

October 15, 2020

Dear MCPL Task Force, Library Board members, and MCEE&ED Committee members,

As a former MCPL employee, avid library user, and current Marathon County appointed representative to the WVLS Board, I am writing again to express my sincere concerns over the MCPL Library System Inquiry Task Force process. I have continued to follow the Task Force's work and find the process to be flawed and terribly one-sided.

Please consider the following points as a follow up to my letter of [August 15, 2020](#).

- Library budgets are currently strained due to issues related to the economy and COVID 19. Imminent reductions in revenues at local, county and state levels have potential to impact current library revenues/services for several years to come.
- A migration to a new library system is costly and would only be a lateral move for MCPL. Both systems have functioning catalogs that get the work done. Absent a survey of both SCLS and WVLS libraries addressing specific frustrations with, features, and cost of WVLS V-Cat vs. SCLS LINKcat, it is impossible to accurately assess and compare practical functionality and member library satisfaction.
- Access to UW-Madison's collection is not improved through SCLS membership. As UW-Madison's collection is not included in the South Central Library System's online catalog database, the inter-loan process for these materials is the same whether MCPL is a member of WVLS or SCLS. All libraries in the state have access to materials from academic libraries through the WISCAT interlibrary loan system which is distinctly separate from the online catalogs of public library system consortiums.
- MCPL's communications about WVLS services continue to be ambiguous and inconsistent. While recent letters from MCPL staff enumerate dissatisfaction with WVLS services and leadership, MCPL has indicated for over a decade that "WVLS has provided effective leadership" in its annual report submitted to DPI. This opinion was implicitly reinforced in a November 8, 2019 letter from Director Ralph Illick to WVLS Board President Tom Bobrofsky which stated "[they] are not aware of any service issues that [they] seek to resolve at the present time." If there have not been significant service issues, why is there an investigation at all? MCPL's service goals and unmet service needs have not been articulated. Invitations to meet with the WVLS Board have been turned down. If interpersonal issues are getting in the way of straightforward communication, they should be honestly addressed before subjecting Marathon County taxpayers to a potentially costly and disruptive move.
- MCPL loses influence and opportunities for leadership as a SCLS member. Membership in a larger system means MCPL is in a larger pool of libraries. Contrary to the rhetoric that weighted voting offers greater influence, MCPL would have less of a voice/impact on system services and its influence would be diluted in SCLS. Marathon County appoints seven of the 15 seats on the WVLS Board.
- Implementation of recommendations from the Public Library System Redesign (PLSR) project, a 5-year study of public library systems, is just getting underway. Under direction by the state legislature, and supervision by the gubernatorial appointed Council for Libraries and Network Development, this project will logically and fairly restructure library system services across the state. Making a speculative decision to leave one system for another at this point in PLSR implementation is premature.

I had high hopes for this process to be transparent, thoughtful, and diligent. I hoped for sincere conversations, not monologues. I hoped for a clear definition of desired results based on a strategic plan; data and stories from the public about whether a change in system membership is needed or desired given estimated costs;

spreadsheets on how the extra costs to join SCLS and maintain membership would be paid over the next five years, and what would have to end in order to afford them; and a thorough analysis on why changes cannot happen with the current system. So far, the system membership decision is riding on marketing information provided by the systems absent any guidance articulating MCPL's future service needs, as well as on pronouncements and unproven assumptions that a bigger system provides better service because it offers opportunities for MCPL to more closely align with large libraries. It is a process totally without input from the residents of Marathon County and places the cart prominently before the horse.

Please carefully consider the implications of your decisions in the coming weeks.

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