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For Immediate Release

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Town Hall Meetings Featured Public Pleas for Dedicated Funding, No Branch Closings and Ideas on Raising Money to Avoid Deep Cuts in Services and Locations

Summary of Speaker Comments Available Online at www.carnegielibrary.org

(PITTSBURGH, August 10, 2009) Approximately 400 Pittsburgh residents demonstrated strong support for Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh during three Town Hall meetings the library convened during the month of July. Overall comments reflected serious concern that a lack of funding may cause a loss or consolidation of branch locations and reduction of services.

The Library currently estimates that expenses for the system will begin to exceed revenues beginning in 2010, and that the deficit will continue to grow to more than \$6 million by 2014. Perhaps most distressing to attendees was a statistic that showed Pittsburgh at the bottom of a list of similar cities in terms of per capita funding. Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh receives \$20.64 per person compared to \$100 per capita funding received by public libraries in Cleveland.

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh President and Director Dr. Barbara K. Mistick said, "This underscores Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's need to increase local funding as it seeks a long-term, dedicated funding source to sustain its annual operations. Nationally public libraries receive 80 percent of their overall funding from local sources. Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's local funding through the Regional Asset District is approximately 70 percent."

The biggest surprise to those attending the three Town Hall meetings was that Andrew Carnegie did not provide long-term funding to operate the library system. He only provided the seed money to build the city's first libraries. "This is one of the biggest misconceptions about our library system," said Dr. Mistick. "Carnegie rationalized, and appropriately so, that the local library was so important that each community should be held responsible to provide for its ongoing operation."

In response to the outcry of public input at the Town Hall meetings, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Board Trustee Chair Jacqui Fiske Lazo stated, "We were overwhelmed by the public reaction and support that Pittsburghers have for their public libraries. We recognize that, in many cases, our main library and branch facilities are part of the fabric of our city neighborhoods, and are looked on as vital community assets." In fact, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh system is the region's most visited asset, with more than 2.6 million visitors in 2008.

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Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Town Hall Meetings

Attendees at each Town Hall meeting were asked to respond to three questions following a brief presentation of the library system's funding dilemma. The questions and representative responses to them were:

1. What do you appreciate most about our library system today in Pittsburgh?
 - Branches are community assets. The variety of locations provide a safe, community resource for children, seniors, students and job seekers.
 - Libraries are diversified centers for learning and provide a family environment for education. They are a critical connection to education.
 - Local library branches are the "hubs" of our communities.
 - CLP is a leadership library providing up-to-date technology, collections of books and learning materials.
 - The library provides opportunities for children and teens to do homework, socialize, connect to the Internet and take part in creative learning activities, particularly after school.
 - Importantly, the library provides equal access to information for everyone (books, computers, programs, etc), which is essential to a democratic society.

2. If the Library system is forced to make significant budget cuts, what could you do without?
 - Overwhelming support for maintaining the branches because of their value to the individual communities they serve.
 - Reducing operating hours and programs preferable to closing branches.
 - Some people felt that the public might be willing to pay for certain services (interlibrary loan, holds/reserves), a minimal charge for library cards and fees for use of their facilities.
 - Suggestions were also made to strengthen the Library's use of volunteer resources to help offset people costs.
 - Most were willing to sacrifice hours of operation, programs, and limiting the number of books they could check out/reserve
 - Suggested raising funds from private sources, friends groups, and other fundraising efforts in lieu of cutting services.

3. What would you say to the people who make the decisions about library funding – such as the City, the State, the County, the Regional Asset District – to make library funding a priority?
 - Many unaware of the library's financial situation, especially that Andrew Carnegie did not provide money for ongoing library operations, but only for the original buildings.
 - Many speakers were astonished to find out that the City of Pittsburgh only contributes the same \$40,000 amount each year since 1895. They felt strongly that the City needs to step up and make its contribution more in line with today's economics and per capita contributions to libraries from similar-sized cities.
 - There was a general consensus that tax dollars should be used more to support libraries.

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Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Town Hall Meetings

- Generally, most felt that there should be an increase in a dedicated long-term funding source so that the library system can maintain its current operations.
- Commented on the integral part libraries play in education. Links to schools and Pittsburgh Promise should be emphasized.
- People should write to their city, county and state elected officials about the importance of libraries and library funding.

The input from these Town Hall meetings, along with discussions from community leaders and recent assessments completed internally and on behalf of the library system by the Rand Corporation and Carnegie Mellon University will all be factored in the recommendations the staff will make to Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Board of Trustees in September. Implementation of changes that are planned will begin at the end of this year.

“Our worst case scenario is that we would have to close or consolidate community branches, something we would only consider as a last resort,” said Dr. Mistick. “We expect our Board to render a decision in late September on the future of the library system's financial dilemma and system of branches and services.”

On August 5 Governor Edward G. Rendell signed legislation that provides a mechanism for state employees to be paid, but does not provide a complete and final budget for the 2009-10 fiscal year. With this “bridge budget” the Governor is charging the legislature's Conference Committee to start anew in developing a balanced budget for the Commonwealth. During a conference, Dr. Mistick joined other library directors from across the Commonwealth in urging the Governor to maintain a maximum level of state subsidy for public libraries, as well as funding for Power Library and the Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

In its 2010 budget submission to the Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD), Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh requested a 10.1% increase in operational funding. Anticipating the Library's funding from the state may decrease as much as 50% for 2010, the Library is asking RAD to increase support in order to prevent drastic changes to services and programs. The Library formally presents this budget in a public meeting to the RAD board on Tuesday, August 25 at 5:30 p.m.

Between now and late September Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh officials encourage library supporters to take part in a grass-roots effort to write and talk to funders and local community leaders who can influence a change in annual operating funding opportunities for the library system.

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About Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

To Engage our Community in Literacy and Learning

Established as a public trust in 1895, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh serves the citizens of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County with a distinguished history of leadership among the country's great public libraries. Through its 19 neighborhood locations, including Main Library and the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh is the region's most visited asset, with 2.6 million visitors in 2008. Each year the Library provides valuable resources, programs, classes and training opportunities that engage the community in literacy, and life-long learning.

About Libraries *for* LIFE

Sustaining our Future

In 2009 Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh began a community dialogue to engage the region's citizens in protecting the long-term sustainability of the City's library system.