The Politics of Library District Initiatives

A Presentation for the NYLA 2012 Convention

November 9, 2012
Conducted by Libby Post
Who You’re Learning With

• Libby Post, President/CEO of Communication Services
• Work with libraries in NY and NJ on branding and building referendums, budget votes and charter changes
• Train library directors and library boards on how to run successful campaigns
Public Library Clients

- Albany Public Library
- Buffalo & Erie County PL
- Canajoharie Library
- Diver Library
- Elting Memorial Library
- Fairport Public Library
- Finkelstein Memorial Library
- Gold Coast Public Library
- Goshen Public Library
- Grinnell Library Association
- Highland Public Library
- Hudson Association Library
- Irondequoit Public Library
- Jervis Public Library
- Lewisboro Library
- Long Lake Library
- Mahopac Public Library
- Penn Yan Public Library
- Pawling Library
- RCS Community Library
- Saugerties Public Library
- Schuylerville Public Library
- Stone Ridge Public Library
- Wallkill Public Library
- White Plains Public Library
- Wood Library
- Woodstock Public Library
Library System Training

- Division of Library Development, NYSED
- Mid-Hudson Library System
- Mid-York Library System
- Mohawk Valley Library System
- Monroe County Library System
- Nassau Library System
- New York Library Association
- New Jersey Library Association
- NIOGA Library System
- North Country Library System
- Onondaga County Public Library System
- Palmer Institute for Public Library Org. and Mgt.
- Pioneer Library System
- Ramapo Catskill Library System
- Suffolk Cooperative Library System
- Upper Hudson Library System
- Westchester Library System
What Will Be Discussed Today

• What your options are
• Why you may want to consider a public library district
• What steps you’ll need to take
• What connections you’ll need to make
Different Types of Libraries

• Municipal Library—205
  – Trustees are appointed by local municipality
  – Funded by government entity (majority)
  – Funded through public vote (minority)
    • Tax collected by municipality

• School District Public Library—148
  – Trustees are elected
  – Funded through public vote
    • Tax collected by school district
Different Types of Libraries

• Special Leg. District Public Library—48
  – Trustees are elected
  – Funded through public vote
    • Tax collected by local government entity

• Association Library—357
  – Trustees are either appointed or elected
  – Funding varies
    • Annual budget votes (minority)
    • Depend on local funds (majority)

• Other-9
Situation at Hand

• Association and Municipal libraries should begin researching their district options
• Having a renewable, reliable community based funding stream makes living within your own tax cap much easier
• Living within a municipality’s tax cap means you have to compete for ever shrinking resources
Where Do You Get Your Funding?

• Fines and fees
• Private donations
• Endowments
• In-kind services
• Grants

• Local Aid and Public Tax Dollars
  – Direct tax levy from library funding district votes
  – Contracts and appropriations from local municipalities and school districts
    • Dependent on financial status of those entities
  – Budget propositions through municipalities and school districts
  – State Aid
What Is a Public Library District?

• Any public library that
  – Obtains a substantial amount (60% or higher) of its funding through a direct public vote
  – Has a Board of Trustees that is publicly elected by eligible voters within the library’s service area
Benefits of a Public Library District

- Predictable funding stream
- Enables library to secure additional tax support and expand its tax base
- Potential to include unserved areas
- Potential to bond for capital projects
- Increases the library’s
  - Autonomy
  - Accountability
  - Community ownership
Is It Worth the Risk?

- Over 90% of public library budgets are approved by voters each year.
- Approval rates for creating new public library districts exceeds 50%.
- Per capita support for libraries with a public vote on their budgets is twice as high as those that depend on direct appropriations.
Types of Funding Districts

• School District Public Library
• Special Legislative District Public Library
• Both live within their own tax caps
School District Public Library

- Service area uses the same boundaries as the school district
- Created by school district voters
- School District is taxing agent
- Library and Library Board function independently of school district
- Elected trustees provide “representation” for taxpayers
- Potential to increase tax base and expand library’s programs and services
School District Public Library

- Opportunity to bond for capital projects, place building referendums on the ballot
- Once established, library sets time and place for any and all elections
- Simple process for increasing funding through yearly budget votes
- More stabilized funding
Steps to a School District Public Library

• Board makes decision to move forward and sets timeline

• Need 25 signatures of school district residents on a petition filed with the school district calling for the establishment and funding of the library

• Need 25 signatures or 2% of the votes cast in the last school district vote (whichever is greater) on petitions to nominate trustees
Steps to a School District Public Library

- Work with the school board to schedule the election
- Conduct an educational campaign on why and how much
- Hold vote
Steps to a School District Public Library

• Certify and announce vote results
• If the voters say yes, trustees take office and apply for charter
• Old library is dissolved, all assets are transferred
• School district collects taxes for new library
Steps to a School District Public Library

• Funding remains the same until board places new budget before voters
• Library board sets time and place of future board elections and budget votes
• Library is now part of the Civil Service system and must abide by municipal and state purchasing rules and regs
## Timeline for School District Public Library

- 12 month timeline culminating with a May 2011 vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board reaches a consensus and decides to move ahead</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>5/10-6/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach out to stakeholders, municipal/community leaders for support</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>6/10-9/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with school district on petition requirements</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>9/10-10/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branding, education/advocacy campaigns</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>10/10-5/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect petition signatures</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>10/10-12/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Timeline for School District Public Library

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Branding, education/advocacy campaigns</td>
<td>continuous</td>
<td>10/10-5/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petitions verified and filed with school board</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>1/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect trustee petition signatures</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>1/11-2/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election held to create district</td>
<td>1 Day</td>
<td>5/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New board applies for charter, old library dissolved and assets transferred</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>6/11-9/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First taxes collected for new district</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>9/11</td>
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Special Legislative District Public Library

• Service area is determined by existing library board or interested community group in conjunction with the New York State Library and the approval of the Board of Regents
• Based on present patron base and/or unserved neighboring areas
• Municipality is taxing agent
• State enabling legislation includes local election to establish and fund a new library
  – Specifies service area and election process
Special Legislative District Public Library

- Ability to bond for capital projects
- Elected trustees provide “representation” for taxpayers
Steps to a Special Legislative District Public Library

• Board passes resolution to pursue Special Legislative District Public Library status
• Sets timeline
• Work with local officials, board of elections, library system and state library to facilitate process
• Board defines service area and establishes trustee election process
Steps to a Special Legislative District Public Library

• Work with one of their state legislators to sponsor and draft appropriate enabling legislation
  – “Home rule” requirements determined
    • Would come from local municipalities
• Bill introduced, co-sponsors recruited
• After passage, local election is scheduled to create district, elect trustees and approve initial budget
Steps to a Special Legislative District Public Library

• Candidates for trustees must petition and collect at least 25 signatures from qualified voters of the district to be placed on the ballot
• Conduct an education campaign on why and how much
• Hold vote
Steps to a Special Legislative District Public Library

• Certify and announce vote results
• If the voters say yes, trustees take office and apply for charter
• Dissolve old library and transfer assets
• Municipality collects taxes for new library as approved by voters
Steps to a Special Legislative District Public Library

• Funding remains the same until board places new budget before voters
• Library board sets time and place of future board elections and budget votes, if not designated in legislation
• Library is now part of the Civil Service system and must abide by municipal and state purchasing rules and regs
Common Elements of Legislation

• Section 1. Creation of library district
  – Designates the official service area and official name of the district

• Section 2. Election
  – Process for scheduling local election to create and fund the district
  – Process for nominating candidates for the board and specifics of how election will be held
Common Elements of Legislation

• Section 3. Organization and Structure
  – Sets board terms
  – Process for establishing initial terms for trustees

• Section 4. Finances
  – Budget Vote Process
  – Tax Collections
  – Bonding Options
  – Handling of Finances
Common Elements of Legislation

• Section 5. Charter, Commencement of operations, transfer of property, employees and dissolution
  – Covers transfer of assets
  – Ensures that staff can continue with same salary and benefits including State Retirement
  – Ensures the library’s ability to dissolve old library through its legislations
Common Elements of Legislation

• Section 6. Ad valorem levy
  – Authorizes tax collections for the district to be based on value of property within the district

• Section 7 Education Law
  – Specifies that the new district will operate under the Education Laws of New York State and any other applicable New York State laws
  – Library is added to the Dormitory Authority list
Timeline for Special Legislative District Public Library

- 17 month timeline culminating with a November 2011 vote

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<thead>
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<tr>
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<td>3 months</td>
<td>7/10-9/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine specifics of district</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>9/10-11/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement legislative work, bill drafted</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>10/10-12/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill introduced</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>1/11-2/11</td>
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## Timeline for Special Legislative District Public Library

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Branding, education/advocacy campaigns</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>3/11 - Day of vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill passed and signed into law</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>4/11 - 6/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election held to create district</td>
<td>1 Day</td>
<td>11/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New board applies for charter, old library dissolved and assets transferred</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>11/11-1/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax roll for new district established</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>First taxes collected for new district</td>
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</table>
Living in a 2% Tax Cap World

• NYLA took the reigns in drafting an advisory opinion that has driven the guidance issues by the State Comptroller’s office, the Division of the Budget and the Dept. of Tax and Finance.

• If you’re not a member of NYLA, this is one of the best reasons to join.
How To Move Forward

• Explore the options and make a decision which must include a clear commitment on the part of the board to move the process forward

• Notify your local Library System and the Division of Library Development

• Put together a team that will shepherd the process and the project
How To Move Forward

• Develop timeline, work back from the date of the vote
• Figure out what legal and other consultant help you’ll need
• Develop a budget for the transition project
• The Library can pay for “VOTE” materials and messaging, it cannot pay for “VOTE YES”
How To Move Forward

• What are your relationships like with local elected and appointed officials, community leadership or organizations?
The Politics of the Relationship

• No matter what district option you’re pursuing, it is essential to build relationships with your local elected officials, school board members and district officials, community leaders and opinion leaders.
• If you don’t have them, start now
• If you do have them, determine how strong they are and make them stronger
The Politics of the Relationship

• Your job is to educate them on your library and how they can help to
  – Meet community expectations
  – Get a bill passed
  – Increase funding
  – You get the idea

• Have a one-pager about your library
  – Stats on circulation, computer use, etc.
  – How you help people in job search
  – How you help local economic development
The Politics of the Relationship

• **Grassroots Advocacy Network**
  – New online tool developed for libraries and library systems
  – Match Library patrons with County Legislators and Municipal electeds
  – Send e-mail messages on issues of concern to library or system
The Politics of the Relationship

• Remember what Tip O’Neill said:

“ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL!”
The Politics of the Relationship

• Bring the library home to your elected officials, community leaders, etc.
  – Personal stories about how library has made a difference in the lives of patrons
  – Brainstorm with staff, board and stakeholders to develop
  – Ask patrons why they feel the library is an essential service
  – Personalize the benefits
The Politics of the Relationship

• Be clear about your expectations
  – What you want them to do
• Don’t be taken aback when they say stupid things
  – What do we need libraries for, we have Google
  – No one uses the library anymore
  – Libraries are antiquated
The Politics of the Relationship

• Make the Library a political asset for your elected officials
  – Photo Ops
  – Program presentations

• Organize your community to make sure your elected officials know you have support

• Bring community leaders and opinion leaders into your tent
The Politics of the Relationship

• Should build relationships with elected officials at all levels
  – Village/Town/City
  – County
  – State
  – Federal
• You never know when you’re going to need help
How to Move Forward

• Determine the position of the library
  – Do you need to rebrand and market to raise the library’s identity and position as an essential service?

• A strong position will help with your relationships with elected officials, school officials, community leaders, etc.
How To Move Forward

• Implement marketing campaign
• Network and solicit support from officials and community groups
• Reach out to state legislators, if necessary
• Implement education campaign to explain the why and how much
• Implement a “Vote Yes” campaign
  – Target, organize and Get Out the Vote
Questions You May Encounter Along the Way

• The library seems OK the way it is, why are you making this change?
• Will this result in an additional or new tax?
• Why are you raising my taxes?
• Will the library tax automatically increase each year?
• Who decides how the money is used?
• What will the library do with the money?
Questions You May Encounter Along the Way

• Is there a plan to use the money for improvements?
• Will my town or village taxes go down if they’re no longer paying for the library?
• Why should I support the library if I don’t use it?
• Why can’t you just charge a fee?
• Why don’t you just use volunteers?
Questions You May Encounter Along the Way

• Why don’t you spend down your endowment before asking the taxpayers for money?
• How about grants and donations?
• Libraries are supposed to be free, why are you asking for a library tax?
• What happens if the vote fails?
• Why won’t the town or village just give you more money?
Preparing for Questions

• Determine which ones are appropriate to your library
• Develop talking points for each question
• Make sure all board members have talking points
• Make sure all board members answer questions the same
A Quick Review

• Two public library district options
  – School District Public Library
  – Special Legislative District Public Library
A Quick Review

• Once a library becomes a library district, it has autonomous control
  – Determines own budget
  – Sets time and place of budget and trustee votes
  – Is responsible to the taxpayers
  – Has a dedicated community based funding stream
A Quick Review

• School District Public Libraries require petitions and cooperation of local school board

• Once approved, by school district ballot, library is established with initial funding which continues from year to year
  – Library can ask for increases in budget
  – Trustee elected every year as well
A Quick Review

• Special Legislative District Public Libraries require enabling legislation from the NYS Legislature

• Once approved by local public ballot, library is established with initial funding which continues from year to year
  – Library can ask for increases in budget
  – Trustees elected every year as well
Questions?