



New Orleans Public Library
Regular Board Meeting Minutes
ZOOM Teleconference
Tuesday, March 9, 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 TWO 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. Board Chair, Phala Kimbrough-Mire called the March 9, 2021 Board of Directors meeting to order at 4:36 p.m.

- II. **Roll Call — (4:36 p.m.)**

Members Present: Phala Kimbrough-Mire, Vonda Flentroy-Rice, Andrea Neighbours, Raquel Dufauchard, William Settoon, Kathleen Coverick, Anna Nguyen, Dana Henry, Dan Tapia (joined at 5:30)

Staff Present: Dr. Gabriel Morley, Michel Thomas, Tammy Hanson

Guests: John Chrastka, Michelle Thomas, Demetric Mercadel, Courtney Kearney, Jennifer Kitner

- III. **Public Comments** — (4:46 p.m.)
 - A. No public comments were made.

- IV. **Action Item: Approval of Consent Agendas** — (4:49 p.m.)
 - A. Approve January 19th board meeting minutes
 - B. Review Executive Committee March 2, 2021 meeting minutes
 - 1. A motion to approve the consent agendas was made by Ms. Flentroy-Rice. Motion seconded by Ms. Dufauchard. Motion carried unanimously.

- V. **Information Items** – (4:50 p.m.)
 - A. NOPL Foundation Report
 - 1. Foundation members have been participating in the Strategic Planning interviews with Michelle Thomas and encourages all board members to do so as well. The next Foundation Board meeting is at the end of March.
 - B. Friends of NOPL
 - 1. Jennifer Kitner, Dixon Stetler, and two other Friends officers participated in the Strategic Planning interviews.
 - 2. The Friends is having an old book sale On March 27 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Latter branch to raise funds for library programming. Non-members can join on the Friends website or in person during the sale. Members have an opportunity to browse the book selection from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.
 - 3. The Friends are working with Bouchercon, a mystery writer convention, to co-host a fundraiser this fall for the Summer Fun & Reading program for 2022 and working on the Right to Vote program that begins March 13th with a grant the Friends received from the Louisiana Endowment for Humanities for the Louisiana Division. This is a four-part book discussion on voter's rights.
 - 4. Ms. Kitner added that the Friends regular weekly book sales are in the Latter carriage house from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. but the March 27 sale is specifically for the sale of old books. the Friends will be participating in Give NOLA Day on May 4th as well.
 - 5. The Friends Board of Directors met on March 8th and new programs are on the horizon.
 - 6. Ms. Mercadel asked if the Friends do book sales at any other library branches. Ms. Kitner responded that prior to the shutdown, they held weekly book sales at Algiers but now it is only at the Latter branch. The Bouchercon location has not been decided yet. During Give Nola Day, the Friends staff will go throughout the city to put books in the little free libraries. The Algiers book sale was the only used book sale on the West Bank, but pop up sales give hundreds of thousands of books to schools and prisons throughout the state. Teachers can also come to the Latter sale and get free books to fill their classroom libraries. Ms. Mercadel asked to be sent additional information.
 - 7. Ms. Kearney added that the Friends depend on the use of the branch enterprise zones so there is no overhead and 100 percent of sales can be used for the library. Years ago, there was a pop-up at the Norman Mayer branch but space is limited at many locations. New Orleans East branch also has a large enterprise

zone that could be used. Ms. Mercadel suggested working with the library director to gain access to more of those spaces.

C. Executive Director Update/Introduction of new board member, Dana Henry

1. Although vaccines are not yet available to library staff, Governor Edwards recently opened up vaccinations to more people.
2. All parties have agreed to the hotel ground lease but the city attorney and the hotel attorney are working on the specific legal language. We expect the board will vote on this at the next meeting.
3. We have again partnered with NORD for the Summer Learning program.
4. The Nix branch is closed while ADA upgrades continue for the next 90 days. Nix's boiler system will be updated as well.
5. The City gave us some new election timeframes. To be on the November 13th ballot, paperwork needs to be submitted between June 6th and July 16th.
6. Dr. Morley welcomed new board member, Dana Henry. While Early Literacy is his focus, Mr. Henry is looking forward to working with us to ensure everyone has access to books and programs the library offers with the goal of the NOPL as one of the best library systems in the country. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire added that with Mr. Henry's appointment the Board of Directors is well-positioned for future opportunities with active participation from the Foundation and Friends.

D. Financial Report

1. Michel Thompson, NOPL Budget Manager, reported that millage dollars have not yet posted, but there was a recent post for \$532,000 for January. Personnel costs were \$729,000 and operating costs \$26,000 for 2020.
2. In January, Ms. Thompson has primarily worked on blanket POs so vendors do not have to wait for every invoice to receive a PO number. Thus, as invoices are ready, they can be approved and uploaded into the system for payment. The goal is to pay vendors within a 30-day window.
3. We have used trust fund dollars to increase the number of titles patrons are able to stream. Trust balances will be updated monthly as the money continues to earn interest. Trust funds budgeted for 2021 were \$1.8 million but the fund balance is \$1.9 million due to interest earned prior to submitting last year's budget. Qualifying expenses are being taken from the library trust fund.
4. End-of-year fund balance was \$12 million with \$2 million rolled over at the end of 2020. The current unaudited fund balance is \$14 million.

VI. **Discussion Items** (5:07 p.m.)

A. Millage Presentation

1. John Chrastka explained the mission of Every Library (a political action committee set up to bring in donations) and discussed ways in which staff and stakeholders can garner support for the upcoming millage renewal.
2. During the 2015 millage campaign, Mr. Chrastka worked closely with the NOPL staff to encourage community engagement. However, COVID has required a shift in how community engagement is done. Every Library was not a participant in the NOPL's 2020 millage campaign due to nature of the ballot measure.
3. The goal of Every Library is to promote dialogue between staff, stakeholders and the community that is productive. The community dialogue generated by the

strategic planning work creates a shared agenda for a budget that allows the NOPL to function properly over the long term.

4. Every Library wants to ensure the work of the staff and board members do not stray into advocacy work and to position the conversation in a way that is not just “vote yes” or “vote no.”
5. Every Library services are pro bono (free); thus, no public money is used to advance the campaign outcome.
6. The demographics of voters’ library user status does not influence how they vote on Election Day. Non-patrons are unfamiliar of the library’s finances and base their vote on their value system.
7. Twenty-seven percent of the public are “true believers” in the library and will vote for library funding as a matter of course. They believe in what libraries and librarians do. They like to know the library’s strategic plan.
8. Thirty-one percent of citizens have faith in the library’s mission and are closely aligned with the library’s values (support for literacy and education, etc.), but are not users themselves. They are not extremely familiar with the library, but are interested how library’s work intersects with other parts of society.
9. Twenty-one percent of public may vote no because they are suspicious. An open, transparent process is crucial to allay suspicion and suspend it. They want to know where the money is going and see how we represent their value system. These people need to be engaged so they know our process is transparent.
10. Differences between a full-funded and underfunded library system should be emphasized and answers to questions voters may ask need to be pre-determined.
11. Ms. Nguyen asked if Mr. Chrastka was suggesting funding a poll to find out where voters stand, especially amid COVID. Mr. Chrastka replied that a poll would be appropriate to evaluate whether voters are disconnected. Suspicious voters skip measure on the ballot. Strategic plan needs to lead the way.
12. Ms. Thomas added that every correctly run institution has a fund balance for one-time expenditures outside the scope of the strategic plan. Reserve monies are important and an opportunity for the board to make strategic one-time investments in things they want to catapult in the system. Her recommendation is that Mr. Chrastka help the board create messaging around the types of investments that other systems make with these one-time reserve funds. The accumulation of reserve funds is going to be an issue with the millage conversation so the board and library advocates need to have a concise response to inform voters that reserve money is not a long-term solution.

B. Strategic Planning Update

1. Ms. Thomas’ team has been working diligently to engage external stakeholders and opportunities for collaboration as well as the future of the NOPL system. Interviews have ranged from Henderson Lewis of New Orleans Public Schools to the Friends of the NOPL, Save Our Libraries, local community development leaders, educators, early childhood education providers, director of recreation, the mayor’s office, city council members and others.

2. Individuals and groups were asked a set of standard, open-ended questions. Some responses were:
 - a. Consider collaborating with workforce development organizations to provide training at the library branches. Multiple folks suggested that NOPL partner with early childhood centers and K-8 schools to identify library resources that could assist educators in curriculum delivery.
 - b. There are already partnerships in place between early childhood centers and K-8. Some interviewees have active partnerships with local branches but want partnerships with curriculum development individuals. There are new curriculum requirements for early childhood and K-3 that will go into effect in 2022. The Superintendent suggests that library staff be at curriculum planning meetings so they understand what the new requirements are and be responsive to them.
 - c. Teachers can share what they are working on in the classroom with librarians. Staff would curate existing library resources to be used for supplementing classroom activities. Teachers in classrooms that have “smart boards” could upload electronic resources from our webpage.
 - d. Relaunching partnership programs with the Children’s Museum. Emulate the model for parent and family engagement used by the Children’s Museum. Julia Bland from the Children’s museum gave input on how to engage the entire family when they visit our branches.
 - e. Pursue partnerships with schools, workforce development, and economic development organizations, social services organizations, and other organizations who can provide on-site services at the library.
 - f. Social services and community development organizations would like the ability to provide some of their services at the library. Many acknowledged that they are limited in their ability to provide community resources at each branch. The library could partner with food banks, to bring food drives to library parking lots for those who lack transportation.
 - g. A vast majority responded that the library’s strengths are accessibility and staff. The library’s weakness is marketing and communications, both internally and externally. Nearly every respondent said more resources should go towards communications and marketing so people know what we offer.
 - h. Many respondents discussed concerns on how the library could find a way to remain relevant as we come out the pandemic. Some felt that as soon as things began opening up, frequent library users would rush back into the library. Some thought that regular users found another way to get their needs met and may not come back. Others expressed a need to rethink how the library reaches people. Users have become accustomed to doing things digitally so enhanced E-resources, digital resources, and online services will become more relevant. One councilmember suggested changing the culture to make visiting the library a part of our lifestyle, such as outdoor spaces with coffee stands.
3. Respondents were asked to prioritize outcomes for the next ten years. Some responses were:

- a. By 2030, the NOPL system will be a thriving organization that meets the needs of our community through investing in its people, by expanding opportunities for professional development, career advancement, and competitive salaries that create a library workforce with incentive to fully invest their talents and their passions into meeting the needs of our community.
 - b. Adopt a plan to increase early childhood literacy, high school graduation rates, and adult HSED graduation rates while decreasing the high school dropout rate. Pivot to reimagining the brand of “the place with books” to a set of services that the citizens need.
 - c. One goal for the library to achieve over the next ten years would be to significantly improve adult literacy, workforce development partnerships and programming, increase the median income in New Orleans by 20%, increase library utilization by 400% through both in-person and online circulation and interaction, and increase usership and circulation by between 35% and 50%.
4. The majority of external stakeholder interviews are complete. Round tables with childcare providers, adult literacy, healthcare, and small business development industry round tables are being coordinated.
 5. At the request of the NOPL Foundation leadership, invitations were sent to 26 staff members. Over half have scheduled their meetings.
 6. Through March, Ms. Thomas will begin working closely with Dr. Morley and his leadership team to begin crafting strategic objectives, goals, and strategies.
 7. Ms. Mercadel asked how many board members have participated. Ms. Thomas responded that she had originally planned to engage the board during this meeting. She is requesting the board establish a committee to get feedback and input.
 8. Ms. Coverick asked if the all responses will be shared with the board and Ms. Thomas responded that there will be an initial report of synthesized responses after stakeholder engagement.
 9. Ms. Neighbours asked about having more presence in outlying communities (Ninth Ward and New Orleans East).
 10. Ms. Kimbrough-Mire added that the board’s priority is to have full board engagement as it pertains to the strategic plan and the millage campaign. Ms. Flentroy-Rice will collaborate with Ms. Thomas and offer some dates members can attend.
 11. A question was asked on how the 26 staff were chosen and if they were from all levels. Ms. Thomas responded that branch managers, all specialty librarians, and senior staff in administration have been contacted.
 12. Ms. Thomas has the results of the staff engagement from Trentwise in 2019 and it is informing this process. That endeavor is not being replicated.

VII. Action Item: Approval of 2021 Holiday Closures (6:24 p.m.)

- ◆ New Year's Day – Friday, January 1
- ◆ Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – Monday, January 18

- ◆ Additional Mardi Gras closings, TBA
- ◆ Mardi Gras Day – Tuesday, February 16
- ◆ Good Friday – Friday, April 2
- ◆ Easter Sunday – Sunday, April 4
- ◆ Memorial Day – Monday, May 31
- ◆ Independence Day – Sunday, July 4
- ◆ Independence Day (*observed*) – Monday, July 5
- ◆ Labor Day – Monday, September 6
- ◆ Thanksgiving Eve – All locations close at 5 p.m. – Wednesday, November 24
- ◆ Thanksgiving Day – Thursday, November 25
- ◆ Veterans Day (*observed*) – Friday, November 26
- ◆ Christmas Eve – Friday, December 24
- ◆ Christmas Day – Saturday, December 25
- ◆ New Year’s Eve – All locations close at 4 p.m. – Friday, December 31

A. A motion to approve the 2020 NOPL Closure schedule was made by Ms. Nguyen and seconded by Mr. Tapia. Motion passed unanimously.

VIII. **Action Item: Approval to Revise the Progressive Discipline Section from the NOPL Handbook** (6:25 p.m.)

A. Ms. Neighbours asked whether the change allowed stepped discipline to be conducted without triggering civil service. Dr. Morley said yes and that is why the wording was changed from discipline to counseling.

B. A motion to revise the progressive discipline handbook was made by Ms. Neighbours and seconded by Ms. Coverick. Motion passed unanimously.

IX. **Action Item: Approval to Change the Wording of the Grievance Policy in the NOPL Handbook** (6:27 p.m.)

A. This agenda item was tabled so the Executive Committee can discuss options at their next meeting on May 4, 2021.

X. **Attachments**

XI. **Adjournment**

A. A motion was made to adjourn was made by Ms. Coverick and seconded by Ms. Neighbours. The March 9, 2021 Board of Directors meeting adjourned at 6:29 p.m.