

**Lancaster County  
Public Library  
Task Force  
Final Report  
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## **Foreword**

The Lancaster County Public Library Task Force has spent the last nine months interviewing and surveying the many partners involved in the library affairs of Lancaster County. We have met with the System Board, Library Directors and library staff. In addition, we have travelled to four different counties to learn what others are doing.

What we have learned is that there is no one model which could be held out as a clear example for replication. What we have also seen is the extraordinary commitment by Lancaster County libraries to provide services in a very difficult economic climate.

There is no question that stable funding is a crucial component and one that must be continually addressed to insure the future of the libraries in our community.

What is less clear is what the roadmap to the future of our libraries should look like. At times it has been difficult to get clear and concise answers in order to form a collective consensus. It almost seems that those with the most to gain or lose have staked their hopes on a magic pill which could prepare us for the next generation of libraries.

It is our collective opinion that the System, member libraries and local governing boards are not always on the same page or share the same visions for the future. There is also a real difference among member libraries in both need and level of service required due to the diversity of these libraries and the communities they serve.

Fortunately, Lancaster County has provided us with a hope and method to move us forward. The Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan is a model that has both achieved success and provided a venue to develop a collective vision for what our community should look like in the next twenty years. With this as a guide post, we might yet successfully meet our future.

### **Commissioners' Task Force on Lancaster County Libraries**

Purpose: Review current practices of system and public libraries and make recommendations to the County Commissioners for potential improvements to the System as well as to member libraries.

### **Background**

#### A Brief Chronology of the Library System of Lancaster County Presented for the Public Libraries Task Force Terry Kauffman, Chair

The Library System of Lancaster County is a Federated System with 14 member libraries, three branches and a bookmobile, which serves 502,370 residents. Currently, County funding makes up about 85 % of the system's operating budget with 10% coming from the State and the rest from Federal, State and Local grants and some from local donations.

1969-By a Commissioner's Resolution No. 6, February 1969, the County agreed to make the Library System its agent of providing centralized services to the entire County in exchange for support. The Lancaster Public Library was designated to operate the Library System in conjunction with operating the District Center Library at its Duke Street Location. The Executive Director of the Lancaster Public Library, the District Administrator and the System Administrator were all vested in one professional position governed by one Board.

1987-A Board of Citizens petitioned the County to establish a separate Board and Governance organization to oversee System Services and provide a well-coordinated countywide services and cooperative programs to assist member libraries in meeting the diverse needs of its community residents.

1997-By a Commissioner's Resolution, the County agreed to fund the independent Library System at a higher level of funding, hire a System Administrator and staff separate from the District Library Center and the Lancaster Public Library which retained the District designation and became the largest Federated member of the System. Program and Facility support for System Services of IT, Collection Processing, Youth, PR, Business Information, Administrative services and the Bookmobile were paid for by the county by renting space in the LPL Duke Street building and additional County office space on East King Street while the Bookmobile was parked at another County paid space.

1999- At the request of the member libraries, the Library System contracted with Commonwealth Libraries and the District Library Center to assume the District Designation for the provision of all centralized services, thereby establishing one organization to deal with countywide issues and consolidating the System and the District.

2002- The restructuring arrangement proved to be untenable and in November of 2002 the agreement for consolidation was ended. The System Board resigned and in effect disbanded the Library System. An interim System Board was appointed by the County made up of the Board President of each member library who retained the System Staff and hired an interim System Administrator.

2003-In October of 2003, the System Board hired a permanent System Administrator and signed a ten year lease on the Greenfield Offices thereby providing a stable environment for the provision of system services.

2008-By contract with Commonwealth Libraries and at the request of the member libraries, the Library System embarked on a pilot project in August, 2008 to consolidate more District Services with the System by incorporating the District Consultant position into the System Administrator position thereby combining administrative functions. The Governor's Advisory Council of Pennsylvania has extended this pilot for three years until 2012. At the same time, Commonwealth Libraries is suggesting forming new regional districts comprised of multiple Districts and Counties in order to provide efficiencies for State and County Library services.

#### Typical County Library Systems in Pennsylvania

(A) *A Federated Library System:* Local libraries which have agreed to participate in a county, township, or school district public library system (and meet standards) from which some or most of its financial support is derived in the form of money, library

materials, personnel or services. Each member library retains its own Board of Governance and is an independent non-profit agency, with a contract with each municipality in its service area for the provision of library services to citizens in that service area registered with Commonwealth Libraries.

(B) *A Consolidated Library System*: Is usually a one County system which has one Board of Governance for the entire service area and is responsible to fund all outlets (branches) for service in the entire county. The System usually consists of a main library with many outlets spread over the county service area. The System offers centralized services for all the outlets and is charged with a funding a standard level of service through-out the System.

### **What We Heard**

- "Who's in charge?" The Lancaster County Library System needs to speak with one voice.
- Stable, predictable funding is absolutely necessary.
- Two-way communication between County Commissioners and the Library System Board must be improved
- Local municipalities, school districts, and residents should be resources for additional financial support.
- An advocacy organization to promote Lancaster County Libraries should be developed
- The state needs to relax some requirements since there are currently insufficient funds to meet regulations
- The Library System should be defined as a source of essential support services to local libraries. The most commonly cited services are Information Technology and Collection Development Technical Services.
- Some library directors are reluctant to be outspoken in their cooperation with the Task Force because history has caused them to fear future retribution.
- Some library directors don't believe that the System is currently managing resources wisely
- Some library directors do not believe that, in the current funding climate, reductions in system operations have equitably matched staff and operational cutbacks at local libraries
- Some library directors are not confident that State and County funds are allocated appropriately or fairly among member libraries.

### **Input from surrounding county library systems (Berks, Chester, Dauphin, York)**

- Berks and Chester Systems are departments of the county.
- Access to county resources has a positive effect (county solicitor, HR department, county controller, maintenance, and health care/disability coverage).
- Disadvantages include slow processing for the purchasing department, hiring freezes, etc. that apply to the county also apply to the libraries.
- Dauphin County is the only consolidated system, responsible for 8 branches. The remaining counties are federated. Dauphin feels the benefits of consolidation outweigh those of a federation.

- Chester, Dauphin and York counties are financially supported by a dedicated library tax. These range from .10 to a .233 millage.
- Each of the four county systems is led by an At Large Citizen Board.
  - Berks County is appointed by the County Commissioners with system input
  - Chester has a 7 member plus one emeritus board
  - In Dauphin, the Commissioners appoint 5 members and a nominating committee recruits the rest
  - Dauphin also recruits community members to serve on system board committees with senior staff liaisons to the committees
  - York stresses the need for board members with areas of expertise that benefit all their libraries, thus a citizen board as opposed to strictly geographic representation.
- Member libraries are represented by Advisory Councils/Boards that meet with and interact closely with the system boards.
- The facilities for county library systems vary. Berks and Chester are provided by the county. Dauphin and York Systems share the Library buildings. Maintenance and shared resources are advantages to both. The negative is not being able to positively influence decisions that are made that might be detrimental to library services.

#### Recommendations

- **On or before October 1, 2010** the County Commissioners must undertake a strategic planning process related to libraries in Lancaster County. This study should be funded by a Commissioner grant and facilitated by an independent team of impartial representatives. This Strategic Planning process should evaluate all aspects of library services in Lancaster County, but should specifically review and address:
  - Whether the current facility occupied by the Library System of Lancaster County is appropriate and/or whether other options are available, specifically in the County of Lancaster offices at 150 North Queen Street.
  - Whether the Administrator of the Library System of Lancaster County should remain an employee of the System and accountable to the System Board, or should become a County employee accountable to the County Commissioners.
- **By December 1, 2010**, the County Commissioners must restructure and reappoint the Library System Board to consist of a seven-member "citizen" board, whereby individual board members do not have an affiliation with a local library, but rather represent all Lancaster County libraries. Board appointments until 2013 must be selected and appointed by the County Commissioners. After 2013, County Commissioners and the standing System board should collaborate to define the future nominating process.
- **Upon their appointment**, the new System Board, in conjunction with the Library Directors Council, should immediately initiate a process to align the System funding formula (distribution of state aid to member libraries) with the outcomes of the aforementioned strategic planning process to ensure that desirable strategic objectives are matched with financial incentives.
- **By October 1, 2010** the System Board and the Library Directors Council must collaborate to define a process to improve communication between the System and library directors, and the System Board must assign accountability for this improvement to the System Administrator.

- **By January 1, 2011**, the new System Board and the Library Directors Council must collaborate to:
  - define the essential System services that are critical to the operation of every member library.
  - develop a menu of additional System services available to member libraries at an additional fee to support needs specific to their local community.
- **During the 2011-2012 legislative sessions**, the new System Board and the Library Directors Council should collaborate, in conjunction with Senator Smucker and Representative Sturla, to develop a group for the purposes of advocating at the local and state level for:
  - Stronger partnerships between member libraries and school districts, with the goal of identifying new sources of funds/education dollars, collaborative purchasing of books and other library materials, sharing of information for reference and resource materials, shared librarians, and similar initiatives.
  - Legislative reform, particularly
    - Assuming public libraries are to remain under the Department of Education they should be funded at equal levels to other educational institutions. As an alternative, the Department of Education should establish a line item for public library funding.
    - Seek legislation to move the responsibility to provide Public Library service to the jurisdiction of the respective communities of the State, i.e. County, City, Borough, Townships and Towns.
    - Relax state requirements, especially during economic down-times that affect not only local governments but the state as well.
    - The formula for the state allocation of funds should be reevaluated to allow for a more equitable allocation of state funds.
    - Seek legislation to allow options for municipalities and counties to generate more revenue for libraries by amending their respective codes to allow for local flexibility.
- **By January 1, 2011**, The new System Board should seek outside firms for fundraising, corporate sponsorships, and grant writing & application to provide additional new funds for all county libraries without eroding the current base of community financial support for any individual local library.
- **Beginning in 2011**, the new System Board and local library boards should consider user fees for some services.