

Exchanges grow tense in Youngstown board session

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and Attorney Tom Caserta Jr. to find out the reason for the delay in reopening.

In an email sent earlier to the Tribune/Sentinel, resident Sarah Ambrosia spoke of the growing irritation over past months in trying to find an answer.

"Last October I reached out to the mayor to inquire why the Red Brick had not opened. I was told they were 'following New York state guidelines,'" she wrote. "As months dragged on and other business, schools and municipalities began reopening I reached out again and was given the same answer without any details or explanation. ... I was really stumped, since Phase 4 of (Gov. Andrew Cuomo's) reopening would allow this building to reopen with safety precautions, as did the Lewiston Red Brick building.

"I attended a Village of Youngstown board meeting on March 25, and when I brought up the topic, Mayor Reynolds responded to me with contempt."

Following that meeting, Ambrosia said she launched a petition drive in the Youngstown community and online via change.org in an attempt to get the Red Brick Village Center moving toward reopening and a return to full operation.

The library is funded in part by the Town of Porter and located on the second floor of the Red Brick. It has been operating minus in-person visits with sharply reduced

services over the past year.

Ambrosia said neighboring libraries are already open and returning to normal operations.

"After the meeting I immediately began a petition to get the Red Brick building reopened," she wrote.

Her petition (www.change.org/openredbrick) reads as follows:

"As local schools, businesses, and government municipalities open to the community, we are left with questions unanswered and wondering, why hasn't the Red Brick Building in Youngstown opened, too?"

"This municipality includes the Village Office, the Youngstown Free Library, and the Youngstown Recreation Department. The services offered by these entities are vital to taxpayers and families!! Physical activities for youth and seniors are crucial to health and wellness; browsing the bookshelves in the library and utilizing internet access is essential to many; with families, distant learning and homeschooling, access to resources is imperative to the education of our children!

"We can open with the same safety precautions as everyone else, which have proven effective - masks, social distancing, and limited capacity. In fact, air purifiers are already running in the building. We insist on truth and transparency from our local government officials - please open the Red Brick Building for the better

of the community!"

As of this week, Ambrosia's petition amassed 379 signatures toward a goal of 500, and remains open. She said she received additional support for reopening from visits with residents.

At the meeting, Ambrosia was joined by other library officials and supporters online who let their feelings be known to Reynolds and board members.

Reynolds responded by questioning why they were there.

"At the last board meeting, we said we were planning if things continue to move in the right direction - which they have been - we were planning to have the building, which would include the library, opened back up by May 1," he said. "So I'm not sure why the library has been wanting to have the building opened by May 1; I'm not sure why all the people are at the meeting tonight."

In response, Ambrosia and others who spoke said they felt the village was ignoring them.

"After last month's meeting, my friends (and) I began a petition that has since been circulating around the community," Ambrosia said. "We felt this was the logical next step, since it felt like our questions and comments were falling on deaf ears. I presented this petition to each of the board members ... and I also dropped off a copy at the village office of all the paper signatures we obtained.

"The community is speaking loud and clear that they want this building to be reopened. Phase 4 of the New York state guidelines that the mayor is referring to permits this building to be open with safety precautions."

Informing Reynolds and board members of the village reactions to her online and door-to-door petition, she said, "Every person's response was frustration, bewilderment, lots of questions they couldn't answer, and they immediately said, 'Yes, I will sign this.'"

"Unfortunately, this has become much more than just the reopening of the building. The community is questioning our leadership. Why are you not allowing us to have a conversation about this? ...

"It is time to move forward and develop a plan for reopening and not only develop a plan, but share it with the community. Your constituents deserve better communication."

She went on to pose questions to Reynolds, Caserta and the board

as to the reasons for the delay, asking why Youngstown was not acting as fast on reopening as other municipalities; what is the timeframe to open; and would the community be given the opportunity for input.

"Let me address a few things on that," Reynolds began. "One, Sarah you keep saying ... you were very unhappy with me and the board because we're not communicating with you. And I take offense to that, because we have been communicating with you. The issue is, you don't like and don't accept that answer that we've given you. But the fact that you don't like the answer doesn't mean that we're not communicating with you. And what you fail to understand is we have had the building closed because of mandates from New York state.

"It's not something that we're just choosing to do because we're picking on the library. And as far as every time you asked for when are we going to reopen it, you've been told as soon as we have the mandates that say we can reopen the building, we will do that. And I have told you right along, the board is waiting to get everything reopen as quickly as we can. What you don't seem to understand is the mandates that we're under ... it means that we don't have a choice with that; we have to follow them."

Throughout their conversations with Ambrosia, both Reynolds and Caserta attempted to answer her questions. They said they understood the frustrations over library's long-term closure and the calls for action. They also attempted to explain the village's position with respect to the state's restrictions. But as the conversations continued tempers escalated, emotions took over and patience ran out.

"This is not just about the library," Ambrosia countered. "The mayor keeps referring to everybody who's here from the library, but it's not just about the library. It's about the entire building. And again, the community is expressing to you something. We elected you to these positions, and we're expressing to you how we feel. And you're completely dismissing (us)."

At that point, tempers escalated and the discussion grew tense.

"Nobody's dismissing anything; we're just (not) doing it as fast as you want," Caserta responded. "That's an unfair statement you just made. And you have to admit

that's an unfair statement."

Explaining she entered into this discussion because she felt the village's handling of the library's interests were being ignored, Ambrosia said, "I don't appreciate how we're being treated here."

"How are you being treated?" Caserta asked.

She responded, "With contempt. Why are we arguing here, why we can't have. ..."

"Sarah why can't you listen?" Caserta interjected. "What did I tell you? I said they'll be open by May 1. So, we listened to you and we did it in a way that was the most appropriate for all the entities in the village. Where's the contempt?"

Responding to claims made by other library speakers of a perceived lack of cooperation on the part of the village and its plans toward reopening, Reynolds said information on the reopening had been shared earlier with Library Director Sonora Miller, but it was not conveyed to others.

"Sonora has been given the information," he said. "If she's not passing that on to her board, that's not my problem. You need to address with Sonora why she is not putting her information out."

Miller immediately rejected that claim.

"It has been alluded to that I am not passing along information," she responded. "What I heard in a verbal phone call with the mayor was that the building might be open - that's not the same as a written email confirming that the building will be open with details."

Advising Reynolds she had not been provided any details at all regarding mandates or a reopening plan, Miller added, "At this point, all I heard was hearsay. I am not your megaphone. If the board wants to put it out, that's up to the village and the board."

With the discussion continuing to drag on toward a half-hour, Reynolds said he felt there had been enough.

"OK, I think we all got our points across," he said. "We on the board will see if we can get better on putting information out to the public. But for everybody, the one thing I would say at this point is, one thing we learned throughout this whole process is having a library in a municipal building is probably not the ideal situation. With that, I will let that go, and we will move on."

(Look for additional news from the session in today's issue; related commentaries are on Page 4.)

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
POWER AUTHORITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

The Power Authority of the State of New York (Authority) will hold a public hearing as detailed below on a proposed form of Contract for the sale of hydropower to Amcor Rigid Packaging USA, LLC, Pine Pharmaceuticals, LLC, Plug Power Inc., and seven neighboring states, namely, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Copies of the proposed Contract forms may be inspected at the Authority's office at the address below, or online at the Authority's Web site, www.nypa.gov.

Those wishing to make oral statements at the hearing are asked to provide to the Authority, in writing, in advance of the hearing, their name(s) and the name of the organization or group they represent. Oral statements should be limited to five minutes. Speakers should also bring two hard copies of their oral statements to the hearing.

Hearing Date: May 6, 2021
Hearing Times: 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Hearing Location: 535 Washington Street, 2nd Floor Conference Room
Buffalo, New York 14203

Written statements provided to the Authority by close of business on Friday, May 7, 2021 will also become part of the record of the hearing. For further information, including the address of other Authority offices at which copies of the proposed Contract forms may be inspected, contact:

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Karen Delince, Corporate Secretary
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