

Dear Residents,

Since our announcement on July 18 to the staff and the community about the temporary relocation to a smaller facility and the closure of the present library building on October 1 for critical repairs, a great deal of anger, support, rancor and frustration has been evidenced in person and in public. As your Board of Trustees, we are, without question, deeply concerned about the overall reactions we have received.

We know, as you do, that the MMS Community Library is an extremely important part of the community – a sanctuary to many, in fact – and we completely understand the strong feelings about closing the library for a 16-month period. We have had only the best of intentions for the library and the community.

We know the proposition of a 16-month layoff for our part-time staff and a few members of the full-time staff is not good news. And yet the Board also knows – as does the community – that we are in a very serious situation with the state of the current building, the limitations we have for funding, and the unknown restrictions associated with the new New York State property tax cap. Clearly, this situation demands a more creative approach that will not further burden the larger community. We thought this was the right solution at the right time, despite the fact that some would be impacted in the short term.

There should be no confusion with respect to what we believe we need to do and what some have mistakenly speculated. Our administrative team and the Board were very clear about the project and the cost in our personal outreach to staff on the evening of July 18, in our web posting that evening, in our letter to the community in the newsletter, our handouts in the library, and in the Newsday reporting that occurred on July 19. There are no hidden agendas, no plans other than what we have said: close the library on October 1, operate temporarily from a rented location, spend between \$4.5 and \$5 million to get the library fixed (with specific projects cited in the handout), and open back up as a healthier, safer, and more efficient facility in 16 months.

Never did we suggest any other plan, nor would we say one thing and do another with this very serious matter.

As we now know, the community responded very passionately to this plan. Many are concerned that there will be no library service during construction, but this is not true. Some are concerned that we might instead build a new building with the money, but this isn't true. Some suggest we are trying to permanently fire a good portion of the staff, but this, too, is not true. Some even said that this was not legal, but that, too, is not true, as we very carefully researched this matter with our legal counsel before moving forward with our announcement.

Libraries all over Long Island and beyond go through building improvement projects and function in a temporary location with reduced staff. It is hard for some to accept, especially if you are personally affected through the temporary loss of your employment at the library. However, in an effort to be fiscally responsible we presented a plan to use our existing budget and relocate to a temporary location. We believe this plan will allow us to continue the majority of library services and is the most reasonable and fairest option to meet the needs of the majority of the community.

The Board of Trustees listened very intently to what our community had to say at our meeting on July 25. Based upon this, the Board is going to suspend the planned October 1 closing of the library to consider all of the concerns and suggestions that were raised.

This does not mean the Board is abandoning its plan; rather, we want to further analyze the concepts that have been brought forth, and perhaps cast further light on why we believe the concept that was presented is best for the community. **But for now, we are on hold.**

As it stands, the Board believes there are really four options:

1. **Do nothing.** We have many serious infrastructure challenges that can no longer be ignored. This is not a real option.
2. **Build a new library.** The community has rejected this plan before, and in this financial environment (and given the stresses that our community is experiencing), it doesn't seem responsible or practical to consider the tens of millions of dollars the community would have to give over to create a new home. The Board does not believe this is feasible to pursue at this time.
3. **Phase our improvements to eliminate layoffs and seek public support for this in a vote.** This is possible, and will be further studied. It was initially rejected by the Board as an option that was far too costly and time-consuming to make the necessary improvements to the building, which are really not debatable. The cost to do so would add millions to the project costs. The time frame would also greatly increase.
4. **Stay with the current plan.** It's the least expensive, quickest way to improve the library, despite the short-term impacts. Furthermore, most library services and programs would continue, albeit in another location. Although a much smaller collection would be housed in the temporary location, interlibrary loan services would allow residents to request books and DVDs from other Suffolk County libraries, which would be received in most cases within several days for pickup.

During our public session and in other venues, some suggested we should have gathered input and talked about the concepts first, instead of presenting the plan as a "done deal." This is a fair criticism, but we hope you can accept that we truly believed we were acting in the best interest of the community. There is little input required on the need for new electrical systems, new ceilings, new boilers, etc. But we accept the criticism that this could have been presented as a concept for community discussion, rather than a certainty.

The library needs help – immediate help. We are sorry that there was some confusion regarding release of information, as well as the Board's intentions, and look forward to a more positive dialogue in the days and weeks ahead.

Sincerely,
The MMS Board of Trustees