

**Erie County Budget Hearing
November 16, 2011**

SHARON THOMAS, B&ECPL System Board Chairperson:

Good afternoon and thank you for having us here today. On behalf of the 37 Libraries which make up the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library System, please accept my sincerest appreciation for your time. As always, I must express the Library's gratitude for your ongoing support and confidence in the services we provide.

2010 was a banner year for the Library System.

- Circulation surpassed 8 million items
 - There were more than 3.9 million visits to the library
- and
- Public access computer use has risen by a staggering 96% across the System since 2007.

2011 is proving once again that the Library is a vital service to the residents of Erie County. Despite the reduction of service hours - 98 per week - circulation of materials remains constant and computer use is at maximum capacity.

We have worked hard to provide quality services, which meet the needs of the residents, within the budgetary constraints placed upon us.

I must make this clear.... to continue to provide necessary services and meet residents needs, we, the Library, cannot continue on the financial road of uncertainty.

As you are aware, this past September, with the support of a *super* majority of contracting library Boards, the System Board of Trustees voted to move forward to create a Special Legislative District Public Library System. We remain committed to this task in order to reduce our governance structure (23 government entities, 23 hiring authorities to 1 government entity, 1 hiring authority) and secure long term financial stability. Both of which are key to our ability to meet the ever growing demands and needs of our services.

We are in the initial phases of the Special Legislative District Public Library process. We expect to begin to work with constituents after the first of the year. The entire process is expected to take between 18 - 24 months. We ask for your support and assistance in helping us reach our goal.

Today, we are here to discuss how you can help us in the 2012 budget. I'd like to now turn this over to Mary Jean and Ken. Thank you.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR MARY JEAN JAKUBOWSKI:

Thank you, Sharon and thanks to all of you for having us here today.

I too, would like to thank the Legislature for its ongoing support of the Library. 2011 has proved to be a year of challenge and a year of change. Our use statistics speak volumes to us, as I know they do to you, of the importance of the Public Library within this community.

Yes, we can all agree our statistics are impressive. However, funding and the challenges we face year to year as a result is not [impressive].

Historically, funding has been unstable. Harkening back as far as 1975 we can demonstrate the lack of stability in funding. Library funding has been reduced many more times than it has been increased.... there have been library closures, reduced hours and services, reductions in staff etc. Sadly all of these have become a trend.

Planning for the future is nearly impossible.

We have worked hard to streamline workflow activities, we have purchased equipment, from significant investments like RFID to smaller investments into new floor cleaning equipment and everything in between to increase efficiencies, we have reduced floor plans and restructured staffing patterns, and monitored utility use...the list goes on and on.

Can we do more? You have my word that we will continue to explore all options, new technologies and library trends.

We have also stepped up our fundraising efforts. In just the past six (6) months we have raised more than ½ million dollars for the 2012 materials budget, programs and the development of a strategic plan. Donations were received from generous individuals, businesses and foundations. And, again you have my word; we will continue to look for new and creative ways to bring additional dollars into the Library System. But these funds cannot supplant basic library service needs.

We have had to make very difficult decisions. You have had to make very difficult decisions.

Despite what some may think....it must be said the Library is not a political entity. It is a quality of life institution - one which has proven itself through the test of time. It is and institution that is ever evolving. It is an entity which the community believes in.....supports and looks to in order to meet many of its basic needs.

I believe NOW is a time of opportunity. I hope you will as well.

Let us start today to work together to simplify and reduce our governance structure.

Let us start today, to work together to secure stabilized funding. Together we will do great things.

I will now ask Ken Stone to go through our 2012 budget.

Thank you.