

MINUTES FOR REGULAR MEETING OF THE
EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH LIBRARY BOARD OF CONTROL
MAIN LIBRARY
FIRST FLOOR LARGE MEETING ROOM
7711 GOODWOOD BOULEVARD
BATON ROUGE, LA 70806
JUNE 17, 2021
4:00 P.M.

AGENDA

CALL TO ORDER – Jason Jacob, Board President (4:07 p.m.)

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Candace Temple, Board Vice-President

- I. ROLL CALL – Rosana Sotile, Assistant to the Deputy Library Director
Jason Jacob, Board President – Present
Candace Temple, Board Vice President – Present
Martha Guarisco, Board Treasurer – Present
Delores Watts – Present
Donald Luther, Jr. – Present
Kathy Wascom – Present
Nicole Allmon-Learson – Present (4:32 p.m.)

A quorum was present

STAFF PRESENT – Spencer Watts, Library Director; Kristen Edson, Deputy Library Director; Mary Stein, Assistant Library Director; Patricia Husband, Assistant Library Director; Rhonda Pinsonat, Library Business Manager; Ronnie Pierce, Library Assistant Business Manager; Rosana Sotile, Assistant to the Deputy Library Director; Brian Thornhill, PC LAN Administrator; Amanda Goncu, Systems Librarian.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF MAY 20, 2021 – A motion to approve was made by Candace Temple and seconded by Donald Luther, Jr. **The motion was carried unanimously.** (4:07 p.m.)

III. SPECIAL ORDERS – There were no Special Orders.

IV. REPORTS BY THE DIRECTOR

A. FINANCIAL REPORT – Rhonda Pinsonat (4:08 p.m.)

- For 2021, operating expenditures through May 31st are 32.55% of the operating budget. Through May, we should have spent no more than 42% of the budget.
- Cash collections from Property Taxes for 2021 remain marginally ahead of those collected in 2020, as we are approximately 1.33% ahead of the same date last year.

B. SYSTEM REPORTS – Mary Stein (4:09 p.m.)

- “Around the Parish” slideshow and descriptions of Library programs.
- The Baton Rouge Concert Band performed a Memorial Day concert in the outdoor plaza at the Main Library; next performance will be July 4th.
- Summer Reading began June 1st; both virtual and live programming; more than 5,000 people have registered.
- STEM kick-off programming held in the plaza at the Main Library; variety of organizations participated; the new reading mascot was also debuted, Cuddles the Bear.
- This month’s Garden Discoveries program was “Busy as Bees”, a children’s program that included bees and beekeeping.
- Interactive displays and furniture for children are being placed back in public spaces, including the AWE’s, Burgeon Manipulatives, interactive tables, and other hands-on displays.
- The new Reading is Elementary program is expanding on the 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program; children earn a patch for every five books read; prizes for those who read 50 or more books.

- The new mobile outreach unit for Volunteers of America was dedicated in the plaza at the Main Library last week; will serve the entire East Baton Rouge Parish and provide services after-hours; will also help Library staff serve citizens in need.
- Last month's Business Forum program featured Steve Cannon, CEO of AMB Group; next month's program will feature Brian Solis, digital anthropologist and futurist, on July 14th.
- Last Friday's Movies on the Plaza featured Disney's The Princess and the Frog; a dance party usually follows the movie; the next two Friday nights will feature Cool Runnings, and then Dora and the Lost City of Gold.
- The Recycled Reads book sale will debut for the first time post-pandemic, but with required pre-registration and limited number of patrons per hour.

C. OTHER REPORTS

1. MAINTENANCE AND ADDITIONAL CAPITAL PROJECTS – Kristen Edson (4:19 p.m.)

- Due to recent heavy storms, roof leaks were patched at Bluebonnet, Jones Creek and Greenwell Springs Regional Libraries, and at Delmont Gardens, Scotlandville and Zachary Branch Libraries; four of the library locations are included in the capital projects list for repairs and renovations.
- Interior and exterior window washing has begun at the Main library and will start at all locations the week of June 21st.
- Parking lot sweeping at the Main library will occur once a month starting in June; should help with preventing debris and trash in the bio-swales.
- A new account manager for the landscaping contract for all Library locations has been assigned; an initial meeting with him was held to discuss recent issues at the Main library, and he continues to assess all other library locations.
- Library staff continue to move gondolas throughout various library locations to accommodate weeding projects and shifting furniture from storage; Jones Creek Regional Library is ready to return its collection from storage now that shelving placement is complete.
- The Baker Branch Library energy management system upgrade project is delayed due to shipping delays of the variable frequency drive; should arrive by tomorrow.
- The variable air valves have been installed at Bluebonnet Regional Library as part of that location's energy management system upgrade; new thermostats should be installed and programmed by the end of this week; a walk-through will soon be scheduled.
- The compressor on the chiller at Zachary Branch Library has failed; waiting on replacement; consideration is being given to replacing the chiller next year.
- The final punch-list for repairs at Carver Branch Library was completed May 28th – a slideshow of the completed repairs was shown to the Board; bollards were also installed along the entire front of the building; landscape lighting along Terrace Street was also replaced and more securely installed.
- A member of the public reported to the Library that all parking lot lights were out at Jones Creek Regional Library; the issue was assessed and fixed; three new catch basins were installed at the back of the building to assist with drainage issues; also grading work was performed.
- The server room upgrades at the Main library were completed; training for the new systems occurred on June 3rd; final acceptance was passed by the Metro Council on June 9th; the state Fire Marshall inspection will soon be scheduled.
- Public bids for the boiler replacement at the Main library were due June 10th for contractors; the lowest bid will be presented to the Metro Council for acceptance.

2. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS – Spencer Watts and Patricia Husband (4:27 p.m.)

- The infection rate for Covid-19 has remained low across the Parish and among Library staff; some concern over the future of the Delta variant; Main Library hours extended to 8:00pm on Sundays; after July 5th the library locations that normally close at 9:00pm will return to their regular schedules; some deep cleaning will still be performed at night; additional acrylic dividers have been ordered for computer stations; air purifiers have been placed in study rooms and small meeting rooms.
- A kick-off meeting for the Scotlandville Branch Library renovation project was held on May 21; in attendance were the architects, Library staff and staff from Architectural Services; discussion included site conditions, other outside interests in the property, and the presence of a wind-shear monitoring device; a thorough list of needs and concerns was compiled; these included a review, based on the scope document, of all major functional areas; particular attention was devoted to the public service areas, but substantial effort was also directed to discussion of support areas; other operational components were thoroughly discussed, and items such as stack space and furnishings were given an overview; in the afternoon, Deputy Director

Edson and Facilities Manager Rattle, met with the architects and consulting engineers and conducted a walk-through and review of building systems and spaces; this also included a review of the parking lot and site access.

- The Letter Wall at Jones Creek Regional Branch Children’s Services was installed; a photo of the Letter Wall was shown to the Board; reading nooks will be placed along the Letter Wall; replacement panels for service desks are scheduled to be delivered next week; contractor continues to address issues with meeting room doors; awaiting redesign for the monumental sign.
- The design contract for the Baker Branch Library renovation project has been finalized; the architect requested a kick-off meeting to be scheduled soon.
- Computer Services update: Installations of the new, more robust Wi-Fi connections at the Main Library and River Center Branch Library are complete; receiving quotes for remaining branches and creating a schedule; ongoing discussions with consultants to help with the assessment for dark fiber options and possibly assist with writing a Request for Proposals; Library staff have reviewed the Emergency Connectivity Fund initiative, conducted research, and attended a webinar; the Library is approaching the final stages of attaining PCI compliance; a series of interviews and information exchange will occur over the next several weeks, then will receive a PCI compliant certificate; will allow the Library to accept credit cards throughout the whole system.
- The Library applied for an ARPA Grant; will use money to purchase the network switches and acrylic dividers.
- Inadequate search capabilities of the online catalog have been voiced by a concerned patron; Library is preparing for a future ILS upgrade.
- The Library’s new budget app has presented some challenges; data will still be available for next month’s budget work session.
- Question from Martha Guarisco regarding if the budget app is just for the Library or if it’s used parish-wide; Spencer Watts responded that it is part of the Library’s intranet, collaborative system, and not part of a multi-agency system; it has some similarities to the MUNIS system.

Board President Jason Jacob asked for public comments. No public comments were made.

V. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES – There were no reports of committees.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. UPDATE ON SOUTH BRANCH LIBRARY – Spencer Watts and Patricia Husband (4:52 p.m.)

- New clarification on the greenbelt set-back from Glasgow Ave. added 20 feet of depth to the buildable area; a photo of the architectural site plan was shown to the Board.
- The design team presented four basic options for the placement of the building and site utilization:
 - Expand parking only without any other changes to the site; this option only netted about four extra parking spaces.
 - Design the building as originally planned, but with no changes to parking or the footprint of the building.
 - Expansion Option A, which would place the chillers in the parking area; there were three sub-options with this, and Library staff chose one that would place the chiller yard on the east side along the Gallerie; also gave parking capacity of 69 spaces, one less than the goal of 70 spaces.
 - Option B attempted to place the chillers within the building; would be extraordinarily expensive and would create difficulties with the acoustics and safety clearance requirements.
 - Option C provided a staff courtyard at the staff entry, with access to mechanical and electrical rooms; it was determined that any extra space would be devoted to public spaces.
 - A final option was briefly considered; would have shifted the west wing to the south, allowing for a full circulation loop and larger parking lot; would have involved a more extensive redesign of the building entry, changes in the building massing, and greater expense, therefore making it an unfavorable option.
 - Option A was chosen by Library staff, with the A-3 parking lot plan.
- Other site issues that need to be addressed include: two backflow preventers which had been previously shown behind a knee wall along Gallerie; these devices need to be nearer the water main; Architectural Services is working to coordinate electrical service to the site, since there are issues with servitudes and traversing private property.
- Patricia Husband commented that the expansion of the building would allow for more shelving.

- Question from Donald Luther, Jr. to clarify the placement of the boiler and chiller, and if there will be a generator; Spencer Watts responded there could be a docking site, but there would not be a full site generator, but possibly a partial generator that could power lights and air conditioning.
- Question from Kathy Wascom regarding the size of the library, measured by square feet; Spencer Watts responded that a cap of 18,800 square feet has been put in place; would be best to optimize the building space now instead of trying to add a few hundred more square feet years from now.

Board President Jason Jacob asked for public comments. No public comments were made.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. VOTE TO APPROVE THE USER AGREEMENT FOR THE RIVER CENTER BRANCH LIBRARY MAKERSPACE – Amanda Goncu and Kristen Edson (5:07 p.m.)

- Makerspace equipment currently in use at Bluebonnet Regional Library and River Center Branch Library; new equipment will be selected for Greenwell Springs Road and Jones Creek Regional Libraries to encourage patrons to explore and learn within the makerspaces.
- Library staff involved in the Makerspace development projects have created a system-wide user agreement; each makerspace will have unique equipment and staff.
- User agreement includes content regarding safety, training, and liability issues; will have documentation to be signed by patrons; also will include intellectual and proprietary laws since some of the makerspaces will allow for use of advanced equipment and activities.
- Question from Donald Luther, Jr. regarding if Librarians will be teaching some of the advanced classes, such as soldering, or if there will be specialists from the community; Amanda Goncu responded that it can be both; some Librarians have soldered in the past with makerspace programs; will be a mix of Library staff and community members teaching the classes.
- Question from Donald Luther, Jr. regarding if the Library has a space to record podcasts; Amanda Goncu responded that both the River Center Branch and Bluebonnet Regional Libraries have podcast equipment and space; Greenwell Springs Road Regional will receive A/V equipment for a smaller system; the Library plans to teach workshops and host classes for the community to learn how to podcast.
- Question from Kathy Wascom regarding if appointments will have to be made to use the makerspace, such as getting a badge for the 3D printer, and if someone will be there to train people; Amanda Goncu responded that there will be a new reservation system for all makerspaces; once a patron is badged for equipment, they can book equipment online and the space will be ready for them; there will also be drop-in hours for makerspaces, no appointment required, with staff present in the rooms.
- Question from Candace Temple regarding what will be the age requirement to make a reservation for makerspace equipment; Amanda Goncu responded that this has been discussed frequently; the Library's policy is that ages 9 and up can be in the library unattended; it is possible for a 9 year-old to get badged with a parent, then they can book the equipment; makerspace age requirements will be in line with the Library's policies for children.
- Question from Martha Guarisco if a Library staff member will always be present in the makerspace room; Amanda Goncu responded that yes, that is the plan; Kristen Edson added that some contract workers may be present but they will have been trained by Library staff and that the agreement has been reviewed by the City-Parish Attorney.
- A motion to approve the user agreement was made by Donald Luther, Jr. and seconded by Nicole Allmon-Learson. **The motion was carried unanimously.**

B. BUDGET AND REVENUES; DISCUSSION OF LONG TERM BUDGET PLANNING AND PROPOSALS TO REDUCE REVENUES – Spencer Watts (5:17 p.m.)

- A brief explanation was given regarding the recent proposal by City Councilman Dwight Hudson to create a special revenue fund dedicated strictly to drainage maintenance; the Library is exploring the full ramifications on what his proposal fully entails.
- Major flooding issues throughout the parish continue to put pressure on the City Council for solutions; the proposition is based on reducing the library millage from 10.52 mils to 9.52 mils, which would reduce revenues by \$4.8 million per year; would also extend the millage for another six years, making it a 16-year millage instead of a standard 10-year millage.
- The Library would like to see more exploration into other City-Parish department funds to support the drainage proposal costs; the current proposal would be a 10% cut in revenues for the Library.
- Major points of concern include the following:

- Full understanding of the Fund Balance: The millage is set up to where the tax money is collected a year in advance, resulting in the appearance of a large fund balance; remaining funds include the pay-as-you-go plan, which includes facility projects, such as renovations for Central, Zachary and Delmont Gardens Branch Libraries, and land purchases for future START libraries; the Library has also been advised that construction costs have increased by 15% and will need to place money from the fund balance to the current construction projects that are under design contracts (Baker, Scotlandville and South Branch Libraries); more library locations would be added to this list if the new millage becomes a 16-year millage because of the Library's master plan for future renovations.
- Known and Anticipated Costs Increase: The proposal claims that by making the cut to the Library's fund, the Library would still have a \$3.7 million budget surplus; it was not taken into account that the annual recurring costs for the operation of the new South Branch Library would be \$1.6 million per year, almost half of the entire estimated surplus; this would not allow for enough money for other notable costs that occur annually and those that include unforeseen issues or other project costs, such as community literacy efforts, upgraded technology, and facility management; this would force the Library to have to choose which areas would need to be cut, resulting in a loss of operational funding; this could possibly result in eliminating plans for current and future construction and renovation, as well as ceasing to provide some community services, and not being able to operate several library branches; the Library anticipates that revenues will begin to fall short very early on in the extended millage period, possibly before the original millage end date of 2025.
- Using 2020 as a Base Year for Costs and Surplus: Because of the pandemic in 2020, the Library had an abnormal surplus; the City-Parish hiring freeze also contributed to the surplus, as the Library froze around 34 positions; during the pandemic the Library was able to operate with fewer positions but now that operating hours are increasing, the positions need to be filled.
- Carry Forward Impact: In 2020, the Library had over \$2.39 million in carry forward funds for projects that could not be completed due to limitations from the pandemic; these funds are not surplus; they represent planned expenditures and projects.
- Preserving the Integrity of a Dedicated Millage: When significant changes are made to millages, it can possibly undercut the faith of the public, especially if large adjustments are made; members of the public may question why funds are being taken from only one or two City-Parish departments, instead of spreading out the fund sourcing into multiple agencies, resulting in lack of voter support and lack of support for millage changes; this could also undercut the public's faith in the Metro government and question its integrity.
- The proposal will be introduced at the June 23rd Metro Council meeting; normally questions and comments are not made.
- Comment from Donald Luther, Jr. regarding his recent conversation with Councilman Hudson; he informed Mr. Hudson about the Library's unique accounting procedures and how fiscally responsible the Library system is, as proven by the renovations and new construction over the past few decades; he invited Mr. Hudson to the Board meeting but Mr. Hudson declined due to family reasons; he emphasized the importance of community awareness and understanding of how much the Library provides, citing that he learned about two new services the Library provides with its makerspaces at today's Board meeting; he acknowledges and applauds the mosquito abatement department in also taking a revenue cut for this proposal, although it seems to be a better fit for a drainage project as less standing water results in fewer mosquitoes; he feels it is a mistake to take four times as much revenue from the Library than another department; he feels there is a large misunderstanding regarding the Library's budget and that even though it may seem there is a large revenue surplus, that money is already committed to earmarked expenditures; Mr. Luther is concerned that in the later years of the extended mileage cycle, the Library may have to be "bailed" out; he is not comfortable moving forward with the proposal and would like to see the accounting to prove that the Library will not have to cut services, cut personnel, and close branches; he would like to ask the City Council to seek other sources of funds for the proposal.
- Question from Martha Guarisco regarding what can be done to educate the public about the Library's accounting practices; Spencer Watts responded that there is a misperception because of the substantial amount of money in revenue, people may think there are no plans for it when actually the Library does have plans for it; it's important to dispel the misunderstanding; an entire year's worth of revenue is collected for next year's budget, and is reflected in the fund balance; this is money that is already committed; savings for the major capital improvements to the library system are also in this fund; we may need to be more assertive in helping people to understand these factors; it will be important to explain to the Metro Council members the nature of these accounting procedures.

- Comment from Candace Temple that it is not too early to begin enlightening more public organizations and people on this accounting matter; she explained a situation in which someone spoke to her about the Library having excess funds, and she was able to explain how the money is already allocated; the result was that those involved in her conversation have a better understanding of the situation and will ask the Council for more information; she feels it is important that the Library begin immediately to be more aggressive and ask for more time to see how this will affect the Library long-term.
- Question from Jason Jacob regarding if the Library's meeting with Councilman Dwight Hudson will help with the accounting projections; Spencer Watts responded that what will help the most is a clear resolution that outlines the millage's adjustments; Jason Jacob commented that he has spoken with three Council members and explained to Councilman Hudson that this proposal is unfair and it will not fix the problem; he will do his best to reach out to more Council members on how this should be a more measured approach; Spencer Watts responded that most people are saying it sounds like a good plan, but a 10% cut is not easy to absorb in any department; he explained that some people also don't understand how we are in the fifth year of a millage cycle which is the time to save money because of rollbacks, but now the Library will be stuck with a double rollback because the millage expansion will make it ten more years; the proposal is being presented to people in a way that may cause them to think it will be a minimal impact to the Library, but they have not yet heard from the Library and aren't educated on the flaws in the plan.
- Spencer Watts also commented that one of the silver linings from the pandemic is that the Library was able to save some operational money, making its savings better than anticipated, but that doesn't mean it will last forever; the Library has use for that savings; the Library could chip in for the proposed project if the fund sourcing was more of a community effort; the Library could delay or defer some capital improvement projects, such as Central, Zachary, Baker and other library branch improvement projects; he feels the Library is essential in providing the best quality services to citizens, such as collaborative rooms, study spaces, and maker spaces, but there would not be enough money to create those spaces and provide quality programs; the Library has also been planning to commit more resources to Early Childhood Literacy, but may have to scale it back; programs such as this enrich the community not only from the standpoint of having different opportunities but also gives people growth opportunities on an educational basis; it would also be inequitable to give some library locations preference over others in regards to having to wait even longer for improvements.
- Donald Luther, Jr. commented in response to Spencer Watts that what he said is a real issue, as is the water and flooding in the parish; he explained how the Comite River project has been ongoing almost his entire life and surely there is money for it, instead of having to take 10% from the Library's revenue; he feels it is appropriate for the mosquito abatement department to contribute money, but they are only being told to give a quarter of what the Library has to contribute; he feels the City Council is asking a lot from the Library without asking other agencies to also put up money, and they may not be there to "bail out" the Library when there is a problem; the Library's good stewardship is leading the standard for the country in many ways, and five to ten years of not having funds and having to put projects on the back burner will tear apart the Library, and that's a mistake; the search for revenue should be broadened, including looking to the federal government's infrastructure plan to see if money is available; the Library is not the place that should bear the brunt of the cost for this proposal.
- Spencer Watts responded that one of the arguments they may receive is that some of the money for the large mitigation projects, such as the Comite River, is tied up in large federal funds that require a lot of planning, permitting and reviewing; the storm-water management plan has been complex; however, drainage projects just received \$19.5 million; perhaps there could be a more measured approach to this proposal; also, the mosquito abatement department has a relatively small millage.
- Delores Watts asked Spencer Watts if there are any more meetings or discussions planned with the City Council; Spencer Watts responded that we are reaching out to more members, but would like to be armed with more information, especially with the millage being extended to a 16-year millage as it shows more emphatically the issues the Library will be facing; it is possible that by year eight or nine, if the Library runs into trouble, the same people that advocated for taking money out of the Library's pay-as-you-go plan will not be willing to help the Library solve its issues; it is unlikely that they would reduce money from the drainage fund to help the Library.
- Candace Temple commented that she would like to press upon the Library to begin speaking to various organizations about the impact; it's important to talk to the Council members, but more important to talk to the constituents who put pressure on their Council members to make the right decision; Spencer Watts responded that the Library asserts care over how they are responding, but there are friends and Board members who will help with speaking out.

- Donald Luther, Jr. expressed his disappointment that no members of the media showed up for today's Board meeting; he feels more people should be vocal about it, because it's a big problem that will only get worse.
- Kathy Wascom commented that the proposal was thrust upon them, only one week ago, and there hasn't been much time to gather and disseminate information with only a 6-week notice; she has never seen a rededication tax in East Baton Rouge Parish; she has asked how this could be allowed to happen, if there is a statute or something in the form of government that would allow this to happen in the middle of a millage cycle; it disrupts long-term planning; if it could happen to the Library, it could happen to any other agency; she explained that the last time this happened with Councilman Hudson it involved redirecting money for a mental health facility from the Library and other agencies, but his proposal was defeated; now it's for drainage, but the City is already getting money for drainage; it is her understanding that this would be for drainage maintenance, but the idea of taking a nationally recognized first-class Library and diminish it's entire system for this type of project isn't credible; a library and its community goes hand-in-hand; she feels the East Baton Rouge Parish Library enhances the whole community economically and culturally, and presents a wonderful picture to the rest of the state and nation on who we are; she does not want the Library to be diminished in any way; she feels the 10 year millage should be completed while using money from the federal government for the drainage maintenance; then the Library's millage can be reviewed once the 10-year cycle is complete; she feels every Council member needs to know the millage reduction will affect each library location in their district, since they each want a library in their district that is a good place for people to visit with the latest technology and books; it's important for each Council member to know the impact, especially those members in the districts of South Branch, Delmont Gardens, Central and Zachary Branches; also the north Baton Rouge economic district, the Downtown Development District and the Federation of Civic Associations need to know what's going on; she feels there is a large campaign that needs to be put together, and that the people in the parish have always voted for a library millage because they see how fiscally responsible the Library is without going into debt; trying to diminish such an organization does not bode well of any part of the parish; she explained that in the 1980's the library system was cut because it did not have a dedicated tax and had to lay-off part-time employees; concerned citizens gathered together to insure a dedicated tax for the Library; from there, the Library has gone from poverty to a first-class system that provides so much for the community, and she would hate to see the whole cultural learning system diminished in any way.
- Jason Jacob commented that the Board has homework in the coming weeks to do their best to educate the Council members, public entities and other community groups; it's best to stay engaged and remain on top of the issue.
- Spencer Watts thanked the Board and stated that the Library will continue to gather more information and continue working with Council members and other organizations; it's important to note that there's an aspect of this that is very rushed and hasty, creating issues with the approach; it needs a more careful examination than we may be able to get people to give it, as it is usually a six month process to put together a proposal and receive feedback; this is a very swift timeline in which bad decisions could be made.
- Donald Luther, Jr. commented on memories he has of the Main Library at Goodwood before the new building was constructed; he remembers walking into the building and having to avoid caution tape, missing and moldy ceiling tiles, and carpet worn down to the concrete; he wants people to remember what a poorly funded library looks like and would continue to look like.

Board President Jason Jacob asked for public comments. No public comments were made.

VIII. COMMENTS BY THE LIBRARY BOARD OF CONTROL – No comments were made.

IX. ADJOURNMENT – Board President Jason Jacob requested a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Delores Watts and seconded by Candace Temple. **The meeting was adjourned at 6:06 p.m. by unanimous vote.**