



Blauvelt Free Library
541 Western Highway
Blauvelt, New York 10913-1527

March 6, 2020

ATTN: All Community Members

RE: STATEMENT on REDISTRICTING

Why the Blauvelt Free Library Opposes the Move to Consolidate

In January of 2019, three of the five public libraries within the *South Orangetown Central School District* approached the Orangetown Town Council with a proposal to consolidate their library operations into a single organization, wherein the existing facilities would serve as branches with managers reporting to an Executive Director. By consolidating, the libraries would become a Special District, which would require Orangetown residents to vote on their annual budget in place of the current arrangement, which has library administrators appear before the Town Council to request funding. The *Dennis P. McHugh Library* in Piermont, which belongs to the same school district, became a Special District library around 2001, and their Board of Trustees has no desire to change that status, as their residents already vote on their budget.

At the time, Supervisor, Chris Day, supported their agenda, which would require rebranding – a new name, website, and stationery – and combining payroll, insurance, staffing, housekeeping, bookkeeping and other common functions with a hoped-for cost-savings. The *Blauvelt Free Library* strongly opposed the plan and did not join trustees from the Orangeburg, Palisades and Tappan Libraries in their presentation before the Town Council on Tuesday, June 11, 2019 when they asked the town to contribute \$5,000 to the cost of a \$20,000 study by a Newburgh-based company called *Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress*. The study was completed in December of 2019 and presented to the Town Council on December 3, 2019. *Pattern for Progress* concluded that a unified district would reduce costs, improve services, and help stabilize finances. These findings contradict what the libraries were told when they consulted with a Civil Service expert in an effort to better understand what adopting that model of service would mean. Furthermore, we believe that many of the purported savings forecast by the *Pattern for Progress* study could be explored on an ongoing basis without the considerable expense engendered by a formal consolidation.

On July 18, 2018, representatives of the *Blauvelt Free Library* met with trustees and directors of the other SOCS D libraries for a presentation by Geoff Kirkpatrick, Chair of the New York Library Association (NYLA) Civil Service Task Force, who advised us on the expense of moving to such a model. He estimated that the operating budget for the consolidated group would need to increase by 20% owing to higher administrative costs, the greatest percentage going toward pensions and the creation of new staff positions such as a Business Manager and Human Resources Administrator. In addition, there is no guarantee that libraries would not face closure or financial concerns. The new Regional Board could still decide to close a library branch or cut funding, drawing from one library's reserves to supplement another's. Funding would be pooled, which would benefit some communities and hinder others. Any assets (building, cash reserves, investments) and liabilities (loans, mortgages, lines of credit, outstanding bills) currently held by individual libraries would be shared among the group.

The *Blauvelt Free Library* opposes the mandatory adoption of a Civil Service model, because it would make operation of the library a government entity, not a stand-alone non-profit. Staff positions would be created by the County and strip away any local autonomy. Tightly defined descriptions assigned to job titles provided by Civil Service regulations can foster a restrictive climate where employees are rewarded for longevity over performance and productivity. At the *Blauvelt Free Library*, treating our patrons with kindness and personalized service is paramount. Our work ethic is driven by the needs of our community, which includes the residents of our hamlet, as well as every person who walks through the door.

Civil Service restrictions prevent libraries from hiring and retaining personnel for their attitudes, diverse skill sets and commitment by limiting the pool of choices to those who test well and reside in New York State. Civil Service policy stipulates that staff be shared among the newly consolidated library facilities, with employees on call to report to wherever they are needed owing to absent staff or following the request for a particular set of skills in a given location. The *Blauvelt Free Library* has always made it their mandate to share services and personnel in the spirit of collaborative enterprise. Our Public Relations department has generated logos, brochures and signage for a broad spectrum of programs and events – for our sister libraries, the library system, and town organizations, all free of charge. We have also lent personnel for tech support, and on one occasion to provide the muscle needed to move furniture at the *Orangeburg Library*. One of our staff employs his decommissioned ambulance to help libraries transport bulky items. This type of assistance is only possible because we are able to hire people who think outside the box – something not possible under Civil Service.

Our Children’s Departments have always collaborated on services and programs with particular emphasis placed on the annual *Summer Reading Club*. For the past nine years, the *Blauvelt Free Library* has created and produced a “Big Brochure,” which showcases programming for all five SOCS D libraries – playfully dubbed “The Mighty Five Libraries” – which is wildly popular with families. Last year, our Adult Programming departments managed costs by co-sponsoring four events – a Korean culture night, a Camp Shanks big band tribute, a civil rights documentary, and *South Orangetown Day* at the Manse barn in Tappan.

All Orangetown libraries already belong to a 46-member consortium – the *Ramapo Catskill Library System* (RCLS), which connects 17 libraries in Rockland County with member libraries in Orange, Sullivan and Ulster Counties. The System enables reciprocal borrowing and delivery from one library to the next, obtains discounts through group purchasing of costly databases, and provides network services that link the collective holdings of member libraries in an *Online Public Access Catalog* (OPAC) for patrons, and circulation management software for staff. When we want the System to explore other cost-savings measures, we need only ask.

The *Blauvelt Free Library* has always been fiscally responsible and has worked closely with the Town Council to balance their financial needs with regard to the fiscal constraints of every budget cycle. The library’s recent two-year renovation was financed exclusively through reserve funds acquired over decades of prudent stewardship and careful planning. As community members who care about all libraries, Blauvelt’s Board members and Director are concerned that once the consolidation initiative is set in motion it cannot be undone. There is also the very real concern that a consolidated budget without Town Council oversight would override the tax cap and burden taxpayers. The process could result in the closure of existing libraries and negatively impact their staff’s ability to meet the essential needs of their patrons and communities.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Grunberg', written in a cursive style.

Laura Grunberg
DIRECTOR *Blauvelt Free Library*