

Letter to the Editor

Library Services

Submitted by George "Jody" Sweeney Commissioner, 5th Levy Court District

For those of you who are not aware, Kent County Government is an autonomous government. We consist of 7 elected Commissioners, 6 elected Row Officers, 1 appointed County Administrator, 5 appointed Directors of County Divisions and nearly 300 employees in various degrees of support. We balance our budget every year. We have raised property taxes just one time in 25 years and very rarely do we affect employees' take home pay. Public Safety is a priority and we provide the best to save the lives of thousands of residents each year. Yet State and City legislators feel the need to express surprise, concern, disdain, or disappointment in our ability to govern.

These same legislators and those involved with the Dover Public Library did just that recently when the county government voted to purchase a building to improve library services. We were accused of not "following the Master Plan" and of "taking the money from Dover". To fund the Dover Library, we were asked to give them \$3.7million: \$1million in funds from the library capital account and a bond of \$2.7million repaid over 20 years by closing the County Library. We chose to go in a different direction. The total cost to move into a new County Library will be approximately \$2million dollars. This funding has been sitting in capital funds which were set aside from the Realty Transfer Tax years ago and cannot be used to balance our budget. Dover thought they were "entitled" to this money.

The County Library lease at its current location expires in May, 2010. In May, 2009, we began looking for a new lease location with long term potential and simply fell into an offer that we could not ignore. It is a mere .3 miles from our current location and will continue to serve the growing population south of the City of Dover. In every map generated since 1998 depicting a "library service area", the new location of the County Library is within the Kent County Library designated "Service Area" and services the 2nd highest density of population in the County. The supporters of the Dover Library have no basis of truth for accusing us of infringing on some alleged area that belongs to them!

We currently provide support to Harrington, Smyrna, Milford, and Dover via the Reciprocal Borrowing Program. This program is a separate tax on non-municipal residents at a rate of \$.037 cents on 40% of the assessed value of their home; an average of \$20 per year. These funds support county residents' visits to municipal libraries at a rate of \$2.65 per loan. Over the last 14 years, the county has provided \$6.4million in funding to the 4 municipal libraries with \$4.9million to Dover alone. Concern has been raised by the Dover Supporters that our actions affect Harrington and Smyrna Libraries because they are undersized. Maybe we should consider changing the Reciprocal Borrowing Rate to improve the share of that funding for the smaller libraries as suggested by those opposing the County move.

The Dover supporters cannot have it both ways. They cannot appeal for all of the County funding while describing the woes of two of the other municipal libraries.

Imagine an area of the county, in a quiet park setting with playground, walking trails, sports fields, benches, trees and grass. Now imagine an area surrounded by concrete, brick, and blacktop, office buildings and paved sidewalks, cars and noise. Which would you prefer as a setting for a library? Ask yourself what you would do to prevent one of those locations from becoming a reality if the less attractive location was yours.

This is the RIGHT thing to do and is sorely needed. We have been accused of ignoring the plan. We were included but not consulted about the "Master Plan", but I am ready to meet with any group to cooperatively discuss the future of Library Services in the County as long as it is not at the expense of the County Library.