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Subject:

Date: May 25, 2007 5:54:26 PM EDT

 4 Attachments, 21.0 KB  

Editorial: Library Post Mortem     
Written by Dan Veaner  
Friday, 25 May 2007

  
The failure of library to become independent by only 34 votes illustrates a divide in Lansing that appears to be here for the long haul. While some saw a wonderful resource run by volunteers who have been fiscally conservative and responsible, others saw a new taxing authority on top of onerous taxes already suffered in the area. Putting the library vote onto the school ballot virtually doomed it to failure, enhancing the misperception that it was part of the school district and linking it to a 7.4 rise in school the school tax levy this year.

Ironically, linking the votes was another way the library board attempted to save money. By tacking their issues onto the school budget they estimate they saved about \$4,000 it would have taken to hold a separate vote. And library officials now say that if they had conducted a separate vote the initiative would certainly have passed, that residents voted against taxes, not against the library. Penny-wise was pound-foolish for the vote.

It may have been pound-foolish for the voters as well. The library tax would have amounted to about \$30 per year, give or take. But it would have had other tax impacts as well. State and county tax money that currently goes to the Tomkins County Public Library (TCPL) and independent libraries in other towns around the county would have come back to Lansing if the initiative had passed. Without our own library there is nothing to prevent TCPL from trying to get more tax money from Lansing as they abortively tried in Ithaca last year. In addition the Lansing facility would have been eligible for grants and programs that it can't tap into currently.

Between the library board being amazingly conservative in their spending and the additional revenue opportunities, the bang for a buck that would have amounted to the cost of a single hardcover book per year would have been astounding. It would have covered the salary of a certified librarian, and expanded programs and the collection.

The volunteers are showing signs of burnout, though they are making a valiant effort to keep the library open, and efforts like the Summer Reading Program are still going forward. It would be a shame if the library closed, especially since it is entirely paid for with no mortgage or other debt. Library officials hope they can bring it to another vote in the near future, and that it will pass. I hope so, too.

Donna L. Scott

Subj: (no subject)  
Date: 5/25/2007 2:24:55 PM Eastern Daylight Time  
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Dear all again,  
I couldn't resist sending my sister's letter to the editor of the Star.  
Donna

Letters: The Library's Future   
Written by Lynn C. Scott  
Friday, 25 May 2007



I remember my father taking me to a little library set up above the town offices in Churchville, NY, when I was just a tiny girl. I remember the excitement of taking out my first book, and rushing home to read it. This was just the beginning of my "library career." I continued to use the library throughout my childhood. I loved to read of other places and other times far beyond the boundaries of Churchville.

As an adult I continue to read avidly, and frequently use my local library in Fairport. What does this have to do with the Lansing Community Library? Two things. First, Lansing is a small town in the country just as Churchville still is. Having a library "close to home" may make the difference between a person actually going to the library and reading books, or choosing to do other possibly unhealthy activities, wasting both minds & lives. Second, There may be another tiny girl or boy in Lansing just waiting to have the world's horizons opened to their eager inquisitive minds. They can find that world at the Lansing Community Library. I congratulate those who have launched the library in Lansing, and do hope it has a future in your community.

From: Lynn C. Scott  
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**Subj: Lots of answers to questions**  
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Dear Paula, and others,

Long answer to Paula's questions - you may need some of this information:

Paula asked: Just a few clarifying questions (probably discussed Tues nite, sorry) if we were able to stay open year long before, why not any more? Is it that some of our grants have dried up (I believe this is true)? Fundraising committee exhaustion ( I believe a new infusion of energetic fundraisers couldn't hurt!)? We don't think we can raise the needed funds? Why did we do the capital improvements before we got the ongoing tax support? Did we put the cart before the horse? It's very likely that this will be a question on the lips of the community. I'd just like to have a 'ready' response.

Funds:

Yes, we are now running out of funds. After we finish paying the contractor for the addition, we will have around \$8000. We need \$25,000 to run the building and do operations for a year.

Yes, grant opportunities are drying up. Suzie, Susan and I over the years have spent mega-hours writing grant applications and many are not funded. Others that did give us money once, will not be funded in the future because the foundation or agency has already given us a donation and expect us to find other further funding. BBQs and Twilight Magics don't make that much money for the huge effort it takes to run them.

Active fund raising members have dropped to about 4 people or less. Total burnout, even tho they care greatly for LCLC.

We did the Cap campaign and the building renovation first because that is what we were working on all these years. We had to get busy spending the money we had gotten, or people would not give us anymore because they saw no "progress", remember?

Also, We probably thought offering a debt-free, finished new building would be helpful with getting our community to support putting the library on the tax rolls. Timing for the vote was because people recommended we have it after the school building proposition in February and the upcoming Lansing Sewer vote.

And 742 supporters agreed that our wonderful building was a great, fiscally-responsible gift to Lansing, I think. As you have pointed out, we had these many, 742 supporters. Apparently we just did not do a thorough enough job of "educating " the masses in Lansing, hence we had a somewhat well-organized group of senior citizens meeting to plan to vote NO against the library proposition (partly "no more tax" and partly, "They don't need a librarian") as well as many other no voters.

Others, from the comments we have heard so far, were just woefully misinformed about everything from the financial aspects of the tax to even what the library does and the services it offers and how a public lib. works.

We did not do an intensive or thorough job of educating our public, as Debby W-C and I were advised to do in the library referendum class we attended in January.

This is because we had woefully few people to do the work of the campaign. We also didn't have quite enough time to do a thorough job of repetitiously getting out the key messages. (one has to repeat things at least 7 times, etc.)

And the big strategic error was holding the vote along with the school election. But we did THAT to:

1) save several thousand dollars on putting on the election- more of our fiscal conservatism and responsibility.  
2) because it was easier for our very under-staffed group. Holding ones own election is also a lot of work.  
Turns out that was a very serious error on our part. We should have discussed that a lot more and not caved in to "easiness".

I myself was putting in at least 60-80+ hours a month during the educational campaign and a few others put in the many hours they could, including Melissa S., who did a great job on all the graphics and mailings. But we needed lots more of us phoning voters and going around visiting voters to explain what the vote was about. There was apparently much misunderstanding about a lot of aspects of the proposition. Only about 3-4 of us actually did phoning and a few house calls.

I am not beating up myself or others here, just critiquing the effort.

We also should have done a lot of neighborhood meetings and more public information meetings at various Lansing groups like the Lions (we did do that group) using the slide presentation we wrote. I had it available in flip charts on paper, as well as in a computer program. If anyone had heard about this "senior citizens group" that was going to vote NO, ahead of time, they should have told us, so we could have offered to meet with them and give our presentation.

Frankly, I got discouraged myself at how few of us were helping with this effort. It takes a lot of people to do a successful tax referendum and we just didn't have the bodies to do the work. We didn't even manage to have a face-to-face meeting with our own desk volunteers and operations staff, so they, the front line folks, would know what it was all about.

So, we move on from here. I personally, have to take a big rest from fund raising and electioneering.

Thanks to all who put up yard signs, wrote letters to editors, and did what they could to help this effort. We did have 742 supporting votes! Not a shabby number at all!

Donna Scott

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