alternatives are best viewed as long-term concepts rather than near-term solutions.

## **6.6 Comparative Observations**

When viewed collectively, the options evaluated in this study reveal several consistent themes:

- The current structure is increasingly vulnerable to funding volatility and equity concerns.
- Joint library systems offer a proven framework for shared governance and service delivery within Oconto County.
- Countywide consolidation provides the greatest equity but faces significant feasibility challenges.
- Incremental, voluntary approaches reduce risk and allow communities to retain local control while addressing financial pressures.

## **6.7 Summary of Key Observations**

Based on the analysis of service, financial, and governance considerations:

- The existing funding model does not align service use with cost responsibility.
- Municipal libraries serving regional users face disproportionate financial exposure.
- Payments to Brown County represent a significant, ongoing, and arguably unnecessary external cost.
- Joint library expansion presents a realistic mechanism to improve governance alignment and cost predictability.
- Structural changes, if pursued, will require collaboration, clear communication, and phased implementation.

These observations inform the development of a recommended path forward, which is presented in the following section.

## 7. Recommended Path Forward

Based on the analysis of existing conditions, financial impacts, governance considerations, and service equity, this study recommends a phased, regional approach to expanding coordinated joint library participation as the most practical and sustainable path forward for the City of Oconto Falls and surrounding municipalities. This approach recognizes the importance of maintaining high-quality library services while addressing long-standing funding inequities and reducing exposure to escalating external costs.

### 7.1 Preferred Near-Term Strategy

The preferred near-term strategy is for the City of Oconto Falls to work collaboratively with interested unlibrariated municipalities to explore participation in an existing or newly structured joint library system. This strategy builds on proven models already operating within Oconto County and aligns service delivery, governance, and funding more closely than the current structure. Key elements of this strategy include:

- Voluntary participation by municipalities, allowing communities to opt in based on location and local priorities.
- Shared governance through joint library boards, providing representation for participating towns.
- Reduced requirements on inter-county payments to Brown County.
- Improved long-term cost predictability for all participating jurisdictions.

This approach directly addresses the structural issues identified in this study while minimizing disruption to existing library operations.



## **7.2 Phased and Regional Implementation**

Rather than pursuing countywide consolidation, the recommended approach emphasizes incremental implementation. A phased strategy allows municipalities to build trust, evaluate impacts, and adjust agreements as needed. Initial efforts should focus on:

- Unlibrariied municipalities with the highest levels of non-resident library use.
- Geographic proximity to the Oconto Falls Community Library.
- Municipalities that have expressed interest in improved governance alignment and cost stability.

This regional focus reduces political risk, respects existing joint library systems, and allows for future expansion if conditions evolve.

## **7.3 Role of the City of Oconto Falls**

As a primary service provider and regional access point, the City of Oconto Falls is well positioned to play a convening and leadership role in advancing this strategy. This role includes:

- Facilitating discussions among potential partner municipalities.
- Working with library leadership to evaluate governance and operational implications.
- Participating in the development of intergovernmental agreements.
- Ensuring that service levels and community expectations remain central to decision-making.
- Assisting other existing libraries/joint systems to explore joining forces with the remaining unlibrariied towns.

Importantly, this leadership role does not require the City to commit to a specific outcome in advance. Rather, it positions Oconto Falls to shape discussions, protect service quality, and pursue solutions that support long-term sustainability.

## **7.4 Positioning for Implementation Support**

The recommended path forward is designed to stand on its own merits. However, its phased and collaborative nature also positions participating municipalities to pursue implementation support, including potential eligibility for the Wisconsin Department of Revenue's Innovation Grant. Pursuing external funding, where appropriate, may help offset transition-related costs and accelerate implementation, but it should be viewed as a supporting tool rather than a prerequisite for action. This recommended approach balances financial responsibility, service equity, and local governance preferences. By focusing on incremental, voluntary collaboration, the City of Oconto Falls and its partners can address immediate challenges while preserving flexibility for future system evolution.

## 8. Wisconsin Department of Revenue Innovation Grant

The Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR)'s Innovation Grant assists municipalities that transfer one or more allowable services to another entity or municipality. The program is intended to encourage long-term service innovation through shared services, consolidation, or restructuring, while providing financial support to offset transition costs and promote sustainable service delivery.

Statewide, the Innovation Grant program includes approximately \$297 million in available funding. A municipality may receive up to \$10 million per year for five years, subject to a required contract. The annual grant amount is calculated as 25 percent of the total cost of providing the transferred service in the calendar year immediately preceding the service transfer, and service costs may not increase by more than 15 percent over the five-year grant period. Grant funds are unrestricted and may be shared among participating municipalities, depending on the structure of the service transfer.

For the City of Oconto Falls, the Innovation Grant presents a meaningful opportunity if the City and County municipalities elect to pursue the creation of a new countywide library district. In this scenario, library services would be transferred from a municipally operated model to a jointly governed entity, aligning directly with the purpose of the Innovation Grant program and making the City eligible to benefit from grant funding to support implementation. All other existing municipal libraries/joint library districts would also likely qualify in a countywide library system.

The 2025 operating budget for the Oconto Falls Community Library is approximately \$204,065. If a service transfer were to occur, these 2025 expenditures could serve as the baseline for an Innovation Grant application, subject to DOR review and approval. Based on current program parameters, the City of Oconto Falls could potentially be eligible to receive \$51,000 per year for up to five years, or \$255,000 in total grant support, assuming compliance with program requirements and cost-growth limitations. The other existing municipal libraries/joint library districts would also qualify for 25% of their respective 2025 library expenses.

Innovation Grant funding could help offset one-time and early-stage transition costs, including governance and administrative restructuring, intergovernmental agreement development, operational coordination, system alignment, and public communication. While participation in the Innovation Grant program is not required to implement the recommended path forward, the grant represents a strategic opportunity to reduce short-term financial impacts and support a successful transition to a joint library district.

## 9. Implementation Plan

Implementation of the recommended path forward will require a coordinated, phased approach that allows the City of Oconto Falls and potential partner municipalities to move deliberately while maintaining service continuity. The steps outlined below are intended to support informed decision-making, preserve flexibility, and position participating communities for long-term success.

The first phase focuses on regional coordination and decision-making. During this phase, the City of Oconto Falls would convene discussions with interested unlibrariated towns to confirm interest in forming a new joint library district or expanding an existing shared-service arrangement. This phase would include preliminary financial modeling, review of governance structures, and identification of participating partners. No formal commitments are required at this stage, allowing municipalities to evaluate participation based on local priorities.

The second phase involves formalizing governance and service arrangements. If sufficient interest exists, participating municipalities would work collaboratively to develop an intergovernmental agreement establishing the joint library district. This agreement would address governance representation, funding responsibilities, service expectations, and transition timing. Legal review and coordination with library leadership would occur concurrently to ensure compliance with state statutes and continuity of operations.

The third phase centers on transition planning and implementation. This includes administrative and operational steps necessary to shift library services to a joint structure, such as board appointments, budget alignment, staffing coordination, and communication with residents. If pursued, this phase would also align with preparation and submission of a Wisconsin Department of Revenue Innovation Grant application, using eligible 2025 expenditures as the baseline for potential grant support.

The final phase emphasizes monitoring and adjustment. Following implementation, participating municipalities would evaluate service levels, financial performance, and governance effectiveness to ensure the joint library district is meeting its intended objectives. This phase allows for refinements to agreements or operations as needed and supports transparency and accountability to residents.

Throughout implementation, maintaining clear communication with library staff, elected officials, and the public will be essential. A phased approach allows the City of Oconto Falls and its partners to manage risk, build trust, and ensure that service quality remains the central focus as governance and funding structures evolve.

## 10. Performance Metrics and Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation is essential to determine whether changes to library service delivery achieve the intended outcomes of financial sustainability, service equity, and effective governance. The performance metrics outlined below provide participating municipalities with clear, measurable indicators to assess progress following implementation of a joint library district or expanded shared-service arrangement.

Financial performance is evaluated to confirm that service costs remain predictable and aligned with expectations. Relevant indicators include annual operating costs, changes in municipal contributions, stability of funding over time, and compliance with applicable cost-growth limitations. For municipalities previously contributing to Brown County library costs, evaluation includes whether those external payments have been reduced or eliminated as anticipated.

Service delivery and access metrics focus on maintaining or improving service quality for residents. These measures include circulation levels, program participation, hours of operation, technology access, and geographic accessibility. Monitoring service demand across participating municipalities helps ensure that the joint service model meets community needs without disproportionate impacts on any single location.

Equity and fairness are assessed by examining the relationship between service usage, funding responsibility, and governance representation. Indicators include participation levels by municipality, representation on the joint library board, and consistency in service access across served and previously unlibrared communities.

Governance effectiveness is evaluated to confirm that the joint library structure supports timely decision-making, transparency, and accountability. Metrics include board participation, clarity of roles and responsibilities, adherence to intergovernmental agreements, and the effectiveness of collaborative issue resolution.

Implementation outcomes are reviewed to determine whether transition milestones are achieved as planned, whether staffing and administrative coordination function effectively, and whether anticipated efficiencies or service improvements are realized.

Regular reporting to participating municipal boards and the public supports transparency and accountability. Establishing an annual review process allows municipalities to make adjustments as needed and ensures that the library service arrangement continues to support high-quality, sustainable services over time.

## 11. Conclusion

This study examined the current structure of library services affecting the City of Oconto Falls and surrounding municipalities, with a focus on financial sustainability, service equity, and governance alignment. The analysis confirms that the existing mix of municipal libraries, joint library systems, and unlibrared municipalities has provided access to library services across Oconto County, but it has also created structural challenges related to funding volatility, cost allocation, and long-term planning.

The findings highlight the growing financial exposure associated with county funding adjustments and inter-county library payments, as well as the disproportionate impacts experienced by libraries that serve as regional access points. At the same time, the presence of established joint library systems within Oconto County demonstrates that shared-service models are viable and capable of balancing service delivery with local governance.

The recommended path forward emphasizes a phased, collaborative approach that allows municipalities to explore shared library governance while maintaining service continuity and local decision-making authority. This approach provides flexibility to address immediate financial pressures and creates a framework for future collaboration as conditions evolve.

Implementation of any structural changes will require coordination, clear communication, and ongoing evaluation. The implementation plan and performance metrics outlined in this report provide a foundation for informed decision-making and accountability over time. Together, the analysis and recommendations offer a practical roadmap for strengthening library services in a manner that supports long-term sustainability, equitable access, and effective governance for the City of Oconto Falls and its partner communities.

Pivoting to a countywide library system would be possible if at any point throughout discussions led by Oconto Falls spurred a broader conversation. A countywide library system would secure the most Innovation Grant funding as multiple libraries/joint library district municipalities would become eligible for five years. Oconto County could qualify as well by transferring their current cost to a new countywide system.

# Innovative Public Advisors

December 26, 2025

Dear City of Oconto Falls Leadership and Project Partners,

Thank you for the opportunity to conduct this comprehensive library services study for the City of Oconto Falls. This effort reflects the City's commitment to providing high-quality, accessible, and fiscally responsible library services while thoughtfully evaluating long-term sustainability and regional collaboration.

Our analysis confirms that the existing mix of municipal libraries, joint library systems, and unlibrariated municipalities has provided broad access to library services, but it has also resulted in funding volatility, inequities in cost allocation, and growing exposure to inter-county library payments. In particular, the City of Oconto Falls has assumed a disproportionate share of financial risk as a regional service provider. At the same time, the presence of established joint library systems within Oconto County demonstrates that shared governance models are viable and capable of balancing service delivery with local control.

Based on these findings, this study identifies a phased, regional approach to expanding joint library participation as the most practical path forward. This approach allows interested municipalities to collaborate voluntarily, improves alignment between service use, funding responsibility, and governance, and positions the City and its partners to manage long-term costs while maintaining service quality. The study also highlights the potential opportunity to leverage the Wisconsin Department of Revenue's Innovation Grant should the City and its partners elect to pursue the creation of a new joint library district.

We commend the City of Oconto Falls for undertaking this timely and forward-looking effort. Innovative Public Advisors remains available to assist with next steps, including facilitating intergovernmental discussions, supporting agreement development, assisting with implementation planning, or providing guidance related to potential Innovation Grant eligibility.

Thank you again for the privilege of partnering with the City of Oconto Falls on this important initiative. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



**Jay Shambeau, ICMA-CM, MPA**  
Partner, Innovative Public Advisors



**Jess Wildes, MPA, MS**  
Partner, Innovative Public Advisors



**City of Oconto Falls**

500 N. Chestnut Avenue, Oconto Falls, WI 54154

920-846-4505 | [cityofocontofalls.com](http://cityofocontofalls.com)