



June 20, 2022

Good evening -

My name is Phil Kartsonis - 26 West 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Ocean City NJ. I am here to provide Public Comment on behalf of the Mary Jacobs Foundation Trustees. Our family lived in Rocky Hill for 24 years and I served on the RH Council for 5 years including 2 years as Mayor. I am MJ Foundation Trustee for the last 4 years and I am personally working with Cornerstone Architects to build out Phase 2 of the library.

Why am I involved in the library after moving from Rocky Hill? It is because the Trustees we want to fulfill the mission to create a new exciting Phase 2 library for Rocky Hill.

3+ years ago - MJL Foundation led the Phase 2 conversations with members from the RH Council, Montgomery and the SC Library Commission

- We are have always been committed to providing a Phase 2 library
- We are currently spending significant \$\$ (close to \$300k) to make the new library an exciting space. The plans and construction updates are on our website.

I would like to make some corrections from the Task Force statement just provided:

1. The Rocky Hill Council participated and agreed to Phase 2 for a 2 year library. They were included in all discussions. There should be no misalignment. 2 members from the Rocky Hill Council attended the meetings and signed the agreement
2. A comment was made that "It was our understanding that that 2-year time period was provided to allow for long term planning and to define the future MJM library in RH." That was never the understanding of any of the four parties that negotiated the agreement. We agreed to the two year period because that was the most amount of time that the SCLC would agree to continue limited library services in the Borough. It does not prohibit a later agreement in which the SCLC might agree to provide some library services after Phase 2, but at the current time the MJF/SCLC is waiting to see what the demand is in Rocky Hill during Phase 2
3. MJL did not pursue fundraising as we were in a state of flux and did not feel it was right to fundraise for a building that was changing.
4. All the materials in the library have been secured and documented. We obviously plan to secure and display the historical materials in Phase 2 space.
5. There was never 11-12 members on the MJL Foundation. We currently have a group of 5 dedicated individuals who devote their time/effort as volunteers. We don't understand the continued negativity placed at these volunteers.
6. Recently – there has been use of the word mini library. A brand new, state of the art library with full services has opened less than 2 miles away. This Phase 2 library is intended to preserve a library in Rocky Hill (with 700 residents) with an appropriate size.
7. Any statement or inference that the RH Council has not been involved in the Phase 2 transition is completely false.

Here are some examples on how the RH Government has been involved and has actually created obstacles in getting Phase 2 completed:

1. September 2021: After I attended the RH Council meeting, I sent a follow-up letter to RH Council with support needed. Nothing has been provided – but we moved forward....
2. Jan 2022: Rocky Hill engaged Legal Counsel (Stark & Stark) and did not advise the public and this was never reported in the Montgomery News
  - We formally asked that RH stop any legal discussions and save taxpayer \$\$ – but this request was ignored – but we moved forward....
3. March 4, 2022: The MJL Foundation arranged a meeting with RH Council, SCLC, Montgomery Township
  - Shared Phase 2 design plans (17 pages in total) with all parties and it was well received with no issues voiced from Rocky Hill – great we are moving forward
4. 1 week later: Councilperson Bristol attended the Somerset County Commissioners meeting to express issues with the plans – we were disappointed but we moved forward with Phase 2. In addition, these plans were shared with Montgomery News without our approval.
5. April 2022: SCL Commissioner Brian Auger reached out to the Mayor to have a live discussion about the Phase 2 progress – there was no response – but we moved forward with Phase 2
6. May 16, 2022: 3 months after sharing the plans (back on March 4, 2022) and getting no response – we receive a letter asking to change the Phase 2 plans (after the architects have been hired)
7. May 2022: Councilperson Bristol called into the Brian Lehrer radio show to complain about the library situation

We continue to be challenged by the lack of partnership from the RH Council and misinformation in the community – much of which has been stirred up by a few individuals. RH was involved in the negotiations and there were multiple meetings over the last 12 months with all the parties.

As a reminder - RH Council provides no support to Mary Jacobs Foundation. There is NO monies in the budget for 2023 for the library.

However – we still plan to move forward with Phase 2 plans – significant investment and a beautiful new space. Please look at the plans at the MJL website with the updates. This site will continue to be updated.

I have already been in communication with the Library Liaison – Council President Trey Delaney and we are providing regular construction plans.

The obstacles to the project has delayed opening into Q4, 2022. The Architects met with the Zoning Officials and have a Minor Site Application review being finalized and we hope to present at the Planning Board on July 20.

In closing – we hope we can move forward with a better partnership for Phase 2....Any additional legal actions or obstacles has the potential to impact Phase 2 opening plans and delay the resumption of library services

Thank you very much,

Phil