



Library Advisory Board Meeting Thursday, October 19, 2023 Via Zoom

District 1- Vacant	District 4- Howells	District 7- Aoh (President)
District 2- Rosenthal	District 5- Almorsy	At-Large- Murphy (Vice- President)
District 3- Tempestini	District 6- Vacant	At-Large- Groves (Secretary)

AGENDA

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Approval of Minutes – September 28, 2023**
- 3. Public Comment- (limit to 10 minutes)**
- 4. Library Reports**
 - a. Staff Reports- Outreach- Alyssa Johnson
 - b. Report of the Director
 - c. Review of Financial Report- Deana
 - d. Statistical and Other Reports-
 - e. Report of District Consultant
- 5. Board and Committee Reports**
 - a. Report of County Council Liaison
 - b. Report of Friends of the Library
 - c. Report of Erie Regional Library Foundation
- 6. Unfinished Business-**
 - a. Distribution of Bylaw Changes
 - b. 2024 Board Meeting dates and times
- 7. New Business**
 - a. Presentation of Slate of Officers
- 8. Adjournment**
- 9. Appendix**
 - a. Announcements
 - b. News Articles

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 - b. Report of the Director

Connections-

Youth Services Librarians- As announced in August, the Library has relocated two of its five Youth Services Librarians to expand programming and gather data at the four branch libraries of Erie County. This was done for a multitude of reasons. The idea of a full time Branch Youth Librarian is not a new concept. Past Directors have looked to expand youth services across all ECPL locations. With the upcoming Bayfront construction, the time to gather statistics, along with expand branch programming is now. Once established and data is collected, the library can utilize what is learned both during the Bayfront construction and after. Information gathered could set the stage for additional dedicated Librarians across the library. This initiative was set in motion before any discussion regarding the research center.

Great Lakes Research & Education Center- On Tuesday night a resolution was passed to accept a lease agreement between Erie County and Gannon University. This agreement will allow the Raymond M. Blasco, M.D. Memorial Library to be the home location of the Gannon Great Lakes Research and Education Center. There were a number of questions brought up and here is a quick fact sheet to help clear up some misconceptions.

This information is accurate as of 10/18/23:

Will the Library lose state funding? No, ECPL receives money to be the District Library Center for the Erie-Crawford District. There are certain criteria that must be met to receive this funding. Nothing in the Water Research project changes any of the services that we offer and this funding is not in jeopardy.

What about Keystone Grants? None of the proposed areas that the Water Research Center will occupy are in Keystone Grants funded project areas. The Library is remaining a library and will be here for many, many years.

Is the Library losing Children's programming space? No. This project is located on the same floor as Children's but on the opposite side of the building. Additionally, the Research Center will offer programming to supplement our programming. A win-win for the community.

Is the Library losing public space? No, in fact, the footprint for the Water Research Center will develop additional public space for the community.

Is the Library losing children's programming? No. Children's programming is not being eliminated. Some of the locations have been changed as the branches begin to have access to librarians to increase programming through-out our county service area. This has been a plan in discussion for many years, with many Directors. This plan was discussed long before we were presented with the Water Research opportunity.

Gannon staff will park by State Street near their Environaut.

Capacity-

Staff Development Day- the Library conducted a Staff Development Day on Monday, October 9. Antonio Howard gave a powerful speech and led a mural painting event. It was wonderful to see all staff engaging to create something meaningful and heart felt. The mural is located in the staff hallway of Blasco on the first floor.



PA Forward - The Erie County Public Library is a PA Forward Gold Star Library. PA Forward® is a literacy initiative of the Pennsylvania Library Association that highlights a ‘libraries’ role in moving Pennsylvania forward. The five literacies in which libraries “brand” their programming and communications are Basic Literacy, Information Literacy, Civic and Social literacy, Health Literacy and Financial Literacy. At staff training day, Jessica Church, our District Consultant, shared the multitude of resources offered by <https://paforward.org/>

Display Policy- A display policy is pending review by the County Solicitor. Once reviewed, it will be presented to the Board. We can discuss any changes or modifications and move forward.

c. Review of Financial Report- Deana

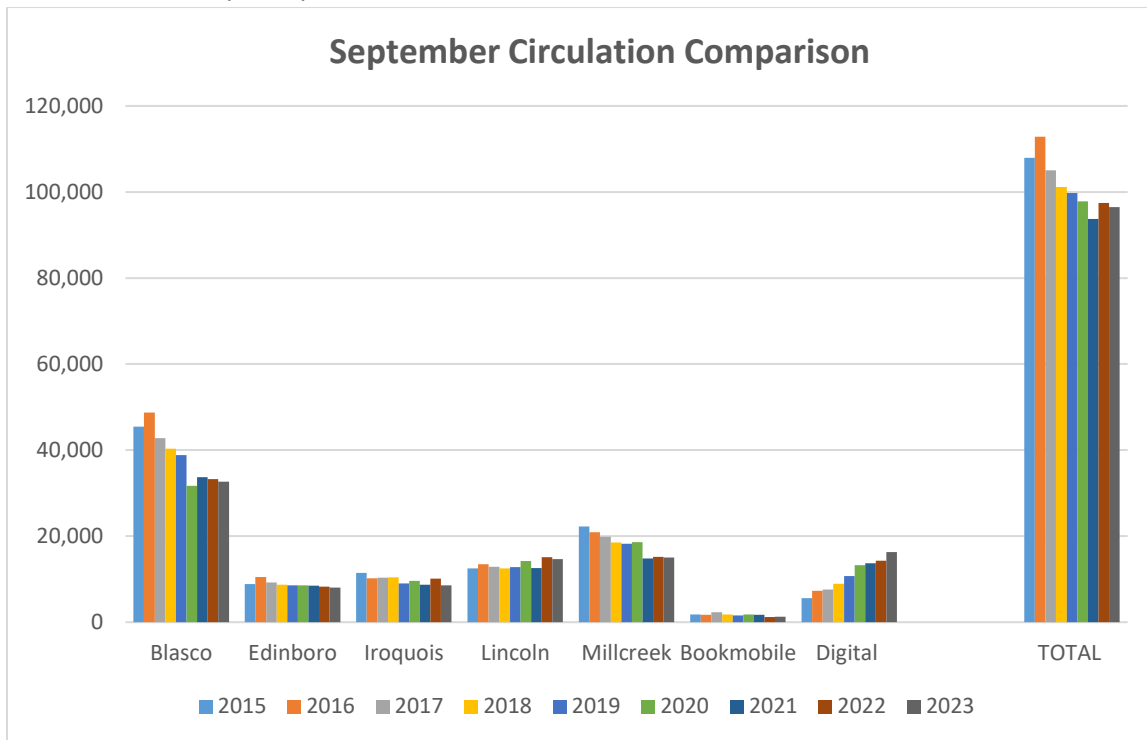
See attached



September 2023 Statistics

Numbers Snapshot

- **506** new cards issued (↑8%), including **131** e-cards (↑60%)
- **16,300** Digital Circulation is (↑12%)
- **33,530** Patron visits (↑6%)



	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Blasco	45,456	48,739	42,775	40,287	38,850	31,714	33,734	33,270	32,650
Edinboro	8,874	10,481	9,248	8,684	8,527	8,574	8,508	8,291	8,051
Iroquois	11,493	10,187	10,359	10,450	9,040	9,625	8,716	10,113	8,530
Lincoln	12,535	13,500	12,876	12,537	12,805	14,242	12,596	15,125	14,649
Millcreek	22,215	20,900	19,864	18,498	18,247	18,621	14,802	15,169	15,039
Bookmobile	1,790	1,731	2,327	1,799	1,553	1,771	1,707	1,187	1,260
Digital	5,595	7,318	7,580	8,898	10,716	13,240	13,682	14,313	16,300
TOTAL	107,958	112,856	105,029	101,153	99,738	97,787	93,745	97,468	96,479

District Services Report as of September 25, 2023

Updates for ECPL LAB Report

Submitted by Jessica Church, District Consultant

State Aid Applications for Libraries

The member libraries are wrapping up their applications for State Aid. While the specific application process was new to many this year, this general concept falls in line with the purpose of the State Aid program. According to the way in which legislators wrote the laws and fiscal code, State Aid is a reward to libraries for meeting a set of standards. In this current cycle to receive State Aid funding:

- 2022: Gather operational and financial data
- 2023
 - Due in March: Submit data on State survey (annual report);
 - *Where we're at in the process now* Due October 1: Apply for State Aid based on the data provided earlier in the year. If a library did not meet all of its standards, it also applies for a waiver (if applicable and if available).
 - Due later this year: Libraries explain how they plan to use their State Aid to enhance library services
- Early 2024: Library receives State Aid funds for meeting standards throughout 2022.

District Tidbits

- The Erie & Crawford Library District includes **16 member libraries**:
 - Albion Area Public Library (Erie County)
 - Benson Memorial Library (Titusville, Crawford County)
 - Cambridge Springs Public Library (Crawford County)
 - Cochranon Area Public Library (Crawford County)
 - Corry Public Library (Erie County)
 - Erie County Public Library (includes branches and bookmobile)
 - Linesville Community Public Library (Crawford County)
 - McCord Memorial Library (North East, Erie County)
 - Margaret Shontz Memorial Library (Conneaut Lake, Crawford County)
 - Meadville Public Library (Crawford County)
 - Rice Avenue Community Public Library (Girard, Erie County)
 - Saegertown Area Library (Crawford County)
 - Springboro Public Library (Crawford County)
 - Stone Memorial Library (Crawford County)
 - Union City Public Library (Erie County)
 - Waterford Public Library (Erie County)
- **District Aid** is all State Aid funds designated for serving libraries through collaborative means in a certain area—in our case, Erie & Crawford Counties. Funds go to initiatives such as delivery, covering the salary of the district consultant, and projects that benefit most/all member libraries.
- **County Coordination Aid** is State Aid funds for cooperative projects for libraries in a specific county. In Erie County, these funds help to cover Polaris (the software used to catalog items and check them in/out), certain IT positions and technology equipment, Dial-A-Story, and more. As Erie County does not have a federated system (a formal unit to operate such projects), the funds and initiatives are overseen by the District Library Center.

5. Board and Committee Reports

- a. Report of County Council Liaison
- b. Report of Friends of the Library
- c. Report of Erie Regional Library Foundation

6. Unfinished Business-

- a. Distribution of Bylaw Changes
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9. Appendix

- a. Announcements

-Next meeting is Thursday, November 16 at Blasco in Room 219

- b. News Articles

Blasco Library could soon house 3,000-square foot water research center. Here's what we know

October 5, 2023 | Erie Times-News: Web Edition Articles (PA)

Author/Byline: A.J. Rao, Erie Times-News | Section: News

[Read News Document](#)

If plans coalesce between Erie County government and Gannon University, a 3,000-square foot water research and education center could become a reality at Blasco Memorial Library.

The proposed center, the Great Lakes Research & Education Center, is the brainchild of Gannon University, and is a part of its \$24 million water quality initiative known as Project NePTWNE, pronounced "Neptune," after the Roman god of freshwater and the seas.

Originally, the university planned to build the center at the historic Union Fish Company Building at 116 W. Front St. at Wolverine Marina. That was the plan sold to members of Erie County Council in March when they approved \$1.5 million in American Rescue Plan funds to develop the center.

But at a Sept. 28 meeting of the Erie County Library Advisory Board, Erie County Public Library Director Karen Pierce said Gannon University was now in talks with the county to build the center at the library.

Pierce said the plan was not set in stone but that members of Erie County Council and the Library Advisory Board have already toured the proposed site on the library's first floor.

"We're still in a preliminary stage," she said. "But I'm really excited about all this happening. I think it's going to be something that's fabulous for our community."

Gannon University spokesman Doug Oathout told the Erie Times-News that the university is still "exploring the idea" and expects the matter to be discussed by council at an upcoming finance committee meeting.

Where would the center be located? What would it consist of?

The proposed center would be located on the library's first floor and occupy what is now office space at the very end of the Community Classroom area and through the doors to the right of the Internet Lab, according to Oathout.

Oathout said library employees who use that office space would move upstairs.

Oathout said the center would occupy more than 3,000 square feet as opposed to the 1,800 square feet planned at the Union Fish Company Building. The center would have an exit and entry point for employees while visitors would enter through the main library entrance.

The center would include an aquatics research lab, classroom space, fish tanks, a butterfly conservatory and exhibits.

"You're looking out the windows at the bayfront and here (in the library) there would be further explanation of the ecology of what you're seeing and the interconnectedness of all the ecological systems," Oathout said.

Oathout said the center's water tanks and exhibits would not adversely impact the library, insisting measures will be in place to contain any kind of spill.

"You're not talking about millions of gallons of water here," he said.

Why did plans change from the Union Fish Company Building?

Oathout said Gannon University stepped away from developing the center at the Union Fish Company Building because of a stipulation by the Erie Western PA Port Authority, which owns the building.

Oathout said the Port Authority insisted that the university would only get a 30-day notice if asked to vacate.

"For us, we had to pause and say, 'If we're going to invest a lot of money into this space, is it smart to do that knowing that at any given time, you could be handed a 30-day notice to vacate the property?'" Oathout said.

Oathout said the university tried to get some "long-term promises" out of the Port Authority but was unable to reach an agreement. He said the county then approached the university about using the library.

"We have an opportunity to provide an even better experience for the general public (at the library)," Oathout said.

Gannon University sub-leases the space at the Union Fish Company Building from Lakeshore Towing, who is the primary tenant and leases the building from the Port Authority.

Oathout said the university will continue to lease the space from Lakeshore Towing because the university uses the nearby dock space for its Environaut research vessel. Oathout said it's still unclear how the university will use the 1,800 square feet inside the building.

When the Times-News contacted the Port Authority to comment on the university's decision, Port Authority Board Chairman Jeff Brinling provided the following statement:

"We've had a long-time relationship with Gannon University as community partners and we look forward to continuing that relationship in the future as we both believe in the betterment of our community, especially the bayfront."

Why is a former public library director objecting to the project?

Former Erie County Councilmember Mary Rennie, who previously served as public library director, voiced an objection to the project at the Library Advisory Board meeting in September.

Her objection dealt with the county seeming to embrace a water research center while curtailing Blasco Library's children's services and programming due to limited parking.

Rennie referred to Pierce's recent announcement to move two children's librarians from Blasco Library to the branch locations. Rennie said the explanation given by the library was that the Bayfront Parkway project will limit parking at Blasco Library and that moving the children's librarians to the branches will allow visitors and families to engage in programming at alternate locations.

She questioned why a water research center would not raise the same concerns about space.

"If the library parking cannot support children's library functions, then it certainly cannot support additional extraneous programs," she said.

Rennie stressed how Blasco Library is a designated District Center library and that it receives funding from the state Department of Education to fulfill that role. She also said Blasco Library has received multiple Keystone grants from the state, all with a stipulation that library services remain undisturbed.

"The Blasco Library is the only county library that serves the largest municipality in Erie County, which is the city of Erie," she said. "It is unconscionable to take away popular services for families and children which promote curiosity and learning, healthy interaction between family members, early literacy and social skills, all of which are critically important."

Council approves ARP money for Neptune: Research or 'redlining?': Erie County Council OK's recovery funds for water testing center

More on Project Neptune: Gannon University seeks to clean Lake Erie and boost economy in the process

A.J. Rao can be reached at arao@gannett.com. Follow him on X @ETNRao.

Erie County Council to vote Tuesday on water research center at Blasco Library

October 14, 2023 | Erie Times-News: Web Edition Articles (PA)

Author/Byline: A.J. Rao, Erie Times-News | Section: News

1063 Words | Readability: Lexile: 1620, grade level(s): >12

[Read News Document](#)

A new water research center is one vote away from becoming a reality at the Blasco Memorial Library.

Erie County Council will vote on a resolution Tuesday to approve a 25-year lease agreement between the county and Gannon University. The agreement will greenlight the development of a water research and education center — to include a fishery and aquaponics lab, a butterfly conservatory and a science classroom —

on the eastern wing of the library's first floor.

Gannon University will pay \$22,956 annually to lease the space and is prohibited from breaking the lease within the first 10 years, as per the lease agreement.

The resolution to approve the agreement was not listed on the public agenda of council's finance committee meeting Thursday. Councilmember Ellen Schauerman, who heads the committee, brought forth the resolution as a last-minute addition to the agenda. Finance committee meetings don't include public comment periods.

Since the measure is a resolution, it doesn't require a second reading and can be approved by a single majority vote of council at Tuesday's regular meeting, which begins at 6 p.m. in Room 117 of the Erie County Courthouse

The public will be allowed to comment on the resolution Tuesday. It will be the only opportunity for the public to voice their thoughts about the project, which will take up more than 3,000 square feet of space at Blasco Library, a public library designated by the state as a district library center.

Council members say resolution was rushed, not transparent

Erie County Executive Brenton Davis has championed the project, stating on his campaign Facebook page that the center will help transform Blasco Library into a larger regional asset, attracting more investment and visitors to the area.

But Councilmember Andre Horton said the last-minute arrival of the resolution was reminiscent of the proposed Fairview Business Park project, in which council voted to greenlight a land transfer with little public input and later voted to rescind the deal after facing public backlash.

"This doesn't lend itself to transparency," Horton told the Erie Times-News. "The Blasco Library is one of our most prized resources in the county. I think there should absolutely be more public input, especially coming on the heels of the Fairview Business Park project fiasco."

Former Councilmember Mary Rennie, who previously served as executive director of the Erie County Public Library, referred to the resolution as the "Fairview Business Park, version 2."

"The incredible sneakiness of it is just mind-bending," she said. "How can somebody say on one hand that in their heart they think they're doing what's best for the people and yet they won't allow the people to be a part of the process? That's just outrageous."

Councilmember Terry Scutella added that he wouldn't "rubber stamp" the project, telling the Times-News, "When we rush things, we screw them up."

Council Chairman Brian Shank disagreed and praised the project as a "game-changer."

He said he hasn't heard any pushback from his constituents and that the lease agreement was a good deal that didn't need to be dragged out by council or require a separate public hearing.

"We can't do a public hearing for everything we do. We would never get anything done," he said. "We want to listen to the people. We want to make sure that what they say is heard. But I think this (resolution) is not really appropriate for a public hearing."

Shank added that council members have previously added items to the agenda at the last minute and that the rest

of council always accommodates that. He said council should be equally accommodating when the county executive has a late-arriving agenda item.

The Davis administration did not respond to an email from the Times-News on Friday inquiring about the resolution.

Davis: Gannon will be investing in county, not Port Authority

The proposed center, the Great Lakes Research & Education Center, is the brainchild of Gannon University, and is a part of its \$24 million water quality initiative known as Project NePTWNE, pronounced "Neptune," after the Roman god of freshwater and the seas.

Originally, the university planned to build the center at the historic Union Fish Company Building at 116 W. Front St. at Wolverine Marina. That was the plan sold to members of Erie County Council in March when they approved \$1.5 million in American Rescue Plan funds to develop the center.

But plans changed after the Erie Western Pennsylvania Port Authority, which owns the Union Fish Company Building, insisted the university would only get a 30-day notice if asked to vacate, according to Gannon University spokesman Doug Oathout.

By contrast, the county's lease agreement would give the university a year-long notice after the first 10 years.

Davis added that the \$1.5 million in Rescue Plan funds would now be invested in a county-owned building as opposed to the "shoddy old building at the Port, which could be unreliable for a lease (and would) place the project fate and work in the hands of a Port Board," according to his campaign Facebook page.

The center would be located in an area of the library that currently holds offices and some reference materials, which would be moved to the second floor, according to the administration's rationale statement to council.

Rennie: Blasco Library is reducing children's services and programming

In a statement to the Times-News, Rennie called out the Davis administration for pulling back children's services and programming at Blasco Library while simultaneously planning for a water research center.

She referred to how the administration recently moved two children's librarians from Blasco Library to branch locations because there wasn't enough parking space available at Blasco Library to accommodate its popular children's programming.

"But apparently, we do have parking space for new staff and visitors to a popular Great Lakes Research Center, complete with an aquarium? If that seems illogical to you, you are not alone," Rennie stated.

Rennie applauded Gannon University's water research initiative but disagreed with relocating the center to the library. She blasted county officials for not investing enough in human capital.

"The Blasco Library is the only outlet to serve Erie City proper, where the concentration of child poverty is the highest in the county," she stated. "As a community, we cannot afford to lose the services it provides for families and children."

More on Great Lakes Research Center: Blasco Library could soon house 3,000-square foot water research center. Here's what we know

More on Project Neptune: Gannon University seeks to clean Lake Erie and boost economy in the process

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Council must reject Gannon's Blasco lease, defend children's services



Your Turn
Mary Rennie
Guest columnist

Erie has never done very well by its children. Numbers over time bear this out. Historically, over too many years, we most valued the basic economic

building blocks of land, labor and capital, with maybe a sprinkling of attention to production line savings. Like other Rust Belt areas, we missed the boat when it comes to human capital.

Researchers now say that as much as 90% of corporate value rests on "intangible" commodities, which in large part means human capital. It's no longer as much about labor. Corporate profit is less tied to the strength of their employ-

ee's backs, but rather to the inventiveness of their minds and ability to work together on common projects. It's all about people and investing in them. Our collective economic future depends on it. Sadly, however, that boat just keeps passing us by.

Investment in people begins with — yep, you already know — child raising. It's more than book knowledge. With children it's just as important to encour-

age imagination and curiosity and to provide for healthy relationships with others. We want our children to grow up feeling invested in their community. That's where motivation begins. Most parents get that. Teachers get it. Smaller, tight-knit communities get it. Librarians get it. Politicians — who often seem to live in a world of quick moneyed fixes

See [RENNIE, Page 2A](#)

Rennie

Continued from [Page 1A](#)

— never get it, in my view. Too often, what I see as ignorance, indifference and a lack of transparency hurts all of us, and it keeps playing out locally again and again, most notably with county government.

Leasing space at key public asset to a private college

The Erie County Executive dropped yet another piece of legislation into the agenda before Erie County Council the other day with no public notice. Council intends to vote on it at the Erie County Council meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 17th. The resolution, if passed, is to approve the lease of more than 3,000 square feet of the Blasco Library to Gannon University's Project Neptune (or NePTWNE). As a councilwoman, I gave my support and voted to help fund this project. Lake Erie is our greatest physical asset, and investment in its health seems like a no-brainer. I applaud Gannon's ambition on

behalf of the whole community. Changing the location of their Great Lakes Research Center to be within the Blasco Library, however, is wrong.

We can't afford to lose children's services at Blasco

Even as the Davis administration was planning to sell off a portion of the Blasco Library to Gannon, they were pulling back on Blasco library services to children and families. They sent the children's librarians to other locations. "We don't have enough parking space at the Blasco Library for people attending popular Storytime programs" is what I was told at a public Library Board meeting. But apparently, we do have parking space for new staff and visitors to a popular Great Lakes Research Center, complete with aquarium? If that seems illogical to you, you are not alone.

For children, early literacy is as much about the experience as anything else. At library programs, books are brought to life for children. They also get to interact with other children and with their family members. It's quite possibly one of their only chances to also see a good

cross section of the larger community, and not just their immediate neighbors. In other words, it hits all the important child raising points I mentioned earlier. Are we willing to give all that up?

Full disclosure: I love the branch libraries. I oversaw the Millcreek, Lincoln and Edinboro branch construction projects and managed their operation. Each branch, however, now has a manager to conduct public programs. The Blasco Library is the only outlet to serve the city of Erie proper, where the concentration of child poverty is the highest in Erie County. As a community, we cannot afford to lose the services it provides for families and children.

If that weren't enough, the Blasco Library built the children's room in part with capital grant funds received from the state and federal governments. They were given with the stipulation that library services be undisturbed. This seems to be a clear violation of that. The Erie Library also receives more than \$1 million dollars from the Pennsylvania Department of Education each year, in part for the Blasco Library's role as a District Library Center, serving libraries throughout Erie and Crawford counties.

It's possible that the removal of these staff and programs due to "parking issues" will result in a major loss of state funding.

Transparency failure akin to Fairview Business Park fiasco

Ultimately, this is the Fairview Business Park, version 2, which is sad. Obviously council members have not learned from that fiasco. County Council exists to represent the public at large. Legislation should receive proper public scrutiny. Instead, the Council Finance Chairwoman Ellen Schauerman in allowing this item to land on the meeting agenda with no advance notice once again, in my view, put the desires of the County Executive ahead of the public's right to know and to participate in the process. County Council is culpable if they allow this to pass. The meeting is at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 17th, in the Erie County Courthouse.

Tell your council representative "no."
Mary Rennie formerly served as Erie County councilwoman and executive director of the Erie County Public Library.