



April 26, 2021

Dear Mayor Pandaleon and Members of the Lake Forest City Council:

We are writing about the proposed project to update and expand the library. Gorton values the library as a community partner and resource, maintains a collaborative working relationship with its staff, and strongly believes a vital library is important to our community. It is clear that the significant repair and accessibility updates, which the library proposes, are needed and overdue. Given the historical significance of our own building, we understand the unique challenges of providing services within a historic structure, and wholeheartedly believe that the library should be renovated for today's patrons.

We write, therefore, to express our concern not over the renovation, but over the proposed project scope. While it is important to reimagine our library for the 21st century, the new library should not duplicate programs and services already available at existing institutions in Lake Forest. The library offers comparisons to the libraries of nearby communities, such as Deerfield and Highland Park, as examples of what a library "should be." But these comparisons are of little relevance, as they ignore the significant wealth of resources which our community already enjoys. Simply, the library does not need to become a community center, a teen program office, a place for education or even a hub for arts and culture -- because those already exist in Lake Forest. It is this expansionary aspect of the proposed project to which we object, as it duplicates the existing distinct assets already utilized, generously supported and maintained by the community.

Additional programming at a new library will also come with a cost to Lake Forest taxpayers. The City currently contributes almost \$4.5 million of its tax revenue to the library, over \$2.6m of which is for the salaries and benefits of its employees. Certainly, expanded programming will require either additional employees or outside contractors, and an ever increasing operating budget. It is also worth noting that Gorton does not perceive that a significant unmet demand for programming currently exists in our community. However, if additional programming needs are identified in the future, the City's existing nonprofit organizations, with leaner budgets and without the burden of city-level employee benefits and Illinois pension requirements, will be able to fill that need at a significantly lower cost to the taxpayer.

We hope there can be a way forward where the library can be repaired and updated prudently, while not overstepping its useful footprint here in our community, or damaging other organizations already doing good work. It is for these reasons that Gorton is not in favor of the proposed library project as it stands. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gorton Community Center Board