



Library Advisory Board Meeting Monday, March 18, 2024 Via Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83819780963?pwd=OFkraXEyamdRL2tEbFNXcDJZOWswZz09>

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

AGENDA

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Approval of Minutes – February 26, 2024**
3. **Public Comment- (limit to 15 minutes)**
4. **Library Reports**
 - a. Staff Report-
 - b. Report of the Director- John Euliano
 - c. Review of Financial Report- Deana
 - d. Statistical and Other Reports- John
 - e. Report of District Consultant-Jessica Church
5. **Board and Committee Reports**
 - a. Report of County Council Liaison- Councilman Horton
 - b. Report of Friends of the Library- Kathleen Horan
 - c. Report of Erie Regional Library Foundation- Patrick Miller
6. **Unfinished Business-**
7. **New Business**
 - a. Collection Development Policy
8. **Adjournment**
9. **Appendix**
 - a. Announcements
 - b. News Articles

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 - a. Staff Report- none
 - b. Report of the Director- John Euliano

Connections-

Blasco Adult Programming-

Frontline Presentation-Librarians Jennifer Martin and Rachel Stevenson presented at the Pennsylvania Library Association's Online Frontline Conference about the benefits of programming collaboratively instead of as individuals. They discussed a variety of programs librarians at ECPL had worked together on including LibCon, ErieMakes, Valencrimes, and others. Stevenson also presented on the importance of program evaluation with Emily Mross from Penn State Harrisburg.

Opioid Grant team meeting-Rachel has firmed up most of the speaking engagements for May – September. Material resources is selected that will fill the brochure racks. Andrew will select furniture, get the quotes for printing, and work with Alyssa for advertising.

Idea Lab- the Idea Lab had an outreach trip to Girard/Lake City Chamber of Commerce. Over 25 people in attendance; some in the crowd had utilized beehive services in the past and had positive reviews.

Mercyhurst Fashion Student Entrepreneur toured the Idea Lab.

ECGRA Year 1 report submitted for 2023. This three-year grant funds the Idea Lab equipment, supplies and programming.

Spring Heritage Displays- the Heritage wing gallery will host an exhibit titled, “History of Capturing Image.” This display includes early methods of photography, moving picture, 3D/stereoscopes, Camera Obscura (solar eclipse viewer)

The April staircase display will feature, National Garden Month.

The May staircase display will feature, “National Inventor’s Month or National Preservation Month.

May program display will feature, “The History of Comics” for “Nerd out at the Library.”

Programming Statistics for February- Adult Services hosted **41 programs** with **319 attendees**. Program highlights include, Valentines and Valencrimes, Product Photography, Get that Grant! and Social Media Marketing Bootcamp.

Blasco Youth Services-

Teen Services-We are halfway through the first round of the Statewide **Teen Reading Lounge** program. The program runs through 8/31/24

The Teen Advisory Board, under the guidance of Teen Librarian Tammy Blount, is currently working on planning for the May 2024 “**Nerding out at the Library**” event, as well as teen activities for the summer library program.

Youth Services has officially launched two ongoing programs: The **Kid Librarian Program** and the civic and social literacy-based **Best Pet Election** program in early March. The Kid Librarian program will remain a Blasco-based program through a pilot period. The Best Pet Election program will be available through all ECPL branches, including the bookmobile.

Blue Whale Project-The National Science Foundation’s Blue Whale Project, which launched in October 2023 and visited each ECPL branch, is coming to a close. The materials received through the Blue Whale Project Grant are now the property of ECPL. Jessica Stefano, Youth Services Manager, provided an overview of each Blue Whale Project program to a group of programming librarians and library directors from across the district in early March, as the programs supplies will now be packaged as kits that may be shared with any library within the district at no charge.

Summer Reading Program-Plans for the ECPL Summer Library Program, **Step Out and Read (SOAR)**, are underway. Several grant applications related to the summer library program have been submitted and decisions related to these grants should be available by early April.

Additional Programming- Jessica met with several outside organizations to collaborate on larger learning events including Lake Erie Lights, Hagan History Center, the Maritime Museum, and Asbury Woods. Several collaborative events are currently in the planning process, including a late-March Homeschool Learning Day in the Blasco Library building which currently has 158 registered participants.

Youth Services Blasco Programming Statistics: 11 programs offered, 123 youth attendees, 117 adult chaperones. (Youth Services took a two-week break from Story Time in February to plan and gear up for the next months of consistent programming)

Edinboro Branch Programming-

Program Review: Edinboro Branch Library (EDB) 2024 programming participation decreased slightly through February (likely due to break in story time schedule). Total program participation brought in **200 participants**. In order to encourage program participation and ensure EDB is meeting community needs, a greater variety of programs are being developed that work across age demographics. These include a family art history/creative program (“Cave Painting”), a teen through adult creative expression program (“Visual Journaling: Collage Layers”), and an all-ages soap making program (“Melt and Pour Soap Making”). On top of EDB’s usual slate of unique programs, these additions will hopefully serve to meet community needs and expectations, and provide more opportunities for enthusiastic engagement with the library.

Edinboro Programming Statistics: 22 Programs offered in February

- **9 Youth programs with 61 youth attendees, 50 adults**
- **12 Adult programs with 89 attendees**

Iroquois Branch Programming-

In February, Iroquois Branch welcomed a new partnership with **NAMI** for the teen population at Iroquois. Iroquois high school closes after dismissal. Those teens look to the library as a place to hang out before going back to school later for practice or games. Twenty-five teens are a challenge for the small library. They are more interested in a warm, dry place to hang out than the actual library collection. Nonetheless, everyone is welcome at the library. It is another safe place for teens.

The team from NAMI are offering an afterschool program each Wednesday from 3-4pm. While it seems the snacks are bringing the teen into the actual program room, we are building a rapport with those individual teens. The goal is to try to offer something from 2:30-4 for our youth. Youth Librarian, Dana Nahas, is offering a program on Mondays once a month.

February ended with the **Craft Swap. 110 patrons from the community participated.** 30 people took early bird tickets, which means they contributed items to the swap day.

The Sunshine Group came Thursday and collected items that would be of most use to them. Other organizations that benefited from our swap include Project Linus, Social Knitworking in Edinboro, a crafting group at St. Boniface, a crafting group at St. James, NAMI, and a crafting group in Albion. The IRQ library also took supplies for future programs. It was very successful.

While the entire IRQ team supported the effort, Zara Ostrander took the lead along with Erica Kaiser.

IRQ Programming Statistics: 23 Programs offered in February

- **7 Youth Services with 80 youth attendees, 58 adults**
- **5 Teen programs with 33 attendees**
- **11 Adult programs with 137 attendees**

Lincoln Community Branch Programming-

In February, Lincoln library hosted the Blue Whale project.

A presentation titled, “Working Dogs” was offered by our Alliance of Therapy Dog team. Eighteen patrons attended, which is a good amount for this type of specific presentation.

Kimber Gavio, yoga instructor from Balancing Yoga, offered a tween & teen yoga class in addition to her Saturday offerings. Even though attendance was lower than her adult class, I feel it was worth the try. We might pick it back up in the fall when the weather changes.

LIN Programming Statistics: 25 programs offered in February:

- **6 Youth Services with 150 attendees (adults chaperones not included)**
- **7 All Ages with 93 attendees**
- **1 Teen with 6 attendees**
- **7 Adult programs with 99 attendees.**

Millcreek Branch Programming-

Millcreek Branch Library (MCK) continued to have decent program participation in February. There were **145 program participants across 11 programs offered in February**. Controlling for lack of Storytime sessions in February due to a scheduled break, program participation exceeded February 2022 and 2023. In addition to popular recurring programs like MCK’s “Seed Swap,” new programs are currently being planned, leveraging grants received by ECPL, to include Maker programs from the Idea Lab (“Modern Songwriting and Recording”), opioid addiction programs, and reading groups pertaining to NEA Big Reads. MCK is also in the preliminary stage of planning a youth art show to include displayed art work and several formal “gallery nights.”

Millcreek Programming Statistics: 12 Programs offered in February

- **3 Youth Services with 48 youth attendees, 35 adults**
- **9 Adult programs with 42 attendees**

Outreach Services-

Outreach Services received a grant to participate in Remake Learning Days- A STEAM event is planned with Lincoln in May.

Earth Day Extravaganza-Began conducting donation appeals to gardening companies for our Earth Day Extravaganza, on April 27, and to develop recurring protocols for keeping our seed libraries sufficiently stocked at each site.

Secured and distributed **Eclipse Glasses** to locations for our public giveaway beginning March 18, Solar Eclipse Party is tentatively scheduled at Lincoln Library on April 8 (it will be the only location actively programming on this day).

Poetry Erie PA -Alyssa began meeting with a newly reformed Poetry Erie PA Group to host the Poetry Anthology Event on April 17, celebrating the publication of Erie County Public Library's Poetry Anthology.

Social Media Workshops-Alyssa attended two social media workshops to help implement best practices moving our accounts forward. She also worked with IT departments to devise a public submission-landing page that will help all departments safely accept and collect submissions from the public for a variety of initiatives.

Participated in Multicultural Night with Grover Cleveland Elementary, reaching about **75 students**.

Collections-

Technical Services-

The library is actively working on expanding and updating its world language selections this year. New adult audiobooks, adult and teen fiction, adult nonfiction, kids audiobooks, and kids Wonderbooks in Spanish have been added to the collection. The majority of these items were added to Blasco, with selected titles added to Edinboro to support programming. Updating and refreshing the juvenile print collections in Spanish at all locations will be a focus this year. Also, the world cinema collection continues to grow with the addition of new titles representing numerous cultures and languages.

Capacity-

March 8, 2024 Blasco Closure- Due to the expected visits and logistic concerns revolving around the solar eclipse, the County has decided that Blasco will be closed for the day. Branches are anticipated to remain open at this time. There will be no due dates for library materials that day.

Internal Display Policy- County Solicitor has reviewed and approved the Board approved Internal Library Display Policy. The policy is now posted on the library website for public access.

[Library Internal Display Policy | Erie County Public Library \(erielibrary.org\)](https://erielibrary.org/library-internal-display-policy)

Director Search- County Council approved the salary range for the Director.

Personnel Updates-

There have been numerous lateral transfers throughout the library locations this month.

- Jennifer Meyer has transferred to the Edinboro Branch filling the vacant position from the retirement of Karen Shelhamer.
- Anna Garvey has transferred into a full time position at the Lincoln location. Her part time position is posted externally.
- Roynell Brown will transfer to Blasco effective Monday, March 18. He was previously at the Iroquois Branch. If there is no internal interest, the full-time Iroquois clerk position will post externally.
- Jenny Martin has submitted her letter of resignation as the Digital Collections Librarian. Her last day will be April 1. She will stay on as a per diem to help train and support the new Digital Collections Librarian through HistErie week, June 3-8.

c. Review of Financial Report- Deana
December Financials shared and posted on website.

d. Statistical and Other Reports- John

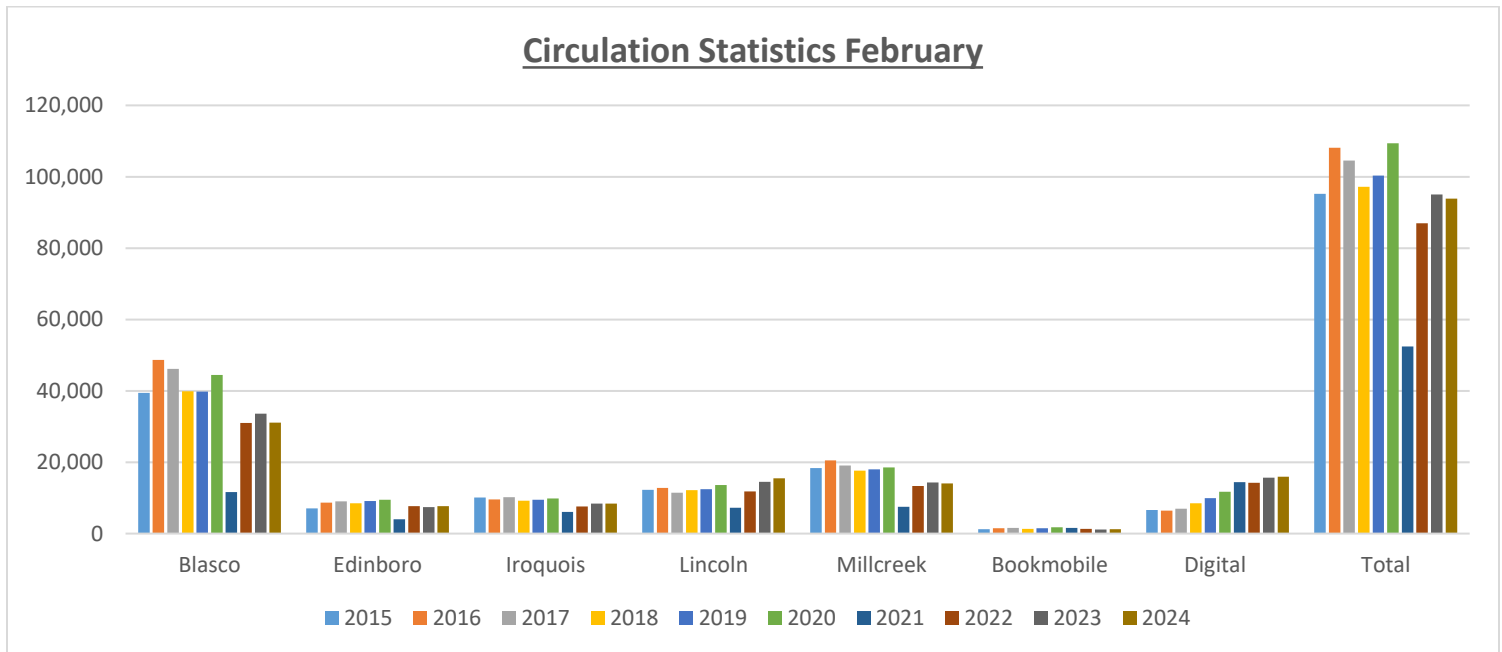


February 2024 Statistics

Numbers Snapshot

- **493** new cards issued, including **64** e-cards
- **3,511** WiFi logins, **3415** public PC logins across locations
- **38,071** patron visits, **23,513** at Blasco and **14,558** at branches and Bookmobile. (↑) **17%** from February 2023 and (↑) **34%** from February 2022.

Circulation



	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Blasco	39,475	48,636	46,156	39,854	39,802	44,493	11,618	31,006	33,588	31,134
Edinboro	7,094	8,662	8,997	8,543	9,165	9,494	4,008	7,663	7,455	7,659
Iroquois	10,157	9,566	10,206	9,191	9,486	9,809	6,064	7,583	8,383	8,372
Lincoln	12,233	12,794	11,472	12,205	12,417	13,642	7,277	11,816	14,499	15,527
Millcreek	18,386	20,483	19,043	17,619	18,003	18,534	7,504	13,315	14,302	14,022
Bookmobile	1,264	1,508	1,632	1,345	1,495	1,730	1,586	1,322	1,143	1,250
Digital	6,644	6,434	6,993	8,466	9,954	11,696	14,377	14,219	15,668	15,900
Total	95,253	108,083	104,499	97,223	100,322	109,398	52,434	86,924	95,038	93,864

e. [Report of District Consultant-Jessica Church](#)

District Services Report as of March 13, 2024

Updates for ECPL LAB Report

Submitted by Jessica Church, District Consultant

Annual Reports

District member libraries are wrapping up their initial submissions for annual reports. They'll go into a review period with the district consultant before moving onto a review period with the Office of Commonwealth Libraries.

Interlibrary Loan Delivery

We've begun officially integrating Crawford County into delivery. We're working on adjusting routes to maximize time and resources as we continue to evolve the process.

County Coordination Aid

The application period has closed for the part-time interlibrary loan driver position. We are currently reviewing the applications and hope to fill that position soon to supplement delivery service. In the meantime, we've been utilizing a couple of per diems to ensure that books and materials are still moving about the county.

County Coordination Aid is the State aid received by Erie County Public Library to facilitate coordinated library service among all of the public libraries in Erie County. As a county library and the district center, ECPL is the designated library to administer these efforts.

5. Board and Committee Reports

- a. [Report of County Council Liaison- Councilman Horton](#)
- b. [Report of Friends of the Library- Kathleen Horan](#)
- c. [Report of Erie Regional Library Foundation- Patrick Miller](#)

6. Unfinished Business-

- a. None

7. New Business

- a. Collection Development Policy for review and approval
- b. May in-person meeting

8. Adjournment

9. Appendix

- a. Announcements

-Next meeting is Monday, April 15, 2024 at noon via zoom

- b. News Articles

Speros: County Council has 'no authority' to rescind Gannon lease

March 6, 2024 | Erie Times-News (PA)

Author/Byline: A.J. Rao; Erie Times-News | Page: A1 | Section: News

617 Words | Readability: Lexile: 1550, grade level(s): >12

Erie County Council's attempt to rescind a controversial lease agreement between the county and Gannon University is a violation of local law, according to Erie County Solicitor Bill Speros.

In a memo Tuesday, Speros addressed how council plans to vote on an ordinance to rescind a resolution from October, one that allowed Gannon to lease a portion of Blasco Memorial Library.

The ordinance, which will be discussed Thursday at council's finance committee meeting, seeks to prevent Gannon from constructing and operating a water research and education center on the library's first floor.

While the lease has generated backlash from community members who view the lease as a private entity infringing on a public asset, Speros argued that council has no authority under the Home Rule Charter to rescind the deal — and gave three reasons why.

Speros: Council can't rescind contracts, could expose county to 'legal risk'

First, Speros argued that council has no power under the Home Rule Charter to execute or rescind county contracts, or to engage in contracting matters on behalf of the county. Rather, he stated, local law grants this power exclusively to the Executive Branch.

"Thus, a council ordinance purporting to rescind the lease, and thus exerting control over a county contract, is an overreach of council's powers," he stated in the memo.

"Such an ordinance would create the precedent that council can reconsider and potentially rescind any commercial county agreement. This would open the door for every new council to revisit every commercial lease or services agreement approved by a previous council, and to use such power to exert undue control over the administration of county contracts."

Secondly, Speros argued that the executed lease became "legally and commercially binding on both parties."

As such, he stated, rescinding the lease without Gannon's consent is a "breach of contract, which exposes the county to legal risk."

Thirdly, Speros argued that local law allows council to amend or repeal a previously enacted ordinance but does not give council the power to rescind a resolution.

"There is no ordinance that council has the power to repeal here," he stated. "This is precisely the reason why council demonstrates its approval of county contracts via resolution rather than by ordinance: so that there is no legal basis for council to rescind — and thus breach — a multi-year county agreement solely because a newly elected council has a different political agenda."

Speros stated that if council passes the ordinance, it must send a copy of the ordinance to Erie County Executive Brenton Davis within three days. Davis will then have 14 days to veto the ordinance and council will have 30 days to override the veto with a supermajority vote.

Council to tentatively approve the ordinance by end of March

The ordinance will have a first reading at the March 12 regular meeting and tentatively be up for an official vote at the March 26 regular meeting.

County Council Chairman Terry Scutella, a critic of the lease, told the Erie Times-News that he has enough votes to approve the ordinance, referring to his Democratic colleagues: Andre Horton, Chris Drexel and Rock Copeland.

However, he said he doesn't know if council has enough votes to override a likely veto from Erie County Executive Brenton Davis, who has championed the lease.

None of the four council members who support the ordinance received Speros' memo, as it was sent by Erie County Public Information Officer Chris Carroll to news media outlets Tuesday.

Scutella, while stating he will read over the memo, added "I'm going by what our solicitor says, not what the county executive's solicitor says."

The water research and education center is a component of Gannon's \$24 million water quality initiative known as Project NePTWNE.

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

Legal questions surround County Council proposal

March 7, 2024 | Journal, The (Corry, PA)

Author/Byline: Rebekah Wallace rebekah@thecorryjournal.com | Section: News

508 Words | Readability: Lexile: 1430, grade level(s): >12

Erie County Council is considering an ordinance that would rescind an agreement between the county and Gannon University.

The ordinance would repeal Resolution No. 36, 2023, which approved ARPA funding of \$1.5 million to Gannon to establish a water research center to be located on the Bayfront. In exchange, Gannon agreed to lease 3,200 square feet of property located in the Erie County Blasco Library for this purpose, titled Project NePTWNE.

The lease agreement with Gannon was approved by Council on Oct. 17, 2023.

County Council Chairman Terry Scutella said in an interview Wednesday that Council's finance committee will discuss the ordinance at its meeting today. Then, if committee members agree, it will be put before Council at its regular meeting on Tuesday, March 12, for a first reading.

A second reading of the ordinance and a vote would not take place until Council's next meeting on March 27.

If the proposal to rescind the agreement passes with a minimum of four of the seven Council members voting in its favor, County Executive Brent Davis has three days to veto that decision. Then, Council has 30 days to override his veto with a minimum vote of five.

A letter from County Solicitor Bill Speros to the Erie County administration states that, "Erie County Council has no authority under the Home Rule Charter to propose an ordinance to rescind Resolution 36 of 2023, by which Council approved Gannon University's lease of a portion of Blasco Library for Project NePTWNE. Rescinding the lease via ordinance in this manner is a violation of law in at least three ways."

The letter continues to state that a) Council has no power under the Charter to execute contracts on behalf of the county, b) the lease became legally binding for both parties upon Council's adoption of the agreement, and c) the law grants Council the power to amend or repeal a previously enacted ordinance, but does not give Council the power to rescind a resolution.

Scutella said Council's solicitor, Thomas Talarico, disagrees and has given Council the green light to move forward with the rescission.

"That's their difference of opinion," Scutella said, noting Talarico says Council members have grounds to do this. "We wouldn't make a move like this without his legal advice."

Scutella said he is maintaining an open dialogue with Gannon about this matter.

He also explained that Council members and some of their constituents have concerns about the library location, including that it could set an unwanted precedent of public property being leased to a third party, and that it could disrupt people in their attempts to use the library.

Scutella said he believes the resolution approving the agreement should be rescinded, and that Council should look for a better water testing site along the Bayfront.

He added that over 300 Right to Know request have been filed, and conceded that negotiations with Gannon regarding the lease agreement "were not transparent."

Scutella went on to say he has heard no one speak out against the water research project itself; the debate is over nothing more or less than the best location for it.

Blasco Library debate: Gannon's argument 'does not hold water'

March 7, 2024 | Erie Times-News: Web Edition Articles (PA)

Author/Byline: Anna McCartney | Section: Opinion

This column has been updated to clarify that Dr. Sherri "Sam" Mason is not part of the debate over Gannon University's lease at Blasco Library for Project NePTWNE.

Why did Erie County Executive Brenton Davis and Gannon University take American Rescue Plan funds meant to help communities most adversely affected by COVID-19 to build a research lab and education center that we don't need on the waterfront?

I have read through all the past and updated literature Gannon provides for its \$24 million Project NePTWNE. Everything I read seemed pretty scant on any details, including their glossy four-page color brochure "The Great Lakes Research & Education Center."

Prior to Erie County Council's Oct. 17 approval of the 25-year lease for space at Blasco Library, Gannon indicated that the \$1.5 million from the county was to be used to offset the research center's construction inside the Union Fish Company building. The Gannon information was changed to say inside the Blasco Public Library in October, although at the time of this writing, the Erie County website still listed the Union Fish Company as the location of Project NePTWNE.

Why has Gannon been given priority over taxpayers to take the computer lab, meeting rooms and library staff offices, and move them to less desirable locations in our Blasco Public Library so they can have a prime first floor location?

A question in the Gannon brochure asks: "Why does Gannon University want a location on the bayfront?"

Their answer: Gannon has a research vessel — the *Environaut* — docked on the waterfront. Gannon maintains a laboratory that is proximate to the boat would aid researchers and their projects because researchers currently must transport everything to campus more than a half-mile away.

My answer: Gannon wants a research lab on the waterfront but they don't need one. All they need is a slip for their boat — and they already have one.

I spent more than 16 years working with researchers and educators to involve students and the public in Great Lakes science. I can tell you it is not in our best interest to spend \$1.5 million to take space away from our public library.

Every Tuesday during the school year, I researched and wrote about environmental problems for the Erie Times-News in Education (NIE) page: "Connect with your environment." I had the pleasure of working with researchers and teachers all over Erie County and the Great Lakes. I wrote about research and solutions dealing with harmful algal blooms; water pollution caused by pharmaceuticals and personal care products; polluted runoff from streets, parking lots and agricultural activities; bacterial contamination from sewer overflows and leaking septic tanks; from industrial practices and poor land use and development.

That research was done by scientists in labs that are not located on the waterfront and their water samples had to

be transported miles from where they were collected. Samples from tributaries, wetlands, coastal regions, and many locations on the Great Lakes are regularly taken back to labs located at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center, Penn State Behrend, Mercyhurst University and the NOAA Great Lakes Environmental Research Lab in Ann Arbor, Mich., and many others. This proves Gannon does not need a lab on the waterfront. They could easily use their campus labs.

Another problem in the Gannon literature is that it does not show how a lab on the waterfront will solve microplastic pollution. That research has already been done by many experts, including scientists right here in Erie County.

I wrote about the plastic problem many times in the NIE pages starting in 2003 when I worked with the Pennsylvania Coastal Resource Management Program to involve students and citizens in the PA Lake Erie International Coastal Cleanup. Plastic had become the major source of marine debris, which had made its way into Lake Erie and waterways all over the world. Through the years we learned about the high cost of convenience because single-use plastic topped the list of items collected — such plastic does not decompose. It breaks into smaller and smaller pieces but never goes away.

Starting in 2013 I was fortunate to become acquainted with Sherri Mason, Ph.D., a leading researcher in freshwater plastic pollution, during my time working at Pennsylvania Sea Grant. Her award-winning work has drawn international attention to the threats posed by microplastics and led to the passage of national measures banning microbeads. Dr. Mason's research group was among the first to study the prevalence and impact of plastic pollution within freshwater ecosystems. She collected microplastics from the surface of all five Great Lakes, mostly aboard the U.S. Brig Niagara. Her research has also identified microplastics in treated drinking water, sea salt and bottled water.

Her work has expanded to include discovery of other non-biodegradable materials that are introducing chemical contaminants into water supplies and the Great Lakes food chain, including synthetic fibers. These tiny fibers are shed when fleece items are laundered and are ingested by fish. They enter the food chain, introducing chemical contaminants including endocrine disruptors, neurotoxins and carcinogens that are potentially harmful to both aquatic organisms and humans. Dr. Mason is not part of the debate over Gannon's Blasco lease for Project NePTWNE. But in my opinion, her work serves as an example to show that research can be and is done in labs far from the waterfront. She currently serves as Director of Sustainability at Penn State Behrend.

Building a new research lab in our library will not discover or solve microplastic pollution. But it will give Gannon an attractive selling point to bring students to their campus. So, in effect, will taxpayers be subsidizing Gannon to educate its students?

Gannon's claim that it will provide K-12 outreach includes no details. They could learn from the National Sea Grant College Program's Center for Great Lakes Literacy (CGLL), a collaborative effort led by Sea Grant educators throughout the U.S. Great Lakes watershed.

The lack of any details or expectations for Gannon in the 25-year Blasco lease should worry us all. There are no measurable deliverables that Gannon must provide to the community. I fail to see how spending taxpayer dollars on building a research and education center on the waterfront will solve the microplastic problem, improve drinking water, grow the economy or provide K-12 outreach.

Gannon makes no guarantees in the lease of maintaining any public space or access, and in fact, we should ask if the lab itself will be publicly accessible.

Finally, there is no way to remove microplastics from the Great Lakes once they are released. Even if some

filtration system was developed, I don't believe there is a feasible way to separate the microbeads from valuable phytoplankton and zooplankton necessary for productivity in the lakes. Given how widespread the negative effects of plastic and microplastic pollution are, there is no silver bullet solution to address the problems. Multiple policy changes at the local, state, and federal level are needed to combat this problem. In my view, single-use plastics must be banned and producers must be responsible for products that are used only for a few minutes but that pollute our environment and threaten all life on our planet.

We must re-examine the use of that \$1.5 million ARP funding and we must rescind the lease.

It would also be helpful for Gannon leaders and Erie County officials to visit the existing labs working on Great Lakes water issues. They'd quickly learn that their own arguments about the need to locate the Gannon lab on our bayfront just don't hold water.

Anna McCartney is a resident of North East.

Does a private college's research lab belong in Erie County's flagship public library?

February 23, 2024 | Erie Times-News: Web Edition Articles (PA)

Author/Byline: Erie Times-News | Section: Opinion

With scant public notice or input, a majority of Erie County Council voted in October to approve a 25-year lease agreement that grants Gannon University permission to develop a water research laboratory on the first floor of the Blasco Library. Gannon will pay \$22,956 a year to occupy approximately 3,000-square feet (\$7 per square foot per year) in the eastern wing of the bayfront library's first floor. The university will also have use of the public library's IDEA Lab, conference rooms and H.O. Hirt Auditorium.

As A.J. Rao has reported, the facility will be part of the university's \$24 million Project NePTWNE (short for Nano & Polymer Technology for Water and Neural-networks in Erie). Plans at Blasco call for a water research and education center with a fishery, aquaponics lab, wet lab areas, a butterfly conservatory and a science classroom. The lease was pursued by Erie County Executive Brenton Davis who, with county council's support, also in 2022 allocated \$1.5 million in American Rescue Plan funding to Gannon's Project NePTWNE. Gannon will pay for its center's utilities.

Support for Project NePTWNE is not in question. The debate centers on whether the public library should house the research center, the terms of the lease and the opaque process used to negotiate and approve it. The group Keep Our Library Public reports that more than 5,000 people have signed petitions in paper and online opposing the lease that places the lab in Blasco. Concerned residents rally and demonstrate and line up to speak at Erie County Council meetings and call for the lease to be rescinded. The arguments for and against this occupation of public library space by a private, sectarian entity are wide-ranging. Opponents raise questions about county officials' lack of transparency and due diligence in planning and negotiating the lease; the potential costs and liability exposure; the long-term impact on services and future planning, reduced public access and more. Gannon and the Davis administration and their supporters defend the process that led to the lease and maintain Project NePTWNE's presence in the library will be a boon to the public and an educational resource for local youth.

Read the views here:

Library leaders raise questions of costs, propriety

Mary Rennie, a former Erie County Councilwoman and former director of the Erie County Public Library, and former Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper have each shared their perspectives, raising questions about the propriety of the lease, its potential impact on public services, and its generous terms at a time when the county confronts a historic tax hike under the Davis administration.

Read them here:

More: Rennie urges citizens to oppose Gannon lease at Blasco, removal of children's programs

Dahlkemper questions costs: Davis' budget required historic tax hike, why sign away Blasco Library space for a song?

New County Councilman Copeland says Blasco should be protected

Erie County Councilman Rock Copeland, a Democrat representing Erie County's 3rd Council District, was elected in November. Here he lays out priorities for his leadership, including protecting public assets. He, like others opposing Gannon's Blasco lease, supports Project NePTWNE, but argues a compromise and another site for the lab should be sought.

New councilman: Copeland pledges stability, transparency, protection of public assets like Blasco Library

Gannon and Bishop Persico push back, defend lease

Gannon University President Walter Iwanenko has defended the lease as an "ideal fit" and the process used to craft it. He says the process was transparent. Emails obtained by the Erie Times-News indicate the private discussions about the lease date back to June, as Rao has reported.

"The educational value and added benefits of our project go well beyond the research and learning for our students," Iwanenko wrote.

Erie Catholic Bishop Lawrence T. Persico joined in the defense of the lease and expressed his dismay at protesters who demonstrated outside Sunday Mass at some Erie churches.

Read their positions here:

Gannon president: Public will benefit from water research center at Blasco Library

From the bishop: Persico backs Gannon Blasco lease, urges protesters to focus on Erie Co., not Sunday Mass

Erie resident Krista Perry explained the protests outside churches here:

More: Why citizens are taking their concerns about Gannon's Blasco lease to the Catholic church

Public decries secretive process to lease a public asset

Based on information obtained through Right-to-Know requests, environmental educator Anna McCartney examined the timeline of the lease negotiations and the lack of opportunity for the public to learn about the project, its impact at the library and voice their views.

She writes, "Questions also remain about whether County Council violated Pennsylvania's Sunshine Act by

bringing the lease to council's finance committee at the last minute of Oct. 12. Again, as Rao reported, 'Not only was the resolution introduced at a finance committee meeting held just three business days prior to the vote but the resolution was not listed on the committee meeting's published agenda. Indeed, it was added to the agenda during the committee meeting itself.'

She joined others who voiced support for Project NePTWNE, but called for it to be located elsewhere.

Anna McCartney: Murky process and misuse of a public asset - why we oppose Gannon's Blasco Library lease

Liz Allen, a retired Erie Times-News Sunday columnist, wrote about the importance of libraries in Erie's heritage, her own life and for the "poor, the immigrants who come to Blasco to practice their English and library patrons in the city and rural areas who rely on the Bookmobile to borrow new DVDs, best sellers, children's audiobooks, Wi-Fi hot spots and puzzles, according to erielibrary.org/calendar."

Liz Allen: What price can we put on our public library's Erie values and heritage?

Lorraine "Lori" Dolan was one of the first residents to pen a guest column on the effort to pull back the lease and the creation of the library advocacy group Project Minerva. She noted the lack of public input, the failure to investigate the impact of this project and the media's failure to scrutinize the plan and the process. Fishtanks, she noted, are not included in the definition of a library.

Read her column here:

Dolan: 'Project Minerva' movement underway to end Gannon lease and protect Blasco Library

Dolan in a more recent piece called for a public forum to allow the public to be heard.

More: Gannon's Blasco Library lease negotiated with no public input, hold a public forum now

Letter: Gannon's water research center at Blasco a 'perfect fit'

This letter from Amy Kuzma written in support of the water research center appeared in the Erie Times-News in January:

"I am a regular library patron. It all started when my daughter (now 11) discovered the joy of reading. I quickly realized my house and my budget could not keep up with her ravenous reading. We not only use the library for books. We have attended classes involving the Cricut, a photography class, a block party and my daughter loves the 3-D printer. Modern libraries need to supply books, of course, but they need to inspire too.

I think the Gannon University water research endeavor is a perfect fit for an institution that should educate and inspire the general public. One critic said that fish tanks do not belong in the library. You better tell that to the Millcreek branch because they have a fish tank.

Do sewing machines, Cricut machines, and a Glowforge belong in a library? You can find all that in more in the Makerspace. I believe only 3.5% of space will be taken up by Gannon. I have visited the library at various times — weekdays, weekends, evenings — and there has always been ample space for patrons, so I think the library can afford to lose 3.5% of their space.

Change is scary but it can be inspiring too.

Amy Kuzma, Erie

Debate draws national attention

The debate has drawn national coverage. The National Catholic Reporter published a detailed story on Feb. 19. According to the article, the Catholic Diocese of Erie referred questions from the NCR reporter to Gannon. Gannon did not make Iwanenko available for an interview. Doug Oathout, Iwanenko's chief of staff and the director of marketing and communications, according to the article, told the reporter that Gannon believes there is a community benefit to having the center at the library and also referred the reporter to a brochure about the project. The Davis administration did not respond to "multiple emails and calls," NCR reported.

National Catholic Reporter: Catholic university's plan to lease public library space sparks debate