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## **North Hills Community Library Branch: Evaluation of Services**

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9/23/10

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## Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide an evaluation of library services and their usage at the North Hills Community Library, a branch of the Upper Dublin Public Library. Located in the North Hills Community Center, it fulfills basic standards for branch libraries as per the Pennsylvania Library Code by:

- maintaining 20 hours/service each week.
- providing ready reference service at all times.
- ensuring the branch staff are ready and willing to communicate with the main library for reference & interlibrary loan assistance.
- having a telephone that is listed in the local directory.
- having a sign that clearly identifies it, from the outside, as a public library.
- maintaining a collection of not less than 6,000 different titles, which are current and are demonstrably useful to the residents of its service area.
- budgeting & expending annually for the purchase of library materials twice the amount of the equal distribution grant allotted to the branch.
- selecting collection materials to serve the informational, educational, and recreational needs of all residents of the service area.
- having a collection of ready reference items of sufficient scope to meet the needs of area residents.
- subscribing to at least 10 different periodicals.

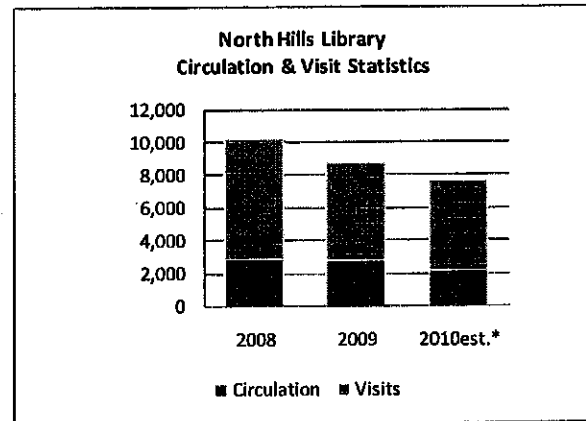
At latest count (9/16/10), only 151 *current* cardholders are listed at a North Hills

address in Upper Dublin Township's service area. This represents approximately 2% of all Upper Dublin households that have library cards. Since check-out histories are not kept, however, there is no way to determine whether the North Hills Branch is the residents' preferred library.

The Upper Dublin Public Library expends approximately \$25,000 - \$30,000/year from its budget (3% of the Library's 2009 total budget, offset in part by state funding) to run and maintain the North Hills Branch facility. Since all branch services, including staff hiring, collection purchases, network & computer administration, reference, and programs, are provided at the Main Library level, additional expenses are incurred for Main Library staff support, supplies, programs, etc. The Township also funds approximately 800 hours for the Community Center receptionist, who is the sole back up for the Branch Library staff person.

**Underutilized Services**

While the North Hills Community Library's circulation and visits have never been high (the North Hills Branch has consistently had the lowest circulation of any public library facility in Montgomery County), these figures continue to steadily diminish each year.



\*2010 annual estimate based on monthly averages through August 2010

A recent library redesign and greater emphasis on collection choices have not improved usage of the Library's traditional services. Materials in the collections are often withdrawn by library staff in new or nearly-new condition in order to make room for more current materials. Branch staff report that few people ever browse the shelves or make collection recommendations.

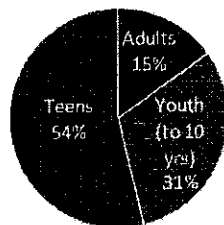
Library staff is rarely called upon to check out materials or answer reference questions to support school or personal research. In 2009, library staff answered an average of 21 reference questions/month. Instead, the primary role of the library staff person is to maintain order among the after school teenage visitors and rotate them on and off of the public workstations every 20 minutes. As a result, staffing the Library's hours has been difficult; since 2007, the Library has employed six different Branch Coordinators/Library Assistants.

**Well-Utilized Services**

Despite underutilized collections and staff, the North Hills Community Library provides some well-utilized services, including:

- use of the Library's four public workstations. Most afternoons, there is a waiting list. In the opinion of Himmel & Wilson, authors of the Library's recent space planning study, *Inventing the Future of the Upper Dublin Public Library*, "an expansion of the number of computer workstations would be heavily used by Township residents in close proximity to the...facility" (p. 20).
- use of the facility as an after school hang out for teenagers, providing them a safe & relaxed environment for spending time with friends. Summer 2010 statistics show that at least 50% of visitors are teenagers. This percentage is probably higher throughout the school year when fewer children under age 10 visit because they attend the North Hills Learning Center's Homework Help program after school, which is not open to high school students.

Breakdown of North Hills Library Visitors June-August 2010



- attendance at teen library programs. Generally held once a month, feedback from participants has been positive and attendance has been consistently good.

### Conclusion

The North Hills Community Center is an active, vibrant facility, but it has limited space for expansion of services. While the North Hills Community Library can continue to provide traditional library services as it has been, it's clear that these services are little used by residents of the community, and that the space could be better used to serve the needs of the residents in a more meaningful way.

Furthermore, expansion of the Library Branch is not recommended. In *Inventing the Future of the Upper Dublin Public Library*, consultants Himmel & Wilson reported that they had little expectation that usage of traditional library services would grow if the facility were expanded. Additionally, "Upper Dublin's population is not sufficient to support multiple full-use facilities. Duplication of staff and materials is simply too costly for the Township to consider given the total number of people served" (p.20). Instead, the consultants recommended a single, expanded full-use facility that meets all Upper Dublin residents' needs.

Therefore, based on an examination of the Branch Library's popular services, some alternatives to better serve the residents' needs might include turning the space into a computing center or a place to host after school programs. Further alternatives (and solutions for meeting those alternatives) would certainly arise from discussions with North Hills residents, Upper Dublin

Township departments, and the  
Upper Dublin School District,  
among others.