

Steve & Barbara Kessler Remarks to the Scarsdale
Board of Trustees In Support of the Scarsdale Library
Improvement Plans
November 30, 2016

Good morning. My wife and I would like to submit these additional comments for your consideration in support of the Library Improvement Plans and in support of the Village Board approving a Bond resolution in December, without a referendum. We intended to speak last night, but as our remarks are lengthier, we thought we would submit them today out of respect for the large number of speakers last night.

We thank you for arranging last night's Committee of the Whole meeting. It was a wonderful demonstration of our fine community, considering the large attendance and large number of speakers. We truly are a community who cares about issues that have an important impact on our residents.

My wife and I have lived in Scarsdale for over 30 years, raising three children here, all of whom attended the Scarsdale schools and benefited from using the library. My wife, Barbara worked for more than 30 years as a librarian, at both public (including Scarsdale Library), school and university libraries. She worked many years as a librarian at Columbia University, including being the first female reference librarian at the Columbia University Law School, working with professors like

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Telford Taylor who participated in the Nuremburg trials. Her extensive professional expertise has assisted our participation with the Scarsdale Library Improvement plans.

It is fitting that the Committee of the Whole met last night having all of us just enjoyed celebrating Thanksgiving with our family and friends. We have all been encouraged to step back to reflect during this holiday season upon the meaningful things about which we are grateful.

My family and I are grateful that we live in such a wonderful community, a community with a rich heritage of providing an extensive range of resources and services to our residents all supported by a longstanding tradition of active volunteers, spending many hours to enrich our community. We agree with Jane Veron's similar remarks last night.

An additional comment. We have been so pleased during our two and half years on working on the Library Improvement Plans to see how many families with younger children have been actively participating in the plans as well as providing financial support. Additionally, many of these families are interested in joining the Friends of the Scarsdale Library, demonstrating their strong on-going support for the Library. Our younger generation is "voting with their

feet” to support the Library. How encouraging. How inspiring!

We commend everyone who attended and prepared for last night’s meeting, reaffirming that we all care about our community.

Why are we participating?

We strongly support the library improvement plans and request that the Village Board approve a bond resolution in December, 2016 as part of a public/private partnership. The Library is a critically important resource for our community. It is a public resource open to all of its users providing an extensive range of programs and services to all segments of our residents, children, teens, parents, seniors, people with disabilities.

The Westchester Library System has confirmed that the Scarsdale Library is one of the most heavily used libraries in the County on a per capita basis.

Does the community support the library? Does the community highly value the library?

The answer is most emphatically yes!

Years of active use of our Library confirm that a large number of our residents have “voted with their feet”.

Our community wants a dynamic, vibrant library to support our intellectual curious residents, our young children, our children attending schools, our parents, our seniors.

So again, why do we strongly endorse the Library Improvement Plans?

The Plans that truly respond to the large number of community residents who want a library that maintains its quality and range of programs and services.

We are not alone. The NYS public library librarian just released a survey of NYS public libraries that confirms that NYS public libraries statewide need extensive improvements to support the active use of libraries. Additionally, as indicated in our fact sheets, multiple Westchester County communities have also endorsed renovating their libraries at costs equal to or greater than the proposed cost of our Improvement Plan. **OUR PLAN IS NOT OVERPRICED. IT IS PROPERLY PRICED.**

Now is the time to approve the plans, to approve the funding of the plans without a referendum.

Are the plans well thought out? Do they respond to the community needs? Are they fiscally responsible?

The answer to all of these questions is YES.

I want to thank the Village Board for spending an extensive amount of time during the past year carefully reviewing the plans and providing important comments. Each of the Board Trustees, individually and collectively, has been involved in this review. The Village Manager and his Capital Projects staff have been actively involved with the library's building committee each step of the way in working with the library board, working with the nationally known architecture firm selected to work with the library. The goal has been to prepare a fiscally responsible plan that enables the library to maintain the level of services requested by the community. At each step of the work with the architect, the building committee, including the Village capital projects staff, have questioned and closely examined costs. There is an extensive analysis of the costs included in the plans.

Are the plans well thought out? Do they respond to the communities high usage of the library?

YES

Our community is very fortunate in having Elizabeth Bermel as the Executive Director of Library. She is exceptionally talented and experienced with her strong, vibrant and positive vision of the future of our library. She has provided professional librarian leadership to assist the Library Board in its oversight of the plans.

Additionally, the Library Board members have included engineers and architects. These plans are based upon 5-6 years of comprehensive preparation by the library board, in consulting with the community, in consulting with librarians in other communities who have completed their improvement plans.

During the past several years, Elizabeth Bermel, members of the Library Board and members of the Capital Campaign committee have spent an extensive amount of time meeting with various groups in the community representing senior citizens, people with disabilities, young teens, neighborhood associations, PTAs, Scarsdale Public School librarians, Scarsdale Board of Education and others. We have truly benefited from the comments provided in these meetings, incorporating good suggestions into the plans. One example of this good work is our successfully obtaining a large grant to increase the Library's programs and services for people with intellectual disabilities. Our library is committed to serving all its users. Barbara and I are very sensitive to and committed to increasing services to those with physical or intellectual disabilities. My wife is a stroke survivor, who for years has been advocating for increased services and opportunities for people with disabilities and their families and care providers.

The Scarsdale Library has provided an extensive amount of information regarding the plans on its

website to make this information available to the entire community. One of our goals has been to work closely with the community and regularly make publicly available updates to the plans.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR THE VILLAGE BOARD TO APPROVE THE PLANS.

The Plans incorporate the community comments and respond to the questions previously asked. A group of generous private donors, confirming their strong commitment to the library and to our community, have already pledged a couple of million dollars to the plans. Most of the costs incurred to date have been privately funded. **OUR PRIVATE DONORS HAVE ACTED FIRST. SUCCESSFULLY RAISING TWO MILLION DOLLARS IS SIGNIFICANT WHEN RAISED PRIOR TO THE VILLAGE COMMITTING A BOND RESOLUTION.**

Our Library Board has demonstrated that it is committed to continue to work in partnership with the Village Board. During the past year, we have been carefully working with Mary Lou McClure in closely reviewing funds raised and funds expended to maintain strong oversight of the financial aspects of this project. We appreciate her expertise and cooperation. The funding of the plans should follow other well-executed construction projects. We will work together with the Village Board and staff to develop phases of costs. Not all public or private funds need to be raised or spent in

advance. Rather, together, we will establish a timeline to follow to support the plans.

Let's move ahead together as a community in the spirit of Thanksgiving and in the spirit of our holiday season, to enable the Scarsdale Public Library to continue to be a highly valued resource to our community.

We again thank the Village Board and staff and thank everyone who attended last night's meeting.

Steve & Barbara Kessler
35 Brite Ave
Scarsdale