October 19, 2020

To the MCPL Task Force, MCPL Board and Marathon County Extension, Education and Economic Development Committee,

WVLS employees have had the honor and privilege of working with MCPL staff on all aspects of library service during the six decades WVLS has rented office space in the MCPL Wausau location. A happy consequence of shared office space has been the many professional and personal connections established between MCPL and WVLS employees, including lasting friendships between current and former staff members. Proximity and shared goals have fostered longstanding relationships between WVLS and MCPL based on mutual respect, open and honest communication, and a willingness to work through misunderstandings. WVLS is proud and gratified by the work it has accomplished in partnership with MCPL staff.

MCPL's characterization of the MCPL/WVLS relationship depicted in the letters presented by the MCPL leadership team to the MCPL Task Force last month belies MCPL statements in official documents as well as the cordial rapport other MCPL staff have enjoyed with WVLS. The attempt to portray the WVLS/MCPL relationship in an exhaustively negative light contrasts greatly with the mutual helpfulness and support both MCPL and WVLS staff exchange in their actual day to day interactions.

For example, Rachel Metzler, former MCPL employee and current WVLS ILS and Database Support Specialist, stated:

*MCPL has been an important part of my life. Not only do I have childhood memories of Tom Pease and the reading bathtub, but MCPL was my first professional position in libraries and jump started a life-long passion.*

*Working closely with fine employees such as Kitty Roesler, Chris Luebbe, Mary Stachowiak, and Pat Schmitt early in my career taught me lessons about hard work, excellent patron support and service, and the importance of accurate records.*

*It was hard for me to leave MCPL in 2010 for my first librarian position but I was delighted when life brought me back to working closely with the MCPL team when I took my position at WVLS.*

*I was happy to find that the same MCPL team that taught me important lessons at the beginning, continue to lead our system as committee chairs and members. It has been a joy working with them as we guide the system to more unified sharing and better searchability in our library catalog.*

*It has been an honor to develop relationships with other MCPL employees. Julie Kinney’s leadership on the Databases Advisory Group was valuable during a WVLS database review project. Dan Richter has provided many exciting pieces for the WVLS Newsletter that shine a light on the Children’s team of Taylor Weinfurter and Laura Lawler and the creative, exciting work they do for those they serve. And Laura Damerell also provides enjoyable and valuable insights on interlibrary loan and WISCAT matters. These relationships and others have enhanced my professional life.*

*In the past year or so, where it has felt like WVLS has been under a microscope by this Task Force and the leadership at MCPL, the employees at MCPL have warmly treated WVLS staff with respect. They have not let this potential change affect the time and care they put into their committee work. They have welcomed us into their celebrations and have been sure to share news of their personal lives. Further, I applaud the staff of MCPL for continuing their work, sharing their leadership, and helping to influence V-Cat toward the future.*

*It is hard for me to believe that MCPL wants to leave its leadership behind and move to a system where it will no longer be a resource library. I believe the MCPL staff will be wasted at a library that is in the middle of the pack.*

And, Anne Hamland, WVLS Public Library Services Consultant, shared:

*I have worked with MCPL staff at the Wausau location as well as all the other branches, both in my former role as a public library director and in my current role since 2014 as the WVLS Public Library Services Consultant. Every encounter I have had with MCPL staff has left an indelible mark -- one of passion, expertise, and gratitude.*

*Mary Stachowiak helped me when, as a new director at the Frances L. Simek Memorial Library (Medford,) I needed to learn the intricate steps and guidelines for interlibrary loan and finances.*

*Julie Kinney, Taylor Weinfurter, Laura Lawler and the youth services team are wonderful to work with and valued experts who are excited to share their experiences and knowledge at workshops and WVLS youth services discussions with member libraries. They serve as respected mentors to youth staff and directors across WVLS.*

*Through my work coordinating scholarship and grant opportunities, as well as service programs for youth to adults, I have built relationships with MCPL staff through attendance at conferences, the Youth Services and Development Institute and youth gatherings, and through routine outreach. Every staff member is always thankful for the outreach and support and jump in with both feet to make the most of our networking opportunities. Whenever I put out a call for applications or ask for hosts, I receive invitations from many MCPL locations and staff. I run into former MCPL staff members at conferences and workshops and find emails in my inbox years after they have moved away from the Wausau area. MCPL staff and branch staff are my friends, my colleagues, and passionate brainstorming and pilot project partners.*

*I am thankful for these friendships and indebted to MCPL colleagues for sharing their expertise as it has enriched my professional growth. Not only does MCPL receive value from this partnership, but our libraries also benefit from these relationships as well.*

Additionally, Jamie Matczak, WVLS Continuing Education Consultant, offered:

*Before working at WVLS, I was employed at the Nicolet Federated Library System in Green Bay from 2006-2017. In that time, I met so many amazing people. Some worked on our staff, some worked at member libraries, some at other library systems, and some from other states. There were several friendships that happened immediately, and others took years to cultivate. Either way, I hope to have these friendships for life.*

*Even though I work remotely for WVLS, the occasions that I have been at the office are met with smiles and warm greetings in the hallways with MCPL staff. Staff will comment that they recently liked a training video that I did, or they participated in a webinar. In particular, I have enjoyed working with Mary Stachowiak and Stephanie Martell on matters related to courier. They are communicative, professional, and understanding. Last year at a conference in Vermont, I was able to get to know Heather Bain from the Hatley Branch. Heather received a WVLS scholarship to attend, and we spent a post-conference evening sightseeing, having dinner, and exchanging laughs and stories with the other WVLS scholarship recipients. Dan Richter has been incredible in providing information about MCPL projects and services for the WVLS monthly newsletter. When I speak to Lisa Haessly (Marathon City), Deb Gauerke (Edgar) and Audrey Kohlbeck (Spencer) and others on the phone, I feel like I am talking to friends. Beth Martin, who just retired as a school librarian for the DC Everest School District, has been instrumental as a member of the WVLS Librarians Advisory Committee. I knew Jim Backus, WVLS Trustee and Marathon County Representative, before I started my position at WVLS from meeting him at state conferences.  In 2009, Katie Rosenberg (Wausau Mayor, former MCPL Board Member and former MCPL rep on the WVLS Board) and I spent a month in Morocco, on a small team of five people, as part of a Rotary International Group Study Exchange. I will never forget that experience.*

*There is tremendous talent among the hard working MCPL staff and within the Marathon County library community. I value the relationships that we have built, and I hope they continue to grow.*

Given the collective positive experiences WVLS continues to have with MCPL, we are as perplexed by what was shared in the September 2020 letters as by what was not. There is a glaring contradiction between what MCPL leadership team presented in those letters and what was formally stated in February 2020, when the MCPL Board indicated WVLS provided effective leadership in its 2019 annual report. It is both unfair and premature to use the anecdotal dissatisfaction expressed in the letters as part of the SWOT analysis, absent any opportunity for discussion and resolution following presentation of proper context with which to thoroughly understand their significance when examining all the services WVLS provides to MCPL.

Respectfully,

Marla Sepnafski, Director

WISCONSIN VALLEY LIBRARY SERVICE