

## LIBRARY CONSOLIDATION TASK FORCE MEETING

Date: Thursday, January 13, 2011  
Time: 5:03 PM  
Location: Lower Saucon Township

Present: Lower Saucon Township: Mike Karabin, Lynn Koehler, Kim LaBrake  
Hellertown Borough: Lamar Handwerk, Joseph Pampanin  
Hellertown Area Library: Jessica Goedel, Alison Finkbeiner, Robin Rotherham  
Jack Cahalan, Lower Saucon Township Manager; Charlie Luthar, Hellertown Borough Manager;  
Tina Krasnansky, Financial Director Hellertown Borough; Cathy Gorman, Director of Finance  
Lower Saucon Township

Jack said the official name of this group is the Saucon Valley Library Consolidation Feasibility Task Force, but we can call it the Library Task Force. The long name says what the purpose of it is. It is for the Saucon Valley and we have talked about consolidating services on a regional basis to save money. Feasibility is the big word as one of the tasks is to decide whether or not this can work.

Jack said the purpose of the Task Force is to determine the feasibility of consolidating Hellertown Borough and Lower Saucon Township library services at the Hellertown Area Library (HAL).

Jack said we know that the Borough of Hellertown is using the library, so the big question is can Lower Saucon Township also share the facility. The reason he recommended to his Council that we set up the Task Force and look it from both the Township and the Borough perspective was because there will be impacts to the residents of the Borough in terms of financial impacts, and those all have to be looked at. There will be impacts to the library staff. Those things all have to be looked at. The purpose of the Task Force is not to decide that the Township is going to change from the Bethlehem Area Public Library (BAPL) to the HAL. That's not the decision of the Task Force. What the Task Force is supposed to be doing is gathering information that can be taken back to the Lower Saucon Township and the Hellertown Borough Council and to the Library Board that will help them make a decision. The Township makes a decision on library services every year with the BAPL. Council asked we bring back information about other alternatives, and that is something that our Library Committee in the Township has been working on. Through that, we contacted the HAL board and they provided us with some information.

Jack said we have some background on why the Task Force was formed. We do have an agreement with BAPL that is renewed annually. The cost of it is going up. The one thing that he has heard since he's been here from Robin is that over 50% of the patrons who use the HAL are from the Township. We do have some Township residents who go to the HAL when they move in and Robin has to tell them to go to the BAPL to get a card and then they come back, but they are not happy about that. They want to go to the HAL. There is another segment of Township residents who like the BAPL and feel very strongly about the services they receive there. The last one is regional cooperation. It's something that Saucon Valley Partnership has been working on for the past five or six years and they have a long list of regional opportunities that we are exploring together. We don't have enough people to work on anymore at one time. We started with the police consolidation and there was a study conducted on that. We are currently working with the Volunteer Fire Companies from the Township and the Dewey Fire Company in Hellertown and they are looking at the feasibility of consolidating all of the fire companies into one Saucon Valley Fire Company similar to what this Task Force will be looking at. We are also starting the same process with our recreational services. We were just awarded a grant from the State and will be getting the services of a consultant to work with the Recreational Study Committee to look at all the recreational opportunities between Lower Saucon, Hellertown and the SV School District. We are also working together on the Rail Trail and our Public Works Departments work jointly on road projects. That's the background. He wants to make it clear we are not doing this just to pull away from the BAPL. We want to explore all library services that are available to Township residents.

Jack showed the slide with the composition of the Task Force. At the Township's reorganization meeting, the Council appointed Council Member Tom Maxfield as a Council Liaison. The Borough has Gail Nolf and she'll be communicating back and forth to the Borough Council. The HAL's representatives are Michael Evangelista,

Alison Finkbeiner and Jessica Goedtel. Jack and Charlie and the new Borough Manager and Robin will serve as the ex-officio members of the Task Force. Cathy and Tina are here and they will assist us to work on these assignments.

Jack said he wants to give you a little more background of what the Task Force should be looking at, which is feasibility of consolidating the Township and Borough's library services. They put together a list of what they felt would be recommended tasks for the Task Force which are as follows:

- Familiarize itself with State Library Code requirements for local libraries. Robin has copies of the library code.
- Familiarize itself with library needs to Hellertown and Lower Saucon Township residents
- Gather and analyze current and future demographic data on Hellertown Borough and Lower Saucon Township, which is critical. The Hellertown Library Board did submit a proposal to us some time back and it was their first shot at that. That's something we need to further explore and it may be expanded or revised.
- Evaluate the short-term and long-term financial impacts of a consolidated library system on the two municipal budgets. Money is an issue and one of the things that concerned the Township Council was the cost of library services. If the Township Council decides to go in with HAL, we have to look at the impacts to both the Township and Borough in that partnership.
- We need to evaluate the immediate and long-term location, building space, staffing and technology needs of a consolidated library.
- We need to identify areas of analysis where professional independent consulting services would be necessary to supplement the Task Force's work. We are going to have to recommend that to the Councils if needed.
- We need to explore regional opportunities for library services for Lower Saucon Township and Hellertown Borough.
- One of the important things is we need to do select a location a location for the meetings. We hope to gather and get input from residents who can provide us with information, pro or con, about this whole idea, and that will be important to hear that.
- He said it's going to take a series of meetings, but they would like to conclude the work of the Task Force no later than July 1, 2012. One of the reasons for this 1 ½ year process is to give the Task Force time to do this work. He also wanted to give assurances to the BAPL who we have a contract with that we are not planning on pulling away from the agreement from them without giving them at least a one year notice. We need to come back with a report at the end of the Task Force's work that we can give to the Township and Borough Council which says here are our findings and recommendations. Here's what it will look like to all three entities and then the Township can make a decision and the Borough can consider what this partnership will entail.
- A couple of important things would be to benchmark with residents to determine their opinions regarding potential library consolidation. There are people who may not be using the library, but paying taxes and we need to hear from them also. The way to do that is do surveys, have at least one public meeting where we can bring everyone in and discuss the concept of the consolidated library and there could even be a referendum.

Jack said the reason for this first meeting is to organize the Task Force and decide how we are going to conduct the meetings. He went over this with Charlie and Robin and here are some of their recommendations. You need to look at that and let us know if this will work. The second and third Thursdays fit in with the schedule of meetings that Jack and Charlie have that they have to go to. Robin said it was okay with her. We thought we could start monthly for the first three months (January, February and March) and then bi-monthly after that. They recommend a 5:00 PM or 5:30 PM start time. We can have the meetings at the Township unless you want to change that. Someone asked about rotating the meetings at different locations. Charlie said it's really the Township who is asking the questions, so it would be proper to have the meetings at the Township and it would be good to visit the HAL. Jack said when we agree on this; we'll advertise the schedule of meetings. The group decided the meetings would be the second Thursday of the month. The next meeting would be February 10, 2011 at 5:00 PM.

Jack said they recommend that you appoint a Chair Person to conduct the meetings. Jack, Charlie and Robin do not want to be leading the Task Force. That's something the Chair could do, and it's something they suggest, but it's

strictly up to you. They will have the minutes transcribed and they will be ready for the next meeting. We'll approve the minutes and then we'll put them on the websites. Everyone can read what's going on and there are no closed doors. The group decided that Kim LaBrake would be the Chair.

Jack said the other thing they recommend is that we have Sub-Committees on the Task Force that can focus on the several different areas. The Sub-Committee would be made up of three members. When we get into the bi-monthly meeting schedule, if they want to get together and exchange information in between that, they can be prepared to come back to the meeting with that information and answer questions. That could move us along. Some of the meetings that he and Charlie go to are a long drawn-out process. They are suggesting the committees be:

- Financial – gather information on costs of consolidated library; prepare consolidated budget; identify future costs and financing of expansion; recommend formula for Township/Borough financial support of consolidated library
- Building – look at current HAL space and identify interim, long-term expansion of building, parking, etc. needed for consolidated operation
- Demographics/Statistics – gather statistics on Borough, Township residents currently utilizing HAL, BAPL services, estimate and project numbers anticipated under consolidation operation
- Technology – look at current HAL technology and resources and identify interim and long-term expansion of these resources to meet anticipated consolidated patrons and state library requirements

Jack said these are just suggestions. If anyone has an opinion, let him know. The Finance people will be helpful. The Statistics and Demographics might be the hardest as it involves pulling numbers from the libraries together. Lynn said likes the committees, but she can see that there are points where the financial people are going to need information about the building and the technology. The first committee is going to get the information for the other two committees. There's definitely going to be interaction and sharing of information. In a sense, the Financial Committee is almost the main one where the other three committees are being fed the information. The Demographics/Statistics, the only thing missing is the public element in terms of planning, getting public information, is that what demographics are? Jack said yes. Lynn said that would also be where we send out surveys to the public and get information like that. If we need to divide or sub-divide the group, we can do that later. Jack said he just thought we could have a report by that group at the next meeting and they can put some information on the table. This will be a process to break up the information gathering into manageable pieces. Lynn said Jack gave two milestone points in the timeline, and it may be useful to have each committee put together a timeline and the other committee could look at the timeline and say they need this information sooner, can you move the timeline up. Jack said okay. Lynn said in the first year it's going to be gathering information and making recommendations about what to do. Will we be holding the public hearing the first year? Jack said that's something we can discuss. You need to present something to the public so you will need time to gather information, learn some things and provide some of our draft conclusions.

Lynn said sometime within a year we should be able to have a public meeting. The Trustees of the BAPL, there's been a verbal understanding that if Lower Saucon would leave, there would be at least a year notice, which is why the timeline with a two year period of really important. If we don't have a decision by the end of this year, then it will go another year. Jack said that's up to the Township Council to make that decision. They decide every year about library services and if they decide next October that they don't want to continue, that will give us enough time. Lynn said if they decide in October they don't want to do it, that would be a two month notice. Jack said it would be a year from October, but not that we're considering to do that. Lynn said to do this, it would take another year before it happened as a courtesy to the BAPL. Mike said it's a courtesy. It has nothing to do with a written contract or anything else, so it's only verbally agreed to with whom? Jack said it isn't in the agreement. The other thing it's not just between us and the BAPL, there are other supporting municipalities and that will take some time for them to adjust if the decision is made and that will be a major adjustment financially for all of the parties. This will give everybody a lot of lead time. Someone said if you typically make a decision to do whatever, it involves some sort of planning and start-up to actually put that plan into place. It's not like you aren't going to make a decision to join the library in two months and invade Hellertown and have enough room. That time is a courtesy too, but there is a big planning chunk in there that you have to look at if there is a decision to leave. Lynn said it will also be a courtesy notice to the HAL telling them "here we come". Robin said she gave everyone a copy of a one paragraph history of the HAL and the library's mission statement. They do have goals and objectives. She

gave them three years of circulation figures broken down by Hellertown adult, Hellertown juvenile, ACCESS PA adult, and ACCESS PA juvenile. 98% of their ACCESS PA check-outs are done by Lower Saucon residents. She is an ACCESS PA adult, but she lives in Emmaus. ACCESS PA is a state-wide card in PA. If you live in a municipality like Hellertown, and your home library is Hellertown, you can go to Bethlehem and get a BAPL card as well. It's a reciprocal lending agreement between all the libraries in the State. Before budget cuts, libraries would get reimbursed by the State, a percentage of every check out. For every Lower Saucon person that came into the HAL, she would get x amount of dollars for those check-outs. On a good year, it was \$12,000.00. That no longer exists. That was one of the things that drove the Library Committee to look at this as we are serving your patrons in Lower Saucon, but we are no longer being reimbursed for those. It's a reciprocal lending agreement. She gave you a brief overview of their 2011 budget – expenses and where they expect to generate income to meet those expenses. This is just a brief overview.

Someone said she'd like to find out with the ACCESS PA program, if Lower Saucon does move to HAL, will residents in Lower Saucon still be able to use the BAPL, but the BAPL wouldn't get the ACCESS PA revenue? Lynn said after the beans were spilled at a Hellertown Borough Council meeting about this potential merger, the BAPL Board panicked and overreacted. They are much calmer now, but concerned. What happened was they started looking and said they said that if Lower Saucon leaves, what are we going to do? One thing they said was they didn't want Lower Saucon residents coming in and using their services for free, so they started talking to the State library people about the budget cuts. There's a clause in the ACCESS PA program where if the funding is not available, you don't have to provide services to non-residents. She doesn't think that's in the current library code. Robin said it actually reads if you cannot adequately serve the people that support your library, which is a grey matter there, then you can deny services.

Lynn said another option the BAPL is looking at is not being a district library anymore. They would not have to do certain levels of service to the community and another thing they talked about was withdrawing from the State altogether and being an independent library. All these options are coming up as they are saying if Lower Saucon does this, if Lower Saucon does that. The thing is they are concerned that if Lower Saucon leaves, other Townships may leave also. Jessica said Bethlehem Township is also considering their own library as well. It's not just Lower Saucon. Lynn said the other case they are talking about is if you are in Hanover, you can also go to Easton Library and Easton isn't getting the funding either. They can go to Nazareth, Allentown and none of these libraries are getting the ACCESS PA funding. Someone said it's also important to note that they are re-looking at the library code. That may take quite a few years. It may be something we are going to have to look at. Robin said the recommendations are out. It's a 230 page document. They are recommendations for changes to the library code. As far as she read, the district library center would become a more regional operation. Northampton County has two district library centers and what a waste of money. Somewhere down the road we all need to look at that once you understand the old code. Once you read this code, the recommendations are meaningless. She can sit here and read them to you, but that's a good starting place. When you see the changes the State is thinking about, with these changes, you may think municipal government moves slowly, but actually it's the State. Jessica said any decisions we might make, they are the recommendations on the table and we can at least plan for that.

Lynn said they had someone from the State Library come in and speak to the BAPL board and they asked questions about what might happen, what could they do, what are we allowed to do. Another thing that was murmured about was regionalization. If you are talking about Bethlehem and Easton combining, she heard talk about the whole region including Reading and Allentown. This is just the word, there's also talk about the possibility of Hellertown become a BAPL branch library. She'd like to see that we keep an open mind about these other options. Jack said talking about the other resources that we need to pull in, did you mention the District Librarian as a resource? Lynn said there is a new District Librarian because the previous one took early retirement from BAPL. Instead of laying off people, they offered a retirement package similar to what the City of Bethlehem is doing. Regina is the new District Librarian and she was previously an Outreach Librarian who was going out to schools and other places. She also mentioned someone from the State might possibly come in to a meeting and ask what are we allowed to do, what are you going to do, what money is involved, what money can we get from the State to help to do this? There's all sorts of possibilities. Jack said another entity we don't want to neglect out of this is the Saucon Valley School District. Mike Karabin is a school board director and we need to involve them in this process. There are some things we discussed like technology and things like that. What we're looking for without getting into the HAL versus the BAPL, we're looking for the best deal for our residents for library services. That's basically what we are looking for, look at the the costs so we don't have duplication, so you need to discuss that with the school so

we may be able to save a few dollars. Mike may be a good resource for the school district. Lynn said the school also has libraries and space and materials. At some point, we should bring in a librarian from the school district. Mike said or some type of administrator.

Jack asked Cathy and Tina to talk about what you are doing with the fire companies. Cathy said currently with our fire departments, we have asked them to give us their financials for the last year and this current year to try to get a track record of what their annual expenses are and in what categories, and then look at it and try to line item everything accordingly. They all have different accounting packages and everything is different. We are trying to identify what their expenses are, put it in a proper budget format and then review all of them and see if we can consolidate it into one. Not that we're consolidating all their buildings, but to say, okay, this fire department uses \$5,000.00 in fuel; this one uses \$10,000.00 and then we can combine it and say we need \$25,000.00 in fuel overall for everybody to function in a year. That's what we are in the process of doing now. We get monthly reports from BAPL, so she can work off of those reports. If you can get the HAL ones, she can do a side-by-side comparison and look at what items that can be limited, changed, what the school district can help us with in whatever aspect, things you might need, there are things we can look at and compile a budget and see where we would be at and then what our needs are. We can add that in and say this is the funding we have, these are the expenses we have. We can then figure out what do we need to do it and then we'll know on a per capita basis how much additional we would need and this is where we can save in other ways. So far, it's been working out pretty well with the fire departments. Lynn said obviously for the BAPL finances, you are going to have to do a percentage of it based on population. The other thing to point out is in the BAPL budget, donations and grants aren't part of the planned income. There are some that are. If someone donates \$50,000.00, that's not a planned income. Cathy said that's usually itemized to a specific capital item. Lynn said there was an anonymous donation of \$50,000.00 for "Room to Grow". Cathy said the fire departments get those donations too and we don't list them as their normal operations. Lynn said there's one thing that is interesting with the "Room to Grow" project, most of the donations came from the people in the City of Bethlehem. She doesn't think that, in general, Lower Saucon Township businesses or individuals really contributed to it in any substantial way. She doesn't hear of donations from Lower Saucon people or businesses. There was some that came out of Bethlehem Township, but it's mostly from within the City. It's from major corporations that have an office in the City. If there was a merger and it was a community library, she could see a chance for more Lower Saucon people being involved in it in a community way. Charlie said the Borough of Hellertown contributes something to the HAL annually. The Council is certainly in favor of doing a study. There are some things from this study that has already caused Bethlehem to look at the way they provide services to Lower Saucon Township residents. He would like to see the school district get more involved. The school district would be real beneficial. The fire companies are much worse in terms of bringing things together than these entities. There was five fire companies with all different line items, all kinds of different things. It was a good learning experience as you'll find out where the money is spent.

Joe Pampanin said maybe it would be beneficial at the next meeting, as he's probably the least informed on the library services, to go over several different scenarios and what the likely financial implications of those would be. This is a status quo for Hellertown. What would the financial implications be for the Township leaving Bethlehem and just joining Hellertown? Jack said we don't want to jump the gun on anything. One of the reasons we formed the Task Force was that we don't want to strictly look at Hellertown as a cheaper alternative. At first glance, it looks as if we are paying this much to Bethlehem and it's much cheaper in Hellertown. There are a lot of other implications that go along with that like the services that we get from Bethlehem. He knows we have the proposal that was given to us by the HAL and we can bring that to the next meeting and go over that and go from there. Cathy said she can put together a comparison as to how much Hellertown pays per capita and what Lower Saucon pays per capita. A couple of years ago she was working on comparisons of the libraries in Northampton and Lehigh Counties, so she could bring that to the next meeting. Jack said we can see where we are right now and then see where we need to go.

Jack said we can go over what we want to work on for the meeting in February. Kim said maybe some people are undecided and maybe we should wait until the next meeting. If you have not been to either Hellertown or Bethlehem library, she'd recommend to go to both and just get an idea of what they offer, what the differences are, check the computers. You don't want to be on a committee where you feel you won't be beneficial to it. If there are numbers people, you may feel comfortable being on that committee as that will be a benefit to the whole group. She does architecture every day, she does buildings all day, so for her to be on the building committee is really efficient as she can go over and look at the building and look at the square footages, that is very quick and she can

be very efficient at that. If everybody has a skill that fits on one of the committees, it would be great and what we'll do is basically seek out those people tonight, and then based on the people that aren't here for the next meeting, we'll put their choices in, and then we can do the balance. At least we have a start on where we are going to be. Jack said to even it out, see if we can stick to the three per committee. The Finance Directors are going to be with the Finance Committee and then he, Charlie and Robin will decide where they will go.

The group decided what committees they would like to be on. In summary:

**Demographic/Statistics:**

Alison Finkbeiner  
Lynn Koehler  
Jessica Goedtel

**Building:**

Kim LaBrake  
Joe Pampanin  
Mike Evangelista

**Technology:**

Gail Nolf  
Mike Karabin  
Jack Cahalan

**Finance:**

Reverend Lamar Handwerk  
Tom Maxfield  
Cathy Gorman  
Tina Krasnansky

Kim said Robin can help out on all the committees.

Jack said the next meeting is February 10<sup>th</sup>. We can talk about the proposal from HAL. Cathy will put some comparisons together on the financial numbers. Kim said make sure you take a jaunt through the libraries. Someone said see what you are looking for, see the differences. Go to HAL and look for some books you are interested in and compare it to BAPL. The HAL is smaller, but a lot of the books are there. If we all go and at least do that, and come with pro and con statements, then everyone on the committee has been there and can say, they've been there and when I was there it was kid's hour, but I didn't see it in the other one. Just your impression. It would be good to hear everyone's opinion as to how they see both libraries.

Lynn said two more things in the next couple of months, if you haven't seen the BAPL bookmobile, it's relatively new and it's in the Township on Wednesdays. Try to visit the bookmobile. It does not go on the eastern side of Lower Saucon. Don't forget the South Side Branch of the BAPL on 4<sup>th</sup> and Webster Streets. It has a lot more Spanish language material, and it's also undergoing some renovations and it's a very nice library.

Jack said he'd like to put out an advertisement of our meeting schedule. He'd like to come up with some dates for the rest of the year. He'll make sure there is something in the newspaper about the next meeting. This is a public meeting and what we'll be adding to the agenda is a public comment section in case residents want to come in, they can ask questions and speak. He did have a request from the BAPL for them to be represented on the Committee, but they probably will have someone from the Library here. They can participate. They can provide information. They are trying to avoid this being a comparison back and forth between HAL and BAPL.

Lynn asked if you want to have any agenda points for next month? Kim said right now there's a lot on it. The discussion on the proposal from HAL; the demographics of BAPL; coming up with a full year schedule; and then each member's impressions of the libraries they visited this month, the good and the bad they've seen. Lynn said then breaking into committees and plan on what they are going to do. Kim said she'd like a contact list. Jack said he'll get that together and send it around to everyone.

Jack said that's a good start and everyone has a lot of work to do. The meeting adjourned. The time was 6:25 PM.