

**AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE LA PORTE COUNTY PUBLIC
LIBRARY TO THE CITIZENS AND TAXPAYERS OF LA PORTE COUNTY**

In recent weeks you may have heard or read about various problems affecting the La Porte County Public Library. The purpose of this open letter is to set the record straight and to make more transparent the series of events leading to the current situation.

Our lawyer has advised us that some of the executive sessions that we held prior to November 2011 were likely conducted in violation of the Indiana Open Door Law because they were not properly advertised, because we received information that we should not have received, and because proper minutes of those meetings were not kept. We now need to take steps to correct our errors by advising the public of the nature of the information we received in those executive sessions and the actions taken.

In those executive sessions we received the following information and took the following actions:

- We received information on applicants for the open position of Executive Director of the Library. The information we received on these applicants included their names, addresses, and educational and work histories. We also received and reviewed their applications, resumes and their responses to questionnaires that had been sent to them by the selection committee of the Board.
- After receiving this information on prospective candidates, we narrowed the field of candidates and conducted interviews of the final three candidates. We discussed the various applicants and formed a consensus that the best candidate was the one from Sheboygan, Wisconsin.
- When the candidate from Sheboygan, Wisconsin declined our offer of employment, we decided, in an executive session, to re-advertise the position.
- Following the re-advertising of the position of Executive Director, we again received information on applicants, including their names, addresses, and educational and work histories. We again received and reviewed applications, resumes, and responses to questionnaires.
- After receiving this information on prospective candidates, we narrowed the field of candidates and conducted interviews of the final four candidates.
- Following those interviews, we discussed the candidates and formed a consensus that Fonda Owens was the best candidate. We directed the Chairperson of the Personnel Committee of the Board to enter into discussions with Fonda Owens on such details as salary and fringe benefits and to report her recommendations at the public meeting of October 27, 2011.
- At no time did we take a vote or make a final decision regarding the final selection of Fonda Owens as the Library's Executive Director until the public meeting of October 27, 2011.
- During the Board's executive sessions from January 2011 through October 2011 we received information relating to the financial position of the Library. This financial information included projections of budgetary shortfalls that had first been made known to the Board in public meetings as far back as April 2008. This financial information included monthly financial reports of the Library that had been presented and approved in prior public meetings of the Board, information relating to tax draws received by the Board, spreadsheets that had been presented to the Board

by former Executive Director, Judy Hamilton, and updates to those spreadsheets prepared by interim director Fonda Owens. These spreadsheets contained information about the budget for the Library, the anticipated expenditures, the anticipated revenues and the anticipated shortfalls of more than \$500,000/year. We also discussed the on-going and highly publicized tax assessment and collection issues in La Porte County.

- During these executive sessions we discussed the hiring of an outside consultant to perform an evaluation of the operations of the Library.
- We received and reviewed bids and proposals from three outside consultants to provide an evaluation of the structure and reorganization of the Library.
- We authorized the interim director to select the outside consultant that she thought was best for the job.
- We met with a representative of Strategic Management, the outside consultant selected by the interim director, to discuss its findings and recommendations.
- We also received information relating to recommendations from interim director Fonda Owens for steps that could be taken to address these budgetary concerns. Included among the information we received from Ms. Owens was the following:
 - A copy of the evaluation report prepared by an outside consultant, Strategic Management. This report addressed the standards affecting funding and/or accreditation of the Library, indicators that measured service outcome, which employee groups contributed most directly to the achievements of the goals of the Library, commentary about job descriptions, tasks that needed to be performed that weren't being performed, and barriers that existed at the Library that interfered with the ability of employees to perform efficiently. The evaluation report of Strategic Management also contained the following 12 cost savings recommendations: (1) eliminate department heads and Page positions and restructure the entire organization in accordance with a flow chart produced by Strategic Management; (2) close the Hanna branch and extend hours at the Union Mills branch from 28 hours to 32 hours per week – this would entail transferring Hanna's Clerk III to a Clerk I position in Union Mills and reducing her hours from 30 to 20 – a net savings of more than \$80,000/year; (3) take steps to reduce collection expenses; (4) do not renew OCLC subscription; (5) eliminate benefits and PERF (Public Employee Retirement Fund) for part-time employees – a projected savings of more than \$38,400/year; (6) eliminate shift premiums – a savings of about \$3725/year; (7) eliminate compensatory time; (8) conduct a regional study of salaries and benefits for workers and adjust salaries and benefits accordingly – in this regard, Strategic Management pointed out that the Library was paying some of its clerks an average hourly rate of \$10.25 while Porter County was paying its clerks \$9.55 per hour; (9) transition to a paid time off system rather than sick days, personal days and vacation days; (10) reduce the number of employees in Technical Services from 7.4 FTE's to 4.8 FTE's (Full Time Equivalent); (11) reduce postage costs by making greater use of e-mail; and (12) replace cleaning service with a part-time janitor – a cost savings of more than \$14,000/year. A complete copy of the report of Strategic Management can be found on Library's web site

www.laportelibrary.org located under the "About" tab, and is also available for public viewing at the Library's main branch.

- We received information that the total annual cost savings of the recommendations of Strategic Management exceeded \$750,000.
 - We received Ms. Owens' recommendations for restructuring and reorganizing the Library based upon her 9-month long study. Ms. Owens' recommendations were: (1) reduce the Library staff from 73 to 54 employees; (2) eliminate the job classifications of Department Head, Professional II and Page; (3) adjust the salary range for managers to \$45,000 - \$75,000; (4) re-define full time positions as those requiring 30 or more hours each workweek; (5) eliminate compensatory time as of January 1, 2012, with current balances to be carried over with no further accumulation; (6) eliminate personal days off as of January 1, 2012; (7) eliminate shift premium pay as of January 1, 2012; (8) eliminate vacation leave for part-time workers as of January 1, 2012, with current balances required to be used by June 30, 2012; (9) eliminate sick pay for part-time workers as of January 1, 2012, with current balances to be carried over, but with no new accumulation after January 1, 2012; (10) conduct an in-depth study of wages and benefits prior to the submission of the budget for 2013; (11) close the Hanna branch as of December 16, 2011; (12) provide service to Hanna by the Mobile Library; (13) increase operating hours for Union Mills branch by 4 per week; (14) reduce the number of departments from nine to five; (15) combine two points of circulation; (16) create a computer lab; (17) offer severance pay to displaced workers; and (18) offer employee assistance services and advice from unemployment office to displaced workers.
 - We received information that the proposed savings from Ms. Owens' recommendations would be approximately \$610,000/year.
- During these executive sessions we also discussed the change in status of employees who might be laid-off or reassigned if the proposed reorganization was implemented, employees who had resigned, and employees who had been discharged.
 - During these executive sessions we discussed remodeling and restructuring of the physical layout of the main library building.
 - In those executive sessions we also discussed the comparative skills and abilities of Library employees and their status as employees of the Library.
 - In executive session we discussed all of this information in an effort to determine if a consensus existed among Board members, but at no time did we vote upon any recommendation from either Strategic Management or Ms. Owens. We took no final action on these recommendations in executive session.
 - During those executive sessions we discussed alternatives to cutting staff and reorganization, including borrowing money, using the "rainy day" fund, and across the board wage reductions. We discussed these options to determine if a consensus existed among Board members. We did not vote upon or take any final action with regard to these alternatives.

- During those executive sessions we also discussed the issue of closure of the Hanna branch and a consensus was reached that continued Library service would be provided to Hanna even if the branch was ultimately closed.

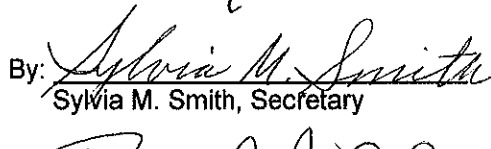
We have been advised that our actions in executive sessions likely went beyond the bounds of what is permitted by the Open Door Law here in Indiana. For those transgressions, we are sorry and we now offer our apologies to the public and to all persons affected by those actions. At the time of those executive session meetings we certainly did not know that we were doing anything wrong. We did not intend, in any manner, to violate any laws of the State of Indiana.

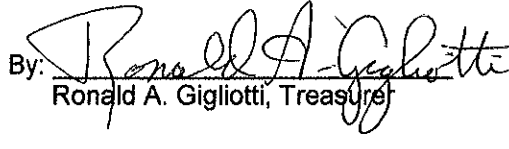
If any members of the public have questions relating to these executive sessions, please present them to us at our next Board meeting now scheduled for December 15, 2011, at 7:00 P.M.

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE
LA PORTE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY**


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