

Dear Shabbona Community,

Every morning in the mad dash to get my daughters ready for school, I'm constantly dropping reminders that we need to finish breakfast, fill water bottles, brush teeth, and comb hair. As the morning progresses, their annoyed "We know, Mom" quickly turns into blind panic about being late. On the worst of mornings, all of those annoying reminders don't do the trick, and I roll up to school with two tearful little girls just as the bell rings.

I'm worried we have a similar worst-case scenario on our hands in the Village of Shabbona right now. Everyone nods their head in agreement that things seem to be heading in a downward trend. Our grocery store is gone, the hardware store is gone, and many buildings downtown have sat vacant for years now. If we lose our only community center, one that has been actively serving us for years, it may well be a fatal blow to the village as we know it. That's why voting to save our town's library in this election is critical; it is ultimately a vote to save Shabbona before it's too late.

This is a no-brainer for villagers within city limits who have sustained the library for years, and thus won't see any increase in their taxes. However, I do understand the hesitation that some joining our district may feel. In particular, some farmers may feel bogged down by another tax tied to property. As a person with largely libertarian leanings, I believe the frustrated calls for tax reforms and relief are legitimate; however, I think even the most fiscally conservative of us would agree that some taxes are necessary to maintain critical infrastructure. For this reason, while I do think the government needs to dramatically decrease current excesses in taxation, I am also in favor of some of my own tax dollars going to support farmers if funneled through efficient programs. Similarly, while some argue that many subsidized programs, such as ECAP, MFP, CFAP, and WHIP, use taxpayer dollars to offer farmers excessive "free" bailouts, I understand that the farmers applying for that money are simply recouping losses caused by that same broken system.

The library is in a similar situation. Our particular views on tax policy are irrelevant to our options in this situation; we are forced to use the current system if we are to continue serving the community. As a small local library, we simply don't have the power to restructure the federal or state systems of taxation we have inherited. All that we can do is ask for the minimum amount of money we need to keep our doors open. If you compare the amount we are requesting to the current revenue of surrounding libraries, you will find that we are doing just that. Meanwhile, we remain transparent and specific about how those funds will be allocated. As a member of the library board, I can assure you that unlike the well-paid, power hungry government officials inspiring your distrust, we are a board of unpaid community volunteers who have consistently sacrificed both time and personal funds to keep programs running. We only want to expand our district so that we can continue to do that for even more members of our community.

In a small town, a library that doubles as the only community center is critical infrastructure worth supporting. Not only do we offer a variety of enriching, educational, and rewarding (not to mention fun!) programming, we continually strengthen our community by pulling it together. We are the only organization in town to offer consistent weekly programs, allowing community members to build and maintain relationships. Moreover, we create opportunities for different groups to network and serve one another. For example, children

participating in our summer reading program have read and crafted with the seniors at Prairie Crossing Rehabilitation Center. ICHS students helped plan last summer's reading program. The art students have built black light mini golf courses for families to enjoy in the library, and the FFA students have led an interactive story time event for children about raising animals. To us, the most successful programs not only offer ongoing education and enrichment, they facilitate members of our community investing in each other.

This is the main reason why those little girls I mentioned earlier have also cried every time we try to explain what the "Vote Yes " signs around town mean. The possibility of losing the library that has been an essential part of their childhood is devastating to them. They don't easily accept our attempts to comfort them by saying we might find other places to pet reptiles, crack open geodes, play with our friends after story time, watch service dogs in action, learn how to paint from local artists, and participate in fun science experiments. They want those things for Shabbona, and I have to agree. Sure, we can drive half an hour or more to find some of the services and programs our library offers, but I want to keep all that vitality and enrichment here. I want everyone to enjoy those things while continuing to forge connections and build relationships that will ultimately strengthen us as a whole. I want to continue investing in this community, and I hope you will join me by voting yes to preserve an essential institution that has served Shabbona for years.

Sincerely,

Leah Shearer  
Flewellin Memorial Library Board Vice President