Library Advisory Board Minutes: September 12, 2023
For Multnomah County Library Advisory Board

The Multnomah County Library Advisory Board (LAB) met virtually on Tuesday, September 12, 2023. The meeting began at 5:00 pm.

Board members present were: Clare Wilkinson; Cassandra Duprey; Danielle Pacifico-Cogan; David Jarvis; Domiè Newton; Gabie Mbenza-Ngoma; Hazel Burke; Jade Chan; Kate Fleming; Kelsey Fong; Kristi Ketchum; Lizzie Martinez; Mabel Reed; Madison Riethman; Megan Parrott; Nikia Kae Solbjor; and Taryn Sauer.

Staff members present were: Annie Lewis, deputy director; Johnette Easter, HR Director; Jen Studebaker, community services manager; Jon Worona, director of innovation & technology; Katie Shifley, finance & facilities director; Kirby McCurtis, Location Services Director; Shawn Cunningham, director of communications & strategic initiatives; Sonja Ervin, equity & inclusion manager; and Vailey Oehlke, library director.

Commissioner Lori Stegmann, District 4, Multnomah County was also in attendance.

WELCOME & CHECK-IN
Meeting attendees joined the virtual meeting either via video or phone and participated in a warm-up exercise. Clare Wilkinson welcomed new members to their first LAB meeting.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS/WORKGROUP UPDATES
Wilkinson drew folks’ attention the second page of the meeting agenda, reviewing LAB’s “working” mission statement:

The Library Advisory Board nurtures, challenges, and supports MCL to be the very best it can be in support of all communities within Multnomah County. LAB does this by providing a public user lens on MCL’s services, strategies, and budget. Together, LAB helps ensure library services are accessible to everyone, regardless of background or situation.

Wilkinson explained that LAB’s primary purpose is to serve as the library’s Community Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC); however, LAB is different from other county CBACs in that the group meets year-round and increasingly, is becoming more of a community lens for library leadership and working more closely with library staff.

Wilkinson walked attendees through previously-established group norms — guidelines for coming together and interacting. After reviewing, Wilkinson invited others to return to these norms to make changes or additions, which are welcome as members get to know each other better.
Commissioner Lori Stegmann (District 4) joined and introduced herself, sharing that she is the board liaison for the Library Advisory Board. Stegmann shared that she lives in Gresham, and was involved in the planning for the current library bond and is looking forward to new library spaces.

Wilkinson continued, noting that we all learn in different ways and communicate and take in information in different ways, and because this group can’t all be in the same room, this can sometimes create challenges in terms of communication and understanding. Wilkinson welcomed any LAB members who would like to share about the best way they learn or communicate to do so, sharing that she herself is a verbal processor and learns best through reading. As folks learn more about each others’ communication and learning styles and preferences, we can adjust the ways in which we deliver and share information if the way things are done now doesn’t suit folks.

Gabie Mbenza-Ngoma responded that, as a teacher, starting up at the screen can be challenging and she’ll likely always have something occupying her hands during meetings and that she is still actively listening.

Madison Riethman echoed what Wilkinson said about learning through writing and reading, and she may be doing so during meetings, noting that anything folks can share in writing is helpful for her.

Nikia Kae Solbjor thanked the group for making space for this conversation, noting that she is a slow processor and prefers to have time to process and reflect. Solbjor also asked about expectations around having cameras on for these meetings. Wilkinson thanked Solbjor for this question, sharing that LAB hasn't explicitly talked through this, but that her own assumption is that folks may need to get up and move around to take care of things, and that doesn't mean they're not listening.

Wilkinson offered that LAB might conduct a short future survey around comfort level with cameras on or off and what kind of information folks would like in advance. A Google Jamboard is another option the group could use. Wilkinson thanked folks for sharing, noting that this is the start of a conversation that will be continued.

Meeting minutes for the June 13, 2023 meeting were approved.

Moving onto the next order of business, Wilkinson thanked Lizzie Martinez for her long tenure as LAB co-chair and for leading and greatly improving LAB's membership and recruitment efforts. Megan Parrott is nominated to replace Martinez, and Kate Fleming moved to take a vote to approve Parrott as co-chair. Cassie Duprey seconded the motion. By show of hands, members unanimously approved to vote Parrott in as co-chair alongside Wilkinson (Parrott abstained from the vote).

Deputy Director Annie Lewis echoed Wilkinson's appreciation, thanking Martinez for serving as a LAB leader for so many years. Lewis also thanked Parrott for stepping up into this role, and for Wilkinson for continuing on as co-chair.
UPDATES FROM LIBRARY LEADERSHIP

Lewis reminded that LAB members receive information ahead of each meeting, including a Director's Report, which is an opportunity for library leadership to communicate systemwide library happenings, bond updates, and more so LAB members have awareness. Lewis highlighted a few items of note:

- The Everybody Reads selection for 2024 is Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow by Gabrielle Zevin. For folks who may not be aware of this program, Lewis shared that Everybody Reads is the library's signature community-wide reading program in partnership with Literary Arts and The Library Foundation. The signature event is an author lecture, and lots of other fun visits happen as well. LAB members receive complimentary tickets to the author event.
- Lewis also highlighted several cultural celebrations coming up, including Latinx Heritage Month (9/15-10/15) and Mid-Autumn Festival (dates and link). With Midland Library currently closed, the Mid-Autumn Festival will be held at Gresham Library this year.
- Lewis also called attention to some exciting bond-related updates, noting that the new Operations Center will soon receive a temporary certificate of occupancy. The Operations Center will house a 500,000-item collection and will have an automated materials handling (AMH) system. Moving all operations to a central location will take some time. Staff teams are busy planning move-in, and this is a huge milestone – the first completed project! Library leadership hope to offer LAB a special tour of this new space.
- After a community engagement effort, the Belmont Library project team will move forward with keeping the existing building and adding a new addition (for about ~15k square feet), and this site will include parking. There were a number of other options for this site, including a full tear-down. In response to a question about where the addition will be located (a second floor, adjacent, etc.), Location Services Director Kirby McCurtis shared that it's too early to know – plans for building layout and design are just beginning.
- Lewis also encouraged folks to take a look at a post on MCL's Instagram account of a time-lapse video of the Isom library complex and a design walk-through of the new Albina Library.

STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

Lewis reminded that longer-term LAB members have received two updates on MCL’s strategic plan, and that new members will receive an update now since the plan has now actually launched. MCL launched a strategic planning effort about 16 months ago, and this is the organization’s first strategic plan (the library system hasn’t yet operated under that type of model) – the library has instead been guided by strategic pillars and priorities. With the launch of the 2023-2025 strategic plan, MCL is now shifting the language for how it talks about organizational priorities to vision, mission, values, goals, and strategies.

Lewis noted that this first plan (for 2023-2025) is really about building organizational capacity, and that the next iteration of planning (for 2026-2028) will involve robust community engagement. Lewis shared the plan, explaining the difference between values (aspirational beliefs at the heart of the library’s work), goals (what staff are working to accomplish toward that vision), and strategies (these aren’t on the website, but are individual strategies for action assigned to managers and teams across the library system).
In response to a question about what prompted creation of a strategic plan, Lewis shared that there is a lot of complexity involved in the efforts library staff are currently undertaking to better serve community members. While pillars and priorities did help to guide that work, they weren’t tied to specific action plans that enabled our organization and community to understand how we’re advancing and achieving those priorities. The strategic plan is a road map that will guide our work; help teams understand how their work connects to larger organizational goals; and increased accountability for library leadership to monitor, track, and make progress toward achieving goals.

Martinez shared that LAB members have been invited in during development of the strategic plan, with frequent updates. Lewis added that LAB members will be involved in supporting the goal of “Ensuring positive experiences for community members with library staff, spaces, materials, and services” — specifically, around redesign of MCL’s annual Patron Survey and its new Patron Service Strategy.

**PATRON SERVICE STRATEGY**

Location Services Director Kirby McCurtis joined to share information about the library’s Patron Service Strategy initiative. McCurtis explained that, with library spaces, services, and staffing all undergoing changes, MCL has a unique opportunity to rethink its strategy for patron service. The overarching goal of the Patron Service Strategy work is to center positive experiences for community members with library staff spaces, materials, and services. Led by McCurtis, this initiative is a multi-year, four-phase project involving creation of an updated patron service vision and priorities, and operationalizing these priorities for staff as new library spaces open. McCurtis shared that. For patrons, the hope is that this work will result in feeling seen, welcomed, and having a sense that they are always in the right place to ask a question no matter where they are in a library building.

McCurtis shared updated service principles, created by a team of library staff and managers – the result of a year’s work. In new library buildings, MCL wants patrons to be able to easily identify staff; have clear sightlines throughout the buildings; and for each patron to experience services that are more than just a transactional interaction. The vision is that library services are transformational, determined by connecting with community members and really engaging to understand what they want in their library spaces.

One of the ways MCL will know if it’s getting this work right is by looking to LAB for help – in collaborating in the redesign of the library’s annual survey; testing; and participating in a focus group. There may also be opportunities for LAB members to visit their home library locations to experience the new service model in action, and to provide feedback on their experience.

In response to a question about the timeline for this work, Lewis shared that the survey redesign will start in spring 2024 so it’s ready to put out in the fall. In response to another question about survey accessibility, Jon Worona shared that MCL’s website is accessible for screen readers for folks with visual disabilities. Reading level is another lens that MCL uses to keep its web content accessible. Lewis added that the patron survey is translated into the library’s identified Service languages (Vietnamese, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and English), and MCL contracts out to a
translation company but also has internal staff editors who review translations to ensure that the translations are accurate and reflect sort of localized or regional dialects as well. MCL staff also promote the survey. That said, there is always an opportunity to do better. Lewis shared appreciation for this question, and welcomed suggestions and solutions for making the survey (and other content) even more accessible.

**ACTION ITEMS + CLOSING**
The meeting adjourned at 6:11 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:
Maddelyn High, director’s assistant
Multnomah County Library, Oregon