

October 2, 2020

Supervisor Burdick | Board Members Bittker, Calves, Carr, Galligan |
Comptroller Zambrano
Town of Bedford
321 Bedford Road
Bedford Hills, NY 10507



Dear Supervisor Burdick, Town Board Members, and Mr. Zambrano,

We hope this letter finds you and your families well. The COVID-19 pandemic has tasked you with managing unprecedented challenges to the physical and economic health of the Town's residents, employees and businesses, and the stability of Town finances. Thank you for your continued good work.

Katonah Village Library ("KVL," "the Library") has attached for your consideration its proposed 2021 "Pandemic-Era" Operating Budget. Per Mr. Zambrano's guidance, we have outlined a 0% increase from the Town's prior-year contribution to KVL of \$636K. We also include a budget for the "post-pandemic" period that models the funding mix – reflecting a Town contribution of \$831K -- needed to restore KVL to "full service" on a sustainable basis. This is all consistent with our presentation to the Town Board at the February 4th work session. If nothing else, the pandemic has thrown KVL's chronic underfunding into sharp relief.

Pandemic's Impact on KVL Patron Services

Since the COVID-instigated shutdown of the Library on March 13th, KVL's Director and librarians have exploited every opportunity to deliver excellent patron services and programs that satisfy the strict safety protocols issued by New York State and the American Library Association. A few examples:

- **Books/Materials.** Starting April 6th, Director Mary Kane began delivering books to senior citizens at their homes. | On June 15th, KVL began offering patrons contact-free pickup of pre-packed books and materials from the main entrance foyer. | Since July 20th, KVL has offered by-appointment, in-building, 30-minute browsing sessions that allow five patrons at a time to select and check-out materials, and/or use its computers and printer. (In response to patrons' requests, KVL will soon be expanding the hours of its contact-free pickup and by-appointment browsing to include Wednesday evenings.)
- **Professional Assistance.** Since March 23rd, a KVL reference librarian answers all patron phone calls Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. | Since March 21st, patrons can dial a special number to receive one-on-one "tech help" from the Library's IT Assistant.
- **Programming.** *Just ten days after the shutdown*, KVL librarians pivoted to their first remote "Zoom"-delivered program, the first in a launch of a 7-day/week Zoom programming schedule that was at full tilt while virtually every other library in the area remained out of action. This herculean feat did not go unnoticed: KVL librarian Michael Robin was invited to present at the Connecticut State Library's Department of Library Development panel on digital programming. KVL has delivered more than 300 remote programs to kids, teens, and adults since the start of the pandemic. **[Please see Appendix for highlights!]**

Pandemic's Impact on KVL Finances

In 2020. When COVID shut down the Library in mid-March, we cancelled our three in-person fundraising events (i.e., June and November fundraisers, October Book Sale), which forfeited an estimated \$92K in revenue. The

shutdown will also eliminate another \$48K of anticipated 2020 revenue from overdue fines, tutors' fees, and rental income from meeting rooms and art-display space. Our Annual Appeal campaign, which is budgeted to net \$72K in revenue, will be deployed as planned in October.

Given our projections for KVL's revenue declines and the near-total absence of patrons in the building for the foreseeable future, KVL made deep staffing cuts in mid-April. That action will reduce our core personnel expenses by an estimated \$137K for the remainder of 2020. The Library will still face a deficit of \$50-\$70K by year's end, all of which will be funded from our capital reserve – the third consecutive year we'll have had to make such a transfer.

For 2021. Our proposed budget projects KVL's COVID-era operations will continue through most or all of next year – i.e., curbside pickup of materials, “Zoom” delivery of programs, 30-minute by-appointment browsing sessions, and an Annual Appeal campaign. Ironically, *as KVL continues in its much-diminished operating parameters for the full twelve months of 2021*, the Town's current \$636K in funding is adequate.

The After Times: Looking to 2022 (and Beyond). KVL is Bedford's flagship library. When the pandemic ends, we all want it to return quickly to its robust levels of operation. When we met with you in February, we estimated the Town's current \$636K in annual funding would need to increase to \$831K in order to sustain KVL's “full service” operations. That analysis remains true. The “party” fundraising KVL began in 2010 -- as a short-term remedy to what it assumed to be a short-term funding crisis -- has flowed, and ebbed, then predictably sputtered. “Event fundraising” and the use of our capital reserves to cover core operating expenses are untenable options for KVL. Instead, we need to go back to what works: restoring the roughly “85% Town/15% KVL” funding mix that had been the norm prior to the 2010 cuts. Absent that, KVL cannot return to the volume and variety of services it has provided historically.

How We Use our Capital Reserves. Presently, we have begun the process for construction of an ADA-compliant restroom on the library's main floor, and installation of a modern, energy-efficient, virus-filtering HVAC system – all of which will be funded from our capital reserve. Charged with the prudent maintenance and patron-centric enhancements of a c.1930 18K-square-foot property valued at \$6.4 million, the KVL Board of Trustees would be irresponsible to continue to plunder our capital reserves to cover chronic operating deficits. Consequently, the Board unanimously agreed to draft a policy resolution prohibiting further use of KVL's capital reserves to fund chronic operating deficits.

We recognize and appreciate the complexities of balancing the Town's competing priorities. However, KVL has been funded at or below 2010 levels for the past decade. In essence, we have been aggressively de-prioritized even as the Town's General Fund (and fund balance) has grown steadily. The COVID pandemic has forced us to hit the “Pause” button. We now have the opportunity to hit “Reset” as well. We ask that a working group, including Town Board members and Comptroller Zambrano, engage with us as soon as possible.

In the meantime, thank you for your time in considering our proposed 2021 budget and funding request. Please contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

Mary Kane
Director
mkane@wlsmail.org

Virginia Lanigan
President, Board of Trustees
virginia@laniganconsulting.com

Michael Dwyer
Co-Treasurer, Board of Trustees
mmdwyr@yahoo.com

APPENDIX: Katonah Village Library Programming Highlights Since Start of Pandemic

Our Children's Librarian (Claudia Uccellani) and Young Adult Librarian (Michael Robin) kept Bedford children and teens busy this summer!

- A total of 180 kids enrolled in Katonah Library's Summer Reading Program: 138 elementary school age kids and 42 preschoolers. The children in Grades K – 5 completed 78,000 minutes of reading and the preschoolers completed 720 early literacy activities. Twenty-eight programs were held with 450 patrons participating. Activities included weekly story times, two weekly craft sessions, two book discussions, two specials programs, and two outside performers.
- The Library's weekly 'Grab and Go' bags were popular with both children and parents. Each Monday, new bags with craft supplies and instructions were put in the vestibule for families to pick up; 400 bags were distributed.
- The Children's Room also offered two events in the community for families to enjoy. The first one was a StoryWalk in collaboration with the Katonah Chamber of Commerce. Over 20 businesses in town participated. The second was a Fairytale Scavenger Hunt in keeping with the summer reading theme, *Imagine Your Story*. The materials for this program were made available in the vestibule for families to pick up and enjoy on their own.
- 55 Summertime programs were offered for Young Adults, with 306 Young Adults in attendance. Fifteen Live programs were offered (outside, with social distancing) with 84 participants.
- Open Mic, a program for patrons of all ages, proved one of the summer's most popular programs, with 413 in attendance. The Chamber of Commerce has booked two of the Library's Open Mic performers for Katonah Night and is working collaboratively with our librarian on an Open Mic performance in the town gazebo.

###