

February 19, 2016

Editor
The Commerce Journal
2305 King Street
Greenville, TX 75401

Dear Sir:

I'm writing on behalf of the Friends of the Commerce Public Library Board of Directors (the Friends), the organization that operates the Library for the City of Commerce, regarding your coverage of the City Council meeting February 16, 2016. Your description of the discussion and vote on a bond issue to fund improvements to the historic building we occupy seems to imply that our organization was somehow at fault for the decision by the council not to include the issue in the upcoming City election. I believe that characterization of the situation is inaccurate.

The City of Commerce owns the building that houses the Library and the Friends operate the library and provide other services for the benefit of the public. We receive about 40 percent of our operating budget from the City and the City pays the utilities for the building. The remainder of our funding comes from the public through Friends membership fees, donations and grants from public and private agencies.

The beautiful structure we occupy started life as the US Post Office for Commerce and was first occupied in 1917. The building was given to the City when the new Post Office was opened in 1973. At that time, the City funded renovation of the facility to convert it for use as a library. Since that time there have been few changes to the building except for routine maintenance. The Friends raised funds in 2012 to restore the deteriorating wood work at main entrance portico on the Park Street side of the building. We obtained a grant, in 2013, from the First United Methodist Foundation of Commerce to replace the air conditioning system which dated from the 1960s. The following year the City paid to replace a portion of the roof which had been leaking (and damaging books and furnishings) for several years.

Last fall, the Friends met with the City Council in their budget study session to discuss annual funding for the operation of the Library as well as needed repairs and other improvements to the facility. During that study session it was suggested by a Council member that funds be included in a bond issue in the 2016 election. Since the meeting was a study session, no action was taken on the recommendation, nor on the creation of a committee to study the issue and report back to the Council. We are not aware of any action to establish a study committee in a regular Council session since then.

The Friends of the Commerce Public Library Board whole-heartedly endorses the idea of a bond issue, yet we realize there must be study and preparation before such a proposal can be placed before the voters. We fully understand the economic realities of running a city with a limited tax base and would not expect our citizens to blindly support any bond issue that is put on the ballot. For that reason, I met with one of the Council members the week before the February 16 meeting to suggest that any consideration of a bond issue be postponed until all parties have been able to formulate a plan and lay out the benefits to the community.

The Friends of the Commerce Public Library Board are eager to join with the Council, City staff, and Commerce Public Library users to study and plan improvements to the Library so we can better serve

the City and our many patrons from Commerce and beyond. We hope that the new Council and the new management team will work with us to enable the Commerce Public Library to continue serving our constituents and to improve the quality of services we provide to enhance the quality of life in our community.

Sincerely,

Jim Patton, President
Friends of the Commerce Public Library Board
1210 Park Street
Commerce, TX 75428