

# ELY PUBLIC LIBRARY EXPANSION

*Our Next Chapter: A Space for All*

*More space. Better access. A stronger community hub for all.  
Designed for Ely today and the future.*

# FAQ GUIDE



ELY PUBLIC LIBRARY  
BE INSPIRED

**THE PURPOSE OF THIS PUBLICATION IS TO PROVIDE GENERAL INFORMATION AND ANSWER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS TO THE RESIDENTS OF ELY CONCERNING THE PROPOSED ELY PUBLIC LIBRARY BUILDING EXPANSION.**

**Library History and Rationale**

The Ely Public Library is currently constrained by an undersized facility that no longer meets the needs of our growing community. Limited meeting space and overall capacity restrict the library’s ability to provide modern services and robust programming for children and adults. Expansion is essential to ensure the library remains a safe, accessible, and vital community hub.

The Ely Public Library was established in 1974 and originally operated in the City Hall building at 1570 Rowley Street. In 1998, the City of Ely acquired a former fire department facility at 1595 Dows Street, which was renovated for library use. The library has been operating at this location since 2000. Over the years, the city, community members, and the Friends of the Library have maintained and improved the facility, including recent interior painting, carpet replacement, updated shelving, and upgraded HVAC systems. The building remains largely ADA compliant.

In 2012, the City of Ely formed the CCREC Task Force (Cultural Community Recreational Education Center) to evaluate community interest in a combined community center, library, and recreation center. In collaboration with Martin Gardner Architects, the group identified potential land, developed conceptual designs, and prepared cost estimates. Although the City Council approved moving forward with land acquisition, the purchase was unsuccessful, and no suitable alternative site was identified within city limits.

In 2015, the Library Board completed its first formal space needs assessment through a grant-supported study led by George Lawson. Based on projected population growth and service demands, the study recommended approximately 15,000 square feet to meet community needs over the next 30 years. The city subsequently acquired adjacent property as a potential expansion site.

In 2020, the city engaged architect FEH Design to conduct an updated space needs assessment (18,000 square feet) and explore design options. Community input informed multiple concepts, including both expansion and new construction. Ultimately, a new standalone facility was identified as the most cost-effective option; however, the preferred site was no longer available when the city attempted acquisition.

The city then pursued development on municipally owned land, commissioning FEH to design a combined library, community center, and recreation complex integrated with City Hall. The proposal included either major renovation or replacement of the existing City Hall facility. This plan was presented to voters in fall 2023 but was not approved.

In 2024, the Library Board and Friends of the Library again partnered with FEH to develop revised concepts utilizing the current library site and adjacent properties. Options included both renovation/expansion and full replacement; however, projected costs remained prohibitive.

As a result, the Library Board refocused on identifying a more financially feasible solution that still addresses community and library needs. Following a competitive selection process, Solum Lang Architecture LLC was retained. The firm was chosen for its strong understanding of project goals, commitment to success, and prior experience designing the library’s original renovation from the former fire station. The project priorities are outlined below.

### **Q1. How can I be involved in this exciting project?**

- Become a Friend of the Ely Public Library – The Friends group meets the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. The Friends group advocates for and supports the Ely Public Library.
- Attend any or all our open houses and information sessions – These sessions provide for community connection as well as general discussion and feedback opportunities pertaining to the future of the Ely Public Library.
- Donate your time and talent to move this project forward. Be an ambassador of this project and help share the information, research and write for grants, partake in fundraising.
- Consider a monetary donation to the project. Any amount is welcome, large or small. To learn more, call the library at 319-848-7616 or visit [ely.lib.ia.us/support/donate](http://ely.lib.ia.us/support/donate).

### **Q2. What is the proposed solution to the library space constraints?**

To continue serving the community in an efficient and fiscally responsible manner, the Library Board has prioritized a single-level expansion of the existing facility. Drawing on years of community surveys and public input, the Board identified key needs, including additional restroom facilities, a significantly larger community meeting space, and improved ADA accessibility—all while maintaining a cost-conscious approach.

Given the library's limited financial resources, expanding the current building represents the most practical and sustainable solution. The proposed project will increase the library's footprint from approximately 5,030 square feet to 11,830 square feet. The expanded facility will provide:

- A large, fully ADA-compliant community room for library and city events, with seating for up to 240 people available for public rental (3,650 square feet)
- A dedicated adult area with comfortable, quiet reading spaces (1,460 square feet)
- Support spaces (serving kitchen, bathrooms, storage, etc. (1,070 square feet)
- Enhanced energy efficiency through environmentally responsible design and construction methods
- Installation of a fire sprinkler system
- Expanded youth services areas, including a designated teen space
- Increased collection capacity with improved accessibility for individuals using wheelchairs and walkers

### **Q3. What steps did the Library Board take to come to this decision?**

In collaboration with Solum Lang Architects, the Library Board incorporated priorities identified through past public meetings and community surveys while maintaining a strong focus on cost efficiency. A single-level expansion was determined to be the most practical solution, allowing the library to operate within current staffing levels while significantly increasing its footprint and adding a substantially larger community meeting space.

The proposed community space will support large events, serve multiple city functions, and be available for public rental. The Library Board has presented the proposed design to the City Council and is requesting approval to place a bond referendum on November 3, 2026, General Election ballot.

### **Q4. Why does the Ely Public Library need to expand?**

There are several key reasons supporting the expansion of the current library:

- We exceed space capacity 77% of the time during our 2:00 pm programs
- Community feedback has consistently identified the need for a larger, fully ADA-compliant community space
- Increased demand for program, meeting, and event space

- Insufficient quiet areas within the current facility
- Limited reading and study spaces for students and the public
- Shelving is not optimally accessible due to height constraints
- Inadequate spacing between book stacks, limiting accessibility for patrons with disabilities
- As our community continues to grow, so does the need for more gathering spaces

#### **Q5. Who is asking for an expanded building?**

The Library Board gathered resident input through community meetings, design sessions, and surveys to better understand desired features and space needs for an expanded library over the past twelve years.

Top priorities identified included:

- Large ADA accessible community room for library and city events, as well as available for rent
- More meeting and collaborative spaces
- A dedicated adult area
- A teen space
- Larger children’s space
- More bathrooms

Using this feedback, the Board directed the architects to develop a cost-effective expansion plan that maximizes both library and community space. The resulting design includes an addition of 6,180 square feet.

#### **Q6. What about the Legion or St. John Church? Can’t the library and city use these locations?**

While we appreciate the community support and occasional access to spaces like the Legion and St. John Church, these locations are not a sustainable solution for ongoing library programming. In the past, we have encountered several challenges when holding programs offsite:

- **Accessibility limitations:** Some patrons who regularly attend programs use wheelchairs and cannot easily access certain facilities, particularly the Legion. Ensuring equitable access is a priority for the library.
- **Increased staffing demand:** Offsite programming requires additional staff time for transporting materials, setup, and teardown. Currently, we operate with only two staff members scheduled at a time, making this difficult to sustain.
- **Additional costs:**
  - Staff time and potential need for extra staffing
  - Rental fees for space (when not donated)
  - Even when spaces are offered free of charge, there are real costs incurred by the host site (staffing, cleaning, utilities), which limits availability
- **Limited availability:** Community spaces such as City Hall and others are frequently in use, making consistent scheduling of library programs challenging.
- **Program visibility and identity:** Hosting events at multiple locations can create confusion about who is sponsoring the program and may reduce attendance and community engagement.

For these reasons, while partnerships remain valuable for occasional events, they cannot replace the need for adequate, dedicated library space to consistently and effectively serve our community.

#### **Q7. Why expand? Why not a new building?**

One of the Library Board’s core responsibilities is to anticipate how library services and spaces will evolve to meet future community needs. In doing so, the Board has observed neighboring libraries renovating and expanding their facilities to provide increased public space and enhanced learning opportunities.

Library staff currently offer over 1,000 onsite programs annually, which are attended by nearly 20,000 total citizens. Unfortunately, the existing program room does not allow for fluid operations and delivery of programs. Often, staff must limit the number of attendees and/or host a second program for additional costs. A larger programming room will allow library staff to continue providing engaging and exciting programs in a more comfortable, safe and conducive space. This community room will also be available for other city entities to hold events and will also be rentable for the community to use as needed.

Previous efforts to build a new library and community center were constrained by high land acquisition costs. Expanding onto the current site is more cost-effective, as it utilizes existing space and infrastructure. The library is conveniently located within two blocks of three different community parking lots, avoiding the expense of constructing new parking. Early in the planning process, the Library Board determined that expanding the current facility was the most economical option. Because the existing building is structurally sound and ADA compliant, incorporating it into an expansion plan offers a cost-effective solution, significantly reducing total construction expenses.

### **Q8. What about parking?**

The Library Board, Director, and staff are very aware of the parking challenges in downtown Ely during certain peak dates and hours. As is our current practice, staff will continue to consider city-wide events when scheduling library programs. The library will continue to encourage and direct patrons to use the parking lots by the Legion and City Hall when attending programs or when renting the community room.

### **Q9. Why now?**

Library usage, including materials, services, and programs—continues to grow each year. Since 2015, the facility has been identified as undersized for current and projected community needs. The existing meeting room operates beyond capacity approximately 77% of the time, underscoring the demand for additional space.

Community feedback has also highlighted the need for a large, ADA-compliant meeting and programming space available for public use and rental. This is especially true as our community continues to grow. Additionally, construction costs continue to rise—by approximately 5% annually, making timely action increasingly important.

## **Features and Benefits**

### **Q10. Where would we see space improvements in the expanded library?**

- Addition of a Community Room (3,650 sq ft.)
- Dedicated Adult Services Area (approx. 1,460 sq ft.)
- Addition of bathrooms and other support spaces (1,070 sq ft.)
- Addition of Teen Space
- Expansion of Children’s Space
- Installation of a Sprinkler System

### **Q11. How does the library benefit you or the community?**

Possibly the best answers are a sampling of quotes from our residents:

- “The library is the crown jewel of the town.”

- “This library is more than just a place for books—it’s a hub of community life, a support system for families, and a space where every child, teen, and caregiver can feel seen, supported, and inspired.”
- “I enjoy coming to the library and connecting with other people and families.”
- “Ely library staff demonstrates caring attitudes to humans from all walks of life. Their skills and knowledge help attain literature from classics to the most pertinent up-to-date issues.”
- “As a child, story time at the library was where my imagination came alive. Those moments shaped me, and I want the children of Ely to have that same opportunity. Investing in our library means giving every child a place to dream, explore, and discover who they can become.”
- “The library is a place where you can meet old friends and make new ones.”
- “As a child, my family had very few books at home. The public library provided stimulating books to grow my interest in reading and new topics. Now as an adult the public library expands beyond books to historical files, movies, games, educational activities and more. What a resource!!”
- “The library is the central hub of our community — a place where every generation can learn, grow, and connect. When we invest in the library, we invest in the strength and future of Ely itself.”
- “The library has saved me thousands of dollars! I rarely buy books because I can always get them at our library.”
- “We regularly attend both Toddler Time and Preschool Story Time, and the children always look forward to the books, songs, and crafts provided. Thank you for all the hard work you do to make the library such a vital part of our community.”
- “The Ely library is the hub of the town. Both young kids and teens have activities they seem to enjoy. And us older folks can meet, use the computers, read newspapers and discuss stuff. And the staff is helpful and friendly!”
- “I am new to town, and now that I have found the library, I am at home.”

**Q12. I don’t use the library. How will I benefit?**

The quality of a community’s library, schools, parks, and city services directly impacts both overall quality of life and property values. A vibrant library attracts visitors from surrounding areas, encouraging engagement with local services and businesses.

**Q13. Won’t technology and the Internet eliminate the need for more library space?**

While the Internet has transformed daily life, library computers and the patrons using them remain significant space consumers. Staff provide essential support to help the community access and navigate new technologies. At the same time, book usage remains strong, as many materials are not available electronically and many patrons prefer traditional formats.

Recent research highlights the continued value of physical books, showing improved comprehension, reduced eye strain, and a superior sensory experience compared with e-books. Studies suggest that readers retain information six to eight times better with physical books due to fewer distractions.

Over the past decade, libraries have evolved from traditional book repositories into dynamic community hubs. They support education and lifelong learning, preserve cultural traditions, and provide spaces for social and civic engagement, serving as essential resources for the community.

**Q14. What is the expanded building proposed to look like?**

The following three pages present proposed renderings of the expanded library and Community Center. The existing library space is depicted in a lighter color to distinguish it from the new addition.

## Front View



SOUTH ELEVATION

## View from Walker Street

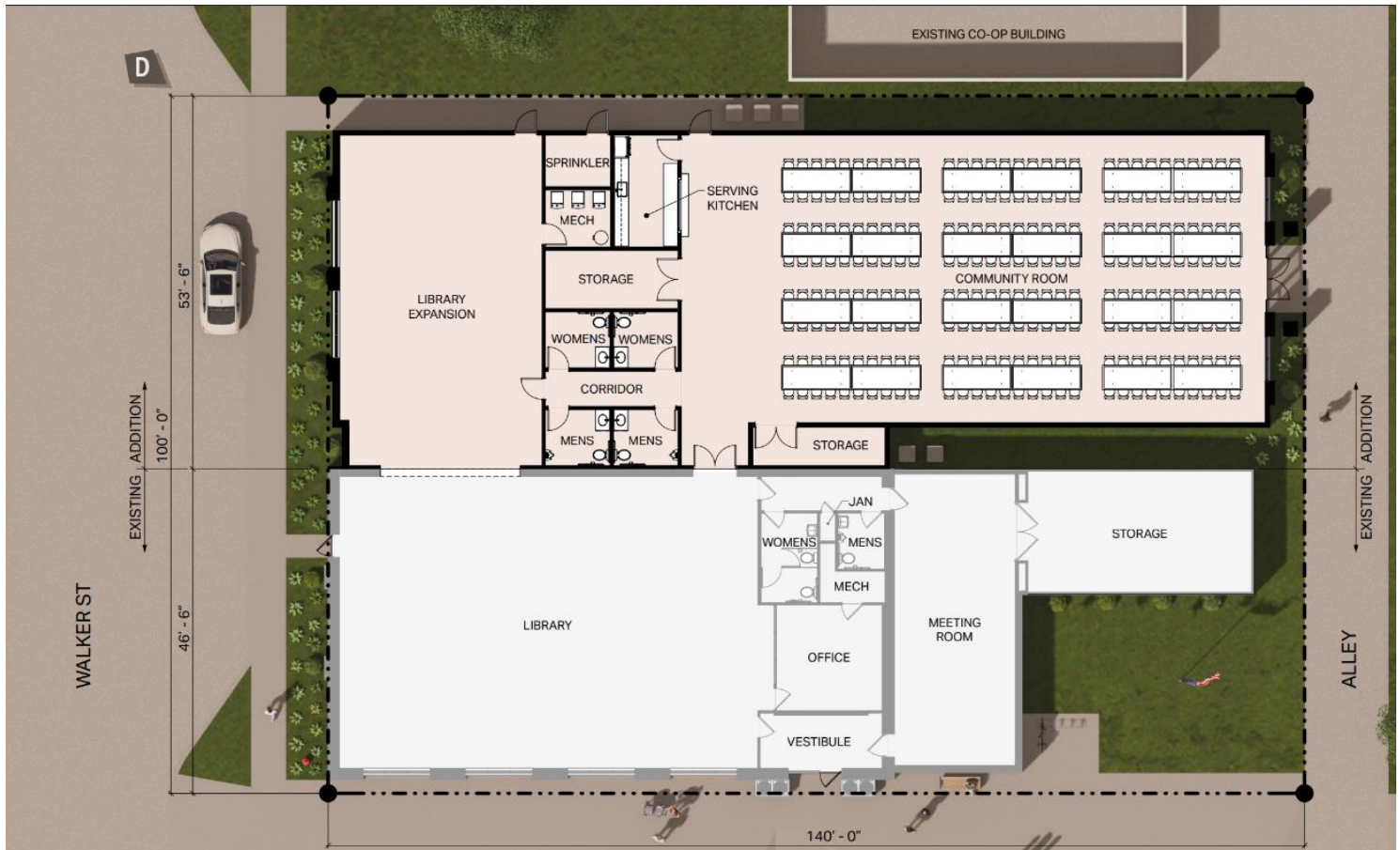


WEST ELEVATION

## View from Alley



## Aerial View



### Q15. Will the expanded library building be energy efficient?

Energy efficient upgrades have already happened to the existing building and will continue to be a priority for the expansion. Some ways will be:

- New mechanical systems will meet or exceed International Energy Efficiency Code requirements, leading to substantial reductions in electricity and natural gas usage while being easier and more cost-effective to maintain
- All lighting inside and outside the building will be energy-efficient LED lighting that consumes 30% of the energy the current fixtures do while improving illumination quality and greatly reducing need to change bulbs
- Lighting in staff areas and meeting rooms will have occupancy and vacancy sensors, automatically turning on and off lighting according to occupancy of the space
- All new plumbing fixtures will be new “low-flow” fixtures that drastically reduce water use per current code requirements

## Cost of the Project

### Q16. What is the estimated cost of the library expansion?

The estimated cost of this library expansion is \$2.7 million.

**Q17. How will the expansion be funded?**

The expansion will be funded through grants, donations, a capital campaign, continued fundraising and general obligation bonds. In support of this project, the City of Ely has proposed a 15 year, \$2.25 million bond to assist with funding.

**Q18. What is a bond issue?**

A bond issue can simply be defined as a loan. The City of Ely borrows the money needed by issuing general obligation bonds and pays the money back with interest over a set period of time. The bond payments are funded with a separate levy on taxable real estate in Ely. This project will seek to borrow up to \$2,250,000 in a GO bond that will be paid off over 15 years. The amount borrowed will be reduced by fundraising, donations and any grants received. A referendum will take place on November 3, 2026.

**Q19. Why a referendum?**

A referendum places the decision directly in the hands of the community. It enables the city to secure financing when needed while also allowing time for fundraising and grant opportunities that can reduce the overall amount borrowed.

**Q20. Is the library eligible for any state or federal construction grants?**

Historically, construction grants have supported library projects. While many grants are awarded later in the fundraising process, any funding received would help reduce the overall project costs.

**Q21. Are there other alternative revenue sources for this project?**

The library’s fundraising efforts are led by the Ely, Iowa, Friends of the Public Library, a 501(c)(3) organization active since 1984. Friends support numerous library programs, including the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, and organize several annual fundraising events to benefit the library and its services.

**Q22. How much will the expanded library and community center cost me as a homeowner?**

If the full amount is borrowed, a homeowner with a home assessed value of \$200,000, the tax rate will increase approximately \$11.24 per month (\$134.86 annually) to pay off the \$2,250,000.00 general obligation library bonds over the next 15 years. Once paid, the GO Bond will drop off the tax bill. Please see the chart below for more examples.

**Estimated Cost to Property Owners for Library Expansion and Community Center**

Home Assessed Value	Estimated Added Monthly Cost	Estimated Added Annual Cost
\$100,000	\$5.62	\$67.43
\$200,000	\$11.24	\$134.86
\$300,000	\$16.86	\$202.30
\$400,000	\$22.48	\$269.72
\$500,000	\$28.10	\$337.15
\$600,000	\$33.72	\$404.58

**Q23. Will the Library Board ask for an increase in the operating rate as well?**

The Library Board designed the addition to accommodate current staffing levels, ensuring no increase in personnel is required. The only additional operational costs would be for utilities and janitorial services.

**Q24. Why do libraries generally cost more than other facilities to expand?**

Libraries typically have higher construction costs than other facilities due to several factors:

- Minimal columns and load-bearing walls increase the need for structural steel
- Floors and buildings must support the heavy weight of books and materials
- High daily traffic requires durable finishes, carpeting, and walls
- Extensive data connections, power outlets, and telephone lines add electrical costs
- Specialized lighting ensures visibility for books at all heights while minimizing glare on screens
- Compliance with ADA standards, sprinkler systems, firewalls, and additional exits adds complexity
- Public projects must comply with state prevailing wage laws, increasing construction costs compared with private or residential projects

**Q25. What will happen if the referendum does not pass?**

If the referendum for the library expansion does not pass, the project will be paused, and the Library Board will reassess options to determine the most effective way to continue serving the community.

**Q26. How is the library operating budget funded?**

Funding for the library budget is provided through the residents of the City of Ely, Rural Linn County, the State Library of Iowa (including federal funding), and College and Putnam Townships. The operating budget also receives revenue from state grants (when available), printing/faxing fees, meeting room rentals, gifts, donations, and assistance from the Ely, Iowa, Friends of the Public Library.

**Q27. What is the history of referendums at the library?**

The library on its own has not previously pursued a bond referendum. Over the past 10 years, only minor remodeling projects have been undertaken. In 2023, the city pursued a new City Hall, Community Center, Library and Recreation Center that went to the ballot and did not pass.

## Proposed Project Timelines

**Q28. What does project awareness and information sessions look like?**

An information flyer will be mailed to every house in Ely with the finalized schedule. Open houses will be held each month at the library and numerous pop-up information events will happen concurrently with other city-wide events. Below are the confirmed information dates and times.

Date	Time	Place	Event
April 27, 2026 (Monday)	6:00-8:00 pm	Ely Public Library	Open House
April 28, 2026 (Tuesday)	5:30 – 8:00 pm	City Park	Sport Leagues
April 30, 2026 (Thursday)	6:00-8:00 pm	Odie’s Bar & Grill	Pop-Up
May 1, 2026 (Friday)	5:00 – 7:00 pm	Ely Public Library	Book Sale Pop-Up
Thursdays starting May 7	6:00-8:00 pm	Ely City Parking Lot	El Sol Food Truck
May 12, 2026 (Tuesday)	6:00-8:00 pm	Ely Public Library	Open House
May 18, 2026 (Monday)	5:30 – 8:00 pm	City Park	Sport Leagues
June 2, 2026 (Tuesday)	5:30 – 8:00 pm	City Park	Sport Leagues
Thursdays starting June 4	7:00 – 9:00 pm	House Divided	Trivia (June & July)
June 5, 2026 (Friday)	5:00-8:00 pm	Ely Public Library	Summer Block Party
June 13, 2026 (Saturday)	9:00 am – 1:00 pm	Ely Public Library	Open House
June 19, 2026 (Friday)	5:30 – 7:30 pm	City Park	Parking Lot Picasso
July 10, 2026 (Friday)	5:00-7:00 pm	Ely Public Library	Open House
August 9, 2026 (Sunday)	2:00 – 5:00 pm	Ely Public Library	Open House
August 20, 2026 (Thursday)	5:00 – 8:00 pm	Odie’s Bar & Grill	Pop-Up

August 21, 2026 (Friday)	6:00 – 8:00 pm	Ely Public Library	Ice Cream Social
September 17, 2026 (Thursday)	6:00-8:00 pm	Ely Public Library	Open House
September 20, 2026 (Sunday)	8:00 – 11:00 am	City Park	Fall Fest 5K
September 26, 2026 (Saturday)	9:00 – 3:00 pm	Ely	Vendor Fair Fall Fest
October 21, 2026 (Wednesday)	6:00-8:00 pm	Ely Public Library	Open House

**Q29. If the referendum passes, what does the project schedule look like?**

If the referendum passes, the following tentative project schedule is planned:

- Project is initiated
- Identify construction partners
- Groundbreaking
- Construction phase
- Final inspections
- Grand Opening – anticipated summer 2028

**Q30. Would the library remain open during construction/renovation?**

The Library Board anticipates remaining open during most phases of the construction project. Since the existing library will not be undergoing renovation, we foresee limited disruptions to our services. If necessary, the library staff will utilize services and procedures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic such as curbside materials pickups, remote ready reference, and virtual programming. The staff will also consider the feasibility of temporary locations for limited collection access and in-person programming such as story times.

## Ballot Question

**Q31. What will the ballot question look like?**

*When we get the verbiage from the city, the ballot questions will be placed here.*

## Voter Information

**Q32. When do we vote on the referendum?**

Voting will be held on November 3, 2026, at the consolidated general election, held at St. John Lutheran Church, 1420 Walker St. in Ely.

**Q33. Who can vote?**

Any United States citizen, age 18 or older, who has lived in Ely for 30 days and is registered to vote from a residence within the city.

**Q34. I do not own property but rent a home in Ely. Am I still eligible to vote in this referendum?**

Yes. You do not need to be a property owner to vote in an election. You must be 18 or older, a citizen of the United States, and a registered voter.

**Q35. If I am not registered at present, how can I register?**

There are registrars throughout Linn County. You can also register the day of the election at your assigned polling place.

**Q36. Am I able to participate in early voting?**

According to Linn County Iowa (<https://www.linncountyiowa.gov/843/Early-Satellite-Voting>):

- You may cast an absentee ballot at 935 2nd Street SW in Cedar Rapids.
- Satellite locations are available if they are petitioned for.
- You must vote your absentee ballot at the early voting or satellite location. You cannot take the ballot home with you.
- An accessible ballot marking device is available for voters who may need assistance.
- Ballots will be available no earlier than 20 days before an election.

## General Information about the Ely Public Library

**Mission Statement:**

*The Ely Public Library is a community hub that connects people of all ages, nurtures young readers, and enriches our community by stimulating imaginations and satisfying curiosity.*

**Board of Library Trustees:**

The Library Board consists of seven non-paid members. Five are Ely residents and two are from Rural Linn County. Those appointed serve six-year terms.

**Communities Served:**

Ely, Iowa, Rural Linn County. Many from neighboring communities.

**Population:** The estimated population of Ely is approximately 2,328 (2020 census data).

**Facilities:** The current library building offers about 5,030 square feet of library, mechanical/storage/bathrooms, and meeting space.

**Library Hours:**

The library is currently open 55 hours per week.

- Monday through Thursday: 9:00 am –7:00 pm
- Friday: 9:00 am –5:00 pm
- Saturday: 9:00 am – 4:00 pm
- Sunday: Closed

**Registered Borrowers:** There are 4,652 active users holding library cards.

**Library Usage in FY 2024/2025:**

- Total number of service hours: 2,860

- Total number of visits/attendances: 34,414
- Total number of items checked out last year: 41,684
- Total number of attendees at library programs: 19,080

**Collections, Equipment and services:**

- The library's material collection has over 169,371 items available in physical, electronic, and streaming formats.
- The library currently has 4 computers available for use. Free Wi-fi is also available 24/7.
- Over 1,500 programs have been made available to our community.
- Services include test proctoring, seed library, tech help, meeting room rental, and printing/scanning/faxing/copying.

**Staff:** There are currently three full-time staff members and three part-time staff members.

**Budget:**

Funding for the library budget is provided for by the City of Ely, Rural Linn County, College Community Township, and Putnam Community Township. Grants, donations and support from the Ely, Iowa, Friends of the Public Library provide additional assistance for materials and programs outside of the allotted budget.