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Wellesley's library turns technological page

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By Matt Rocheleau, Globe Correspondent

The Wellesley Free Library will soon transform the way it tracks its collection, in the biggest change since barcodes were placed on every book two decades ago.

By inserting a small computer chip in each item available for library cardholders to borrow, the staff hopes to speed up the check-out and check-in processes and increase the library's ability to keep track of its inventory.

"This is a huge project for us, and it's very exciting," said Elise MacLennan, assistant director for library services.

It will take until at least July 2010 for enough of the radio-frequency identification (RFID) chips to be installed before the new system will be ready to use, said the library's assistant director for technical services, Helen Charbonneau.

To avoid confusion in the check-out process, she said the library's administration wants around 80 percent of their 250,000 items – which include books and other media – to have the tags before introducing the new system.

The computer chips are small and very thin with an adhesive backing to secure them to each item. The chips used for books cost around 26 cents each and \$1.25 each for audio and visual items, said library director Janice Coduri.

The cost for all of the chips is estimated at \$85,000, the labor to install the chips is estimated to be \$14,000, hardware at \$96,000, software at \$23,000 and miscellaneous – such as training, maintenance, installation, and electrical costs – at \$27,000, bringing the project's total cost to around \$245,000.

Once the project gets underway, the library administration will determine whether they should hire outside help to install the RFID tags or if they can install themselves, Coduri said.

The chips will allow for library customers to check out by scanning the barcode on their library card and placing a stack of books on an electronic pad that reads information about each book in the stack nearly instantly. The number of stacked books the device can scan depends on the thickness of the books, but Charbonneau estimated that about five adult-sized books could be checked-out at once.

Though Charbonneau said the customers will be able to check out more independently, library staff will still be available to assist them.

The RFID tags can also be scanned from about 18 inches away, which will help library staff quickly locate missing items or items not in their correct shelf location.

To protect library patron information, the RFID technology will not be used in

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library cards, said Charbonneau.

Other town libraries in the 42-library Minuteman Library Network adopting such RFID systems include Sudbury, Cambridge and Brookline.

“It has been a very, very helpful tool to other libraries – like Brookline and Wellesley – that have seen a significant increase in the number of items being borrowed in recent years without seeing the increase in staffing to match that demand,” said Chuck Flaherty, director of Brookline Library, where administrators hope the system will be ready to use this January.

For more information, visit the Wellesley Free Library’s [website](#).

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