

August 15, 2023

As director of the Quechee/Wilder Libraries in the town of Hartford, I, along with trustees, have been through many fraught budget presentations before ever-changing Selectboards and town managers (which, unfortunately rarely include library users). The complexity is in no small measure due to the fact that Hartford has four libraries for a population of 10,000, and those are a mix of one municipal and three incorporated entities, a distinction that is incompletely understood, if it is understood at all, by municipal office-holders and residents alike. Sadly, but perhaps inevitably, the libraries are somewhat pitted against each other for funds even though for the past several years, there has been a single card library system in town and all four belong to VOKAL and the area One Card library system.

The budgetary piece is without question the most frustrating part of my work and reached a nadir last year when the Selectboard removed funding for the incorporated libraries from the budget and placed it on the warning for town meeting as an individual ballot item without even explaining that the proposed appropriations were for normal operating expenses. Voters overwhelmingly approved the funding after our time and energy-consuming campaign, but the Selectboard's actions conveyed to many that it did not regard library funding as an essential service but an optional one at voters' discretion.

Particularly when funding is locally based and competitive, losing an individual library's distinct character and identity to larger entities that share resources broadly is a deep worry — because like it or not, statistics provide important data points for garnering funds and support.

Here in the Upper Valley, residents have a wealth of choices of places to go for programs as well as for library materials. As we all struggle to provide the multiple formats people now want materials to be available in, we also try to emphasize maintaining thoughtfully curated choices on the shelves and encourage patrons to browse rather than relying solely on what's trending or recommended to them by third parties. We are happy to be a net lender, but it must be said that having recent books in-house rather than borrowed for weeks at a time by another library is essential to our overall project. E-books have their own set of issues well-addressed by others in the Collections

section.

The comments from Lawrence Webster are particularly intriguing, as he suggests New York libraries have managed to retain local identities within impressive systems. Some of my concerns may be exaggerated, but they are real. Much of my career satisfaction has been in building the collections, creating distinctive programming and attracting a strong and diverse immediate community. What I am most interested in now is reconciling the imperative to share with the equally compelling need to maintain our individual identity.

An important note of concurrence: (1) the request for group purchase options for library benefits, especially for health insurance

Finally, as much as I cherish the individual character of our libraries, I value what various larger entities have long meant to the strength and quality of that character. Particularly deep gratitude to the Vermont Humanities Council, the Vermont Department of Libraries, GMLC, and the Vermont Arts Council.

Thank you to all for this Working Group.

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