

Tyler Public Library Board Meeting #462

Date: December 8, 2021

Location: Tyler Public Library

Notetaker: Ami Fortriede (Library Operations Specialist)

Meeting Called to Order: 4:33 p.m.

Meeting Adjourned: 6:20 p.m.

Attendance

- Board Members in Attendance: Sheila Austin (Board Chair), Tami Brooks, Glenda Malone, Dee Chambless, & Kristen Thompson
- Library Staff in Attendance: Ashley Taylor (City Librarian), Elizabeth Bradshaw (Resources Librarian), Ami Fortriede (Library Operations Specialist), & Amy Skipper (Youth Services Librarian)
- Additional City of Tyler Personnel in Attendance: Stephanie Franklin (Deputy City Manager), Deborah Pullum (City Attorney), & Alesha Buckner (Deputy City Attorney)
- Friends of the Tyler Public Board Liaison in Attendance: Andie Rathbone
- Audience count as of meeting start: 46

1. Call to Order

Sheila Austin called the meeting to order at 4:33 p.m.

2. Roll Call & Quorum

Board Members in Attendance: Sheila Austin (Board Chair), Tammy Brooks, Glenda Malone, Dee Chambless, & Kristen Thompson

Board Members Not in Attendance: Melissa O'Neal (Board Co-Chair) & Faith McElvy

Quorum of four was met.

3. Reviewal of Previous Board Meeting Minutes

The Board reviewed the minutes of the September 22, 2021 meeting. Dee Chambless asked about the October 2021 meeting minutes, and Ashley Taylor explained that the October meeting was not an official meeting and the minutes could not be approved because the October meeting agenda was not posted in advance for the public. Alesha Buckner added that no action was taken at the unofficial October meeting other than approval of September minutes; Stephanie Franklin concurred. Sheila asked the Board if there was a motion to officially approve the September 2021 meeting minutes. Kristen Thompson motioned to approved, and Tami Brooks seconded. September 22, 2021 minutes were approved.

4. Board Member Training: Advocacy for Texas Libraries

Ashley Taylor led the training and provided the following information on how Board members can advocate for the library:

- The Texas Library Association (TLA) and the American Library Association (ALA) are leading advocates for Texas libraries. Taylor provided the following links on advocacy on both websites: <https://txla.org/advocacy/> , <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/>
- Users can utilize the website to find representatives for their local library. Texline Legislative Update is a newsletter provided by the TLA that provides updates and information on TLA advocacy, state library-related policy, and legislative action. Past issues of Texline can be viewed at <https://txla.org/news-publications/publications/texline/issues/> Taylor showed an example of the newsletter. There were no questions from the Board.

5. Commentary from Stanley Cofer (Local Pastor)

Stanley Cofer requested to be added to the agenda before the meeting was held and was approved.

Cofer explained that he is a pastor who has a relationship with the library that goes back 30 years, serving as a great resource for his family and children. Cofer explained that he was acquainted with past librarians who have been very receptive [of suggested purchases for the library's collection]. Dr. Rodney Atkins, previous Reference Librarian, ordered many books from Cofer's Christian bookstore. Cofer hopes the library will continue to offer the same quality materials that were offered to his family and host events that have been hosted in the past. He thanked the library, library staff, and library volunteers, including the Board. Cofer stated that he spoke on behalf of local citizens who have spoken with him about the library. Cofer would like everyone to continue to be welcome at the library.

After Cofer's commentary, a member of the audience asked if others could speak. Stephanie Franklin stated that the topic would need to be related to agenda items. A second member of the audience referenced House Bill 2840 that allows for public speaking. Franklin replied that the House Bill 2840 did not apply to the Library Board and that commentary or questions the audience members wanted to speak on could be added to future agendas. Ashley Taylor agreed, and Alesha Buckner clarified that three-minute comment periods would be available for each person.

6. City Librarian Report

a. Statistics Review

October 2021 and November 2021 library statistics were provided to the Board. Ashley Taylor and Ami Fortriede explained that some November statistics are not available yet since it is early December. Questions from the Board: Dee Chambless commented on statistics that were reported as zero, and it was explained that programs were not reintroduced until earlier in the year leading to zero in attendance reported. An unnamed member of the audience asked why October month-and year-to-date were the same, and Fortriede explained that the library's fiscal year begins in October.

b. Update on Library Building and Grounds

Taylor and Fortriede explained the following: The broken window on the 1st floor has been replaced. The 3rd floor carpet replacement is out for bids. The 3rd floor water fountain will be replaced, and a water bottle filler will be added to the 1st floor water fountain.

c. Library Programming and Services Updates

Amy Skipper updated the Board on Youth and Adults programs for the end of October, November, and early December.

October: Skipper explained outreach includes card drives and distributing brochures on library programs and services. Glass Recreation Fest and Caldwell's Boo at the Zoo were attended with 200+ visiting the library's booth at each event. The Haunted House was well attended with 250+ people over four days, and positive reception was received from attendees.

November: Skipper explained that take-home kits were introduced when in-person programs could not be offered that they are popular and have been continued each month. Kits and programs are often STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) related. 200 kits were passed out in November (two fall art crafts, gratitude craft, and a robotic skeletal hand craft.) Staff also led a Downtown Artwalk with five teens to view murals in Downtown Tyler, and the final Library Under the Trees outreach storytime in parks took place until the program is resumed in the spring. Staff attended a Zoom outreach to UT Tyler's K-16 Center Born to Read program, and 24 attended the adult Mario Kart Tournament.

December: The Winter Reading Challenge, Shop Local, and Life-Size Candyland events took place on December 4 at the library. 88 signed up for the reading challenge that day and 130 to date. 17 vendors sold their merchandises and crafts at Shop Local, and 214 visited the Candyland program. Upcoming December programs includes take-home kits for children and adults, children's Toy Tea, movie matinees, and participation in Downtown Tyler's nutcracker scavenger hunt.

Several audience members explained that they would like to speak on the topic of Library Programming and Services updates. Deborah Pullum asked how many were planning to speak. 7 audience members asked to speak, and a three and a half-minute time limit was imposed. Speakers were asked to add their name to a signup sheet.

Speaker 1: Craig Licciarri explained that he had lived in Smith County for 24 years and shared his childhood story of copying bad behavior from another child. He stated children see bad behavior and mimic it, and people who have vested interest in subverting traditional Judeo-Christian values know this and use it to subvert. He said this is not San Francisco or New York. He referenced the book, "It's Perfectly Normal", stated that it contains a quote from Planned Parenthood, and described illustrations and information in the books regarding puberty, masturbation, and sexual intercourse. (Another audience member distributed a handout of book scans.) Licciarri referenced "All Boys Aren't Blue" and said the books do not belong at the library.

Speaker 2: Lauren Snyder, a single mother of two children, stated that she was told how great a resource the library is for homeschooling families and became a library member. She stated the library only pushed one biased agenda focused on democrats and pro Black Lives Matter without options from the other side of the aisle. She said she was surprised not to find more equal representation and found four Trump books when she asked for staff assistance. She did not renew her December membership and expect to find more even representation out of fairness.

Speaker 3: Sara Maynard stated that her mother was a librarian, and the Tyler Library was an important part of her children's childhood. She is currently serving as a prosecutor in Smith County and running for judge. She stated she does not advocate for censorship but proposed that a list of items considered for purchase be posted in a public forum for taxpayers to access to encourage involvement in the library and public input which she stated would be beneficial to the library.

Speaker 4: Robin Lee stated that she moved to Texas from California and that she was disturbed by the trend in California. Lee stated that her child has a rare chromosomal abnormality and does not learn normal but loves book which makes her enhances her daughter's world. Her daughter picks books off displays to read, and she was concerned by books on display in California that discuss alternative relationships. Lee is concerned of the confusion such books may cause for her child, and she wants to keep her daughter safe while not telling her daughter "no" at the library.

Speaker 5: Laurel Maynard has visited the library since she was a child and was a volunteer. Her family monitored what she read, but she stated other children are not so lucky. While volunteering, she stated that she discovered a section of books that library staff were considering for purchase that was only available to library volunteers. She stated that have a secret section and lack of transparency was not good and that everyone should know what books are being considered for purchase. Maynard stated the library has purchased many suggestions she has put in.

Speaker 6: Sarah Fields, Director of Advocacy for Texas Freedom Coalition, stated that she takes issue with the library and schools celebrating holidays such as Flag Day and Juneteenth but not celebrating holidays such as Independence Day and Veteran's Day that pay homage to our nation's history. Fields stated that documenting history is important to learn from it, referencing the dishonorable treatment received by Vietnam veterans upon their return home. Fields is offended the library is not teaching people about the sacrifices that are made by Americans for future generations. Fields stated that we must join forces to keep this legacy going and that whoever does not encourage this respect should feel ashamed.

Speaker 7: Jennifer Flanders is homeschooling parent of 12 children with many grandchildren. The library was a large part of her homeschooling journey, including both books and programs that fostered a love of reading. Her family would often check out 60-80 books at a time, and she grew concerned about books her older children would show her. Flanders stated that the library stops being a resource for all when it stops being a safe place to learn and grow. Flanders asked for transparency and for the library to stop pushing an agenda. Questions: Who is responsible for acquisitions? What determines what is being added? Does the community have a voice? Who is requesting the books that are being added?

Dee Chambless stated that at the meeting on this topic that the librarian chose the books and that she was denied her request for a list. An unnamed audience member asked if the Board has input. Chambless stated that once a book is purchased it's in the collection for 20 years and after purchase the book can be reconsidered.

Speaker 8: Jackson Hug, a Tyler resident and TJC student stated that she is concern the library has fallen to the liberal agenda and Critical Race Theory. Hug stated on her recent visit to the library that the overall slant of materials was biased away from traditional values and promoted hyper sexualization of children, referencing books that described sexual acts, biographies focused only on liberal or democratic

figures, and displays including books on CRT and the demolition of traditional values. Hug is not surprised the library does not publish purchases made and said she speaks for many who are not pleased and want wholesome content.

Deborah Pullum asked if there were any other speakers. There were none. It was explained by Ashley Taylor to an unnamed audience member that there were no computer lab updates since Brenda Choy was not in attendance and out sick. Audience members were asked to wait until the end for questions.

Speaker 9: Misty Kinnet told Dee Chambless she was shocked the only one member was responsible for purchasing books. Question: Who is responsible for displays? Who is the librarian and who hires the librarian?

Ashley Taylor replied, regarding the responsibility of purchasing materials, that the collection is not purchased by one person and there is a committee responsible for purchases. This committee is within oversight of the Resource Librarian, Elizabeth Bradshaw, as well as Taylor as the City Librarian.

Stephanie Franklin added that the City Manager ultimately hires all department leaders and that all comment will be provided to the City Council and Ed Broussard, City Manager. Answers to questions from speakers will be looked at to the add to future agenda items. Franklin stated to an unnamed audience member's question that the minutes from the meeting would be made public and provided about a week's time.

Speaker 10: Jane Love asked the question: How do we get this trash out of this library now?

Stephanie Franklin explained that the library has a form to fill out for the reconsideration of materials and that the books in the library are available in the online catalog.

Speaker 1 (Part 2): Licciarri asked if there is or could be an internal review process and stated that he has a list of 120 objectional materials that he wishes to submit in mass.

Stephanie Franklin explained that the list could be submitted as such, and an unnamed audience member asked if a list of proposed purchases will be published. Deborah Pullum explained that is unknown at this time. Pullum stated that the Board and staff are listening to comments and questions so that we can find the answers. Issues will be moved up the chain to determine the best course of action and that we will be transparent and communicate what we are doing.

Speaker 11: Father Paul R. Key stated his concerns reflect many asked how the library determines what values are reflected. Key stated the he tells his congregation where safe places are in the community and that he does not want to tell them the library is not a safe place. Key stated all things are not equal.

Speaker: 12: Stacey Hurt had the following question: Are the policies and procedures we are referring to posted on the website and, if so, where?

Speaker 13: Anne Hall had the following questions: What percentage of library decisions decisions can be determined by the input of the tax paying citizens of Tyler and what percentage are determined by ALA?

Ashley Taylor explained that the library's fiscal year start in October and that the circulation of materials (what and how often materials are checked out by patrons) impacts how the budget for materials is allocated and investments of new material purchases are made in each area.

Speaker 14: Dennis Swift stated the he has used the library for years, and that it's everyone's responsibility to stop this whether or not they are conservative. Swift said he has not viewed all that is at the library, that he intends to, and that all are responsible for talking to our children.

Speaker 15: Rachell Hale asked Dee Chambless about the November 30th meeting, asking what the library's response was to a request for transparency. *Dee Chambless said her request for a publicly displayed list was denied.* Questions: Who is on the committee for selecting materials? Why is the Board not involved? She stated filth is being brought into the library and indicated that Stephanie Franklin and Ashley Taylor should be ashamed.

Speaker 16: Bill Carver asked Dee Chambless about the minutes from the November 20th meeting. Carver asked why the public does not have more input and why the library does not have Epoch Times. Carver stated kids should see both sides.

Dee Chambless replied that it was not an official meeting, but she took notes. Chambless stated she submitted Epoch Times for consideration.

Tami Brooks stated that she attended the November 30th meeting which was a training for new Board members on collection development that staff was receptive to reviewing the magazines and taking suggestions in consideration. Chambless stated that she felt that the publications provided were all leaning left and brought publication for consideration to the training. Chambless stated at the training she asked for a list of books considered for purchase because once bought the library is stuck with it. Chambless believes the public should like more input.

Speaker 17: Evelyn *** stated its important what children are reading. Her grandchild began gender reassignment and decided ten years later to get pregnant. She felt that inclusive information for the LGBT community confused her grandchild.

Speaker 15 (Part 2): Rachel Hale asked about the reconsideration process. She questioned the library's transparency and that the reviewal of reconsiderations are done by the same people who purchase materials.

Unnamed member of audience asked about the library having a standard policy and says certain books should be placed in sexual abuse section.

Speaker 18: Bee Mariner questioned: Who is the independent review Board? Who set up an independent review Board? She assumes the books will meet a set standard.

Speaker 1 (Part 3): Licciarri asked about the November 30th meeting. Questions: Why can't we have a list in advance? What is the issue? Why has the list been denied?

Deborah Pullum explained that time will be given for the library staff and Board to review and respond to questions to give the community and accurate response. Questions may be added to the next agenda.

Stephanie Franklin clarified there was not a meeting on November 30th but a new Board member training. Dee Chambless asked if the Board could review a list of materials before purchase. Franklin replied that books are often purchased in bulk, months ahead of time. There are several reasons why, including establishing consensus since everyone has differing opinions on books, and stated the

professional staff are hired to review and put forth the collection. Providing a list ahead of purchasing materials is not industry standard with ALA or TLA.

Pullum stated the everyone has been heard, and Franklin agreed, adding that information will be forward to the City Council and City Manager.

An unnamed attendee commented the Rusk County publishes a list ahead of purchasing materials. A second unnamed attendee commented she wanted to see equal representation of religious materials and a Christmas display at the library.

Franklin explained again that the October minutes were not posted because it was not a valid meeting.

Speaker 19: Dwayne Collins agreed with previous comment that it's up to us to teach the children. He read from Fox News article about Fairfax County library putting "Gender Queer" and "Lawn Boy" next to Bible on holiday reading display but the books were removed after residents rose up and objected. Collins stated the public needs to rise up and speak. We need to rise up and speak.

7. Adjournment of Meeting

Sheila requested a motion to adjourn. Kristen motioned; Tami seconded.