

Statement Regarding the Proposed Library Improvement Project

My wife and I have been residents of Scarsdale for almost twenty-four years. We have raised three children here all of whom have benefited greatly from the Scarsdale Library. My wife served as President of the Library Board of Trustees and was an active member of both the Library Board as well as the Friends of the Scarsdale Library for many years. Having said that I would like to discuss two aspects of the proposed library improvement project, which are its cost and scope.

In any major project it is fair to ask how much will it cost to repay the money that the Village is being asked to borrow as well as what impact will the project have on the operating expenses of the Library. The numbers below are derived primarily from the Village of Scarsdale Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2016-2017 as well as from the Project Binder found on the Scarsdale Library web site.

The Village of Scarsdale is being asked to provide approximately \$10 million in funding which would be raised through a bond offering. The village's current general obligation debt is about \$17.4 million dollars and our ability to sustain that level of debt is supported by the Village's property tax levy of \$38.5 million. Approving the library project will increase Scarsdale's general obligation debt by 57% to a total of \$27.4 million dollars. Given a 15-year repayment schedule at 2% interest that would mean additional debt service of about \$780,000 per year. At 3% interest the debt service would be \$840,000 per year.

The Village budget for the library is about \$3.8 million dollars, which consists primarily of personal expenses of \$3.2 million (payroll and benefits). With an expansion of facilities it is reasonable to expect staffing to increase as well. The building size is projected to increase from 31,160 SF to 36,860 SF, which is an 18% increase. There will be new facilities and, presumably, additional visitors to the library. It would not be unreasonable to project an increase of at least three FTEs (full-time equivalents) from the current level of 22 FTEs. Depending upon on how one allocates the benefits numbers I would expect personal expenses to increase anywhere from \$350,000 to \$400,000 dollars per year. I am aware that the Project Binder projects minimal increases in staffing cost. That is an assumption that I don't find credible.

Thus, ignoring all other expenses associated with the project, for example maintenance, potential impact on the Village's Aaa bond rating, the need for additional parking space (the assumption that no additional parking will be required is not credible), etc., I would expect the proposed project to require additional property taxes of at least \$1.1 million on top of our current property tax levy of \$38.5 million. This is actually a conservative number since I have assumed no project overruns, only a 2% interest rate, and the low end of personal expense increases.

Well that doesn't sound like much. After all, it's only a 2.9% increase, or if you divide it by the 5,735 tax parcels that would be \$191/year per household, which has been claimed, is a negligible amount when measured in Lattes.

However, \$1.1 million is not negligible. It is only a 2.9% increase if you consider it over the entire property tax roll. What we are really being asked to do is to approve almost a 30% increase in the library portion of the Village budget from \$3.8 million per year to \$4.9 million per year.

Perhaps it is worth spending an extra \$1.1 million per year on the library. I would like to start by reviewing the mission statement of the library.

The Scarsdale Public Library's mission is to serve a central role in the cultural and intellectual life of the community and to encourage the joy of reading, the exploration of ideas and the pursuit of lifelong learning for children and adults.

When I look at the Project Binder document I see many necessary improvements such as addressing deferred maintenance, ensuring ADA compliance, fixing issues with the HVAC system and such. But I also see items such as:

- Building a café and outdoor reading deck. I know - the expanded café and outdoor reading deck have been dropped from the plan. I only mention them because I think they illustrate how far the plan originally strayed from the Library's mission.
- Adding a tech and makerSpace area. This one is curious. I think 3D printers are very cool but isn't this something that is more appropriate for the school system rather than the library. Of course, were such a facility to be added it would require hiring Library staff with the expertise to support it.
- Emergency generator – yes, it was very nice to have the Library open during Hurricane Sandy but is it really necessary to ensure that the Library have uninterruptable power? The Village has five primary schools, a middle school, and a high school. In an emergency could not one of those buildings serve?
- Additional meeting rooms for community events. The school system has many auditoriums, multi-purpose rooms, and theaters. Why are they not a resource for community groups?

My point is that I think the scope of the Library project has strayed from the mission of the Library. We should not be looking to build facilities just because some other library in the area has built them. We should focus instead on improvements that are in keeping with the stated mission of the Library, improvements that inculcate a love of reading starting at an early age.

Is it worth increasing the Village's annual Library cost from \$3.8 million to \$4.9 million? Sure, for improvements that enhance the core mission of the Library. Yes, we should expand the children's room. Yes, we should provide a quiet reading room. Yes, we should fix the physical plant. But no, we should not add "improvements" that stray from the

mission of the Library. As it stands, I think that the current library project which would cost over \$17 million and represents at least a 30% increase in the Library's annual cost has too many questionable elements and highly optimistic assumptions and I cannot support it.

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