

WESTCHESTER LIBRARY SYSTEM
Central Library Study Committee Meeting
May 18, 2017

The meeting of the Central Library Study Committee was called to order by Dave Donelson, Chair, at 9:33 AM at WLS Headquarters.

Committee members present: Dave Donelson, Sean Ryan, Edris Scherer

Also present from WLS was: Terry Kirchner

Committee member absent: Susan Morduch

Guests from the Public Library Directors Association (PLDA) and the WLS Board were in attendance.

WLS Executive Director Terry Kirchner welcomed individuals to the meeting and provided a brief introduction to the Central Library Study Committee.

Chair, Dave Donelson, reviewed with PLDA the committee's charge, upcoming meeting dates, and the three core questions that are being explored.

He explained the Central Library Study Committee is in the process of gathering information related to Central Library activities and roles in the Westchester Library System as well as other public library systems throughout New York State. The information will help inform the committee on the overarching question: What should the Central Library be in order to best serve the entire system? The committee may, but is not required to, make a recommendation for future action. Future meetings with invested parties include the Public Library Directors Association (PLDA) – today's meeting; the New York State Library's Division of Library Development (DLD) scheduled for June 8th at 6 PM at WLS Headquarters; the Mount Vernon Public Library (MVPL) and its patrons (in the process of being scheduled for July); and WLS staff scheduled for August 10 at 6 PM at WLS Headquarters. The committee will meet on September 14 at 6 PM at WLS Headquarters to review and discuss the report that will be shared with the full WLS Board at its scheduled 6 PM meeting on September 26. Other meetings may be scheduled as necessary.

The committee is exploring three core questions of the invested parties:

1. What do you think is the purpose of the Central Library?
2. What would you like the function of the Central Library to be now?
3. What do you see as the role of the Central Library in the future?

Committee members will reach out to other public library systems in New York to gather different perspectives on Central Library roles and activities. The emphasis will be on

understanding how the Central Library is funded, how it has evolved and what anticipated changes may occur in the future. The cooperative public library systems to be contacted are the Four County Library System (4CLS), Mid-Hudson Library System, Nassau Library System and the Suffolk Cooperative Library System.

Interim Director, Evania Thompson, Mount Vernon Public Library (MVPL), which is the Central Library of the Westchester Library System, commented that after meeting with the Division of Library Development her understanding is that there were four facts that needed to be brought forward:

1. The Central Library status is a State-created designation
2. DLD is not moving away from the brick and mortar Central Libraries because many systems prefer to have one
3. DLD is willing to guide the Mount Vernon Public Library through its certification process
4. MVPL was not at fault for the loss of NYS Central Library funding in the past. The library was caught in a battle between the former mayor and city council.

Ms. Thompson also noted that she objected to the Central Library Study Committee's list of questions distributed to PLDA prior to the meeting. She noted that none of the questions addressed the issue of racism that was raised by a guest speaker during the March 28, 2017, WLS Board meeting. Ms. Thompson noted that only two of the questions distributed were of importance and worthy of discussion:

- Have you experienced any problems specific to the designation of Mount Vernon Public Library as the Central Library?
- How can the Central Library better serve Westchester?

Ms. Thompson also noted that the MVPL was the only beacon of excellence currently available in the City of Mount Vernon and that its status as the Central Library serves as an important point of pride for the library and the community.

Mr. Donelson thanked Ms. Thompson for her remarks and invited the PLDA membership to join in the discussion by asking a series of questions that relate to the committee's mission. He reminded the group that this discussion is not intended as an investigation of the Mount Vernon Public Library. Its focus is to explore what an ideal Central Library of the Westchester Library System would look like.

Question: Are patrons a factor in discussion of the Central Library?

Answers:

- Patrons have no clue about what the Central Library is. There is no notion of a Central Library by patrons. The Central Library is a passé concept.

- Bricks and mortar Central Library concept dates back to a different time and era when physical libraries were the guardians and warehouses of books. There is some concern that DLD considers the need for physical Central Libraries as non-negotiable.
- For patrons who might visit the Central Library, local convenience, travel time related to traffic and geography of Westchester County and the availability of public transportation options are concern.
- Member libraries are marketing themselves as the first stop for patrons. Libraries are trying to build their own identities, rather than as branches of WLS or the Central Library.

Question: What types of needs do Central Library funds fill now?

Answers:

- Purchasing of digital content shareable by all member libraries allows for access, experimentation and equitable learning opportunities.
- PLDA and WLS have been excellent stewards of the funds.

Question: What resources and components of the Central Library are most important to your library/patrons?

Answers:

- Floating foreign language collections.
- Access to backlist titles and older materials, many of which are currently shelved at MVPL.
- Housing books and materials at other locations besides MVPL is not an issue due to the delivery system. From the patron's perspective, if it's not housed at a local member library, it doesn't matter where it's housed.
- It is helpful to have the satellite language collections because they allow for shelf browsing. This can be very helpful with non-Roman character languages that are difficult to search in the online catalog.
- It's not always easy for an individual library to make the case for hosting a satellite language collection. Doing so requires financial, staffing and space allocation commitments by the library, which is especially difficult to make if the language collected is not strongly reflected within the community served.

Question: Should WLS provide training using Central Library funds?

Answers:

- It's an appropriate use of funds, especially now that there are continuing education requirements for renewing public library certification.

Question: How do you feel about possibly moving the Central Library designation to another member library?

Answers:

- The Yonkers Public Library (YPL) trustees have expressed potential interest in the Central Library role, but there has only been general discussion at this point.
- Put emphasis on the digital Central Library instead.
- The Central Library designation could be on a cycle tied in with the Plan of Service every 5 years.
- The RFP idea was interesting. As member libraries, there is an obligation to go out to bid for large financial purchases – the RFP approach follows this practice.
- Concern that MVPL perceives it is experiencing racism within WLS and PLDA.
- In terms of visiting MVPL, the general concern is about finding a parking spot and not that it's unsafe to travel to the City of Mount Vernon.
- Criteria for a high functioning Central Library is pretty clear:
 - Effectively spending the Central Library funds allocated to it.
 - Meeting the collection development/management goals established and having the staffing resources willing and able to support these collection development/management activities.
 - Materials added to the collection in a timely manner and correctly added to the online catalog for tracking (using Item Type codes).
 - Fulfilling ILL requests in a timely manner.
 - Good access by public transportation.
 - Robust hours of operation.

Question: Have you experienced any problems specific to the designation of MVPL as the Central Library?**Answers:**

- Concern for items not being filled despite MVPL's responsibility is a repository. The catalog says the item is available and on the shelf, but staff says it's not there.
- Customer service complaints about MVPL. Some patrons have reported that they would rather have books delivered to another library than getting them at their home library (MVPL). This means nearby libraries have had to absorb the financial costs of also supporting the MVPL patrons who prefer to use other libraries rather than their home library (MVPL).
- Waiting for holds from MVPL is frustrating. When a member library followed up with MVPL, the items were still on the shelf and had not been pulled for delivery. [Ms. Thompson noted that she had recently initiated staffing changes to address the ILL concerns that have been expressed.]

Question: How can the Central Library better serve Westchester?**Answers:**

- Focus on digital and traveling collections.
- Be accessible to the entire county.

- Educate member library staff so they know and understand the Central Library role better.
- Better market the role of Central Library to increase awareness of resources and services.
- Subject requests. It's been a long time since staff at other member libraries has gotten a positive response for these types of requests.
- Would MVPL be an even better local library if it didn't have to also meet the obligations of being a Central Library? Is the work exerted by MVPL to add, process and deliver materials actually worth the effort to it?
- Important to consider the patrons' context:
 - Patrons are expecting more access and discoverability.
 - Patrons just want the materials and don't care where they are.
 - Having a Digital Central Library promotes our local services and allows for better local marketing of services.

The discussion with PLDA concluded at 10:25 AM. The committee members took a break and reconvened at 10:40 AM to see if there were any outstanding questions related to the PLDA discussion or the upcoming committee activities. No outstanding questions were noted and the meeting was adjourned at 10:45 AM.