

Bloomfield Township Public Library Questions and Answers

Q: What is the status of the lawsuit between the Bloomfield Township Public Library and a Bloomfield Hills resident?

A: The Michigan Supreme Court has ruled in favor of the Bloomfield Township Library. The court ruled that non-residents of a city or township are not entitled to the same library privileges as residents of that city or township who have invested in and continue to support the library with their taxes.

Q: How did this case get all the way to the Michigan Supreme Court?

A: The original lawsuit by a resident of Bloomfield Hills was filed in Oakland County Circuit Court. The Circuit Court ruled in favor of the Bloomfield Township Library's position that a public library is not required to issue library cards to non-residents. Subsequent appeals to the Michigan Court of Appeals and then the Michigan Supreme Court have resulted in identical decisions.

Q: What happened to produce the lawsuit?

A: The lawsuit began after the library's 39-year contract with Bloomfield Hills to provide library services to all Bloomfield Hills residents ended in 2003 and a new agreement could not be reached. A Bloomfield Hills resident then sued the library seeking full borrowing privileges even though he pays no taxes to support the library.

Q: What was the cost of litigation to the library and to the Township taxpayers?

A: Over the four years of litigation, the cost for the library neared a total \$100,000 in attorney fees. By comparison, in the last year of the contract with Bloomfield Hills, it was costing the township roughly \$225,000 per year to subsidize service to Bloomfield Hills residents because the payment being made by the city of Bloomfield Hills was roughly half what township residents were paying through taxes to support the library.

Q: What does the Michigan Supreme Court ruling mean for other libraries in Michigan?

A: This is a landmark case that likely will have a profound impact on public libraries throughout Michigan. The Supreme Court ruling supports each community's individual investment in their public library, retaining local control.

Q: How is a public library, such as the Bloomfield Township Public Library funded?

A: Michigan State law states local public libraries will be funded primarily through bond issues approved by voters and property taxes paid by residents of the municipality, township or county in which the library is located. A portion of revenue is earned through contracts with other municipalities, state aid, county penal fines, and library fines and fees.

Q: What is the relationship between the Bloomfield Township Public Library and the City of Bloomfield Hills?

A: When the Bloomfield Township Public Library (BTPL) opened in 1964 the City of Bloomfield Hills did not have a library of its own, so it entered into a contract with the library to provide full service to Bloomfield Hills residents. The contract gave Bloomfield Hills residents complete access to the township's library and services. Bloomfield Hills has never invested in a library of its own, so the contractual relationship continued between BTPL and the City for 39 years.

Q: What happened to that agreement?

A: Over the years the payments from Bloomfield Hills became smaller and smaller on a per capita basis compared to what Bloomfield Township residents were paying in taxes to support the library. At the end of the last contract Bloomfield Hills residents were paying roughly half of what Township residents paid. The library trustees decided it was unfair to Township residents to ask them to subsidize service to Bloomfield Hills residents, particularly since the subsidy continued to grow. When they suggested the City begin to pay its fair share of costs to operate the library, the negotiating team for Bloomfield Hills refused.

Q: What do township residents pay per year to support the Library?

A: When figured on a per household basis, the average Township family pays \$ \$406 per year in taxes for the library.

Q: Why couldn't the library negotiate a deal with Bloomfield Hills and resolve this issue?

A: Library trustees were eager to reach an agreement with Bloomfield Hills to resume full use of the library for City residents. However, they were not prepared to subsidize library service to Bloomfield Hills residents or any other community.

Rather, library trustees expect any community that wants to use a Township service to pay its fair share of the cost of operating that service. They find it particularly ironic that a city ranked by the 2000 Census as the fourth most wealthy community in the nation would seek to have its public services subsidized by a neighboring community.

Q: Does the Supreme Court ruling mean Bloomfield Hills residents cannot use the library?

A: Non-township residents are welcome to visit the library and utilize the facility's multitude of resources including books, magazines, newspapers, audio/visual materials, and Internet including free online tutoring, interlibrary loan, electronic databases and books.

However, non-cardholders may not take materials out of the building, use library meeting rooms or access the library's web resources from their home. Visitors who do not have cards may participate in the library's youth and education programs, but priority registration is offered first to library members.