



## VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN

This is a letter with information on the VBDL of Lawrence.

It was built in 2004 at the cost of approximately \$ 565,000.00. This project was funded by a special millage for 5 years on the taxpayers of Lawrence township.

In 1999 there was a contract signed by the VBDL, Village of Lawrence and the Township of Lawrence outlining the partnership of these entities. In the contract it does state that the Village and Township will be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the building for the length of the contract, which had no ending date.

At the time of the contract, it made sense for the township and village to help support the library because they did not have a large funding source. As the years have passed the VBDL has made significant changes to their funding by millages, which allows them to bring in a total of 2.8 million dollars per year to operate the 7 facilities throughout Van Buren County.

For the past 30 plus years they have housed in all 7 facilities rent free and pay no maintenance cost. At one point through the years, they would give \$5,000 to Lawrence Library fund for a stipend to defray some of the maintenance costs, that fund would be used for paint on the walls, or for repairs that exceeded the \$5,000. That funding ended about 3 years ago due to some technical lawful issues.

Last January the boiler system at the library broke and I met with Dan Hutchins, the Director of the VBDL along with the Librarian, Anne. The township was requesting a shared cost to repair the boiler system at the price for the VBDL of \$12,000 for their 50% of the cost. At that time, I was presented with a contract that was for the Village of Lawrence, Township and the VBDL. In that contract there was the fact that the two parties were responsible for all cost of maintenance and repairs, and that the library had no intentions of helping with the cost of repairs. Later that month I attended the VBDL Board meeting and the board also stood by the director's advice of not contributing. The Township did have someone come and look at the boilers and we thought they were going to last. When winter rolled around this year, 2025, the boiler system once again broke.

The township bought electric heaters to spread throughout the building to help keep the library operational until the board could decide what direction they need to go to fix the heating system without spending a fortune. The township Sexton spent several hours



## VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN

during the course of the cold days in December attending to the building and making sure the building was heated.

During this time other townships had contacted the Lawrence township Supervisor and spoke about the contract as written and how times have changed especially with the income the VBDL over the years. We had general discussions on the aging of the buildings and the cost increases of repairs and maintenance.

At some point of conversations taking place the director of the VBDL presented to Antwerp township and to Lawrence township an addendum to the antiquated contract from 1999. In the addendum it was proposed to give the townships a \$7500 payment each year with a one time \$15000 payment the first year to make up for the past years of no payments towards maintenance. But this payment language also states only when and if they decide they can afford it.

Sometime after the New Year there was a post from an anonymous member on face book about all the letters and addendum and why the townships were trying to kick the libraries out of the buildings. That information was found to be false and was deleted from the posting. This week the Director of VBDL sent out an email letter to the Friends of the Library stating more one sided information and insinuating that Lawrence township is trying to run the library out of the building. That the new language we will be presenting to the VBDL Board is unjustified just because it is “ OLD” contract. In the letter it talks about the funding lost because of the Power plant in covert being shut down and that they lost 11% of their funding from property taxes a year from 2018 to 2022. They are worried about the stability of funds, hence the large fund balance they hold. My answer to that is, every township, village, city, County Government entity, and any other taxing agency within the Van Buren County operate year to year on a budget from projected revenues. We know about stability! We know how to operate within our means. We know that things may change year to year , cost of repairs go up, cost of maintenance rise, and this is the exact reason we are now seeking for a shared cost in maintaining the building in which you occupy, and have occupied for the past 22 years rent free.

At the December Township board meeting the direction from the board was clear. They want to open up language to exclude the Lawrence Village from the contract. The reason for this is because the Lawrence township and Village tax payers are already paying a 1+



**VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN**

mil towards the VBDL and now we are using more of their tax money they pay in to the general fund for repair and cost associated to the Library building, which means the village tax payers are paying a possible 3x's towards the Library and the township 2x's . Also the Village holds no ownership in the building that the library is in. That is owned by the Township. The board also gave direction to include a 3-5 year review of the contract. This allows each party to review and adjust any needed cost or language associated to both. The board accepted the \$15000 one time payment and \$7500 a year offer but with the need of language that guarantees this payment every year. Not a "possible" payment determined by the occupants of the building.

The Lawrence Township Board wants to make it perfectly clear, they are not asking the VBDL to vacate the building. They have been elected to a position that requires them to spend their tax money with fiscal responsibility. It is the opinion of the board that allowing the VBDL to stay in the building owned by the taxpayers for free and sole burden be placed on them to maintain the building with the tax dollars collected when there is already tax dollars collected for the purpose of the library, must change.

The Lawrence township board also request that the VBDL Executive Director understand that we as a board want the letters that have false accusations and make the Township board look like the villains to stop. The intimidation tactics will not defray us from continuing to do what is right for our tax paying citizens.

The township board request that the representative for Lawrence on the VBDL board carry forward the message to the VBDL board that we as a township plan to have open and honest conversations in the future. That our direction is done with good faith of doing what is in the best interest of the taxpayers of Lawrence Township.

Sincerely ,

Lawrence Township Board of Directors

January, 15,2026