

**Written Justification for the Use of American Rescue Plan Funds**  
*Construction of Dakota County Public Library in South Saint Paul, MN*

Final Rule, 31 CFR Part 35, Subp. A, Section 35.6 (b) permits capital expenditures for projects “responding to the public health emergency or its negative impacts.” Public libraries are not an enumerated use under Section 35.6 (b)(3) and the expenditure exceeds \$1 million requiring a written justification for the expenditure. Section 35.6 (b)(4) requires the following elements

- (i) Describe the harm or need to be addressed
- (ii) Explain why a capital expenditure is appropriate; and
- (iii) Compare the proposed capital expenditure to at least two alternative capital expenditures and demonstrate why the proposed capital expenditure is superior.

**Need to be addressed**

This new library, part of the Dakota County Library system, would respond to critical needs in the community, including in the areas of health care, employment, and workforce development. The new building will also provide public access to the internet for purposes including work, education, and health monitoring.

This request for funding is in response to critical needs in the community, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The South St. Paul community faces challenges and has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, with cumulative case and hospitalization rates well above the state average. Dakota County has made great use of our existing libraries as places to pick-up test kits and to host vaccination clinics. We continue to explore ways to use libraries to connect residents to public health services. In addition, the technology in the new library will enable patrons to conduct telemedicine appointments or access other services to monitor their individual physical or behavioral health.

**Explain why a capital expenditure is appropriate**

The U.S. Department of the Treasury has acknowledged that Public libraries projects providing public access to the internet for purposes including work, education, and health monitoring are responsive to harms and negative impacts of the public health emergency. See Guidance for the Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund For States, Territories & Freely Associated States, Page 6, including libraries as presumptively eligible projects under the Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund section of the American Rescue Plan Act.

This library will support and provide educational and other resources for a community with a median income among the lowest in the county. Our libraries provide a wide variety of services for all ages to support education, including our Storytime and Summer Reading programs, which help develop literacy over a wide spectrum of different learning needs; tutor based homework assistance and a variety of classes and events for teens and adults including basic and more advanced computer classes. Our libraries also help individuals connect with other community services including drop-in assistance for housing and crisis support.

The new South St. Paul Library will be a community resource hub, a place to learn, work and gather. The new library will greatly improve the community’s connection to employment resources, education opportunities and health services. The public will have access to high-speed internet on public computers and Wi-Fi in the building, hotspots and laptops to borrow, plus a variety of informational events and classes through the library.

A new library in South St. Paul will also help job seekers in the community search for employment and participate in career counseling and workforce training programs. Over the course of the pandemic, our county libraries have hosted over 100 job and small business development events. These features and activities will continue in a post pandemic society.

### **Compare the proposed capital expenditure**

The library construction project, which is planned to break ground in the fall on a publicly owned site, has the support of local stakeholders. The new library will include meeting rooms, workspaces and technology not available at the almost 100-year old library which it will replace. The new building will improve access to services for a community that is on average lower income and more diverse than the county and the state as a whole. The services the library will offer will greatly benefit the residents of South St. Paul, all of Dakota County, and surrounding areas.

Based on the hours of public operation, breath of materials and services extended for use, and the location in an under resourced portion of our county, the new Dakota County public library in South Saint Paul exhibits more value to the broad community than any other capital project being considered by the county over the next five years. Specifically, this Library Project is ARP superior to the following competing projects:

Recycling Zone II (RZII) is a second location for collecting and processing solid household waste in the county. Although RZII includes important health, ecologically, and broad positive impact on the community, it lacks the medical tracking, employment support and broad educational & technology components that the library project exhibits.

Law Enforcement Center Renovations is a project which expands the office area and staffing considerations for the county's jail as well as making some small needed changes within the secured perimeter. Although the Renovation Project supports the health aspects of the prison population and the staff that cares for them, it lacks the broad educational, employment and public technology components of the library project.