

Library Advisory Board Minutes: November 12, 2019
For Multnomah County Library Advisory Board

The Multnomah County Library Advisory Board met on Tuesday, November 12, 2019, at Midland Library. Vice Chair Lois Leveen called the meeting to order at 7:31 am.

Board members present were: Brendan Gallagher, Brian Wilson, Chester Ching, Clare Wilkinson, Cynthia Tseng, Lizzie Martinez, Lois Leveen, Sandra Acosta Casillas, Svetlana Karpe, and Willow Kelleigh. Bethel Sishu, Elliot Zais, Rob Edmiston, Quinn MacNichol, and Thomas Dwyer were excused. Erin Cooper was absent.

Staff members present were: Cindy Gibbon, director of policy and special projects; Don Allgeier, director of operations; Jeremy Graybill, marketing and online engagement director; Johnette Easter, human resources manager; Jon Worona, director of content strategy; Shawn Cunningham, director of communications and strategic initiatives; Sonja Ervin, equity and inclusion manager; Terrilyn Chun, deputy director; Vailey Oehlke, director of libraries; and Maddelyn High, director's assistant.

Also in attendance were: Commissioner Lori Stegmann, District 4, Multnomah County; Jeff Renfro, Office of County Management, Multnomah County; and Jennifer Stepanek, The Library Foundation.

CHAIR'S REPORT & COMMITTEE UPDATES

Leveen chaired the meeting in Quinn MacNichol's absence, and welcomed everyone. Leveen reminded that November is Native American Heritage Month, and offered a land acknowledgement. Meeting attendees introduced themselves and shared what LAB committees they serve on or support. Committee chairs offered the following updates on committee work:

Finance Committee

Clare Wilkinson shared that the Finance Committee is gearing up for its work in 2020.

DigiCommittee Update

Brendan Gallagher announced that the DigiCommittee will meet on November 19 at Central Library. The committee will discuss issues related to ebooks and an update on the forthcoming library app for accessing the catalog (tied to the library's new Integrated Library System).

Nominating Committee

Lizzie Martinez reminded that former LAB member Elizabeth Hawthorne's resignation in summer 2019 created an open spot on the Library Advisory Board. The Nominating Committee returned to its most recent applicant pool, and recommends David Hoang for appointment to the Library

Advisory Board. Hoang is a freshman at Portland State University, serves on the Multnomah Youth Commission, and lives in East County. Martinez noted that Hoang is a welcome addition to the Library Advisory Board and will bring the voice of a university student — one not currently represented on LAB.

Martinez moved to nominate David Hoang for appointment to the Library Advisory Board. Chester Ching and Brian Wilson seconded. By oral vote, the motion was approved unanimously. Hoang's nomination will advance to the Multnomah County Library District Board for approval.

Equity and Racial Justice Committee

Leveen shared that LAB's newest committee had its first meeting focused on setting goals. At the committee's next meeting, members will begin developing work plans tied to the goals below for Fiscal Year 2020:

- Develop and implement a tool to use at every LAB meeting to center racial justice in discussion and decisions
- Support the Nominating Committee in developing and implementing onboarding/ongoing training for new (and existing) LAB members that centers racial justice
- Evaluate membership including looking at term limits and committee attendance to ensure the committee fully represents all library users
- Work toward removing barriers for future LAB members by exploring opportunities for budgeting for transportation, food, childcare, etc.
- Ensure all LAB members are conversant in racial equity
- Build a culture of robust discussion at meetings that provides useful feedback for library leadership

The board then approved the minutes for the October 8, 2019 meeting.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Following Leveen's remarks about Native American Heritage Month, Library Director Vailey Oehlke highlighted some of the related programming the library is offering, including [PDX Native Film Night](#), a free event created by Native and Indigenous members of our community. Svetlana Karpe noted that this event is already sold out, but folks may still be able to get in on the night of the event if there are no-shows.

Oehlke also gave an update on the library's decision to [boycott new ebook titles from Macmillan](#), adding that Oregon was one of a couple of states that had a very robust response from library patrons on the publisher's new constraints on libraries. Oehlke expressed gratitude for the library's communications team, which shared a wealth of information with the public on this important issue, which in turn generated a good deal of media interest. Oehlke explained that the decision to no longer purchase new Macmillan ebooks was a very intentional one based on communications and strategies developed at the national level in concert with other library directors across the country and with MCL staff.

In response to questions from LAB members, Oehlke answered that Macmillan has so far

responded to the boycott by issuing a letter from its CEO. Oehlke added that ebook restrictions and the boycott are larger than just Macmillan — if other publishers follow suit with similar restrictions for public libraries, there are real implications for MCL's ability to provide digital content to patrons. For patrons wanting Macmillan ebook titles, the library is communicating about the boycott in several ways, including directing folks to different available formats for particular titles; offering read-alike lists of similar titles; and with an auto-response message about the boycott on the library's [Suggest a Purchase Form](#).

THE LIBRARY FOUNDATION (TLF)

Jennifer Stepanek announced that, for the first time in a couple of years, The Library Foundation is included in [Willamette Week's Give!Guide](#). Give!Guide is an online giving portal highlighting the work of specific nonprofits, and offers opportunities to leverage donations, win prizes, and earn incentives. When TLF was last in the guide, it was among organizations that received the most donations in the education category. This year, TLF is emphasizing support for building the library's collection of diverse books. Stepanek noted that TLF also has a general donation match going on this season.

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY (FOL)

Cindy Gibbon shared an update on behalf of the Friends, who have been doing some grassroots advocacy on behalf of the library after their record-breaking fall book sale. In response to a question from Leveen, Gibbon explained that the primary role of library Friends groups is not fundraising (like The Library Foundation), but to be the library's advocate in the community. Friends of Multnomah County Library got its start in the 1970s during one of the early attempts to secure stable funding for the library. Gibbon commented that MCL's Friends group is very healthy compared to a lot of others, with a strong membership effort and several part-time staff who are active on an ongoing basis. Gibbon highlighted FOL's current equity and inclusion efforts to diversity its board of directors and to reach out to parts of the community that may not have been active with the Friends before. Revenue from FOL's book sales is important for the library, and FOL's importance extends beyond book sales.

BUDGET OVERVIEW & YEAR-END FINANCIAL UPDATE

Director of Operations Don Allgeier gave a summary overview of the library's year-end financial report for its 2018-2019 fiscal year, including an explanation of how revenue from the Multnomah County Library District (MCLD) fund is transferred to the library department's operating fund.

The library's adopted budget for Fiscal Year 2019 was \$86.8 million. Tax revenues were down, and income from library fines was lower than expected (due to elimination of fines for youth patrons and an increase in use of digital materials that don't accrue fines). This was offset by better than expected interest earnings, resulting in slightly higher overall revenue of \$87.1 million.

Major investments in 2019 included new technology to improve the experience of patrons in library buildings; safety and security expenditures; a new Integrated Library System; and physical infrastructure (ongoing maintenance for aging buildings and a new ramp at the library's warehouse). About two-thirds of the library's annual expenditures go toward personnel costs, with materials and services and internal services purchased from the county making up the remainder.

The library also continued its thinking around how to invest in equity and inclusion work, and using an equity lens in its annual budgeting process.

Allgeier and County Economist Jeff Renfro explained that the library district's revenue is confined in the long term by the state's capped rate of annual increase on assessed property value (3%). In response to a question from Willow Kelleigh, Allgeier shared that the forecast for next year is expected soon and the library will continue to manage its spending carefully to maximize the lifespan of the library district. Oehlke added that before voters created the library district, MCL was funded by a temporary levy that had to be renewed and by county general funds spread across many different departmental needs. A major advantage of a dedicated district is the ability to plan better for the future.

A discussion then ensued about the current movement to eliminate patron fines at public libraries across the country, including the related budget implications; equity and access considerations; and new technology that could allow for automated renewals (which MCL is investigating).

Allgeier thanked LAB members who will be joining the Finance Committee this winter, reminding that LAB acts as the library's Community Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC) and reports to the Library District Board. The Finance Committee will meet several times throughout the winter to discuss influences and impacts on the the library's budget and to advise on budget plans, culminating with a letter of recommendations to the Library District Board. Allgeier noted that all LAB members are welcome to attend Finance Committee meetings, and that the first meeting in particular is often of interest to new board members.

GOOD AND WELFARE

Leveen closed the meeting by sharing a recent experience at Central Library that demonstrated the breadth of services and value of the library in our community, including a visit to the [John Wilson Room](#) (a special collection space that a lot of public libraries don't have); using a database only accessible in the library; and witnessing library staff respond knowledgeably and compassionately to a regular patron experiencing a health crisis.

Leveen asked LAB members to watch for an email with a reading assignment ahead of the next LAB meeting, and adjourned the meeting at 8:32 am.

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