

Library Board Minutes

February 20, 2020

Location: James M. Duncan, Jr. Branch Library, Meeting Room

Present: Kathleen Schloeder, Oscar Fitzgerald, Helen Desfosses, Elizabeth Bennett-Parker, Robert Ray, Patricia Rogers, Director Dawson, Division Chief/Administrative Services Wesson

Excused: Trudi Hahn

Guests: Chuck Ziegler, Friends of Beatley Central Library, Alexandria resident Ellen Tabb, and Lynda Rudd.

The meeting was called to order at 4:05pm.

Public Comments

Chuck Ziegler reported that as of January 31, the Friends of Beatley Library had assets totaling \$163,145. To date, there were \$2,420 in funds committed to the library and \$55,830 were budgeted. The Beatley Friends had 168 members and 10 life members. The next book sale was planned for March 25-29. Mr. Ziegler noted that the Beatley Friends had approved \$2,500 for sponsorship to the Alexandria Library Foundation's Anniversary event. The Beatley Friends' annual meeting was scheduled for March 10, to include a tour of the Friends' working area.

Alexandria Resident Ellen Tabb asked the libraries to support what she calls "mainstream American history" and expressed concern that there were not enough programs or displays about George Washington. Ms. Schloeder noted that the Library follows the City of Alexandria holidays, displays are suggested by the Library's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee, and that branch managers have considerable autonomy in preparing and selecting programs and displays, because their audiences are different. She added that there is often coordination with the teachers in the Alexandria City Public Schools and library staff often link their displays and speakers to that. Ms. Schloeder stated that she is qualified to teach in ACPS, with a masters in history, which included women's history, African-American history, labor history, and those topics have been considered mainstream. Ms. Schloeder added that she had personally seen the exhibit at the Burke Branch Library on George Washington, and was sorry that Ms. Tabb had missed it. Ms. Tabb proceeded to provide additional feedback, further defining American history. Given this information, Director Dawson added that she appreciated the fact that Ms. Tabb did not feel that the Library did enough, but it seemed the issue was that the Library utilized a broader definition and did not do the programs or displays to Ms. Tabb's satisfaction. Director Dawson stated that she would use Ms. Tabb's concerns as an example, to have a discussion about programming with the branch managers.

Approval of minutes

A motion to approve the December 2019 minutes was made by Mr. Fitzgerald and was seconded by Ms. Bennett-Parker. The motion carried.

Director's Report

Director Dawson reported that circulation continues to break even, and the number of website visits were up. Director Dawson reported that Beatley Central Library had turned twenty in January and the February 1 celebration was a success, with several Library Board members in attendance. Former Library Director Patrick O'Brien did a brief talk, the Mayor presented a proclamation, and the City's poet laureate kicked off the festivities. The children's program was standing room only. Staff intend to do another time capsule in the spring, and they asked attendees what they thought should go in it.

Director Dawson reported that she, Beatley Central Library Manager Samantha Palmieri, and Division Chief Wesson had met with General Services to begin the process of collecting information for the RFP on the parking lot portion of the Beatley envelope project. The plan was to begin work on the parking lot prior to work on the windows.

Director Dawson reported that with regard to the Burke Branch Library, she would be scheduling a meeting with General Services toward the end of the fiscal year to determine how to proceed with the design of the first floor.

Director Dawson announced that Deputy Director Kimberly Knight would begin on March 9. Ms. Knight has worked for several Virginia library systems, as a branch manager in Arlington and Prince William, a regional manager in Prince George's County, and as assistant director in Chesapeake, Virginia. She is very active in the American Library Association, having just moved off of their board, and she has published several articles in library journals.

Ms. Schloeder thanked Ms. Dawson, Mr. Farley, and Ms. Wesson for their work during the interim without a Deputy Director.

Ms. Schloeder reported that the City was going to put out the contract for the Burke Branch art project. The contract was supposed to be signed in January, but she did not have a confirmation of that. Community engagement had been pushed back to at least April because the Office of the Arts had a big roll-out for a new public art piece in March.

Ms. Schloeder also reported that at the end of the calendar year, in a very rushed donation, the Library received eight shares of Apple stock. On December 29, Ms. Schloeder had made arrangements for the stock to be transferred to the BB&T investment account. Unfortunately, Mike Sahakian and Susan Cassidy were on leave which made the transaction difficult. The stock was worth approximately \$2,320. Ms. Schloeder asked if we want to leave it in the BB&T account or move it to the Alexandria Library Foundation, noting that the Foundation does not have a brokerage account or a process in place to handle donations of stock. Mr. Ray volunteered to go to Sterling (BB&T) to discuss the matter.

Treasurer's Report

Ms. Desfosses stated that the Library was 58.3% through the year, had spent 55.9% of the budget and 73.8% of State Aid funds. The Library had made close to 60% of its fines and fees requirement.

Investment Report

Mr. Ray presented the Investment Report. He reported that as of December 31, 2019, the fiscal year to date portfolio performance was 6.37%, slightly higher than the benchmark of 6.04%. The performance over the last twelve months was 19.63% as compared to the benchmark of 18.32%. As of January 31, 2020, the year to date market value of the Library's investment account was \$3,271,674.

New Business

Director Dawson reported that in his recommended budget to Council, the City Manager did not take any reductions from the Library. He did accept some efficiencies, which were two vacant page positions. Regarding the requested supplementals, he approved \$50,000 for materials and the operating funds for the Digital Access Management System for Local History. He asked if the Library could absorb the cost of the security camera, which we are prepared to do, because it's a safety issue. In the Capital Improvement Program budget, the City Facilities Maintenance Plan (CFMP) was approved for \$23 million as was the request for the Digital Access Management System.

Director Dawson introduced the issue of reducing or eliminating library fines. She noted that this has been on the board's radar over the past several years. As far back as 2015, the whole notion of eliminating fines has been discussed, and other library systems have done so. We became a passport service agency, which introduced a new way to raise revenue. The Library had a chance to participate in the ConnectED program, which provided library cards to all school children which do not incur fines. The Director noted that the Library did not feel that it was in a position to eliminate fines completely, but we did recognize the need to improve the ability for school children to access the library. In 2018, the library board asked for a presentation about fines and the Library brought Barrett Branch Library on board as a passport agency. With assistance from Vice Mayor Bennett-Parker and Kirk Huffman from ACPS, we were able to complete the enrollment of children for ConnectEd cards, fine free. As the City has moved along with its equity committee, the City Manager has asked departments to look at their services through an equity lens. Where most public libraries are concerned, fines are a barrier that stop people from being able to check books out. As a nice interim measure, the Connect Ed cards help, but they do have limitations – only 3 items may be checked out a time, for example. At the same time, the Library's Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee looked at the issue of equity and made several recommendations which the Library would implement. They suggested providing automatic renewals to customers, which was something that the branch managers and Library Administration had been discussing previously. The EDI Committee also suggested allowing blocked users to have access to computers, which they currently cannot do and raising the threshold for blocks from \$10 to \$25. They recommended a fine amnesty period which Ms. Hahn has asked about over the years. The details of how this would work was not ironed out.

Director Dawson added that the EDI Committee recommended eliminating fines to juveniles and teens, which would require Library Board and City Council approval. Currently, \$197K fines are collected annually, which includes payments for lost items. Fines on juvenile material is 36% of that. Total revenue is \$495. If the Library were to eliminate all fines completely, it would need \$135,000 additional funds in its budget. However, if fines were eliminated on just juvenile materials, about \$65,000 would need to be added to the budget. The Director stated that Council Member Chapman went to a meeting of the

National League of Cities in which the topic of fine elimination was discussed. He asked the Director what it would take for Alexandria to go fine free. Ms. Defosses asked if there was an awareness that to reduce fines is a reduction of services. Director Dawson replied that it was understood that we would have to be given that money to make up the difference. Ms. Desfosses added that the Library would have to make up that money somehow or reduce expenditures. Mr. Fitzgerald asked how the Library would get its books back if customers are not held responsible. Director Dawson stated that customers would still have to pay replacement costs for items which are not returned at all. She added that the American Library Association had made a statement recommending elimination of fines because it's an equity issue. Mr. Ray said that fines negatively affect children whose parents are not as readily available. Ms. Bennett-Parker stated that she would talk about this on her oral report to Council, adding that she understood the equity piece of it, and that many members of the community have difficulties with payment.

A motion to adjourn at 5:14pm was made by Ms. Bennett-Parker and seconded by Ms. Desfosses. The motion carried.