

# Analysis of the Duxbury Library's Municipal Appropriation Request FY2022

March 11, 2021

The Duxbury Free Library (DFL) is beloved by residents of all ages and contributes to the character of our town. The Finance Committee recognizes the value and importance of the DFL and is committed to ensuring the taxpayers of Duxbury retain access to excellent library service, including interlibrary loans (ILLs), at an appropriate operating cost, similar to its peers. This funding level must be evaluated against the comprehensive priorities and financial capacity of the town and not viewed in isolation. The Finance Committee has undertaken extensive research to understand this challenge, submit recommendations supported by data and identify resources to continue critical services.

This paper explains the Finance Committee's recommendation to reduce the Library's budget request for FY2022 by 5.75% by taking advantage of natural attrition to move the library closer to a more sustainable funding level. This recommendation is within the state requirements for the DFL to obtain a waiver and retain interlibrary loan services and helps offset budget needs elsewhere in the town.

For context, each year the proposed budget submitted to the BOS and the Finance Committee allocates the anticipated revenue increase by the same percent across all departments. Given the complexity of the financial and management issues facing the Town this year, this was too simplistic an approach.

Instead, because of the recession-induced financial constraints, the proposal asked departments to submit budgets with level spending year over year. However, the Select Board requested the Schools be given preference to preserve level services to avoid a reduction in staff and the resulting increase in class size. In addition, to address the conservation restrictions included in the Duxbury Beach Lease, additional staffing is required by the Recreation Department.

The Finance Committee's assignment was to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of each organization's operation to identify additional savings that could be achieved with minimal disruption to essential services.

Various actions were taken by departments to accommodate a balanced budget. Both the Fire department and IT department obtained grants to offset some operating and capital costs. Other departments, like the COA, were able to accommodate less than level spending through staff reductions. We are suggesting the Library contribute similarly to offset other town expenses.

Contrary to the adverse publicity the Committee has received, there were no recommendations made that would threaten or significantly reduce the services provided by any department. In fact, it was our intention to focus on opportunities to improve the current practices by benchmarking to other similar communities.

To achieve these objectives, however, requires the acceptance of change and in some cases innovation.

Our comparative analysis to other communities, based on the latest published statistics, led us to the observation that the Duxbury Free Library is one of the most expensive per capita and per hour of operation in the Commonwealth.

Duxbury residents pay more per resident to operate the Duxbury Free Library than 92% of municipalities in the Commonwealth, 96% of similar-sized towns and all but one member of the Old Colony Library Network (OCLN), our regional association of 26 local libraries. (see individual charts in the appendix, pages 7-9)

Analysis of the Library's cost per hour open showed that the residents of Duxbury are receiving less access to the library and are paying more per hour than most residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In fact, the Duxbury cost per hour of service is the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest among all OCLN members, the highest by a margin of 24% among similar-sized communities and in the top 5% for the entire state. (see individual charts in the appendix, pages 10-12)

Cost per hour open is an important, but often overlooked metric. In comparison with similarly funded or more highly funded libraries, on a per capita basis, Duxbury's cost per hour open is almost always higher. This is the case when compared with libraries such as Wellesley, Weston, and Concord. These libraries offer more hours of access for the amount of taxpayer funding contributed on a per capita basis.

This analysis is not intended as a criticism of the current trustees or management but rather the legacy from the years when the Library was the only town civic center. Library leadership inherited an expensive management staffing structure plus heavy utilization of full-time employees.

This conclusion was reached after comparing the DFL's full-time and part-time employees, expressed as full-time equivalent employees (FTE) at 35 hours per week, and our annual operating hours to the Commonwealth's other libraries.

Within our Old Colony Library Network (OCLN), Duxbury has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest ratio of FTE's per thousand residents yet is only 17<sup>th</sup> of 26 in annual operating hours. This leads to concerns that the DFL has more volume of staff and/or more highly compensated staff working during the hours the library is open. In other words, the library isn't more expensive to operate because it is open more hours than others. (see individual charts in the appendix, pages 13-15)

The Library's structure predates the arrival of the Duxbury Senior Center and the Student Union which serve much of the same base, but its scale of operation is perpetuated by the State's mandate to increase municipal funding for libraries by 2.5% annually or lose certification for State Aid eligibility.

The Library Director has acknowledged to the Finance Committee that the opportunity to achieve staffing efficiencies exist, but this would require, under the State's funding mandate, that we spend a compensating amount on materials to maintain our overall municipal appropriation requirement (MAR) of an additional 2.5% per year. In fact, this year there is a proposal to replace two management positions with 3 non-management positions maintaining level spending, similar to other departments, but yielding no savings or efficiency gains.

Other staffing models could be explored, such as the use of 19 hour per week vs. 35 hour per week employees. This approach could provide scheduling flexibility to accommodate peak activity periods and extended operating hours while reducing the need for overtime.

A complementary practice, the solicitation of volunteers for part time assignments, like the highly effective COA model, is also not well-utilized and should be considered within the context of management's right to operate efficiently and effectively. Union contract changes will be required, but this is not a unique proposal when we look to other libraries. Within the OCLN we rank only 13<sup>th</sup> of 26 for utilization of volunteer hours.

Until 1986, certification to qualify for State Aid was based on a per capita funding appropriation of \$6. At over \$87 per capita, Duxbury's appropriation in the most recent available Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) data from 2018, Duxbury far exceeds that minimum. In 1987, the threshold for State aid certification was redefined to require an annual library municipal appropriation increase of 2.5% to the

average of the past 3 years of certification or using the municipal appropriation requirement (MAR) for years the library obtains a waiver, granted by the Mass Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC). The intent was to limit waivers to 10 annually and then only to net municipal funding reductions of less than 5%.

During the last recession of 2010, 123 libraries requested and received waivers, well above the statutory limit. As of 2015, 55 of these libraries were still on waivers, struggling to find a way to make up the budgetary gap created by the recession.

A comparison of per capita spending by municipalities indicates the inequity of this funding requirement. The current model does not take a merit- or need-based approach. It instead applies a simplistic increase mandate that leads to underfunded libraries staying underfunded and those adequately funded can grow to have unsustainable funding level requirements.

Interestingly, certification for State Aid is not a compelling issue for most libraries. Duxbury receives only about \$20,000 of its \$1.3 million budget from the State, and this amount has not been increasing by 2.5% each year. However, most municipal library bylaws, including Duxbury's, tie State Aid certification to their mutual aid borrowing rules, essentially shunning libraries that do not receive a waiver and lose certification. The rationale seems to be that we will not subsidize weak libraries, but it also becomes the primary obstacle to modifying a town's allocation of revenues.

Our own Old Colony Library Network also encourages this protocol but leaves the mutual aid decision to its individual member libraries. This practice has at times forced uncertified libraries to form their own exchange networks as noted in this 2009 article.

<https://www.leesvilledailyleader.com/article/20090505/NEWS/305059871>

*"In 2009 five local libraries that lost their state certification are no longer struggling to provide services alone.*

*Through a sharing agreement among the libraries, residents of Bridgewater, Norton, Wareham, Freetown, and Assonet, which is a section of Freetown, are borrowing books and other materials from one another.*

*The Bridgewater Public Library is the latest to join the group which, while shut out from regional library sharing networks, decided to open their resources to each other.*

*And there is more good news for patrons of decertified libraries. In addition to borrowing from each other, those card holders have borrowing privileges at the Boston Public Library because it is Massachusetts' "library of last recourse."*

*That means that Boston's 6 million books and hundreds of thousands of other items must be accessible to all residents of the state who cannot get them locally."*

Duxbury also receives mutual aid from membership in the Massachusetts Library System, which is not tied to State certification. Here is their proposal for mutual aid from their web site.

<https://www.masslibsystem.org/>

*"Massachusetts Library System (MLS) members participate in interlibrary loan (ILL) on a reciprocal basis for all permitted library materials, including online content.*

*If the Boston Public Library does not have what you need, we may be able to borrow it from another library for you.*

*Borrowing via Commonwealth Catalog (ComCat) is the quickest and most convenient way to get your item if we do not have it in our collection. Once you have searched our catalog for the title and cannot find it, log in to the Commonwealth Catalog to search and request from the collections of lending libraries across Massachusetts.*

*Your item is not in the Commonwealth Catalog? Request it on ILLiad and we will initiate a broader search. ILLiad is the software BPL uses to search for items that are not owned by BPL or available through the Commonwealth Catalog. Note that ILLiad requests are subject to special restrictions.*

*MassCat is an online resource sharing network for school, special, and small public libraries in Massachusetts. MassCat was created in 2001 and has been a service of the Massachusetts Library System (MLS) since 2010.*

*MassCat uses the web-based Koha ILS to offer circulation, inter-library loan, cataloging, acquisitions, and serials management. The Koha ILS (integrated library system) is an open-source software used by libraries internationally.”*

In difficult economic times many libraries have chosen to request waivers of this funding mandate from the Mass Board of Library Commissioners and even accepted decertification as the only escape from an inflexible antiquated policy.

In 2015, Edward J Collins, Jr Center for Public Management undertook a white paper analysis of the current aid to library practices. This study was funded by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.

Noteworthy recommendations by the consultants include the following:

“Redefine the municipal appropriation requirement so that it bears some relation to adequate service provisions rather than simply to historic appropriation level.”

“The State’s focus should be on communities in the lowest quartile of per capita library expenditures.”

Given that public policy changes very slowly, what actions can Duxbury take to insure adequate library services in these difficult recession years?

- 1) Reduce spending per capita to match a group of similar towns based on demographics and socio-graphic statistics. This year the Finance Committee is recommending not replacing open full-time positions or new positions and is recommending an evaluation of the staffing strategy going forward. We suggest that the Trustees review our concerns and meet with Town Management and the Finance Committee before next year to propose a path forward.
- 2) Apply for a waiver based on our historic above average funding level. Waivers have been easier to obtain especially in difficult economic times and are given for multiple years. This year waivers are being granted for net spending reductions of up to 10% and extending the waiver period from 5 to 7 years is being discussed.

Keep in mind that a waiver does not reset the States spending mandate; the MAR will only reset after three years of decertification.

- 3) During our waiver period, solicit help from our State Representative, Josh Cutler, to bring this issue and the Edward J Collins, Jr Center for Public Management Study to the attention of the legislature.
- 4) A waiver from the 2.5% annual increase mandate whether for 5 or 7 years does not solve the certification issue permanently, as mentioned. At the end of the waiver period the mandatory funding level is calculated from the last year of full certification and compounded at 2.5% per year forward. The only way to escape this mandate is to accept decertification for three years, the MAR “look back” period, which would reset the municipal appropriation amount.

While we will work to avoid decertification, keep in mind that others have dealt with it as we have cited in this paper and the Library Director should explore these book sharing service alternatives.

In addition, approaching libraries in our network proactively and asking for continuation of mutual exchange privileges would be a good strategy especially as it appears some in our network are facing similar financial difficulties and Duxbury’s resources make us a desirable exchange partner.

- 5) Consult with other libraries to understand how they provide longer hours of service with fewer FTE per capita. The use of 19-hour employees may be part of the answer or using volunteers as docents especially for extended evening hours or to assist students in the after-school hours. Duxbury has highly qualified residents who would welcome this type of community service.
- 6) Consult with the COA and the High School Library to see if there are redundant services that could be consolidated under the Library roof at a savings or services that could be subcontracted to the Library even if they are conducted in the Senior Center facility or the School Library.

This report is submitted to the Select Board and the Community in an effort to reach a level of mutual understanding and to encourage a constructive dialog regarding adequately funding our Library.

Respectfully submitted,

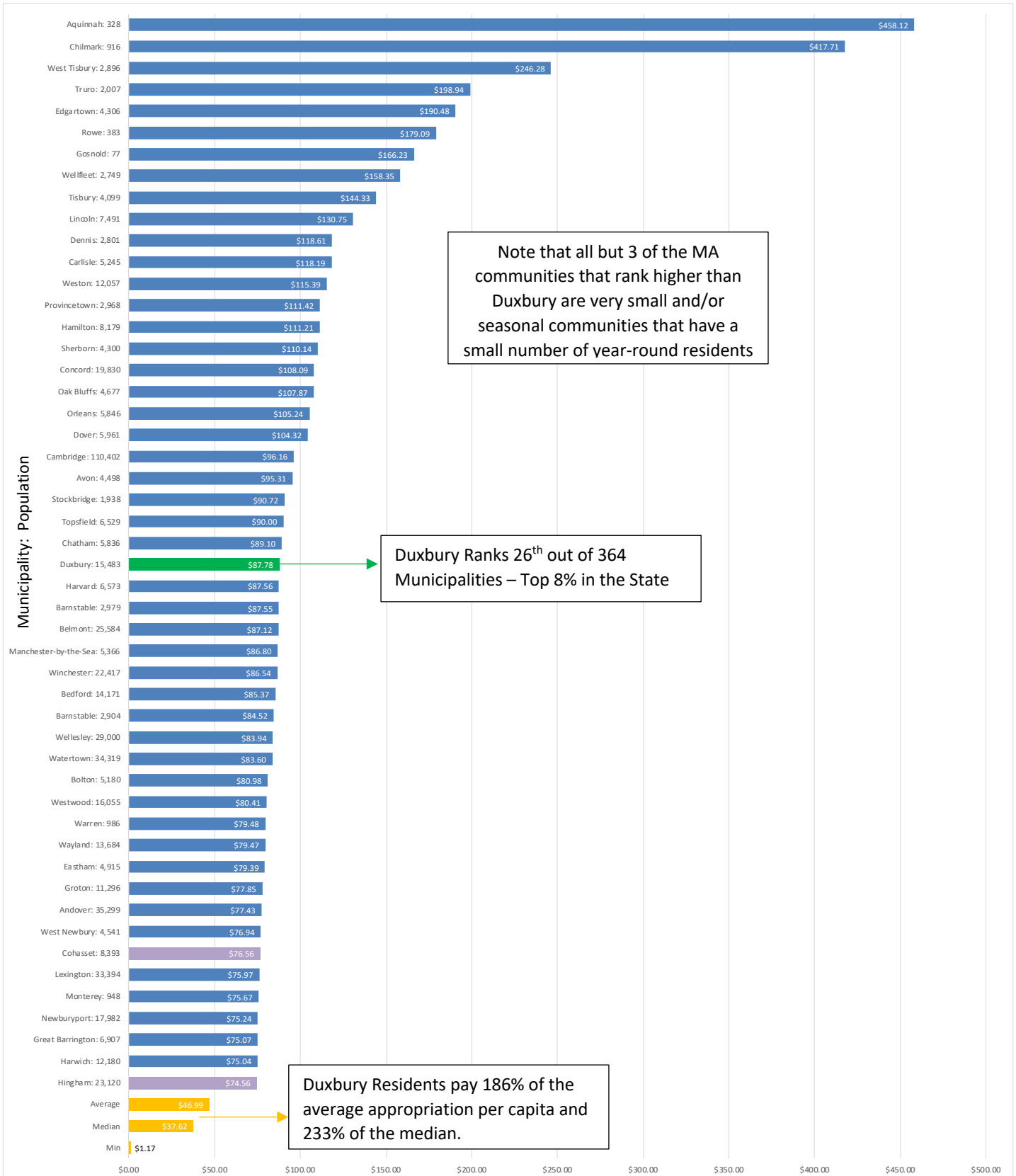
Shannon Godden  
Jerry Pisani

## Appendix

To better understand the Duxbury Free Library cost in comparison to other municipalities, the most recent data available from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC), from 2018, was used, with one exception. Duxbury Free Library's Annual Hours Open in 2018 appear to have been unusually low compared to the years before and after 2018. For a more reasonable comparison, we have used the 2019 DFL Annual Hours Open number of 2567 instead of the 2018 reported number of 2327.

# Top 50 Massachusetts Municipalities by Appropriated Income Per Capita

At \$87.78 per resident, Duxbury, shown in green, ranks 26<sup>th</sup> out of 364 libraries in MA. Duxbury taxpayers are funding the DFL at more than twice the state median and 186% of the state average. Other South Shore towns are shown in purple for comparison.



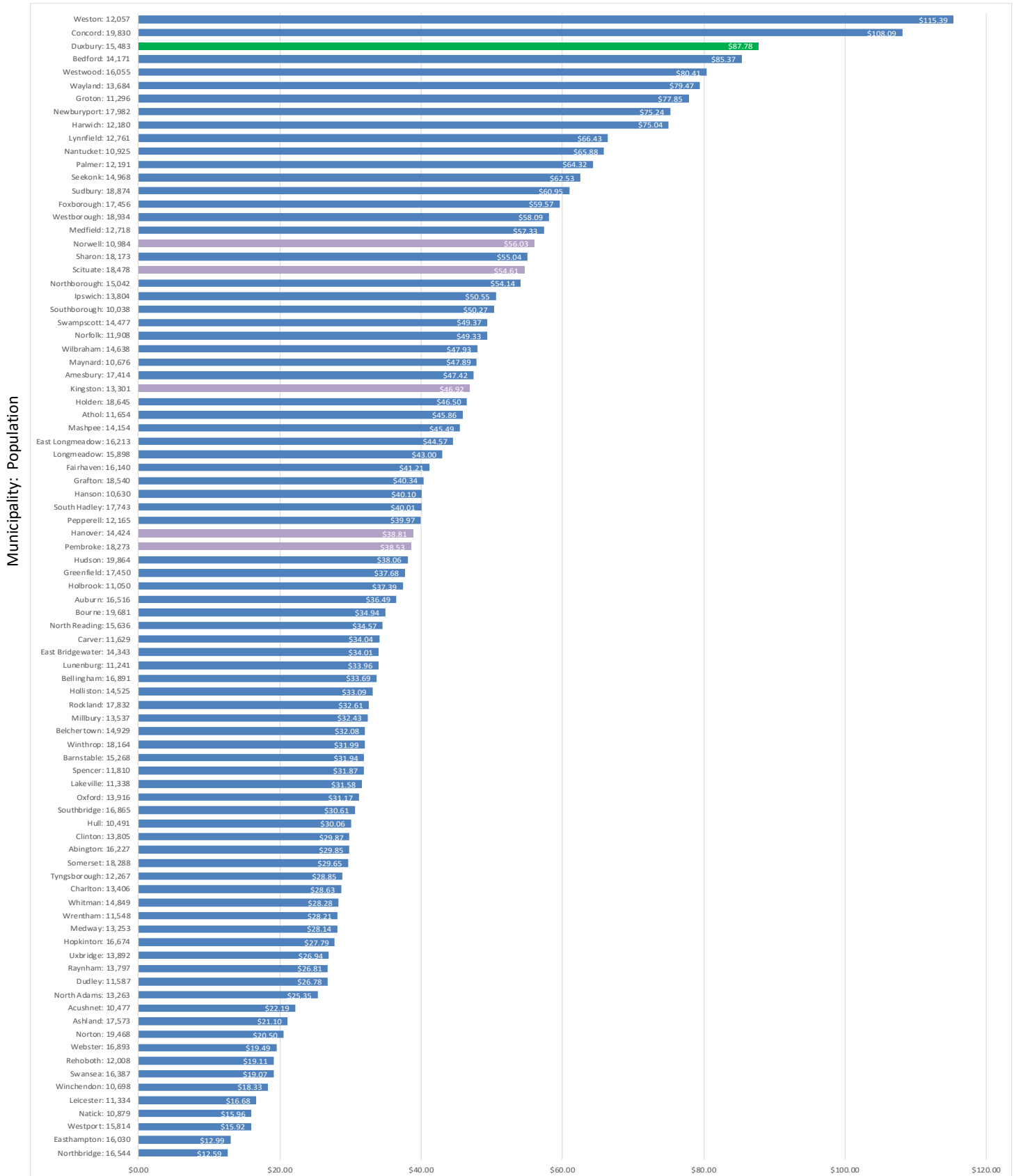
Note that all but 3 of the MA communities that rank higher than Duxbury are very small and/or seasonal communities that have a small number of year-round residents

Duxbury Ranks 26<sup>th</sup> out of 364 Municipalities – Top 8% in the State

Duxbury Residents pay 186% of the average appropriation per capita and 233% of the median.

# 10,000–20,000 Resident MA Municipalities by Appropriated Income Per Capita

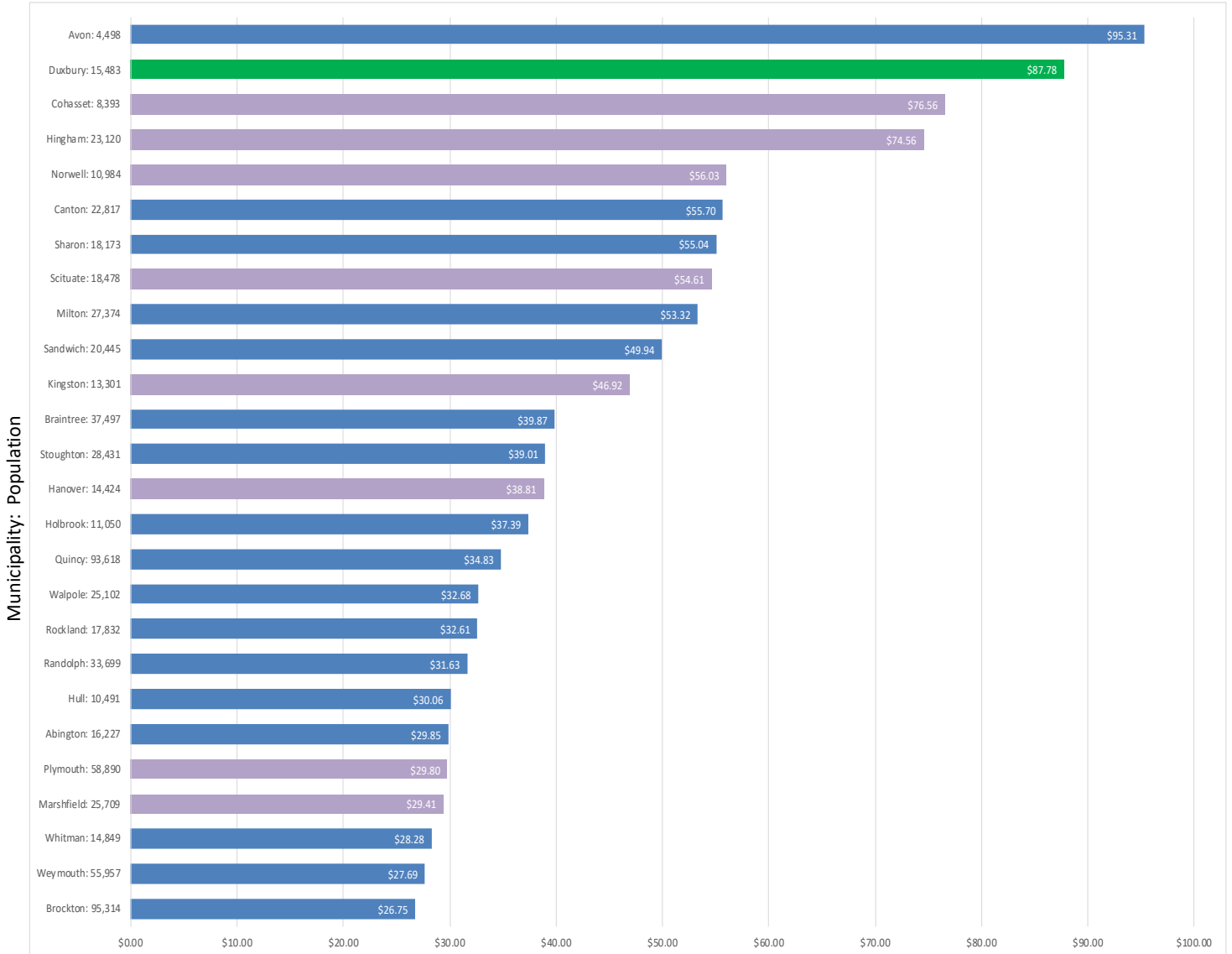
When compared to the 87 similar-sized MA municipalities, Duxbury, shown in green, has the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest appropriated income per capita. Other South Shore communities are shown in purple for comparison.





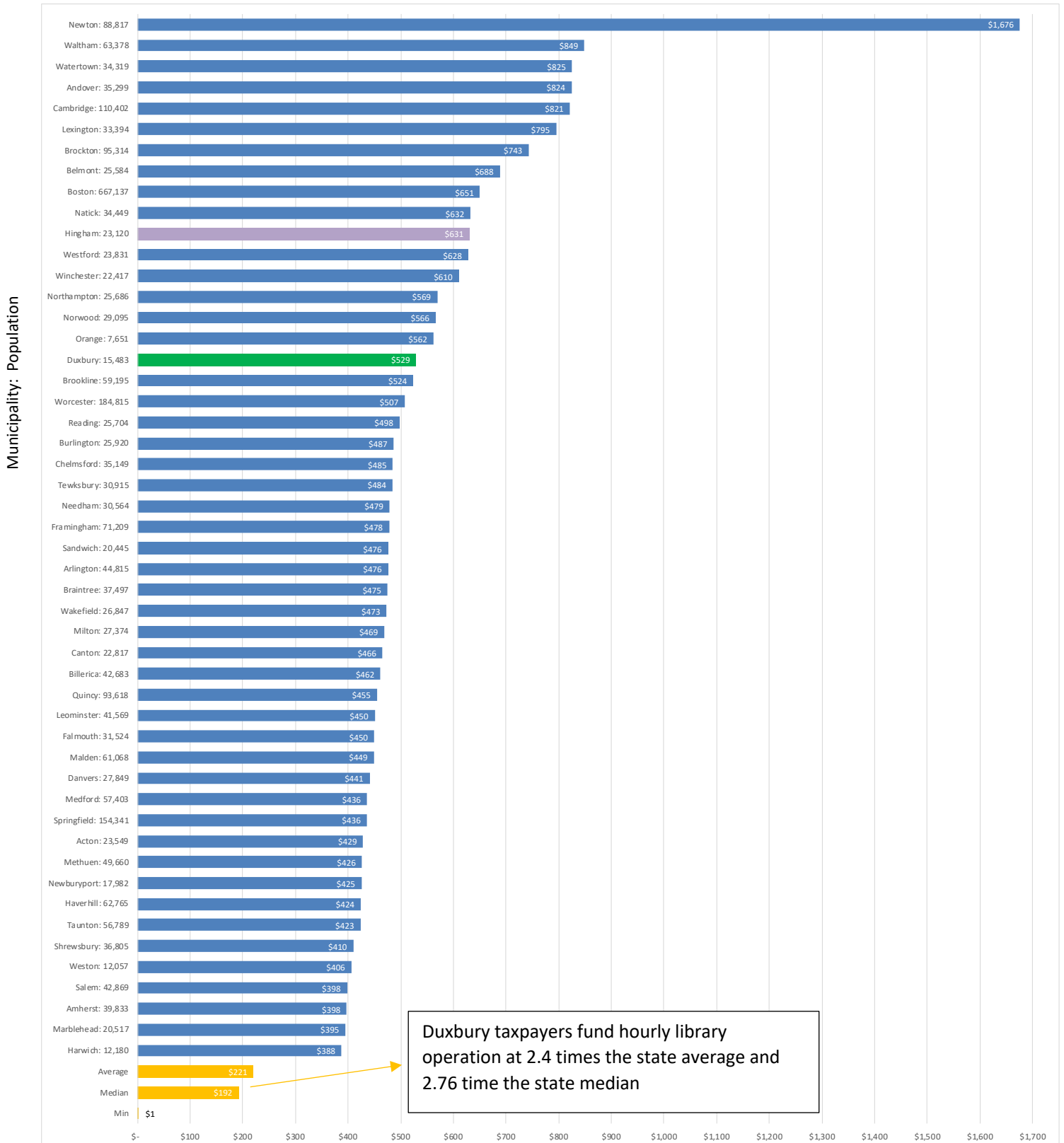
## OCNL Member Municipalities by Appropriated Income Per Capita

Among the 26 municipal Old Colony Library Network (OCNL) Members, Duxbury is second only to Avon, a much smaller town with only 4,498 residents. Within the OCNL, Cohasset and Hingham are the next closest, who are lower by 15% and 18%, respectively.



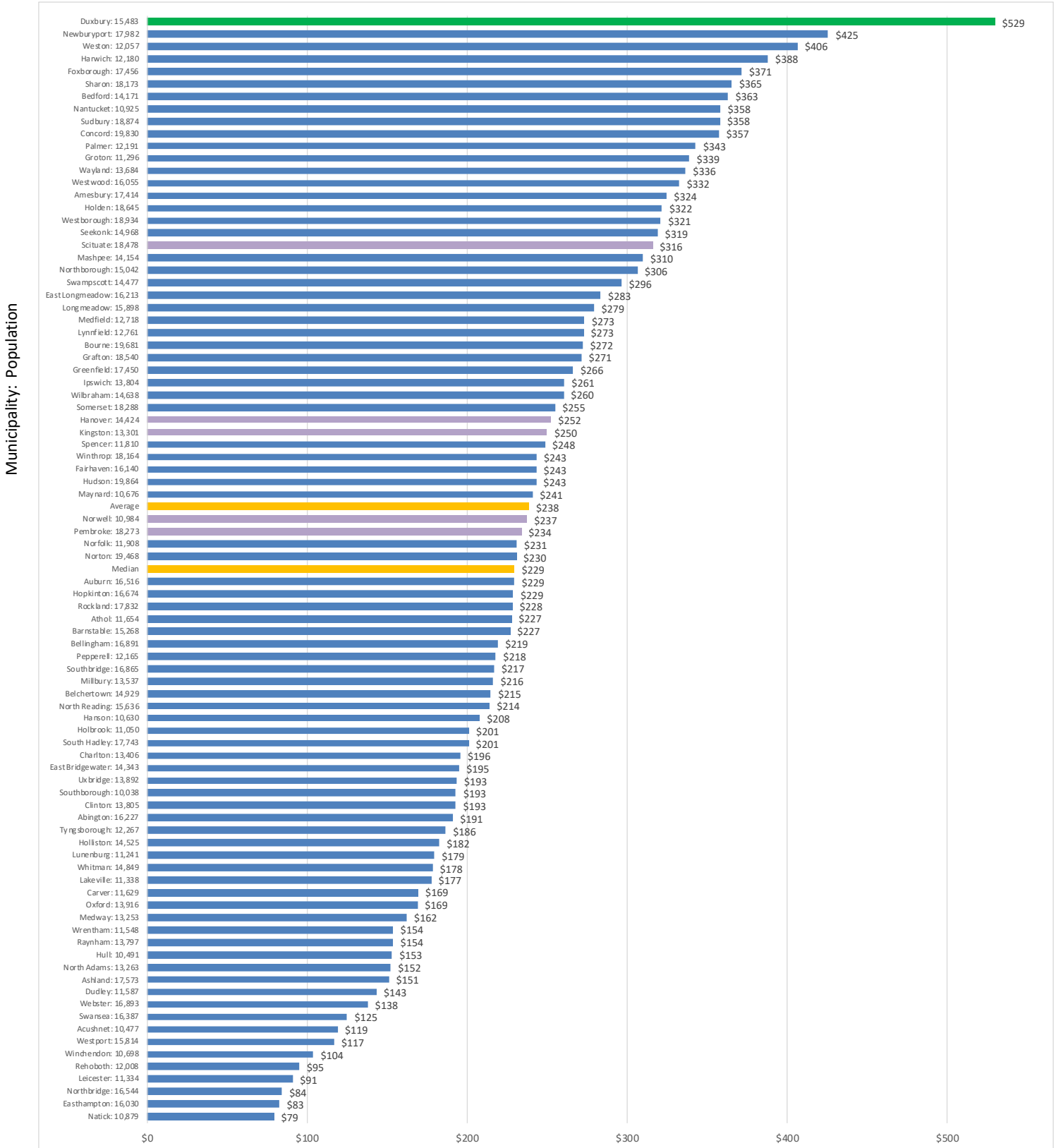
# Top 50 Massachusetts Municipalities by Appropriated Income Per Hour Open

Duxbury ranks 17<sup>th</sup> out of 364 MA municipalities for appropriated income per hour open, placing Duxbury in the top 5% in the state. This indicates that Duxbury taxpayers are paying more per hour of access to the library than 95% of municipalities in the state. Other South Shore communities are shown in purple for comparison.



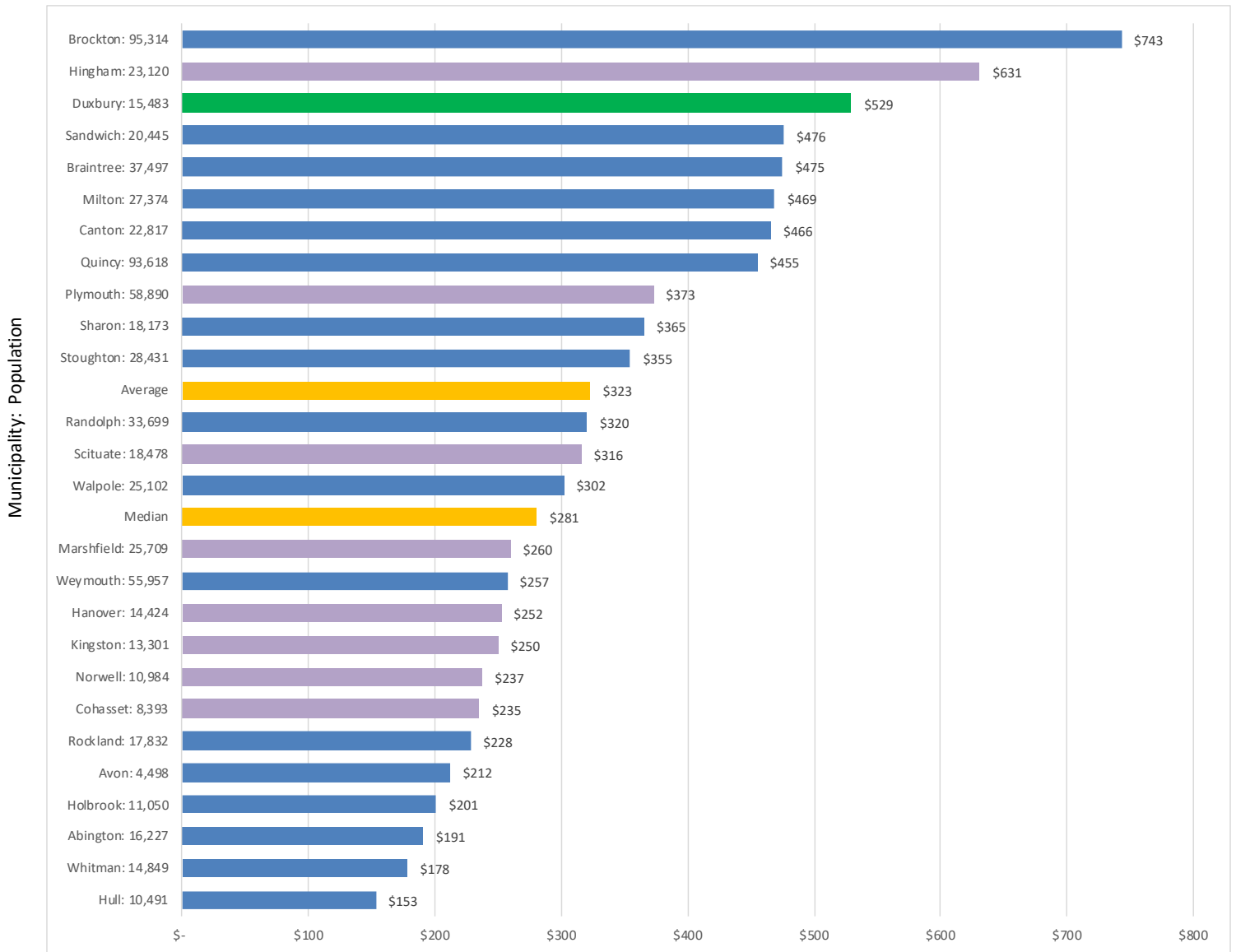
# 10,000–20,000 Resident MA Municipalities by Appropriated Income Per Hour Open

When compared to the 87 similar-sized MA municipalities, Duxbury, shown in green, has the highest appropriated income per hour open by a margin of 24%. Other South Shore communities are shown in purple for comparison.



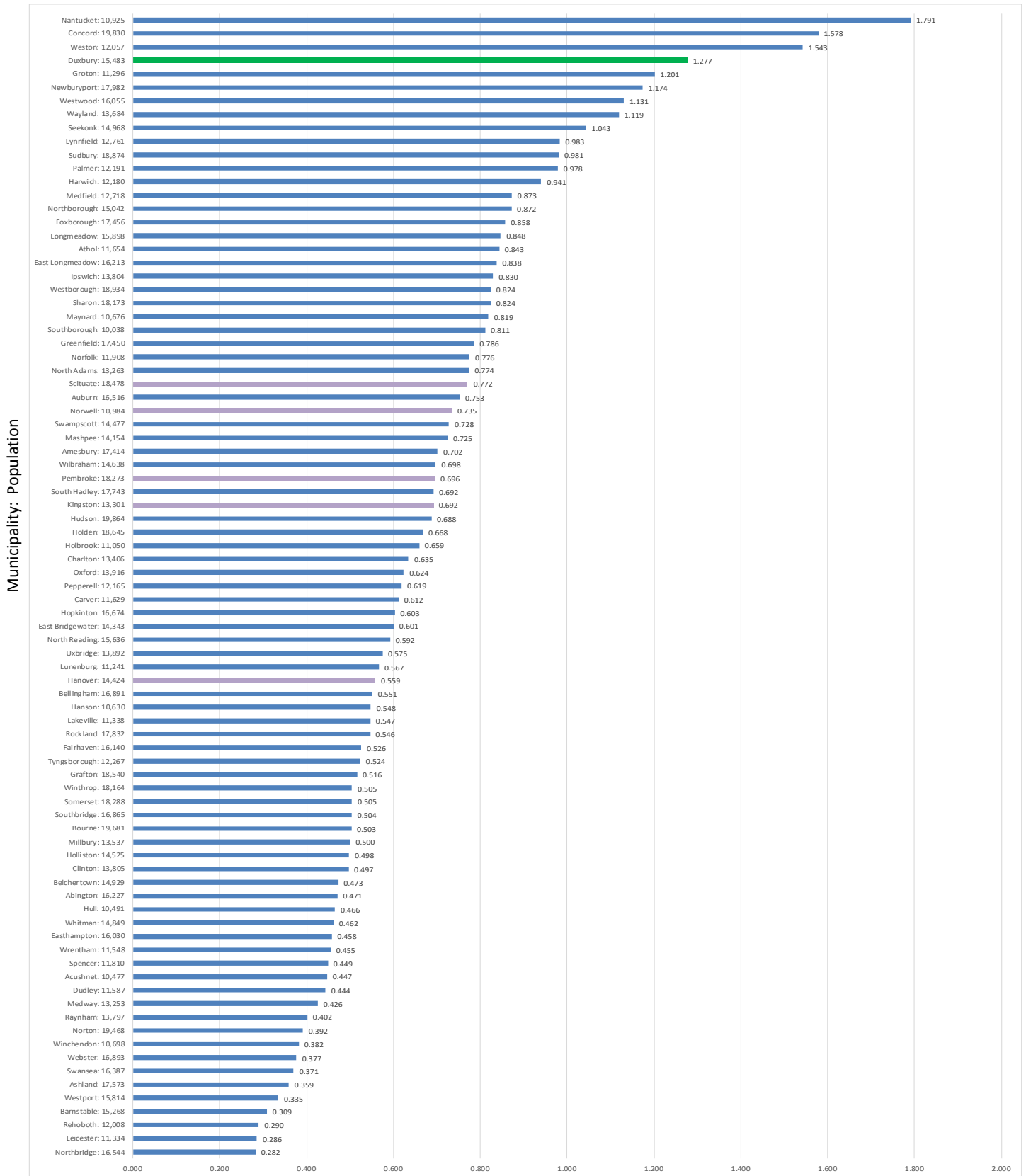
## OCLN Member Municipalities by Appropriated Income Per Hour Open

Among the 26 municipal Old Colony Library Network (OCLN) Members, Duxbury ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> after Brockton, who has 3 locations, and Hingham. The next closest municipality is Sandwich, which is 19% lower per hour open.



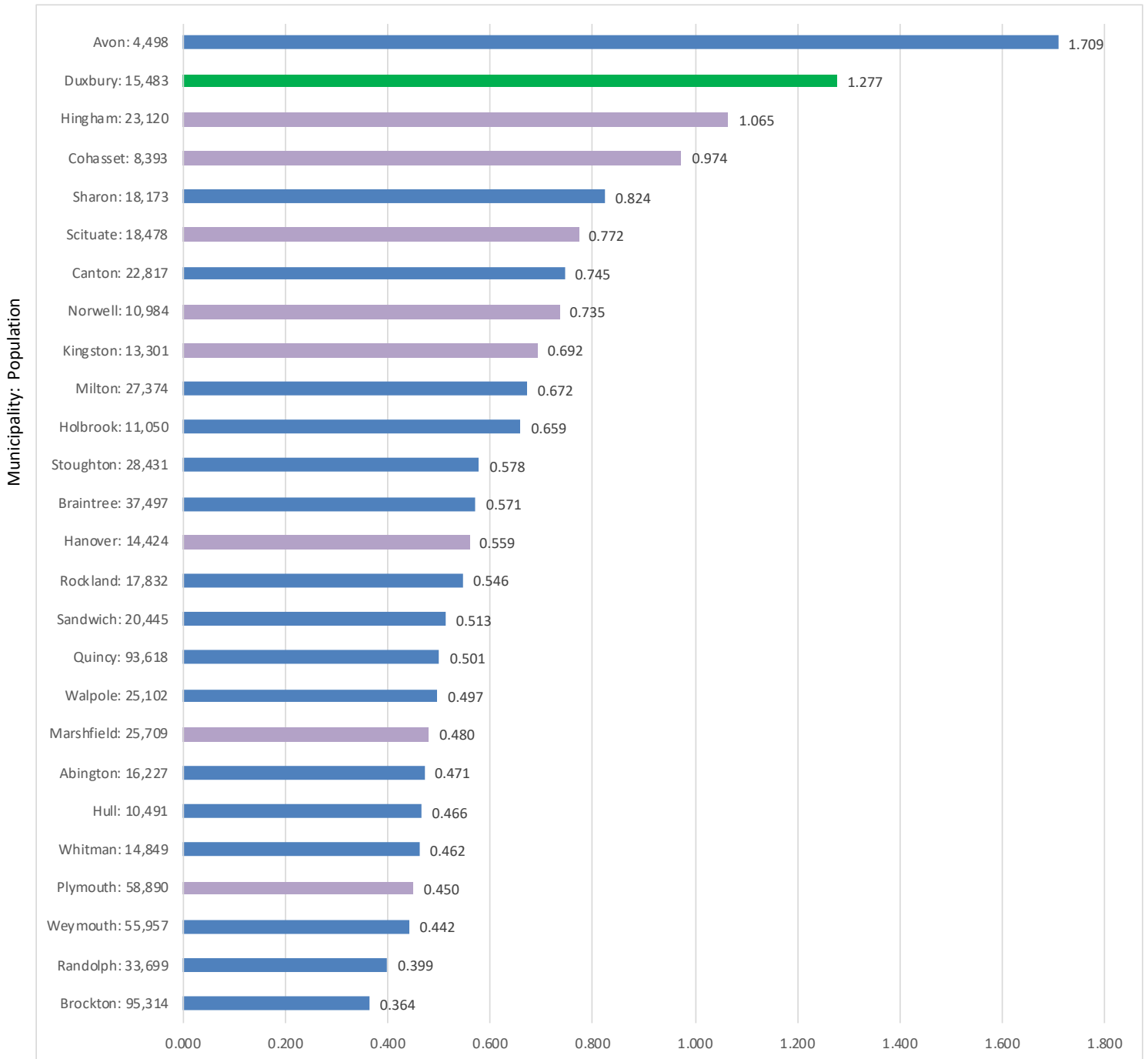
# 10,000–20,000 Resident MA Municipalities Library Employment Per 1000 Residents

Among similar-sized communities, Duxbury ranks 4<sup>th</sup> for the number of full-time equivalent library employees per 1000 residents.



## OCNL Member Municipalities Library Employment Per 1000 Residents

Among the 26 municipal Old Colony Library Network (OCNL) Members, Duxbury's library ranks 2nd for the number of full-time equivalent employees per 1000 residents.



## OCLN Member Municipalities Library Annual Hours Open

Within the OCLN, Duxbury is 17<sup>th</sup> out of 26 members. Duxbury reports offering significantly less hours open annually than even the OCLN average of 3036 and the median of 2717.

