Board should call off plans for new library for now

The Westfield Washington Library Board met last week. Several of the library owners (taxpayers), including three Town Council members and future City Council members, attempted to head off the bond remonstrance by asking that the library folks sit down with leaders who want a different plan*. (Editor's note: the board has planned a new $16.9 million library near 196th Street and Tomlinson Road.)*

Immediately members of the staff began in very strong terms to tell us that the members of the board are hardworking, wonderful citizens and therefore we should not be challenging their intentions and decisions.

I wholeheartedly agree on the first count. But what they don't understand is that this decision is not about them, nor the staff. It is about the owners -- us, our taxes and our library's location.

We first knew of the possibility of the proposed move at a public meeting at the high school less than two years ago. This was the first time the general public became informed of the plan. At that meeting, the library move was given only a brief statement among many about the new school location at 196th Street.

Some of us objected and privately expressed that we hoped the public would be brought into the decisions. The next was at a board meeting at the library where it was clear that the decision had been made, an architect was being selected and that the forthcoming bond would double the library tax.

Nine spoke against the move. One spoke for the move. I stated that so many were opposed that a bond remonstrance seemed possible. But no effort to work with the objectors was forthcoming.

In the meantime, the new Town Council hired a consultant to lead Westfield residents in designing an old downtown redevelopment. Three good preliminary proposals have been presented. Everyone I know wants the library to be a part of this redevelopment for good reason.

The library board should postpone its decision a year while responding to Councilman Bob Horkay's call for civil meetings to work together.

Because of inflation, delaying a decision may cost more. But perhaps other tax and location possibilities will work toward resolution.

--- Mic Mead, Westfield