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Vote no on tax increase for Lansing library

Thomas Hatfield / Guest Column

Lansing School District residents are being asked again to approve a new property tax on Dec. 11. Before voting, the community should consider carefully the consequences of again turning to already over burdened property taxpayers.

Lansing is blessed with three libraries — one in each school building and our Tompkins County Public Library. All are supported in some form by property tax. According to a recent flier mailed to Lansing residents, failure to approve the library tax on Dec. 11 will cause the Lansing volunteer library to close. However, in my family's opinion, the public should also consider the following as they decide how to cast their vote on the library tax.

The majority of residents say they want to maintain the rural character of our community, yet they continue to support property tax increases that further burden those who own the rural land. The best means available to maintain the rural vistas we love is to ensure that the "amber waves of grain" can produce sufficient income to pay the farmer's costs for fuel, fertilizer, seed, labor, insurance, equipment and property taxes.

Roy Moore Sr., my grandfather, moved his family to a Lansing farm in 1942 and operated a dairy farm until his retirement. He told us a farmer could pay his property taxes from the

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proceeds realized by harvesting 10 acres of wheat and use the straw on the farm. Today, 65 years later, the proceeds from harvesting 50 acres of wheat might be enough to pay the property taxes. The point is, if a farmer cannot afford to pay the property taxes, two alternatives exist: sell the land to developers, who will raise houses on the land, or remove the land from the tax rolls by other means.

The community has other options to fund a volunteer public library, and these need to be utilized. If those who use this facility cannot find other means of support, then one could argue either the demand for the library is weak or that supply exceeds demand or is readily available elsewhere. Virtual libraries exist in every home with access to the Internet. Why can't we use

the resources we already pay for — form a partnership with the school district, use the volunteers to support our existing library facilities?

The well meaning folks who have pioneered the volunteer library should not stray from their mission. This facility was to be run by volunteers at no burden to the community. Wanting a paid staff instead of volunteers is fine, but not if you intend to tax everyone for this cost rather than assess it to those who use the facility. The intention to tax property owners has already failed one vote. This result is now being ignored. Why? Well, the voters must have made a mistake, how could they be against a library.

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and it is likely that more residents would have expressed their opinion at the ballot box, the library's supporters have arranged for us to vote on it now. Are they hoping that many who voted against it last time will stay home this time? Perhaps the weather will be bad, perhaps others will have left for warmer winter homes. Whatever the reason, it appears to be an attempt to gain access to the public purse via the back door.

The promise to keep the annual assessment flat also rings hollow, once any organization has access to public funding and finds itself dealing with inflationary expenses, especially when it comes to payroll, the tax bill just keeps going up!

How many more acres of wheat will a farmer have to plant, harvest and sell to pay the property taxes in 10 or 20 years? Perhaps we won't have to worry about it as many farms are already failing, perhaps they will all be out of business by then.

Our family knows the cost of these burdens. If you want your farm neighbors to continue to maintain the rural character of your community, we ask you to vote no on increasing the property taxes yet again. Vote no on Tuesday, Dec. 11.

This column was written by Thomas Hatfield on behalf of his parents, Rod and Gerry Hatfield, who live in Lansing.