

# Alexandria Library Board Minutes

## Date

February 18, 2021

## Location

Virtual meeting conducted via Zoom.

## Present

Kathleen Schloeder, Oscar Fitzgerald, Trudi Hahn, Elizabeth Bennett-Parker, 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 Comment

None

## Chair's Report

Chair Schloeder announced that all three City Council appointees to the Board were up for reappointment in January and February and that former Treasurer, Helen Desfosses, had retired from service in order to allow the Board to diversify its membership. Chair Schloeder asked that the minutes show the Board's gratitude for her service as Treasurer, as a member of the Investment Committee and for the wise counsel that she provided during her tenure. The Board wishes Ms. Desfosses well and thanks her for her service to the Library and to the City of Alexandria.

Chair Schloeder formally introduced new Library Board member Karen Marshall and read her (attached) bio. Ms. Marshall has championed issues of diversity and inclusion and has focused on the prevention of sexual assault throughout her career. In addition to her professional accomplishments, Chair Schloeder recognized that Ms. Marshall completed the City Academy program last fall. Ms. Marshall thanked Chair Schloeder for the introduction and for the welcome. She also expressed thanks to the City Council for her appointment. Ms. Marshall expressed excitement to be a part of the Library Board and stated that she looks forward to helping the Library Board continue to achieve its goals. Chair Schloeder reported that both she and Ms. Hahn were reappointed to the Library Board by the City Council in February and thanked Ms. Bennett-Parker for her continued support.

Chair Schloeder provided a brief update on the Burke Branch Art Project. She reported that the Arts Commission recently approved the concept design and that work can now move forward on the art installation, now scheduled for Fall 2021. Chair Schloeder reminded the Board that they had not been allowed to approve meeting minutes while meeting virtually during the pandemic. Chair Schloeder reported that the Board had asked for special permission to approve minutes and that upcoming meetings may include a portion of that process.

## Director's Report

Director Dawson thanked Library staff for working so diligently and for being so creative during the pandemic time. In addition to providing key Library functions, many staff have served the wider community through work with Meals on Wheels, through service as interpreters and translators, and by staffing call centers in support of the City's pandemic operations. Director Dawson congratulated Ms. Hahn and Chair Schloeder for being unanimously reappointed to the Board.

Director Dawson provided an update on the monthly activity report, which is based on data through December 31, 2020. Director Dawson reminded the Board that activity during this period was limited due to operational closures and capacity limits. While patron counts were down 75% compared to last December, Director Dawson noted that circulation was only down 20%, indicating that curbside service and electronic materials had sustained Library customers during the pandemic time.

Director Dawson reported that staff have been very good at organizing virtual programming, including those recognizing special events such as George Washington's Birthday. Director Dawson highlighted the February Library programs in celebration of Black History Month, acknowledging collaborative efforts with the City and the Alexandria Black History Museum. February is also a time where Library supporters can celebrate *Love My Library* month.

Director Dawson announced that the Library is releasing a new mobile app that will work on both smartphones and tablets to access the website and collections. Customers can also perform ISBN searches of the collection. The Overdrive and Libby apps will remain in use as well. Staff will send out a press release tomorrow followed by a training on March 3 about how to use the new app. Ms. Marshall asked if the new mobile app would be available only to Library card holders. Director Dawson responded that anyone can download or search the app, but that a Library card would be necessary to borrow any materials.

Lastly, Director Dawson informed the Board that based on legislation passed in the Virginia general assembly last year, the City of Alexandria is in the process of negotiating with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) concerning the ability of staff to bargain collectively. The City Manager conducted a presentation to inform the City Council of these early stages in the process. Ms. Hahn asked if Director Dawson had experience in the union environment. Director Dawson responded that she was the union president representing Library staff for just under a year during her tenure with the District of Columbia government.

#### Treasurer's Report

Since the Board's new Treasurer was not yet appointed, Director Dawson provided the Treasurer's Report. She stated that as of December 31, 2020, the Library is halfway through the fiscal year and has expended 42% of the budget. Approximately 61% of State Aid funds have been expended in that period. Director Dawson noted that figure is higher than 50% as several annual database subscriptions are paid in the earlier part of the fiscal year. Library fines and fees revenue is quite low given pandemic closures and the decision to waive overdue fines for most of calendar year 2020. As of December 31, 2020, the Library has collected only \$14,263 or 3% of the expected budget requirement of \$452,411. The Law Library has received \$15,017 in filing fees as of December 31, 2020.

The City's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is aware of this situation. Director Dawson is not yet sure regarding OMB's expectation for making up the shortfall, although it is likely why the Library was not authorized to fill some of its requested vacant positions. The City did support not collecting fines and fees due to equity issues during the pandemic. Director Dawson explained that some unplanned retirements have also impacted the Library budget and that there may be additional retirements that occur before the end of the fiscal year which could impact the budget. Chair Schloeder asked if those retirements would assist with budget shortfalls. Mr. Farley explained that while there would be vacancy savings, some if not all of those savings could be offset by leave payouts.

Ms. Hahn asked if the passport program would experience a surge in demand as travel restrictions are loosened and wondered if there would be adequate capacity to handle that demand. Director Dawson reminded the Board that the Library is only authorized to do new passports, not renewals. The Library has approached the State Department in the past to ask if the Library could expand to do renewals, although the opportunity was not available at that time. A committee of staff at Beatley and at Barrett are gearing up to process passports as soon as the Library reopens. That committee is also considering increasing revenue by offering the passport picture service

for a fee. In the past, the Library has partnered with CVS for that element, although staff identified that recent purchase of a camera and green screen for virtual programming may be able to support that initiative. Ms. Marshall asked about notary revenue and Director Dawson responded that our Law Librarian became certified as a virtual notary and that the service is currently being offered online to customers.

#### Investment Committee Report

Mr. Ray reported that as of December 31, 2020, the market value of the Library's investment account was \$3,677,151. From July 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020, portfolio performance was 14.56%, slightly lower than the benchmark of 15.00%. From Jan 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020 portfolio performance was 13.81% which was higher than the benchmark for that period.

#### Old Business – FY22 Budget Update

Director Dawson reported that on February 16, the City Manager released his proposed FY22 budget to City Council. During budget preparation, the Library had to submit a 10% cut totaling approximately \$717,000. That submission included the following: elimination of Sunday hours, elimination of security guard services, lay off of library pages, elimination of the part-time Communications Assistant position, holding vacant six positions, and elimination of the City supplemental to the Law Library materials budget. Director Dawson submitted to the City Manager a letter prepared by the Library Board Chair outlining the negative impacts of such cuts. The City Manager ultimately included about half of the vacancy savings and the proposal that Law Library materials be retained via usage of excess funds available from the Alexandria Bar Association. On March 17, the Library will participate in a work session to answer any questions that City Council members have regarding the City Manager's proposed Library budget. After a City Council add/delete process, the final budget will be approved on May 5.

Ms. Marshall asked the job duties of a library page. Director Dawson explained that they are part-time employees hired to shelve materials and that they are generally the lowest paid and most highly impacted job group when viewed from a diversity perspective. Ms. Marshall asked about the part-time Communications position and Director Dawson stated those functions could have been temporarily filled by other staff members impacted by pandemic related closures.

Chair Schloeder indicated that Chuck Ziegler, President of the Beatley Friends group, was listening to the meeting and that he wanted to understand how he and other supporters could advocate for the Library during this process. Director Dawson stated that his mailed comments would be included as a part of the minutes (attached). Director Dawson reported that staff will put together talking points that a person could use to thank the City Manager or the City Council for their past support and for their support in the coming year. For example, the Library is grateful for the Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) as well as for the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, & Economic Security Act (CARES) funds which supported purchase of e-materials, curbside service supplies, and personal protective equipment (PPE) needed during pandemic. Director Dawson will provide a copy to the Board.

#### New Business– Treasurer Election

Due to the retirement of former Treasurer, Helen Desfosses, the Board must elect a new Treasurer. A nominating committee was not created due to the unplanned nature of the appointment. The Board had asked and Mr. Ray had agreed to serve as Treasurer since he was the current Investment Committee Chair. Ms. Hahn made a motion to nominate Mr. Ray, Ms. Rogers seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously. Chair Schloeder thanked Mr. Ray and Mr. Ray expressed his gratitude for the opportunity.

#### New Business – Library Reopening Planning

Director Dawson voiced her appreciation for the flexibility granted to her by the Board regarding pandemic related openings and closures of the Library System. The Library continues to remain consistent based on the plans and objective process outlined together at the start of the pandemic. A town hall was held with Library staff on February 12 to discuss reopening and opened the floor for questions. Decision criteria were discussed, including

CDC data on positivity rates and other metrics. The positivity rate had decreased to 6.1% and was trending downward. Staff gathered advice from the City and from the Library staff in recent weeks. The City importantly identified Library staff as falling into the 1b category of essential workers for purposes of COVID-19 vaccination eligibility which has allowed the Library a greater ability to safely open earlier than expected. Staff also conducted a benchmarking analysis with area Library peers regarding reopening plans. Since vaccination is a personal choice for staff, the Library will conduct an anonymous survey to determine the overall vaccination status of its workforce to inform various reopening plans, including how to phase staff back into the buildings as we reopen.

After discussions with the Library Council of Governments (COG) group and after inquiries with several area health departments, it was determined that the materials quarantine could be phased out. The current plan is to reduce materials quarantine to 48 hours for the next month or two and then move to no quarantining of materials.

Director Dawson stated that enforcement of masking had been difficult on staff due to some combative customers. The Library will review signage and other materials prior to reopening. All safety protocols are still in place including masks, hand washing and physical distancing. In anticipation of reopening, managers were asked to develop a 2-week initial staff schedule for a March opening. Director Dawson envisioned a return to Phase 3, including a curbside only on Fridays using the same hours in place at the time of the last closure. Increasing occupancy levels slightly was also discussed.

Chair Schloeder asked if temperatures will still be taken prior to entry in the building. Director Dawson reported that temperature checks and masks will still be required, although the responsibility for that process will fall to staff and security guards as certified nursing assistants (CNAs) are no longer available. CNAs had been funded by CARES money which was exhausted in December. Chair Schloeder asked if the City will still require employees to quarantine after travel. Mr. Farley responded affirmatively, but added that each travel request is assessed and that quarantine requirements depend on the nature of the travel.

Chair Schloeder noted that Ms. Bennett-Parker provided a good report regarding the Burke Public Art Project at the last City Council session. At that same session, Council members asked about what is happening in the City for Black History Month and Chair Schloeder said that Director Dawson provided an excellent report on how Library programs support that celebration.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Fitzgerald, seconded by Ms. Rogers and approved unanimously at 5:21pm.