

41 GILBERT HILL RD, CHESTER, CT 06412

July 20, 2017

Virginia Carmany, Chair, and the Chester Board of Finance
Town of Chester
203 Middlesex Avenue
Chester, CT 06412

Dear Virginia,

The proposed revitalization of North Quarter Park with the new library, children's playscape, nature trails and other improvements just makes sense for the residents and taxpayers of our town.

I am writing to the Board of Finance as a citizen and taxpayer of our town, but for the last three years I have served as the Chester Energy Team's representative on the Library Building Committee. When I joined the committee I knew little about libraries, although I well remember my disappointment when first going inside the current Chester Library on seeing the cramped, outdated facilities and limited collection space. While realtors showing prospective purchasers around the town must surely point out the quaint library exterior as they drive by I would be very surprised if any take their clients inside to see what lies behind the façade.

Over the last three years the committee has explored numerous options and designs for the revitalization of North Quarter Park. The proposed schematic design for the park and new library will provide tremendous benefits to Chester residents of all ages, particularly the youngest and the oldest in our community. I know residents who have moved or are considering moving out of town and others who feel forced to use facilities in other towns due to the poor facilities in Chester. Now is the time to stop this exodus that is eroding our property values.

As a taxpayer who has made little use of the current library I am concerned about the cost of the project, specifically about what it will cost me personally. Having done my own analysis I have concluded that a 3% increase in the property tax revenues in the town's 2017-2018 budget would enable the town to finance 73% of the project cost leaving \$1 million to be covered by the state library grant and another \$1 million to be found by fundraising initiatives, an aggressive but achievable goal.

A 3% property tax increase is easy to comprehend since we have all recently received our 2017-18 tax bills. For me that means \$264.83 per year or \$5.09 per week before taking account of the federal and state tax deductions. Am I willing to contribute that for this project to improve the quality of life in our town? Absolutely! Do I believe that the market value of my home will be at least \$2,648 higher in ten years than it would be without the NQP revitalization? Almost certainly!

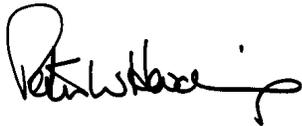
Concerns about possible increases in operating costs have legitimately been raised but are unfounded. The 2017-18 library budget of \$149,000 breaks down into four major categories, two of which (staffing at 75% and utilities at 4%) are related to the size, layout and construction of the building and two of which (collection acquisitions at 11% and systems and services at 10%) are driven by other factors.

Efficient staffing was a major criterion in the design of the new library and was a significant factor in the rejection of a two-story design. The location of the main circulation desk and librarian workstations at the hub of the new library provides excellent visibility over the entry and main areas of the library and will require no increase in current staffing levels.

Energy costs for the new library can and should be eliminated! The building has been laid out to incorporate renewable solar energy systems and in the next design phase the building envelope and systems can be developed to minimize energy use. A Net Zero Energy library building is an inspiring goal that will put Chester on the map as a progressive place to live and to do business.

I respectfully urge the Board of Finance to ask the voters of the Town of Chester to approve the partial funding for the North Quarter Park Revitalization project this November with a property tax increase of 3% over 2017-18 levels. This investment will help ensure the future vitality of our town, bring immediate benefits to our citizens of all ages, and bolster property values by attracting new residents and stemming the exodus of current residents.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter W. Harding". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Peter W. Harding