

Dear Heights Libraries Board of Trustees,

First, I want to thank you for volunteering to serve on the Heights Libraries Board of Trustees. As a 40-plus-year resident of Cleveland Heights, I completely agree that “Our library is such an integral part of our community,” as Director Nancy Levin said. “Serving on the library board is one of the best ways a citizen can serve the Heights community, by helping guide the vision of the public library.”

But I fear that the board has been misinformed and misled on the Coventry PEACE Campus.

When Heights Library acquired the Coventry parkland and the building, I was very glad. I have been involved with the Coventry Park since the playground was built in the 1990s, and served for many years as either the Vice President or President of Coventry PEACE, Inc., which maintained the park. I believed that Nancy Levin would be a great leader in helping the tenants of the former school building to advance their goal of developing an innovative center for community education and the arts. That seemed to be the case until this past December, when the board rejected the long-planned, long-term lease the tenants need to keep growing the project.

The board has still not adequately explained this decision. Worse, public records now coming to light suggest to me that Nancy in fact made the decision, then fed the board only information that supported it while simultaneously advising board members from engaging with the tenants in any way. These records were obtained by the CPC leaders and are being shared on social media. If you haven't already, I strongly suggest you read them.

Having been a nonprofit executive director for over 35 years and a board member/trustee on eight-plus nonprofit boards, I know that Board Trustees rely heavily on information provided to them by their executive directors and staff, especially if they have not had much experience or training. But that information should be only the start of the board's work.

The CH-UH Board of Education's 2019 statement to recruit new members to the library board of trustees stated clearly that nominees “should be willing to ask questions, offer criticism and make suggestions. They should have the courage to plan creatively.”

According to Ohio law, the responsibilities of a Public Library Trustee include:

- Policy Making: Determine the goals and objectives of the library and methods of evaluating progress toward meeting them.
- Administration: Keep in touch with the library's progress and problems through reports from the Director and staff, personal use of the library, and **feedback from the public.**
- Public Relations: **Serve as a “connecting link” between the library and the community, interpreting one to the other.**

Ohio Attorney General Yost writes on the AG's Office's web site: "Board Trustees are guardians of the trust, **servicing on behalf of the community**, regardless of personal interests. Board Trustees who know the facts, analyze the probable result of their actions, exercise sound judgment and keep reasonable records fulfill their duty of care. Those who regularly miss meetings, are inactive or **fail to conduct adequate research** before making decisions do not."

The AG's Office also lists these duties:

- **Ask questions and obtain the information necessary to make informed decisions.**
- Review the performance of the charity's executive director or chief executive officer.
- **Exercise independent judgment; do not blindly follow the staff's requests.**

The AG's Office also advises: "Trustees can be held individually responsible for breaches of fiduciary standards within a charity. For example ... if Trustees knowingly violate contractual agreements thus exposing the Libraries to lawsuits."

Again, it appears to me, and many others in the community, that the Heights Libraries Board of Trustees has been misinformed and misled. I urge you to discuss among yourselves, *without Library Staff*, the issues surrounding the Coventry PEACE Campus.

Ray Gonzalez, ACSW, LISW
Change is Constant, Growth is Optional