



New Orleans Public Library
Regular Board Meeting
Main Library Board Room
Tuesday, January 19, 2021
4:30 p.m.

NOTE REGARDING PUBLIC COMMENT:

The legal purpose of open meetings is to allow individuals to observe and participate in the deliberations of public bodies. Meetings of public bodies must be open to the public unless closed pursuant to a statutory exception, such as set forth in R.S. 42:16 – 42:18, which authorizes closed executive sessions. Public bodies must provide an opportunity for public comment prior to action on the agenda item upon which a vote is to be taken. The governing body may adopt reasonable rules and restrictions regarding the comment period. R.S. 42:14, requires each public body, except school boards, conducting a meeting that is subject to the notice requirement of R.S. 42:19(A), to allow a public comment period prior to action on an agenda item upon which a vote is to be taken.

PUBLIC COMMENT IS LIMITED TO 2 MINUTES PER INDIVIDUAL

NOTICE OF TELECONFERENCE MEETING:

This meeting is being conducted via teleconference per Executive Order 59-JBE-2020 Section 2.C, which states: “All state agencies, boards and commissions, and local political subdivisions of the state shall continue to provide for attendance at essential governmental meetings via teleconference or video conference and such attendance shall be allowed during the pendency of this emergency. All efforts shall be made to provide for observation and input by members of the public. Before any meeting conducted pursuant to this section, the state agency, boards and commission, or local political subdivision of the state shall first provide a written certification that it will otherwise be unable to operate due to quorum requirements. Such certification shall be posted at the same time and in the same manner as the agenda for the meeting. Nothing in this order shall be interpreted to waive any notice requirements.”

MINUTES

- I. **Call to Order**
 - A. The January 19, 2021 Regular Board meeting was called to order at 4:31 p.m.

- II. **Roll Call — 4:31 p.m.**
 - Members Present:** William Settoon, Raquel Dufachaurd, Kathleen Coverick, Vonda Flentroy-Rice, Andrea Neighbours, Phala Kimbrough-Mire, Anna Nyguen
 - Absent:** Daniel Tapia
 - Staff Present:** NOPL Executive Director, Dr. Gabriel Morley; Budget Manager, Michel Thompson; Executive Secretary, Tammy Hanson
 - NOPL Foundation Present:** NOPLF Vice-Chair, Demetric Mercodel;
 - Friends of NOPL Present:** President, Jennifer Kitner; Executive Director, Dixon Stetler
 - Strategic Planning Team Present:** Consultant, Michelle Thomas; Jayden Russell

III. **Public Comments** — 4.33 p.m.

- A. Board Chair, Phala Kimbrough Mire, opened the floor to public comment.
- B. Pam Nath addressed Strategic Planning and the evaluation of Dr. Morley. Ms. Nast left the NOPL due to what she felt were unsafe working conditions. She wants to encourage staff to be involved with the strategic planning process as well as Dr. Morley's evaluation. She feels there is little trust in Dr. Morley's leadership, especially after COVID. His public statements were disingenuous regarding Proposition 2, which undermined public confidence in the library. The post-COVID plan was lacking in that he denied our ability to implement any strategic plan or innovative programming to meet the needs of our patrons, even with staff recommendations. Ms. Nast feels that there is low morale among staff, because Dr. Morley disregards their ideas.
- C. Benjamin Offen requested that the board improve the public comment process because the current process is chaotic and difficult to navigate. He is not sure where to access board agendas.
- D. Francis asked the board if they have reached out to the Save Our Libraries coalition which includes the Teachers' Union and Carpenters' Union, DSA, etc. to work on the millage renewal. She feels this/these partnership(s) will be beneficial as they have an extensive following.
- E. Amanda Fallis Dass asked if John Chrastka of Every Library will be consulted as part of the millage renewal as she feels he has done great work and his consultation would provide much needed energy to the millage initiative.
- F. Anna Stophonavich voiced her strong reservations about the NOPL Board of Directors and Executive Director's support of a 40% budget cut to our library system and the misinformation that was distributed. As such, she is calling for full transparency in the strategic planning process.
- G. Courtney Kearney of the Friends of NOPL stated her embarrassment at the misinformation the NOPL published during the Proposition 2 campaign. As the library system is a champion of democracy and truth, we should be leading by example. Therefore, she feels the board should conduct annual reviews of library Executive Directors.
- H. The caller asked which stakeholders will be consulted for the strategic plan, specifically the Save Our Libraries Coalition and requested a list of stakeholders that will be consulted.
- I. Friends of NOPL Executive Director, Dixon Stetler thanked the board of directors for the presentation by Ms. Neighbours and is excited for the strategic planning that is taking shape.
- J. Emanuel Segura, of Local 23 (Hospitality Union), stated his embarrassment regarding the Vote Yes campaign and the misinformation that was distributed by our library. He is particularly troubled that fellow union members fear layoffs.
- K. Mary Moran, Executive Director of Our Voice Nuestra Voz and former NOPL board member, expressed her disappointment toward the misinformation campaign that was distributed by the NOPL board during a time when literacy rates are down, the

NOPL board was asking people to vote against their own best interests. We need assurance that those who use the library have a voice in the strategic plan.

- L. A caller named Chaz echoed the previous responses regarding the misinformation distributed during the Proposition 2 campaign. He also expressed his difficulty in navigating the dial-in process for ZOOM meetings to be able to express his opinion. He also expressed his complete unawareness that all meeting agendas and minutes for all board meetings over the past eight years are posted on the library website in absolute accordance with Louisiana open meetings laws. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire added that recordings of all meetings are posted to the NOPL website as an extra means of transparency.

IV. Action Item: Approval of Consent Agenda — 4:53 p.m.

- A. Approve November 10th board meeting minutes
- B. Executive Committee Meeting
 - 1. Ms. Flentroy-Rice made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Motion was seconded by Ms. Coverick. Motion passed unanimously.

V. Information Items – 4:54 p.m.

- A. NOPL Foundation Report
 - 1. NOPL Foundation Vice Chair, Demetric Mercadel, reported that the Foundation is working on the Strategic Planning Consultant contract.
 - 2. The Foundation is in the midst of electing new officers and completed the update to the bylaws which allows for NOPL representation.
- B. Friends of NOPL
 - 1. Ms. Kitner reported that Friends of NOPL was able to shift operations in generating income and managing donations to the library and community. Online sales have doubled and increased their numbers to pre-Katrina levels. Their end of year appeal is the most successful to date.
 - 2. Ms. Kitner described the mission of the Friends of NOPL to new board members (provide scholarships to NOPL employees, serving as the NOPL fiscal agent for grants, and being instrumental in millage campaigns).
 - 3. Friends is looking forward to advocating for a full millage renewal this fall.
- C. Executive Committee Meeting
 - 1. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire updated the board on committee assignments as laid out in the Executive Committee minutes in the board packet. Dr. Morley will hold a non-voting position on the Foundation. Foundation seats for voting Board members will be held by Rocky Dufauchard and Bill Settoon.
 - 2. Ms. Kitner inquired whether the Friends of NOPL has a voting seat on the Foundation board. Ms. Marcadel will get this information and respond at a later date.
- D. Executive Director Update
 - 1. City employees will receive vaccinations according to a tiered system. Due to the city's small health department, they have asked for volunteers to assist with vaccine distribution. Several staff members have volunteered and will

- also be vaccinated. Vaccinations will be available to library staff by late January or early February.
2. WWL's Good Day Louisiana interviewed Dr. Morley to discuss the increase in our E-resources, book bundles, and other resources we have provided during the pandemic.
 3. We are working on re-negotiating a ground lease with Astor-Crowne Plaza Hotel. Documentation has not been approved by the city so this will not be ready for a board vote until the next meeting.
 4. The ADA construction at Nix is awaiting the city and contractor to finalize the paperwork. Nix operations will move to another location.
 5. Due to the rise in COVID cases, the library has cut back on the number of appointments.
 6. We have had some regional managers retire, leaving openings to fill. The city has eased the hiring freeze.
- E. 2020 Performance Report
1. Because of the pandemic, all 2020 numbers are significantly lower than 2019, but E-resources have increased:
 - a. 1.3 million total items were circulated in 2020
 - b. We have circulated 665,000 E-resources in 2020 vs. approximately 473,000 in 2019.
 - c. We had 337,000 library visits in 2020, down from 5 million in 2019.
 - d. We led 1300 programs and had around a million website hits in 2020.
 - e. Computer sessions are down to 86,000 uses.
 - f. In 2020, we issued about 13,000 programs and 13,000 new library cards.
 2. Ms. Neighbours asked if Dr. Morley could address the public comments regarding the misinformation distributed around Proposition 2. Ms. Kimbrough Mire asked that this discussion be tabled until the Millage Campaign agenda item.
- F. Financial Report
1. Ms. Thompson went over the unaudited 2020 end-of-year budget. We received \$20,319,000 in millage funding. Total operations costs were \$4 million and personnel costs was \$13 million. She anticipates a steady increase in total operations costs as the city continues to pay items. Vendors have until January 31st to upload invoices. The CARES Act funding for 2020 was \$26,000 for COVID supplies and \$408,000 for personnel costs. Once the audit is finished mid-year, the numbers will be solid.
 2. Ms. Coverick asked about the BP settlement and how many more years we can count on that revenue. Ms. Thompson responded that it was a one-time payout received in 2016. Ms. Coverick asked if this amount was included in the 'trust' line item in the report and if it will be dispersed over several years and Ms. Thompson responded that the funds should be spent this year.
 3. Ms. Coverick asked if a portion of the line item "fines and fees," will be written off (non-payments etc.). Ms. Thompson responded that this is accounted for through the no fees program.

VI. **Discussion Items – 5:13 p.m.**

A. Strategic Planning Update

1. Planning consultant, Michelle Thomas, introduced herself and her team, and outlined the timeline for the strategic planning process.
2. Jayden Russell and her partner will engage with younger people (ages 12 to 24) to obtain feedback on the types of programming that demographic uses.
3. February: A community engagement report from Trepwise is being analyzed to develop survey instruments and questionnaires to use for stakeholder engagement. Most engagement strategies will take place electronically until COVID numbers are down.
4. March: The Board will receive a recommendation report and will revisit the mission, vision, equity and values statements to see if they need modifications. Long-term strategic objectives will be discussed. For example, improve early childhood literacy by 5% per year or 25% over ten years. Board members need to consider the long-term strategic objectives they would like to see in a 10-year plan and be prepared to share those objectives at the March meeting. The initial analysis and recommendation report will be sent to board members prior to the next meeting.
5. April: A plan will be developed and written based on March conversations. Ms. Thomas recommends a 10-year plan based on actionable strategic objectives and outcomes the board would like to see. Staff can produce a yearly operational plan so they can implement different approaches to achieve the overall objective, giving us the opportunity to build upon things that work well. As we are initiating a 10-year millage plan, this will inform the voters of our overall objectives for that time period.
6. May: The strategic plan will be presented to the Board for a vote.
7. Save Our Libraries, Friends of NOPL, and NOPL Foundation are some of the stakeholders Ms. Thomas will engage with on a programmatic level as needs are assessed system wide on a broad range of issues. Other groups include early childhood education providers, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and small business development and health and wellness providers, adult education and life-long learning providers, and young adults. She will consult existing partners such as the YMCA, Job One, and NORD to get a stronger collaboration, without duplicative recommendations.
8. Ms. Nguyen asked when the public will be able to weigh in on the strategic plan and if there will be an opportunity to discuss the plan with the community at large. Ms. Thomas responded that this will be done first to inform the rest of the process.
9. Ms. Neighbours asked how to submit names of potential stakeholders. Ms. Flentroy-Rice responded that names can be emailed to her.
10. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire suggested that the Save Our Libraries Coalition should be engaged on both fronts.

11. Ms. Nguyen stated that it would be beneficial to have a list of organizations that Ms. Thomas plans to reach out to so the board can add to it. This information will be provided by Ms. Flentroy-Rice.
12. Ms. Kearney added that it would be beneficial to reach out to library staff that work with the community. Ms. Thomas said that the primary focus is on external stakeholders but internal stakeholders will be consulted as well.

B. Millage Campaign

1. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire stated that both the millage campaign and strategic plan provides an opportunity for everyone who cares about the library and has a vested interest in seeing the library succeed. She feels that because of the overwhelming failure of the last millage vote, Dr. Morley has been placed in an unfair position. The uncertainty surrounding the millage vote and the message coming from the Mayor's office required Dr. Morley to prepare several budgets in order to plan for numerous outcomes. There is strong support to keep the library at full funding, and the board's intention is to get back on the ballot at that level. Anna Nguyen has agreed to chair the Millage Committee but has not yet had a chance to formulate a report. John Chratska will be working with us as he was previously. The board will make decisions on ballot structure as a whole.
2. Dr. Morley updated the board on options for the fall ballot. The board needs to approve either October 9th election or November 13th as the date for the millage vote. Being on the October 9th ballot means we need to notify the City Council between February 8th and March 18th. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire added that we are under no obligation to be on the October 9th ballot, she recommends that we fill out paperwork in preparation.
3. Ms. Nguyen asked Dr. Morley when the board needs to formulate the language to present an October 9th ballot. Dr. Morley responded that the City Council needs to adopt it by April 8th. Paperwork for the November ballot needs to be submitted between May 17th and June 25th for Council approval on July 15th. Ms. Nguyen expressed concern over the strategic planning timeline coinciding with the millage timeline. Being on the October ballot means the strategic plan would need to be complete by April and additional public input and having language to present to the public would not be ready. Ms. Neighbours asked if the three council members who, at the December 22nd meeting, pledged to back a full millage renewal despite the Mayor's approval, are still willing to work in good faith knowing that we have a robust strategic planning process under way and voters could see how we plan to spend the money. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire responded that the plan will be transparent to the Council.
4. Ms. Nguyen asked if the notice of intent submitted in February or March would be submitted prior to having language that would be on October's ballot. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire responded that the language for the millage campaign sets the level of funding for the renewal and not the strategic plan language.

5. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire asked for a consensus on submitting a request to be on the October ballot as to not miss the opportunity.
6. Ms. Kitner asked if Mr. Chratska has committed to working with us and if any of his prior commitments would interfere with our millage timeline. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire responded that Mr. Chratska is, but she is uncertain of his time constraints.
7. Ms. Nguyen asked when the next board meeting is and Dr. Morley responded that it will be held on March 9th, two days before the deadline to request an October millage vote. Ms. Nguyen asked if it would be better to wait until the next board meeting for consensus. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire agreed that if committee meetings can be scheduled, the millage committee can come back with a recommendation at the March meeting.
8. Ms. Neighbours commented on how Dr. Morley, instead of leading and taking heat from the Mayor, defended a 40% budget cut. Library board members serve with. The purpose of the library is to provide fair, honest and accurate information to the public, but his communication was full of misinformation. Our Institution putting out misinformation was an absolute breach of public trust and not who we are and what we stand for. Three items that stand out:
 - a. He claimed that if passed, the millage would provide continued funding for the library for the next 20 years. The 40% budget cut for 20 years was not mentioned.
 - b. He claimed this millage package will not raise taxes and it is a renewal of an existing millage. It was not a renewal, but a division of the library millage into three others and a large-scale reduction.
 - c. He included an entire paragraph stating if Prop 2 passes, the library will continue fulfilling its mission of transforming lives, enriching neighborhoods, etc. The next section says that if it fails, the library will face a 50% cut, etc.
 - d. The information gave no other possibilities if it failed other than a 50% budget cut, yet we are now working on a new full renewal. Saying a 50% cut assumes devastating consequences and a 40% cut is acceptable is proof of the lie embedded in the language.
 - e. It is disturbing that when our citizens look to the library for facts and truth, our director and institution handed out misinformation and propaganda. Ms. Neighbours has also heard there are some trust issues between Dr. Morley and his staff. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire responded that we have spent a good deal of time discussing the different perspectives. She is confident in Dr. Morley and his ability to move forward. The people attending this meeting should be confident that the strategic planning and millage campaign are going to be an inclusive process that is board-driven.
 - f. Dr. Morley offered no response

VII. Attachments

VIII. Adjournment

- A. Ms. Nguyen made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Ms. Flentroy-Rice. The January 19, 2021 Board of Directors meeting adjourned at 5:57 p.m.

APPROVED: _____



Secretary, Andrea Neighbours

DATE: _____

May 4, 2021