

WEBER COUNTY LIBRARY

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES

Date: July 7, 2020

Board Members

In Attendance: Diana Allison
Sandra Crosland
Jim Harvey
Kathleen Jensen
Cynthia Mattson
Reed Spencer
Spencer Stokes

Others in

Attendance: Lynnda Wangsgard, Library Director
Phoebe Carter, Assistant Library Director
Bryan Baron, Deputy Weber County Attorney
Julia Valle, Business Office Manager
Evelyn Bertilson, Friends of the Library
Marcia Harris, Library Development Board

Allison called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Public Comments:

There were no public comments.

Election of Chair to Serve August, 2020 – July, 2021:

Allison called for nominations of a member(s) to serve as Chair.

Spencer nominated Mattson, noting she was in an excellent position in terms of experience and professional skills to provide leadership at this time. Jensen voiced support and Crosland formally seconded the motion, agreeing that Mattson's professional skills as an accountant complemented the Board's priority in developing a business plan to secure the funding needed to construct a new branch library.

Allison asked if Mattson was agreeable to serve as Chair. Mattson indicated that she was prepared to accept the nomination.

There being no other nominations, Allison called for a vote. All voted in the affirmative, except Harvey who abstained in case the action had to come before the Commission for ratification.

Allison thanked the Commissioner for moving her nomination forward for an appointment to serve a second, four-year term on the Board. She expressed enthusiasm for helping complete unfinished projects, such as securing funding for a new branch.

Approval of June 2, 2020, Meeting Minutes:

There being voiced no additions, deletions, or corrections to the minutes, Jensen moved approval. Spencer seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative.

Commissioner's Report:

Harvey reported Commissioners had followed through on the plan to establish a Library Capital Fund which would, in perpetuity, ensure that tax dollars collected for Library services would not be usurped for other purposes.

Harvey stressed that Commissioners had not committed to build a new library to complete the System geographically, but had discussed raising taxes to cover current operating expenses and may also consider adjusting the tax rate to cover the costs of operating an additional branch. An additional amount could be put into the Library Capital Project Fund to bond against in order to build a new facility.

Crosland asked what the overall tax rate increase might be.

Harvey noted that was yet to be determined. The budget will be developed and refined as the overall COVID impact is determined. He reminded the Board of their commitment to campaign and help educate the public on behalf of a unified County Commission that believes in the power of libraries to change lives. Even though the public will not have to vote on the bond for a new building, they deserve to be informed of any action taken by elected officials, Harvey said.

Jensen asked why the public would not have to vote on a bond.

Baron replied that a different type of tax revenue bond would be used compared to the one that provided revenue for the Board's previous five-year capital plan. Only general obligation bonds require a public vote.

Director's Report:

Wangsgard prefaced review of the output measure report by noting it was a challenge to squeeze meaning out of the numbers. The County's libraries had been open less than three weeks during the reporting period and were currently operating in a radically changed environment. Nonetheless, some interesting usage statistics were evident.

For example, circulation tallied a surprisingly high number with community members borrowing 149,296 items. Of this amount almost 41,000 were eMaterials; that is, eAudio Books and eBooks. Comparative statistics for May, 2019, totaled 209,963 loans of which 29,664 were eMaterials.

During the pandemic, residents were making increased use of those items that could be borrowed over the Web. However, borrowing of print materials was also surprisingly strong in light of the environment in which the service was being offered. Included in overall total of print materials loaned during May were 11,231 items the public had placed on hold and then picked up, taking advantage of the new curbside service. Wangsgard reiterated that while the current monthly circulation numbers were solid, it had to be remembered that the yearly totals included all those materials that had been inventoried while libraries were closed to the public.

In support of these strong borrowing numbers, employees had issued 745 library cards during the three weeks the library was opened in May. A considerable number of these were the new eCards that could be obtained without actually coming into the Library. The eCards may be used only to borrow eMaterials. Also supporting the strong circulation numbers was the cataloging and processing of 2,514 new items that were ordered and made ready for the public while the Library was closed. These books were being snapped up by readers hungry for new materials to enjoy.

The usage totals for value-added databases was down significantly from the previous year. Wangsgard explained that a substantial number of these subscription services can be accessed only in-house and, since the library was not open to the public May 1-10, neither the staff nor community members were using the resource. Also contributing to the downward trend in usage was the fact that when facilities reopened May 11, more than one-half of all public computers were shutdown to accommodate social distancing. Nonetheless, almost 2,600 database uses were recorded between May 11-May 31. More than 3,200 computer sessions were also accommodated during that time.

The total number of visits had to be extrapolated to account for staff members who were doing wellness checks at the front entrances. Approximately 12,000 public visits were clocked each week during May. Wangsgard noted that business was picking up and much more robust usage statistics will be reported for June.

Spencer noted borrowing during the three weeks of May, when libraries reopened, was at 71% of the previous year, suggesting the public found the services to be essential.

Harris observed that not as many people were in the buildings as before the shutdown.

Wangsgard agreed, but it also appears that there are fewer users than before because people do not stay as long. The virus has temporarily changed their habits. Not as many people are comfortable being out in the community. They come in, do their business, and leave. Providing a radically safe environment will be key to reestablishing libraries as a safe place to gather and meet with others.

Turning to the financial report, Wangsgard noted revenue will be under collected and, to compensate, expenditures were being curtailed as well. The County had instituted a "soft freeze" on spending and the Library was complying. Items necessary to keep employees gainfully employed were being procured as well as those items necessary to provide services to the public. Most of the invoices being processed were for items provided on already encumbered funds, including such ongoing costs such as maintenance of the HVAC systems. She assured the Board that the budget will be significantly under expended at year's end.

One unbudgeted and unintended expense, Wangsgard noted, was the cost of providing face coverings to accommodate public access. She noted that during June, approximately 1,900 masks were distributed at the Main Library; 1,000 at North Branch; 400 at Ogden Valley Branch; 500 at Pleasant Valley Branch; and 1,800 at Southwest Branch. Costs had varied over time and as new suppliers had been discovered and vetted. The most recent order was priced at \$17.99/50, or \$0.36 per mask. Approximately 11 percent of those wishing to enter were being provided a mask, but the percent of those arriving without a mask was decreasing over time.

Bertilson asked if these costs included the plastic bag in which they were packaged.

Wangsgard said it did not.

Wangsgard asked if, in the Board's mind, providing a face covering during a world-wide pandemic was a legitimate cost of doing business and, if not, how they would propose managing the entrances.

Mattson asked if there was still a State site where people could request a free mask.

Wangsgard said yes, but the wait was four-six weeks and many folks were not savvy enough to process an online order. She acknowledged employees could become more proactive in assisting with this ordering process, however.

Stokes suggested the staff be very watchful and ensure the masks are not being given out to those who are not actually entering the Library. He also suggested getting some branded masks produced that could be sold to those who need one – durable, washable masks, not the disposable kind.

Spencer asked if people show up, have a mask in the car, forget to bring it in, and just take a free mask as a matter of convenience. Is there a way to mount a campaign to encourage people to bring their own masks, he wondered.

Harris advised that almost everyone now has their own masks. It would be wise to set the Library stock aside, out-of-sight, and assume everyone has a mask. If it is discovered they do not, then one should be provided.

Crosland suggested advertising curbside pickup as an alternative to entering, even though it is labor intensive and, therefore, also comes at a cost.

Stokes said the Board should continue supplying a face covering for those who can't get one or need one. A projected \$12,000 for masks, June - December is not a bank breaker in light of the amount of service the masks are facilitating.

Harvey encouraged selling branded masks and adding the cost to the person's library account. He also pointed out the expense might be reimbursed through a CARES grant.

Wangsgard said these expenses were currently being coded for reimbursement from CARES.

Crosland suggested asking for donations.

Stokes noted collecting and accounting for cash is an expense and it creates opportunities for virus transmission in handling cash.

Allison said she feels strongly that masks should be provided and that the staff should continue to be careful not to make judgments about those without masks.

Jensen suggested also getting input from staff concerning distribution. What is their experience?

Wangsgard noted employees want to avoid a confrontation at front entrances. If they can avoid one volatile confrontation each week, the cost of masks is worth every dime. Employees are dealing with people who have a broad range of political leanings, disposable income, knowledge of how and where to get a mask, and savvy about whether the virus is real. The staff is not just greeting people who display polished social skills, she said. There will be trouble if people are turned away because they do not have a mask. Some already volatile situations will be made worse if people are denied access to the public library.

Wangsgard was asked to report back during August as to the number of masks distributed throughout July and the implementation of the ideas suggested by Board members.

Plans for Procurement of Professional Architectural and Consulting Services:

Commissioner Harvey had arranged an opportunity for Wangsgard to participate during a Commission work session to discuss procurement of an architect to produce specifications needed for mitigation of earthquake damages. Also discussed was the need to hire an architect to serve as the Board's consultant in completing small projects over a fixed period of time. Procuring these services for small jobs is cumbersome and expensive, both for the County and for service providers who have to prepare a detailed response to an RFP. In order to cover their costs, they must increase their fees to the County.

In addition to the immediate need to prepare specifications to be used in repairing earthquake damages, there is a need for professional services to evaluate a proposed site for a new branch library. The site in question was tentatively selected by the Library Board several years ago but acceptance was conditioned upon an evaluation of its suitability to accommodate the size and type of facility needed to serve the community.

By way of review, Wangsgard noted, the Library Board advertised for a site during 2015 and three were pledged by local governments and/or community members. The Board appointed a neutral, site evaluation committee that toured and reviewed each offering using selection criteria provided by the American Library Association. The site that scored the highest was one proposed by Farr West City. Since then, some preliminary work had been done at the request of the City to determine if it was suitable for a library the scope of which would be needed to serve the projected population in northwestern Weber County. A footprint and rough site plan was developed, geotechnical tests were conducted, and projected costs were professionally estimated. This information was shared with County officials during the 2019 Library budget presentation.

However, Wangsgard noted, if a tax adjustment is to be considered this fall, a more sophisticated business plan needs to be developed, including updated cost projections.

Wangsgard distributed the two site plans, one illustrating placement of a 48,000 square foot facility situated on the east side of the property in Farr West, the second with the building on the west side. The library was sized between that of the Pleasant Valley Branch and the Southwest Branch, excluding the space dedicated for headquarters services. The City needs to retain one half of the property for parks and recreation services as required by a covenant agreed to when the property was gifted to the City.

The site plans illustrated one immediate need for professional services. No matter where the building is positioned, the entrance to the parking lot does not line up and intersect with 2400 W. Since 2400 W is a Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) road, this entity will have to approve the parking lot entrance. UDOT does not approve entrances within 300 feet of an intersection. In order to share parking with the City recreation facilities, the parking lot entrance will need to be within 300 feet of the intersection.

Crosland asked about possible problems if the parking entrance does not line up with 2400 W.

In order to move forward, Wangsgard noted, a variance will be needed, and a request for variance will require the services of an architect.

Timing is critical, Wangsgard continued, because Farr West City is ready to develop one-half of their property. They have requested a commitment to a site plan so they do not build infrastructure that will have to be taken out and replaced. Time is also of the essence because once an architect is contracted and specifications are developed to address the earthquake damages, a contractor will still have to be selected to do the work. While much of the work can be done during the winter months, items like repair of the soffit at the Main Library can only be done while temperatures are moderate. Therefore, the goal is to have a recommended architect for the Board to consider putting under contract during their August meeting.

Allison asked if any action was needed by the Board.

None was needed at this time.

Wangsgard thanked Commissioner Harvey for moving the discussion forward with elected officials.

Harvey said all three Commissioners were favorable to hiring the architect. Mobilization is costly and the plan as presented should ensure we don't have to do it twice. Good things will happen as we work together and plan ahead to make sure the County Library System is completed.

Stokes noted a branch in northwestern Weber County could have been included in the just completed five-year capital improvement plan, but elected officials took the funding out of the proposal. Had it been included, he noted, the bond would have passed with an even higher vote

total and the building would now have been completed and would be giving service. Doing a little more in the present saves money in the future, Stokes said.

Wangsgard noted there was also controversy during the time bonds were considered over whether money should be spent to build “third space” libraries, rather than more traditional book depositories as was being done in a neighboring county. Review of cooperative borrowing agreements with that county illustrate that public usage of Weber County’s new model is preferred two-to-one by members of both counties. Successful libraries are evolving to serve as learning platforms and community centers. People in northwestern Weber County will expect this kind of forward-facing library with a robust technology infrastructure and flexible spaces. The Board should wait to proceed until funding is available to duplicate this model, Wangsgard advised.

Spencer agreed, noting the Board will build the library the community needs.

2021 Budget Priorities:

The 2021 budget preparation process was underway and Board members were asked for their funding priorities, as well as for items that should be cut back or deleted.

Stokes suggested adding accent colors to create a less institutional atmosphere. Add a wall of color, or paint the doors a color, he suggested. Stokes also suggested a studio be considered where a seminar or programs could be live-streamed to people participating remotely.

Spencer suggested a technology assessment be completed to guide the use of funding and ensure the electronic infrastructure is available to support future needs.

Bertilson reminded the Board that a salary survey was promised to help ensure current employees can be retained and new, qualified librarians can be recruited. The County can’t afford to lose the staff, she noted.

Jensen agreed with Bertilson and asked that a salary survey be added to the list of budget priorities.

Spencer said all critical positions need to be market driven.

Stokes asked for a review of how many employees work part time versus full time, noting the library may be losing good people who need full time, career positions. We can’t run a world class system if too many part time people must leave to pursue a career.

Jensen suggested the training budget be enhanced to ensure employees do not have to use their own money to attend seminars where they learn new ideas and become better able to serve the public.

Wangsgard noted that the issue isn’t so much that the training budget isn’t adequate as it is that the buildings are so tightly scheduled that service cannot be rendered if employees are away from their assigned work areas. As it is currently, people run from building to building to cover if someone takes a vacation or attends a training, she said.

Travel outside the state has always been a shared cost, the theory being that it is better to allow as many as possible to attend conferences because, when the group returns, there is the critical mass necessary to actually implement what was learned. It's hard to go to the County and ask for funding to send 10 people to Chicago, especially if some of the proposed attendees are support level employees. Those who do not have the personal resources to pay a measure of the travel costs may apply for a scholarship that is paid from non-public funding made available specifically to help offset their portion of the expense.

Crosland encouraged bringing in really good people for in-house training. In this way, the benefit is not limited to just 10 people.

Spencer agreed, but noted that two things have to be addressed in training. Seeing and learning best practices requires going to conferences. People have to be sent out. Additionally, presenters need to be brought in to facilitate overall organizational learning.

Harris agreed, noting a lot can be said for conferences in creating enthusiasm, seeing new products, and also bringing new people into the group.

Stokes asked that ALA attendance be brought back to the Board as planning begins for the 2021 conference so they can be helpful in providing funding.

Other:

There being no further business, Crosland moved adjournment. Jensen seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Respectfully submitted: Julia J. Valle 4 August 2020
Julia Valle Date