

West Point Library Services Summary
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Library Support Services
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Our firm was asked to address the following questions:

1. What is the City's role in providing library services to citizens/residents?
2. What is the City's legal responsibility?
3. What type library services are available and/or needed?
4. Who or what organizations can provide those library services?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of those service options/points of delivery?

Question 1: What is the City's role in providing library services to citizens/residents?

Cities may provide public library services directly, through membership in a county or regional public library system, or through contract with a Georgia library system or a library/library system outside Georgia.

Question 2: What is the City's legal responsibility?

As I have previously said, I am not an attorney. Despite that, as you know, I have considerable experience with public library legislation, and have conducted extensive research into library laws, regulations, policies, and recent interpretations applicable to your situation. I have found no state code requirement for a City to provide public library services to its citizens, although it is a service that citizens traditionally expect from either the City or County government.

Question 3: What type library services are available and/or needed?

Public library services typically include the ability to borrow books and other materials; attend programs (notably children's story hours); borrow books and materials the local library does not own through interlibrary lending arrangements; use public computers for word processing, etc., and access information through online networks, such as the Internet (for such things as genealogy research, job hunting, tax information and assistance, car repair, do-it-yourself home projects, cooking information, etc.); use the library's high-speed network connections with personal laptop computers and other devices; and obtain answers to questions through assistance from reference services staff.

Question 4: Who or what organizations can provide those library services?

- a. Cities may provide public library services by establishing a municipal library under the provisions of OCGA 20-5-20.
 - 1) Based on a question posed while I was in West Point, I will also discuss an added notion—a separate Municipal Library Board contracting with one or more libraries, such as the Hawkes Library and other libraries located in Georgia or outside the state.
- b. Cities may provide public library services by contracting with another library or library system within Georgia under the provisions of OCGA 20-5-40 or a library/library system outside the state under the provisions of OCGA 20-5-60.
- c. County governments may provide the services (available to all county residents, including citizens of any city within the county) through establishing a county library system under the provisions of OCGA 20-5-40.
- d. County governments may provide those services through membership in a multi-county (regional) library system under the provisions of OCGA 20-5-40.

Question 5: What are the advantages and disadvantages of those service options/points of delivery?

4a. Advantage:

Cities can enjoy more local control through the administration of a library under the supervision of a municipal library board appointed by the City. (There are still state code provisions that must be followed, of course.)

Disadvantage:

There is no state or federal library aid money available in Georgia to a municipal library, and participation in many sharing programs may be limited or not allowed.

4a(1) Advantage:

The ability for a library board of trustees to work through contract is clear in OCGA: 20-5, as it applies to County or Regional Library Boards (specifically 20-5-49).

However, the ability of a city library board to contract is not expressly stated in the Municipal Library section, OCGA: 20-5-20. Some attorneys might argue that the Municipal Library Board also has the power to contract.

If that is so (and you could have your attorney do some research), the City of West Point could appoint a Library Board of Trustees, give them an appropriation, and expect that board to decide the best way to offer public library services to the West Point population.

That might include a contract with the Hawkes Library AND either the Troup-Harris Regional Library System (Georgia) OR the Chambers County Public Library (Alabama).

Disadvantage:

You will need to confirm the ability of a Municipal Library Board to contract for services (as the same chapter of Georgia Code allows for County and Regional Library Boards of Trustees).

4b. Advantage:

The City can directly negotiate and arrange for exactly the services it wants from the organization and location it prefers.

Disadvantage:

In addition to the disadvantages of 4a, a City following option 4b has to find an organization able and willing to contract for and provide the services at an acceptable rate and for a long enough period of time to make it more valuable than other service options. (This appears to be one of the issues complicating the continuation of a contractual relationship with Alabama's Chambers County Library/H. Grady Bradshaw Library).

4c. Advantage:

This option is already available to West Point citizens at no additional cost. If West Point does not require a full-service public library within or very near the City limits, any City resident is already allowed full public library service through the Troup-Harris Regional Library System (headquartered in LaGrange, with branch libraries in Hamilton and Hogansville).

These services include access to millions of books and materials available through Georgia's PINES program, which allows books to be ordered from a local library or via a computer, and delivered to and returned by West Point citizens, using any PINES library location.

Disadvantage:

If they stay in Georgia, West Point citizens currently have to travel to one of the Troup-Harris library buildings to use many of the standard Georgia public library services, such as use of a public computer, attendance at story hour and other programs, etc.

A branch library building or even a "service outlet" location in West Point would allow the possibility of book delivery and return for West Point citizens—from local libraries or through interlibrary lending through the state's PINES system.

A local branch library or service outlet costs money, of course, and County governments will often tell a City within the county lines that there is not adequate county funding to provide a building, staff and book/materials collection in every desired location. This routinely leads to joint City/County funding arrangements that finance a branch library or library service outlet location.

"Branch libraries" (as defined by state policy) operate 30 or more hours a week with a minimum of 1,000 square feet dedicated to the library facility, and have a paid staff, etc. "Service Outlets" operate less than 30 hours a week, have less than 1,000 square feet, but still require a paid staff.

Also, using a county-level system requires a governing library board representing the entire county—not allowing all decisions to be made by a City-appointed library board of trustees. If your county is part of a multi-county (regional) library system, the regional library board must approve most policies and actions, and typically manages most activities.

4d. Advantage:

This has the same advantages as option 4c, but typically has more materials and facilities available to area citizens with minimal travel.

Disadvantage:

The same disadvantages seen in option 4c apply. In addition, there is another level of library board governance, with representation from a larger geographic area (more counties are represented on the governing system-level board of trustees).