

Lansing library vote put on hold ²¹⁰⁶

By **JENNIE DALEY**
Journal Staff

LANSING — The Lansing Community Library Center has announced it will hold off on its referendum to become an independent library.

The vote was to come later this year and would have asked taxpayers in the Lansing Central School District to help fund staff and expand the collections.

In light of many factors, including two other local tax initiatives in the works, the library felt it was in their best interest to hold off on a vote. If it hadn't, the library would have been competing with an impending sewer referendum in the Town of Lansing and a Lansing schools capital project worth more than \$30 million.

Marlaine Darfler, chair of the capital campaign committee, said library volunteers are shifting their focus from a referendum they already felt was a bit rushed to more nuts and bolts issues.

"We want to finish our renovations and spend time expanding our programming," Darfler said.

The renovations are a \$350,000 project intended to make the space compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and provide more room for books, computers and programming. Already, the library has raised about \$325,000 of the final cost through donations. A campaign is ongoing to raise the final \$25,000 and bids on construction work are expected back by

March 8.

Kathy Miller, a longtime library volunteer, will be responsible for helping the library to expand its programming so that it will include more adult-oriented events. The library is looking at events focused on local history and other topics to complement regularly scheduled programs for children.

"I think it's a good idea," Miller said of the decision to wait on the referendum. "Otherwise people will confuse our building project with our referendum."

The potential confusion, where voters could have thought their tax money would be going to the construction project, was just one of the obstacles library personnel wanted to avoid.

The week before the library announced its decision, a vote on a Tompkins County Public Library tax failed, and a number of Lansing school district taxpayers showed up to express their disappointment with the schools' capital project. In light of the comments at the Lansing school board workshop, the district decided to cancel an April referendum, which they are considering rescheduling for December or February.

Mark Lewis, superintendent of the Lansing schools, said the current tax environment, where many cost increases are beyond local control, is making it tough for both taxpayers and those who rely on tax dollars for their revenue.

"There are so many of the

components of the budget that we don't have control over," he said.

Eventually, when the library does go through with the referendum, the plan is to use the tax money to fund a full time director. Darfler and Miller both noted that the library has grown much faster than anyone expected. It was this rate of expansion that, in part, motivated volunteers to consider an earlier referendum than originally envisioned.

"We never thought we'd be here already," Miller said. "We've grown beyond our expertise. We're readers, not librarians."

Contact: jdaley@ithacajournal.com