

Alexandria Library Board Minutes

Date

April 19, 2021

Location

Virtual meeting conducted via Zoom.

Present

Kathleen Schloeder, Oscar Fitzgerald, Trudi Hahn, Elizabeth Bennett-Parker (late arrival), Karen Marshall, Robert Ray IV, Patsy Rogers, Director Dawson, Deputy Director Knight, Division Chief Gates, HR Manager Ross Farley.

The meeting was called to order at 4:00pm.

Public Comments

Chuck Ziegler, Advocacy Chair, Friends of the Beatley Library, submitted a written statement prior to the meeting. Mr. Ziegler reported at the meeting that the Friends continued their work insofar as pandemic restrictions allowed. As of March 31, annual memberships totaled 59, lifetime memberships totaled 13, and assets totaled \$163,775.98. On-line book sale revenue totaled \$407.28 and approximately 110 boxes of children's books were boxed and delivered to Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School and to Brent Place. The books will be given free of charge to children of low-income families. The Friends responded to the American Library Association (ALA) request that members contact their congressional representatives in support of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and to support library funding in FY22. The Friends also circulated to all members a request from ALA that Friends members contact President Biden and congressional representatives to urge inclusion of libraries in the proposed infrastructure plan.

Ms. Hahn asked Mr. Ziegler if the Help Libraries Recover Act is part of the overall recovery monies. Mr. Ziegler replied that he believes that is part of the ARP. Mr. Ray asked Mr. Ziegler if the Friends are able to accept or pick up book donations. Mr. Ziegler reported that The Friends do not currently have a place to store such donations due to the pandemic and that they would be able to accommodate donations in the future. Mr. Ray asked if the Library is allowed first choice of the donated books. Mr. Ziegler responded affirmatively and stated that Friends members are also given priority with regard to purchasing donated books. Mr. Ziegler reported that Friends membership is currently down due to their inability to distribute books to members such as book dealers. Mr. Ray thanked Mr. Ziegler and the Friends for all of their work. Chair Schloeder reported with Mr. Ray and the Board that the ability to accept book donations is part of Phase 4 of the Library's reopening plan.

Chair's Report

Chair Schloeder thanked Library staff for all of their extraordinary efforts during the pandemic period.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the following 2020 Board meetings were presented for approval: February 20, March 17, March 30, May 28, September 21, October 19, and December 2. A motion for approval was made by Ms. Hahn, seconded by Mr. Ray, and passed unanimously. Chair Schloeder added that the 2020 minutes may need to be approved once more when the Board returns to in-person meetings.

Director's Report

Director Dawson thanked Library staff for their efforts during the pandemic to creatively deliver services and to support City sponsored vaccination clinic efforts. Director Dawson reported that most numbers in the monthly activity report are down due to Library closures, reduced occupancy levels and hours. Some metrics have increased.

E-borrowers are up 318% and wireless users are up 285% reflecting the large number of patrons using Library parking lots to access wireless internet service when Libraries were closed. The Law Librarian is now one of the few persons in the area certified to perform online notary services, generating a small amount of revenue for the Library.

Director Dawson reported that the Library expects to continue a variety of virtual programs and services through May. The Library provided the bibliography for the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project (ACRP) which is the City's equal justice initiative and will participate in the April 23 remembrance of the lynching of Joseph McCoy. Attendance will be limited due to the pandemic, although the Library will highlight the event on the website.

Director Dawson provided a status report on collective bargaining as it pertains to the Library. A City ordinance to establish collective bargaining rules and process is underway. Based on its current structure, the Library system is considered to be a separate political entity. As a result, the Library and its staff are eligible to participate in collective bargaining generally, but are not eligible to participate in the City's collective bargaining process. Director Dawson read a statement provided by the City Attorney which explained that Library employees are not employees of the City, but rather are employees of either the Alexandria Library Board and/or Alexandria Library Company. Therefore, the City Attorney asserts that the City collective bargaining ordinance does not apply to Library employees. After further research, the City Attorney will update the City Council on potential options for the Library and other similar political entities. Chair Schloeder requested that all Board members be provided a copy of the City Attorney's statement.

Ms. Hahn asked how that can be possible given her understanding of the Library's 1937 charter. Director Dawson stated that the City Attorney reviewed three founding documents to help determine their response. Director Dawson is aware of at least one Virginia local library board that recently changed from a governing board to an advisory board as a result of this issue. Chair Schloeder and Ms. Hahn question how one can say that staff are not employees of the City when the Library Board does not hire or fire or set salaries. Director Dawson stated that past Division Chief Linda Wesson previously reported that in the 1980s the Library Board did such things, but that an agreement was made with the City in the 1990s to take over those functions. Mr. Fitzgerald asked if staff will vote to determine if they want to unionize and asked how that will work. He also asked if this could all be moot if staff votes not to participate. Director Dawson recently advised staff that the Library will wait until the City ordinance is finalized before determining next steps. Her current assumption is that staff will want to mirror the benefits and options provided to their City counterparts. Mr. Fitzgerald asked if that was an indication of how poorly staff feel they are treated. Director Dawson stated that Virginia is a right to work state and feels that staff will want to exercise the option to unionize.

Ms. Bennett-Parker joined the meeting at this time and reported that the City ordinance passed unanimously on April 17. Ms. Bennett-Parker provided a general summary of the City ordinance to collectively bargain on wages, benefits and other working conditions (excluding discipline but including other employee grievance procedures). There will be several different bargaining units and managerial and supervisory employees are generally not included. It is her understanding that staff must conduct a vote to unionize. Ms. Bennett-Parker stated that Virginia is a right to work state so even if Library employees vote to unionize, there is no requirement for staff to participate. Mr. Fitzgerald asked how long it will take to determine the answers to these questions. Ms. Bennett-Parker was unsure of the timeline, but explained that Library staff could collectively bargain as a separate entity, like the schools.

Director Dawson reported on how Amazon's restriction on e-books impacts the Library. Amazon restricts the books they self-publish, although this restriction does not apply to any of the major publishing houses. The Library is able to offer most of these items in Kindle format. Since much of what Amazon publishes is low demand, self-published works, the restrictions do not particularly hurt the Library. Director Dawson reported that the real issue now is that Amazon has purchased Audible which may have greater impact on Library materials in the future. Director Dawson

reported that the Metropolitan Council of Governments (COG) library group has indicated that they may want to review this situation as a regional issue. Ms. Hahn asked if ALA has taken a stand on this issue. Director Dawson stated that the ALA Washington office has indicated they may begin taking some action and that she will keep the Board informed of developments.

Director Dawson reported that the City's Office of Management & Budget (OMB) requested the Library submit a budget memo pertaining to Council Member Bennett-Parker's question about what it would take to eliminate late fines for overdue juvenile materials. Ms. Bennett-Parker stated that the full Council co-sponsored her request to eliminate juvenile fines and the matter will be addressed at the add/delete work session on Tuesday, April 27. The proposal will be reviewed at a final work session on May 3 and final budget approval occurs on May 5. Ms. Hahn asked what percentage of fines are related to juvenile materials and Director Dawson responded that it is approximately 50% or \$70,000. Director Dawson explained that while late fines would be eliminated, customers would still be charged a lost fee if the item is not returned after a certain period of time. Library accounts are currently blocked for further borrowing if \$35 or more is owed on the account. Mr. Fitzgerald asked if parents or children check out the juvenile books and Director Dawson replied that it is primarily the children with their own Library cards, except in the case of very young children.

Ms. Marshall asked if the Library is moving toward removal of late fines for all accounts. Ms. Bennett-Parker responded that full fine removal could occur this year if Council can find another \$72,000 during the budget process. Mr. Fitzgerald asked if this change would require approval from the Library Board to implement the new policy. Director Dawson responded that if approved by City Council, it would be brought back to the Board at the June meeting to make the Board aware that this additional funding is approved for the restricted use of replacing fees and fines revenue and that the Director and staff have developed a process for implementing this change. Ms. Marshall asked how the Alexandria Libraries compare to others in the region on this topic. Director Dawson explained that most no longer have late fines per ALA's policy and goals statement. Mr. Fitzgerald asked if there are studies on the impact of removing fines on the recovery of Library materials and Director Dawson replied that she would pose that question to other colleagues in the region. Mr. Ray suggested this topic be put on the agenda for further discussion at the next meeting since the elimination of fines and the advent of automatic returns of electronic materials may ultimately curtail the Library's ability to raise revenue. Director Dawson reported that the mission of the Library has never been focused on raising revenue. Mr. Fitzgerald and Mr. Ray asked if this revenue change would be in perpetuity. Ms. Bennett-Parker stated that was the intent but that a current City Council cannot bind a future Council to a revenue or policy decision. Ms. Hahn voiced her strong support in favor of removing materials fines.

Director Dawson reported that OMB has also recently recommended approval of the Library's request for a transfer of City general funds to cover the Library's shortfall in fees and fines revenue in FY21 due to the pandemic. This will allow the Library to continue planned operational and materials spending through the end of the fiscal year. Ms. Hahn asked if there is a particular point at which additional book copies are purchased for particularly popular items. Lynda Rudd, Technical Services Manager, responded that an item must have at least 15-20 holds to order and make additional copies available.

Director Dawson reported an update on the FY22 budget process, explaining that the City Manager's proposed budget includes a plan to hold five Library positions vacant for varying portions of the year. Due to City revenue re-estimates, the proposed budget now includes a merit increase for staff as well as a one-time 1% salary increase since staff did not receive any raises in FY21.

The Library of Virginia (LVA) will receive \$200 million to distribute to Libraries through ARP, although they are still working through the criteria of how to disperse this money. LVA is looking at purchasing items that would benefit all library systems such as access to reported databases or regional partnerships. While Alexandria Library already has access to some of these tools, it may be possible to redirect local funds for other purposes.

Director Dawson provided an update on the Library's reopening plan and reported that staff continue to be concerned regarding the use of masks and other protective measures. She also outlined what other area Library systems are doing. Mr. Farley is working with staff currently on telework to phase them back into office work. Director Dawson has asked City Human Resources to advise in the near future regarding whether the Library can validate vaccination status. In anticipation of further reopening, the Library has requested permission to fill some vacancies. The Library currently has 25 vacancies, including 11 Sunday staff members, as well as 17 staff members teleworking to support children engaged in virtual learning due to the pandemic. The Library will begin posting ads to fill the vacant positions. At this time, it is anticipated that the Library will move to Phase 4 at the end of the summer or in early fall based on staff vacancy rates, child care concerns and planned staff vacations.

Director Dawson provided an update on the Library's digitization project. Several years ago, the Library contracted with Lyasis to determine what was needed in Special Collections. It was determined that digitization of materials was a priority. Director Dawson thanked Mr. Ray for his support of the digitization project and for securing grant money. Director Dawson also expressed gratitude to the City for funding a related capital project. The equipment has been ordered and while the City still has a hiring freeze, a seasonal intern position will be hired to help start the project. Mr. Fitzgerald asked what items will be digitized and Director Dawson responded that selection of materials will be part of the process identified by Lyasis. Digitization will apply to the full Special Collections holdings, not just to the Library Company portion of that collection. Mr. Fitzgerald reported his concern that staff has not yet identified what are the most important materials with which to start. Director Dawson said that a plan is being rolled out as part of this process which will focus on the entire Special Collection.

Chair Schloeder asked if the Library would be a voting site for the upcoming primary election and Director Dawson responded that the Beatley central branch would be a voting site as it had been in the past.

Director Dawson concluded with a statement that Spring2ACTION occurs on April 28 and that the Foundation had already received two matching grants. Early giving began on April 14 and will continue until the event date. Mr. Ray asked for electronic marketing material so that he could share information about Spring2ACTION with other Foundation supporters.

Treasurer's Report

Mr. Ray reported that as of March 31, the Library is three-quarters of the way through the fiscal year and has expended 72% of the budget. Approximately 66% of State Aid funds have been expended. There was initial concern about the Library's obligation to raise the budgeted \$452,411 in fine and fee revenue during the pandemic, especially since only \$22,900 or 5% of that total has been raised to date. Mr. Ray is delighted to hear that OMB approved replacement funds and that the budget is being managed. Mr. Fitzgerald asked if the Library will receive the full amount of revenue. Ms. Gates responded that the Library estimates making additional revenue with the restart of passport services in May and June and that approximately \$405,000 was requested and will be provided by the City to make up the anticipated shortfall.

Investment Committee Report

Mr. Ray reported that as of March 31, investment portfolio performance was 17.42%, slightly lower than the benchmark of 17.68%. The performance over the last 12 months was 35.25% as compared to the benchmark of 32.93%. There was a meeting on February 22 with BB&T financial advisors to review investment performance. The update was provided to Mr. Ray, Chair Schloeder, Director Dawson and Ms. Gates. Mr. Ray was encouraged and impressed with the performance numbers against the benchmark and with the fiduciary reasonability, nonprofit orientation and excellent service provided by the BB&T advisory team.

New Business– Intern Policy

Director Dawson reported that a study conducted by Lyasis resulted in a recommendation that the Library have an intern process, especially related to work in the Special Collections area. A pilot was conducted a few years ago with the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) where social worker interns were hired to assist for a single semester at the Library. That pilot brought to light the need for a more permanent internship program for the entire system to ensure that intern and organizational goals are both met. Mr. Farley was asked to draft a new policy which would allow for both paid and unpaid internships.

In reviewing the policy, Chair Schloeder felt there should be more in the policy pertaining to the paid internships since most of the elements seemed to apply to the unpaid interns. Mr. Ray felt the policy was well outlined and asked if Chair Schloeder wanted to make a proposal for modification. Chair Schloeder stated that she would like to see more detail on goals and supervision for the paid interns. Chair Schloeder asked if the paid interns would be considered City employees. Mr. Farley responded affirmatively and Chair Schloeder stated that would cover many of her concerns. Ms. Marshall asked if the outreach to local universities would include local community colleges. Director Dawson replied it would. Mr. Ray moved to approve the intern policy and Ms. Rogers seconded the motion. The motion passed with six members approving. Ms. Hahn abstained.

Chair Schloeder reported that the next meeting in June will be conducted in-person at Beatley. Since she is not able to attend Staff Day on May 21, Chair Schloeder will tape a message to share with staff that day. Ms. Marshall asked what typically occurs on Staff Day. Mr. Farley explained that Staff Day is a day where the Library system is closed to the public for an all-day conference style training and education event for staff. This year's event will be held virtually for only a half day due to the pandemic and is focused on topics of diversity, equity and inclusion. Each year the event is concluded with a variety of staff awards.

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Hahn, seconded by Ms. Marshall and approved unanimously at 5:57pm.