

Comments to Westfield-Washington Township Library Board – 07.11.07

I appreciate you allowing me a few minutes to reiterate why I, with a growing number of residents, want you to reconsider your new location.

First, I want to assure understanding between my personal position and my elected position. I come to you as a citizen and a parent of 4 children who does not agree with your location decision, and who does not desire at this time to bear the additional tax burden the levy associated with this project will impose on all property owners. As an involved member of the community, I have commended and thanked members of various boards for their service and offered support for their efforts. As someone with a long volunteer service I appreciate how taxing and thankless a public service commitment can be. However, any interpretation of my appreciation for your operating a recognized high quality library facility and support of those volunteer endeavors as being supportive of the intended site and schedule, are incorrect.

As a Town Council representative, I come as a person with ability to influence use of town resources, and interest in working with the library board to locate a suitable site in the general downtown area. I want a collaborative effort to identify a site that can bring enhanced business opportunities to the entire community served by this facility, and oppose any site that will essentially be limited to a new library building. All government expenditures, including funds for this library facility, can and should be viewed as opportunities to enhance economic and housing development. While I cannot promise you an equal cost option, this expenditure for a new library can be a tool in our economic development efforts. I believe this project absolutely must be viewed in that context, as well as from a library budget perspective. Our new City Hall project will serve this dual function as well. While a downtown location may create an incremental increase in expenditure, if a downtown location can be used to leverage economic development, any resulting expenditure will reap rewards well in excess of any incremental increase.

I invited each of you to a recent Town Council meeting where our downtown Master Plan study was presented by Cripe Associates. I believe Steve Reitmeyer was the only member of your board in attendance that evening, and he heard about several sites recommended for City Hall, and that these sites could also include a public library. I encourage him to share his interpretation of this presentation, and for each of you to visit the Town's web site or Town Hall, where this study is available for viewing.

Tonight I wish to emphasize that all decisions are still ahead of us, and the opportunity for the library board to decide to work with the current Town Council and City Council-elect is very much alive. A decision to avoid a controversial and divisive remonstrance, by deferring active planning of the current site in favor of opening a dialogue with Town Council and downtown merchants, should not be viewed as abandonment of the project or doing nothing, as appears to be the interpretation of some. This is movement in a new direction, not inactivity.

I support the remonstrance effort but do not desire to defeat the library board or all planning toward a new facility. Rather, I desire to welcome your reconsidered decision to work with all community leaders to plan a facility in a more appropriate location. There are a number of community leaders, as well as a very enthused downtown association, that want to keep the library presence in the downtown area. They should not be ignored. There is also clear and growing community sentiment to keeping our library facility near the downtown area that could be catastrophic to overlook.

I can't stress enough, that this library board's best opportunity to plan the new library facility this community will need and support, is just coming into focus. Please look at this remonstrance as the blessing it can be and an opportunity to acknowledge your changing community, and not as interference to your plans. Reconsidering now can be a positive step. I thank you for your time.

Robert L. Horkay