

What you need to know

Opinion

EDITORIALS & LETTERS

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STAYING OPEN, FOR NOW: Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Covid mitigation plan now includes keeping schools open as long as possible, while infection rates remain low. Parents applaud the move. **Page 2**

YELLOW ZONE TESTING: Good Samaritan Hospital is now offering Covid testing at sites in Rockland for students and school personnel. Tests are required as part of keeping schools open. Three days remain this week.. **Page 3**

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Our Town

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Share Christmas and the Holidays is back, but in slightly different format this year. Kids can still catch sight of Santa and his pals, however.

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Library floats renewal plan for 60 year-old building

Story and photo
by Arthur R. Aldrich

Although few in number, some residents of Pearl River remember when the hamlet library moved from a former bowling alley on Ridge Street to a brand new building on Franklin Avenue. Volunteers lugged books from the old to the new.

Now, at age 60, the "new" library is in dire need of renewal, despite upgrades completed in 1991. Estimated cost is \$23.8 million.

According to library director Eugenia Schatoff, these include a shopping list of problems ranging from crumbling infrastructure to code violations, to ADA compliance issues and a budget of more than \$9000 a month for what she calls "Band-Aid" repairs which waste public dollars without resulting in permanent improvements.

High on the list of faults is a furnace that dates back to the original building and lack of sprinklers or a fire safety system that would protect occupants and the library collection.

Rental of a mobile air conditioner costs taxpayers \$8000 a month; it is the only remedy for an inadequate ductwork system. Ventilation system has been rated as "beyond repair."

The roof doesn't drain properly, causing flooding and frequent leaks. Engineering estimates give the existing roof two more years before replacement would be required, a replacement that would not remedy inherent construction and design defects.

Parking has always been an issue at the library, with on-site spaces limited to staff use, an street spaces, although not metered, often inadequate to

meet demand. The renovation would provide on-site parking for 51 cars, through reduction in the footprint of the existing structure.

Reconfiguration of interior space would accomplish the footprint reduction while adding 6,000 square feet of usable floor space, some of which would be used to house collections, expand the children's room, add a teen room and increase space for meetings, events and study.

"Our building simply can't keep up with the need of our community or the abilities of our staff," Schatoff emphasizes.

Among the other shortfalls of the existing structure is an outdated electrical system which does not provide sufficient outlets or capacity for the equipment required to maintain digital access and computers, an area where demand

for library services as a portal is growing. Some existing outlets no longer are operable, further complicating the library's need to expand its online presence and services.

Funding for the renovation project would be as follows:

- \$322,769 from library funds;
 - \$23, 500,000 bond if approved at referendum;
 - \$125,000 grant from Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee;
- An unspecified sum from private donations, fundraising and naming rights.

Cost per household is estimated at \$187 a year.

As the shortcomings of the building are becoming more obvious and irksome to staff and library patrons,

LIBRARY RENEWAL: Page 7, please



LEFT: Library director Eugenia Schatoff. BELOW: the Pearl River Library, as it was in 1991, now showing its age at 60.



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**Sarah Fuller
kicking for Vanderbilt**

Sarah Fuller a senior at Vanderbilt University has become the first woman to play for an American major conference football game. Due to a Covid-19 outbreak this left Derek Mason, the coach of the football team looking for a new kicker, and it was Fuller.

Women have kicked for college teams in the past but never for a "Power Five" school. The National Collegiate Athletic Association, the organization that runs the college sports described her as the first woman to play in a major conference football game. Fuller wears Vanderbilt's shirt number 32 and her helmet says "Play like a girl".

Fuller admitted to feeling she had a responsibility to try and represent women to break through traditional sports male dominated fields such as football.

Fuller was planning to go home for Thanksgiving when her coach called her to fill in and she said yes. She kicked off in the game against Missouri. Even though Vanderbilt lost the game, her coach said if she wants to "kick and she's available, we'd love to have her". Fuller responded "I would love to get out there and score a field goal." "I just wanted to tell girls out there that you can do anything you set your mind to, you really can." "And if you have that mentality all the way through, you can do big things." Mason said she was "fearless."

He also expressed that she is one of the university's top athletes fitting a need for the team as she was the top soccer player for the school as well. Mason had said he watched her kick a couple of field goals and wanted to see her strength and how far she could kick, he was convinced she could fill in, apparently he was right. The next game is against Georgia and we will certainly be watching!

Library renewal

Continued from Page 1

demand for library service is also increasing. Last year, 145,595 persons visited the library, 8,969 hold library cards and the library was open 67.5 hours a week in 2019.

Circulation has increased by 9.93 percent over last year, ranking Pearl River 10th highest in circulation in the Ramapo-Catskill system.

Most dramatic increase was in use of electronic materials, up by \$36.59 percent.

Chat sessions will be held on Thursdays in December starting December 7 via Zoom. A public information session will be held on December 15

Discussion of the cost of the renewal and increases in the yearly tax levy have already begun in the community and will undoubtedly be brought up at the discussions. No date has been set for the referendum.

**Letters are
welcome**

- We do not edit letters except in the instance of libel, hate speech or deliberate falsehood.
- Letters strictly reflect the views of the individual writer, and do not necessarily express those of this newspaper.
- Keep comments civil; avoid personal attacks.
- Do not state opinion as fact; letters based on facts make a more compelling argument.

Email your opinion pieces to
news@ourtownnews.com

**Library director seeks public input
on plans for \$23.8 million renewal**

To the editor:

The Pearl River Public Library Renewal Plan is the result of over 24 months of careful planning and public meetings, incorporating more than 1,000 survey results from our patrons, and in collaboration with Butler Rowland Mays LLP, an architecture firm specializing in libraries.

As a result of the building assessment and patron feedback, we developed a proposal that addresses key issues with the current building and surrounding property, such as failing infrastructure, lack of parking, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and code non-compliant facilities, and limited meeting space.

While we do not have a date yet for a bond referendum vote to fund the project, it is vital at this point to involve the public in the planning stage. Pearl River residents are invited to learn more about the proposed Renewal Project by joining us for weekly chat sessions with me, and by attending our two upcoming info sessions.

Chat sessions will be held on Thursdays in December, at 7 p.m. via Zoom. Additionally, our Public Information Sessions will be held virtu-

ally on December 15 also at 7 p.m. Patrons can register for all the sessions on our website pearlriverlibrary.org. For more information on the project, patrons can also visit our Library Renewal Project page at <https://tinyurl.com/y6qskv4l>.

The Pearl River Public Library building has been fraught with misfortune from structural and site issues since the construction of our most recent addition in 1991. We believe that taking action now through a bond referendum to support our Library Renewal Project will save money in the long run, and will put taxpayer dollars to better use. The last time we asked for a referendum for library improvements was more than 34 years ago. A lot has changed since then, specifically with regards to building codes and ADA compliance.

It is no longer financially responsible to continue treading water with a building that needs constant patchwork. The consultants all agree, our building is living on borrowed time and the situation has become unsustainable. The expensive Band-Aids are not the fix; they are taxpayer dollars going to waste at a rate of \$9,300 a month.

The annual household cost would be

\$187 a year, or for many homeowners, 51 cents a day. The library has earmarked \$322,769 toward the project, and \$23,500,000 is proposed in a bond referendum for voter approval. The library will also embark on a targeted fundraising campaign, including seeking donors for naming rights. We have secured a \$125,000 SAM grant to help fund our present and future building needs. The length of the term of the bond is 30 years. The exact cost of the project totals \$23,822,769.

Our renewal proposal not only addresses all the challenges the library building faces regularly now -- and all of the underlying issues that became apparent during the assessment process -- it also takes into account the changing role the library must fulfill as the educational, vocational, and recreational needs of the community evolve with the times.

We welcome the submission of questions for us to address at our public meetings via email at renewal@pearlriverlibrary.org, via telephone at (845) 735-4084, or in person at the Library

**Eugenia Schatoff
Director
Pearl River Public Library
80 Franklin Avenue, Pearl River**

**For whom the bridge tolls:
Drivers face new fare structure
on Mario M. Cuomo bridge**

During a meeting of the New York State Thruway Authority Board of Directors today, the Board unanimously approved a toll adjustment on the Gov. Mario M. Cuomo Bridge and other tolling changes that support the statewide conversion to cashless tolling, which occurred on Nov. 14. The adjustment will go into effect Jan. 1, 2021.

"This is a modest toll adjustment balancing the needs for continued investment in our system while keeping tolls affordable for our motorists," Thruway Authority Executive Director Matthew J. Driscoll said. "We have not had a toll adjustment in 10 years and as we enter into a new era of modern transportation on the Thruway, it's the right time both operationally and financially for this adjustment to occur."

Analysis by the Thruway Authority's independent traffic engineer in 2019 determined there will be additional revenues needed for the Authority to fulfill its system-wide operating, debt service and capital needs through the upcoming forecast period. Thruway tolls have not been adjusted since 2010.

In December 2019, the Board of Directors approved the proposal to begin the public process required to implement the toll rate changes supporting the fiscal stability of the Thruway Authority. Due to COVID-19, three virtual public hearings were held in October 2020, and more than 150 comments were submitted dur-

ing the public comment period. Additionally, feedback received during listening sessions held by the Toll Advisory Panel in July 2019 were also considered in the proposal.

The passenger car toll adjustment for the Gov. Mario M. Cuomo Bridge includes:

- Beginning Jan. 1, 2021, increase NY E-ZPass rates by 50 cents to \$5.25 in 2021 and 50 cents to \$5.75 in 2022;

- Beginning Jan. 1, 2021, the commuter discount rate will be 40 percent off the NY E-ZPass rate for passenger vehicles that opt into the program; and,

- A new resident E-ZPass plan will be offered for Westchester and Rockland County residents that will keep their rate flat through 2022. The program will be available for passenger vehicles with a NY E-ZPass and have a vehicle registered in one of these two counties.

- To reduce commercial congestion on the bridge when drivers 'bridge shop' for the cheapest crossings and create additional traffic, adjustments to commercial toll rates on the Gov. Mario M. Cuomo bridge will more closely align with other major crossings in the New York metropolitan area. ?

The NY E-ZPass rates for commercial vehicles on the Gov. Mario M. Cuomo Bridge will increase by 31 percent in 2021 and 30 percent in 2022. For example, the toll for a tractor trailer with 5 axles

and a NY E-ZPass account will increase to \$55.77 during peak hours in 2022, compared to \$90 at the George Washington Bridge. Even with the adjustment, the commercial toll rate on the Gov. Mario M. Cuomo Bridge in 2022 will still be 38 percent less than the toll rate on the George Washington Bridge.?

System-Wide Changes

Additionally, the Board of Directors approved changes to support the Thruway's system-wide conversion to cashless tolling to go into effect Jan. 1, 2021.

The standard NY E-ZPass toll rate will become the base toll rate and a 30 percent rate differential will be established for Tolls by Mail toll rates. Such differential toll rates have been standard practice among other systems that have converted to cashless tolling. To compare other toll road differentials for non-E-ZPass customers nationwide, Massachusetts has an 87 percent differential on the Massachusetts Turnpike and 109 percent on the Boston Extension. The Miami-Dade Expressway has a 100 percent differential and the Pennsylvania Turnpike charges a 36 percent differential.

Establish a 15 percent rate differential for out-of-state E-ZPass customers.

Clarify Board Policy that all transactions processed through a license plate image review will pay the Tolls by Mail rate.