

Alexandria Library Board Minutes

Date

October 18, 2021

Location

This meeting was held virtually via Zoom.

Present

Trudi Hahn, Kathleen Schloeder, Elizabeth Bennett-Parker, Karen Marshall, Robert Ray IV, Patsy Rogers, Oscar Fitzgerald, Director Dawson, Deputy Director Knight, HR Manager Farley.

The meeting was called to order at 4:01pm.

Public Comment

Mr. Chuck Ziegler, Director of Advocacy, Friends of the Beatley Central Library, submitted and read a short statement. The submitted statement reported on membership, book sale revenues and events, and activities as of September 30, 2021. This report is attached and submitted into the record.

Chair Hahn stated that she will reach out to the other Library Friends groups to encourage them to submit reports as well. Chair Hahn closed the public comment period as no other speakers were present.

Approval of Minutes

No minutes were submitted for approval at this meeting.

Chair's Report

Chair Hahn thanked former Chair Schloeder for her contributions as past Chair and during her many years of service on the Board. Chair Hahn reported that the Burke Branch public artwork has been unveiled and encouraged members and the community to see it. She reported that the Library's Tour d'Alexandria took place on October 2 and that it was a great example of the wonderful programs sponsored by the Library.

Director's Report

Director Dawson reported that the City is currently operating under a mask mandate and that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Case Tracker shows that Alexandria is still in a state of high community transmission for COVID-19. The 7-day moving average of COVID-19 cases is 24, a 1% decrease. The 7-day moving average for case positivity is 3.3%, a slight increase. Approximately 76% of residents ages 12 and older are vaccinated and 67.9% are partially vaccinated. For now, the Library will remain with the existing hours. The Beatley, Burke and Duncan branches have already opened on Sundays and the Barrett branch will begin opening on Sundays within the next few weeks.

The data in the monthly activity report reflects that the Library has had various closures or restrictions this year due to the continuing pandemic. The patron count is up 96%, although circulation is only up 30% due to limited hours and services this year. Director Dawson reported that in pre-COVID times, the patron count would have been approximately 60,000 and circulation would have been approximately 84,000. E-borrowers have recently dropped 19% as "traditional" users are now able to come into the building and because other library systems have now increased their hours. While website visits are up 309%, website page visits continue to be down by 85% since customers bookmark the site in their web browsers. Wi-fi usage is up 85%.

Passport services are limited and by appointment only; therefore, the Library was able to do only 140 per month versus an average 400 per month before the pandemic. Director Dawson expects that those figures will rise as additional staff are trained and as more appointments are made available. With school back in session, the Library proctored 7 exams compared to the 2 exams proctored last month.

Director Dawson provided an update on programs funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grants, stating that the 50 hotspots have arrived and that the technology and circulation teams are moving forward with implementation. Director Dawson reported that outdoor programming has been well received. From September 1 until present, the Library has hosted 254 outdoor programs with over 3,000 attendees. Some programs were provided with partners such as Love Your Pet Day.

Director Dawson reported that the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) sent a commitment decision letter on Sept 24 stating that the grant application for the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF), to purchase 80 Chromebooks had been approved. The Chromebooks were purchased and arrived last week. The Library must absorb the cost for cases. Staff is developing circulation procedures and roll-out timelines. The ECF grant requires that Chromebooks are lent only to customers who do not otherwise have access to that equipment. Director Dawson reported that the Library has submitted a request for a second round of funding under ECF for additional Chromebooks. Chair Hahn asked if we have identified an audience for this program. Director Dawson responded that the Library plans to work with partners such as the Alexandria Council of Human Services Organizations (ACHSO) and the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) to reach individuals most in need of this equipment and service.

Director Dawson reported that all city workers must submit proof of their vaccination status by October 25. Unvaccinated staff will be required to submit to weekly testing. Approximately 95% of Library employees have submitted their status as of this time. Director Dawson stated that the City is developing a policy pertaining to contractors and volunteers who may work in the facilities as well.

Director Dawson reported that the Beatley Branch parking lot project is now in Phase II with completion expected before the end of the year. The contractor for the Beatley Envelope project is slated to begin in the next few weeks with the opening of a staging area on the east side of the building. Director Dawson reported that the Envelope project will address ongoing issues with the windows in the building, among other issues.

Director Dawson reported that the City and the Library will be closed on Thursday, December 23 and on Friday, December 24. Since the Library is normally open on Saturdays, it will be closed on December 25 as well. Alexandria Library intends to be open on Sunday, December 26.

Ms. Schloeder asked if there is any update on the Burke Branch first floor project. Director Dawson responded there was not, but that she would reach out to the General Services project manager for an update. Ms. Marshall asked about whether early voting would be conducted at the Beatley Branch and Director Dawson responded affirmatively.

Treasurer's Report

No report was provided at this meeting.

Investment Committee Report

No report was provided at this meeting.

Old Business – FY23 Budget

Director Dawson reported that the City Manager asked boards and commissions to provide input on their priorities for consideration in development of his FY23 budget proposal. He stated that his focus would be on smart, equitable, and green program progress, as well as on improving the City's ability to attract and retain employees.

Director Dawson reported that her recommendations to the Board for inclusion are as follows:

1. Competitive Salaries: For more than 6 years, Director Dawson attempted to have Library positions upgraded to be competitive with peers in the surrounding jurisdictions. Library Assistant salaries are 56% behind the market. (Equity goal)
2. Material Collections: This is a CORE service to support the Library's mission of being able to meet the educational, informational, and recreational needs of our community. (Equity goal)
3. Electric Charging Station: The Library will order its electric outreach vehicle this year and access to an electric charging station will be needed in the Beatley parking lot. (Smart and Green goals)
4. Integrated Library Systems (ILS): This is a CIP request to replace/update the existing integrated library system (ILS) that allows the Library to provide all services (catalog, check in/out, acquisitions, IT, etc). The current system is over 15 years old and all surrounding jurisdictions have upgraded or replaced their systems in recent years. (Smart and Equity goals)
5. Facility Assessment Plan: This is a CIP request to examine the location of Library facilities and ensure services and facilities are available to the entire community. New construction over the years and changes in community populations have impacted access to Library services. Areas which may need new or increased presence are Potomac Yard, the Eisenhower corridor and the King Street corridor. (Equity goal)

Ms. Schloeder asked if there are dollar figures associated with these priorities and Director Dawson responded that research will be completed on each item to develop estimates. Chair Hahn asked if the ILS has the potential to lessen or increase the work of staff, including IT staff. Director Dawson responded that it will require multiple staff members to implement, not just IT. Ms. Marshall asked if the charging stations would be free and Director Dawson replied that further information will have to be received from the City on how those stations are operated and where the revenue, if any, is collected. Mr. Fitzgerald asked if the materials increase would be only on traditional books and Director Dawson stated that the Library would decide which format of material would be purchased. Mr. Ray asked if the ILS and the digital asset management system overlay each other and Director Dawson replied that the ILS is the core technology that all of the other technologies function within.

Ms. Schloeder made a motion to support Director Dawson's recommendations which was seconded by Mr. Ray and approved with one abstention (Ms. Bennett-Parker).

New Business – FY21 Audit

Director Dawson reported that the Library has completed its annual audit with no significant findings. Ms. Hahn stated that she found the language in the audit letter to be confusing and somewhat contradictory. Director Dawson stated that the mention of audit deficiency is related only to the size and ability of the organization to segregate financial duties with such a small staff. Director Dawson reported that while the section is difficult to follow, it is a common statement and occurrence in smaller non-profit organizations such as the Alexandria Library.

Ms. Rogers made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Ms. Bennett-Parker and approved unanimously at 5:04 pm.