

A question has come up from the Quincy Library Advisory Board. But first, a brief history lesson is pertinent.

Background

Since 1973, our library has had [a contract to provide services](#) to the residents of Allen Twp. of Hillsdale County. Of course, the contract was with the Branch County Library, and was transferred to BDL after our 1991 formation. I know of no updated contracts since then, and there is nothing more recent in our Allen Twp. files at the library, but I have nonetheless queried the Library of Michigan just in case, since they keep records of formal library service agreements. Minutes from the Quincy Library Advisory Board say that in an article in the Hillsdale paper on or about July 9, 1997, the Allen Twp. Board reiterated their commitment to the arrangement.

Note, in that contract that the wording says that library services were to be provided at the "Quincy Library", none of the other county locations were mentioned.

In June of 1992, the Quincy Library Advisory Board requested that the BDL Board cede control of the Allen Twp. penal fines per a proposal from the Advisory Board. The minutes show that the BDL Board agreed to this proposal, but the exact details are unknown. What is known is that by 2006 at the very latest (and probably as early as March 1993), the BDL Plan of Service included the following language:

Allen Township penal fines are expended by Branch District Library System at the direction of the Quincy Advisory Board for books and library materials as well as staff time for the Quincy Public Library.

This money was most often used for paying for extra staffing hours for the Quincy Branch employees. Since at least 2012, Allen Twp. penal fines are paid to the library once annually by the Hillsdale County Treasurer.

After the passage of our second millage in 2014, BDL was able to increase hours across the district. Even after looking at emails, minutes, and budget documents, I have not been able to determine the precise use of the Allen Twp. penal fines from this time until the Plan of Service was changed in 2018. Indeed, in 2018 the Quincy Branch manager position was also made full-time and the clerk's hours increased, actions which serve to boost the quality of our services to the community. Hours open to the public are also much increased from the time before our second millage passed in 2014.

On September 26, 2018, the BDL Board significantly overhauled the Plan of Service document. Explaining that full process again is beyond the scope of this report, but you are

welcome to [read the packet from that meeting](#) as a refresher. The short of it is that the change was made to make more productive use of tax dollars for the benefit of all branches, simplify budgets and planning by removing highly confusing breakdown formulas, and to simplify the Plan of Service document itself down to what such documents typically look like instead of the ungainly thing that had evolved over the decades. The above language about directing Allen Twp. penal fine income to the Quincy Library Advisory Board was removed from the updated document, and BDL both stopped sending them that money and stopped asking for input in how it was to be spent. Since 2019, Allen Twp. penal fine income has been put in the general fund for the benefit of all of the Branch District Library and its users.

BDL Director Linda Lyshol sent copies of the proposed change to all our stakeholders in July of 2018, including the Quincy Twp. Supervisor. The BDL Board let the proposal sit for a month before conducting a vote to allow for more examination and comment, even though this was not required. Commentary was minimal, mostly of an interrogatory nature, and [the updated Plan of Service document](#) we operate under today was passed unanimously by the BDL Board.

Today

At their August and September meetings of this year, members of the Quincy Library Advisory Board expressed their dislike of the current arrangement and their desire to again control the expenditures of the Allen Twp. Penal Fine receipts for projects of their choosing. Branch Manager Sarah Strong, BDL Trustee Sue Smith, and I all underlined how

1. the BDL Board is the only entity allowed by state law to enter into contracts, so it is natural and proper that the money goes to BDL and not their advisory board; and
2. the prior arrangement with the Advisory Board ended in 2018 with the Plan of Service change; and
3. that Allen Twp. residents use more than just the Quincy Branch library, so it is proper that the funds go into the general fund to support total library operations.

I did say I would bring this issue before the BDL Board for your consideration again, so here we are, but I recommend no changes to the current arrangement in how we use the Allen Twp. penal fines.

However...

Recommended Action

The 2020 Census shows that Allen Twp. has 1,334 residents. Of those, 173 have BDL Library Cards. 120 (70%) of those use the Quincy Branch as their home library, and 53 (30%) have their home library at the Coldwater Branch.

In the past year (from 9/14/22 to 9/13/23), Allen Twp. residents used the following branches:

Quincy: 800 checkouts (71.2%)

Coldwater: 320 checkouts (28.5%)

Algansee: 4 checkouts (0.3%)

Those 1,124 checkouts saved Allen Twp. residents \$18,544.96 by not having to purchase those library materials. Penal fines from Allen Twp. were \$4,161.20 from July 2022 to June 2023, so township residents are getting a 4x return on that expense. And the benefit to township residents is no doubt bigger, since they are surely also coming to BDL programs and using our computers, wifi, and other free services where we don't track the user's origin.

With the above in mind, I am very much in favor of getting an updated contract approved by both the BDL Board and the Allen Twp. Board that makes it explicit that residents of Allen Twp. may use any BDL location. We do not have the technical capability now to stop patrons living in Allen Twp. from using branches other than Quincy, and I doubt that even in the 1970s after this contract was created that they made any effort to do so either. And what about digital services? No, it makes more sense to allow Allen Twp. residents to use any BDL location, just like [our reciprocal agreement with Burlington Twp. of Calhoun County](#).

So I am asking the BDL Board:

1. Do you wish to see any change made regarding the current use of the penal fine receipts from Allen Twp.
2. Would you like me to work with the Public Services Committee to draft a new agreement with Allen Twp. that better fits current circumstances? I would like to speak to the Allen Twp. Board about this, too. We send them our annual reports, but have not had direct contact in some time.

Submitted by John Rucker