
Lansing Ledger

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Library Seeks Tax Support

To remain open year-round and continue free services

BY MATT COOPER

The Friends of the Lansing Community Library are making another attempt to gain "library of the school district" status after securing approval from the Lansing School Board for a special meeting and election later this year.

The vote, scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 11, would determine whether the library would become an official chartered library and collect taxes to support itself. The public infusion would be collected from residents in the Lansing school district along with their school taxes.

The library failed to gain chartered status earlier this year during the school budget vote, where it failed by a margin of 34 votes. Marlaine Darfler, the chair of the library friends, said she believes it failed because of misconceptions about the library's relationship to the school.

"The library really has nothing to do with the school and the school district,"

she said. "The school district would have no authority over us at all. I had people after the election tell me 'The school already has another library.' It would not be another school library."

Charges for the library's upkeep would appear on the school's tax bill, but all the school would do with the money is pass it directly to the library, Darfler said.

"That's the only thing the school would have to do with us," she said.

The Lansing school board approved a special meeting for the library to hold its election, with board member Sandi Dhimitri abstaining and David Dittman voting against. Dittman said it made no sense to him to have another vote.

"We had one of the largest turnouts for the budget at the last election," he said. "And it lost. I mean, what are you going to do? Have an election every time until it gets approved?"

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Darfler said she felt justified having another election because of the confusion over the school's relationship to the library. The fact that the vote was on the same slate as the school's budget only further confused the issue, she added.

Instead, she would like to have the vote at the library, to further illustrate the library and the school's separations.

Dittman questioned her timing, noting that December may not be ideal for an election. Darfler told him that it was the only time she could secure the voting machines.

Currently, the LCLC is considered a "community library." Tompkins County Public Library Director Janet Steiner said that there is no such designation as "reading room of the Tompkins County Public Library."

"We stopped using that term because it's confusing," she said. "Instead, we consider "community libraries" as satellites of our own, usually."

There are five independent, chartered libraries in Tompkins County: the Groton Public Library, the Newfield Public Library, the Ulysses Philomathic Library, the Southworth Library in Dryden and the Tompkins County Public Library in Ithaca. The LCLC is a community library along with the Danby Public Library and the Caroline Public Library.

The difference between chartered and community libraries is that the latter are run by volunteers and secure their own funding. For the LCLC to become a chartered library, Steiner said it would need to meet a number of requirements.

"They would need to be open for a certain number of hours and they would need to have the staffing needs to meet those hours, including a librarian," she said. "Right now the LCLC is entirely volunteer. They can be open whenever they want."

If the library passes its vote, it will become the sixth chartered library in Tompkins County and be able to join the other chartered libraries in the Finger Lakes Library System. The advantages of being in that system include free interlibrary loans and a shared catalogue.

Steiner said it would be to the library's advantage to become chartered.

"Starting in January next year, we are going to begin charging our community libraries for services that we used to provide for free," she said. "We can't continue to support them as we have, and we're already asking them to seek their own funding."

Should the LCLC become chartered, Steiner said the first thing she would do is applaud them.

"We are pulling for them to make it this time," she said. "It would be a success for us as well, since they would become an asset considering their collection."

The Tompkins County Public Library would still offer support in the way of guidance, though at this point, Steiner said the LCLC has already become mostly independent of their assistance.

"They've done a lot of work to become autonomous," she said. "Almost all of their collection is their own now."

Should the vote fail, Steiner said they would still provide advice, but many of their formerly free services, such as interlibrary loans, would come with a price tag.

"It would cost patrons \$5 to request an interlibrary loan next year," Darfler said.

The LCLC would also have to close during the winter due to lack of available volunteers and funding for standard operations.

"That's part of why we're doing this," she said, "People don't mind donating money for more books, but they have trouble donating for operating costs for things like electricity."

She also noted that, at this point, the library continues to see demand from its patrons for more growth, despite having exhausted almost all of their fundraising opportunities.

"I had no idea it would grow this large seven years ago when I agreed to help do this," she said.

There are still a few hurdles to clear for Darfler and the friends of the LCLC to hold their vote. Public notice needs to

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be in the paper at least 45 days prior to the election, which means they have until about mid October to gather 77 signatures for a petition and enough names on the ballot for the library's board of directors. Darfler remained confident despite the short timeline.

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