



May 16, 2022

The Montgomery News
88 Orchard Rd
Skillman, NJ 08558

Re: Mary Jacobs Library Misinformation

To the Editor:

There have been several factual errors and incorrect implications in the coverage of the Mary Jacobs Memorial Library.

After the unexpected announcement that the Mary Jacobs Memorial Library would be closed, the Mary Jacobs Memorial Library Foundation, a private, non-profit organization, worked for many months to find a way to sustain library services in Rocky Hill. Those efforts culminated in a 2020 agreement that would extend abridged services for two years.

One example of erroneous coverage is that, contrary to what is stated in the recent library article dated April 25, 2022, the agreement is not that the Somerset County Library Commission (SCLC) will provide limited library services, but that these services will be provided if an entity provides a space in the Borough. When the Agreement was negotiated, the Foundation anticipated that the Borough would provide a facility for the "Phase 2" library since its leaders had been arguing vociferously for a continuation of library services in the Borough after the new Montgomery Township library opened. The Foundation was not, and is not, obligated to provide the space for the Phase 2 library. However, neither the Borough nor any other entity has stepped forward to provide a facility. As a result, the Foundation began planning to use a portion of its building for this purpose, even though it knew that continuing to own the building for another two years was not financially sustainable and that the Foundation would have to spend down the principal of its endowment to cover the costs of the renovation and the operating costs of the building. These costs represent hundreds of thousands of dollars of the Foundation's funds.

As the Foundation began this work, the Borough of Rocky Hill, in executive session, decided to hire special counsel to represent the Borough Council to review its dealings with the Foundation instead of increasing funding for the Phase 2 renovation. The Borough also held rallies for "the library's future" after the agreement was long-settled.

In order for the Foundation to support the ongoing maintenance of the building, it will require financial support. The building went up for sale in order to find help, through a sale or lease, with that funding. The “rally” for a Phase 3 and the negative press coverage about the library relocation are standing in the way of the Foundation’s ability to secure financial support and, therefore, from being able to continue supporting Phase 2 through two years.

That the Mary Jacobs Memorial Library will close is not the Foundation’s doing, and the Foundation pursued numerous avenues to keep it open, one of which resulted in the SCLC agreeing to the continuation of services in Rocky Hill through the Phase 2 time. Rather than appreciation for its efforts and its willingness to spend significant money to provide a space that other entities could have provided, the Foundation has been met with hostility and intimations of lawsuits.

The committed community volunteers who serve on the Foundation’s board have been working for months to help sustain library services for two more years, and will continue to pursue its mission of benefiting the community. It is unfortunate that a small, vocal minority of Rocky Hill and your publication seem intent on misrepresenting their efforts.

Sincerely,

The Board of Trustees of the Mary Jacobs Foundation

cc: Neil Silverstien