



THE LEAGUE
OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF SCARSDALE
Box 495, Scarsdale, NY 10583

To: Mayor Jonathan Mark
Members of the Village Board of Trustees
Members of the Scarsdale Public Library Board of Directors
Elizabeth Bermel, Executive Director, Scarsdale Public Library

From: The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

Re: The Proposed Library Renovation Project Bond

Date: November 29, 2016

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (the “League” or “LWVS”) held a public membership meeting on Monday, November 21, 2016 to evaluate the Proposed Scarsdale Public Library Renovation Bond (the “Library Bond”). Terri Simon, President of the Scarsdale Public Library Board of Directors, and Elizabeth Bermel, Executive Director of the Library, made a presentation during which they addressed specific League questions, as well as additional questions from the audience.

The League supports the proposed Library Bond in the amount of \$9.9 million to fund the Library Board’s revised plan for expansion and renovation of the Library (“Option A-1”). The League feels that the current proposal is responsive to public concerns expressed about the cost and scope of the Library Board’s previously proposed plan (“Option A”), while also reflecting Scarsdale community values. Specifically, the League feels that Option A-1 serves the following mission and goals set forth in the Library Strategic Plan 2012-17:

To serve a central role in the cultural and intellectual life of our community and to encourage the joy of reading, the exploration of ideas, and the pursuit of lifelong learning for children and adults.¹

¹ To ensure that we meet our users’ educational, informational and recreational goals, we will provide:

- a safe, attractive and comfortable environment;
- convenient and open access to resources;
- professional services and well-trained staff;
- access to the historical record of Scarsdale;
- a wide range of programs and access to current technology.

Among the broad goals outlined in the Strategic Plan, the Library Board determined to:

- *strengthen the central role that the Library plays in the community, with expanded programming for diverse constituencies;*
- *improve the library experience, with welcoming, flexible and accessible facilities and program spaces that meet the needs of the evolving ways that patrons use the Library;*
- *embrace technology, in balance with traditional means of delivering services and collections.*

The League commends the Library Board and Administration for conducting an extensive and thorough process for identifying Scarsdale Library's current and likely future needs and priorities, including research on 21st century library trends, visits to recently renovated or rebuilt area libraries and fact-finding interviews with their librarians and village officials, and analysis of the Westchester Library System circulation, usage and demographic data.

Further, the League commends the Library Board and Administration for their many and varied efforts to engage the public by regularly communicating with Scarsdale residents and seeking community input throughout the entire six-year process, from the development of the Library's five-year Strategic Plan to the current proposed project and funding plan. In particular, Terri Simon and Beth Bermel have made themselves available to explain, answer questions and address concerns about both iterations of the Library proposal to members of the Scarsdale community, and have in fact given over 36 informational presentations, including at the Library, Village Trustees meetings and various community organization meetings.

The League feels strongly that the Library Board and Administration took very seriously the feedback they received from the community, as evidenced by its willingness to adjust and revise the initial Library project plans. The League commends the Library Board and Administration for carefully considering cost and scope reductions to Option A that resulted in Option A-1. The League recognizes that these were, in many instances, difficult choices and commends the Library Board and Administration for being thoughtful and strategic in choosing items that reduced the current cost by an estimated \$3 million, but that might readily be added at some point in the future.

The League commends the Library Board and Administration for its work in identifying and proposing alternative local sites for the continuation of library services during the renovation. These plans will allow the Library to provide much of the current Library programming during the period of construction, and realize economies in the Supply Field renovation that include improvements of lasting benefit to the community beyond the Library's temporary use of that facility. In addition, the League commends the Library Board and Administration for its foresight in planning to decrease staff, mostly by attrition, in anticipation of reduced staffing needs during construction, thereby increasing operating cost savings during that time.

Finally, the League commends the Library and Village for pursuing already-identified state grant funding for the Supply Field renovation, and strongly encourages them to pursue all available state and federal grant opportunities in connection with the Library renovation.

Questions, Concerns and Recommendations

Public-private partnership and cash flow management. The League supports a public-private partnership to fund the proposed Library renovation project, and acknowledges that any construction project, and certainly one of this magnitude, has associated variables and contingencies that cannot be known at the outset but must be managed over the course of the project. The League commends the Library for several steps it has taken to address contingencies associated with the project, including doing soil testing to eliminate a key exterior variable and reveal problems with the earlier basement plan, hiring independent experts to confirm that construction estimates are conservative, and building the possibility of cost escalations and re-bidding options into Plan A-1. However the League has questions about how the Village and the Library would deal with possible negative contingencies during the project, such as higher-than-estimated costs or private fundraising shortfalls. In addition, the League is concerned that private donations pledged over the course of several years could cause cash flow deficiencies during the course of construction; and, if so, would like to know how the Library Board and Village Trustees would manage this. The League urges the Library and the Village to devise a plan for managing such contingencies that is clear, as comprehensive as possible and communicated to the public.

Library and Supply Field Parking. The League commends the Library Board for undertaking a study of parking needs at both the Library and the Supply Field temporary site. The results of the parking study were not yet available when the League held its informational and consensus meetings. Since the proposed renovation would increase the Library's community meeting space and programing capacity, the League is concerned there is a possibility on certain occasions that existing parking may not be adequate. We therefore look forward to the results of the parking study. If warranted by the study results, we also look forward to hearing the Library's and Village's proposed solutions to increased parking demand, including, for example, the feasibility of using the High School parking lots and/or spaces along Brewster Road for evening events, re-scheduling some programming, and/or shifting some Library events or programs to a renovated Supply Field "satellite" site.

Use of Other Area Libraries During the Renovation. The League recommends that the Library Board and Administration include in its communication plan regular reminders to the Scarsdale community that during the Library renovation, as always, Scarsdale residents may use other area public libraries within the Westchester Library System.

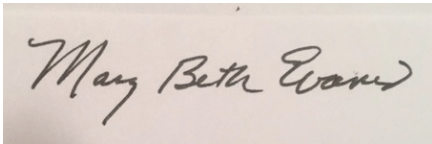
Bond Decision: Trustee Vote vs. Referendum. The League recommends that the Village Trustees vote, and vote "yes," on the proposed Library bond. The League does not support putting the Library Bond proposal to a public referendum vote. Conducting a referendum will unnecessarily delay the project and add expense. Moreover, this decision is squarely within the authority and responsibility of our elected representatives, whom we trust to take the long-range view necessary in considering the bond proposal and to make a decision that serves the best interests of the whole Scarsdale community, now and for the future.

Acknowledgements

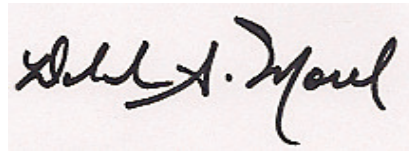
The League gratefully acknowledges the willingness of the Library Board President, Terri Simon, and Executive Director Beth Bermel to provide members of the League with two separate opportunities to learn in detail and ask questions about the Library bond proposal, both at our Fall membership coffee on September 26th and at our recent informational session on November 21, 2016—both of which were open to the public.

The League likewise very much appreciates in advance the Village Trustees' time and consideration of the comments herein, which reflect the consensus of League members reached at our meeting held November 21, 2016.

Sincerely,

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Mary Beth Evans" in a cursive script.

Mary Beth Evans
Co-chair, Library Bond Committee
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Deborah Morel" in a cursive script.

Deborah Morel
President
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale