

**St. Tammany Parish Library
Board of Control Meeting
February 28, 2023
Madisonville Branch
1123 Main St.
Madisonville, LA 70447
6:30 P.M.**

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Rebecca (Becky) Taylor, President. Kelly LaRocca, Director, called the roll and declared that a quorum was present.

Present: Jake Airey (arrived during section 2A), Carmen Butler, Mary Reneau, Ann Shaw, Becky Taylor
Absent: Dr. Argiro Morgan

B. Taylor announced that Jake Airey has replaced Bill Allin on the Library Board of Control. She explained that the purpose of the board meeting is to conduct the business of the Library Board of Control. She explained the rules for attendees and stated the procedure for public comment. A three-minute time limit is established for each member of the public wishing to speak (for or against) an item on the Agenda.

1. Approval of the minutes of the meeting of the Library Board of Control that was held on January 24, 2023.

Discussion: There were no suggested corrections to the minutes.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: M. Reneau moved to approve the January 24, 2023 meeting minutes. It was seconded by A. Shaw. All were in favor, none were opposed, and two were absent. Motion carried.

2. NEW BUSINESS

A. Financial Reports – January 2023

Discussion: K. LaRocca reported that \$7,782,463.08 was received in Ad Valorem Revenue. The first of three equal payments of \$86,171.77 was received in State Revenue Sharing. The budget percentage for the end of January should be 8.33%. Revenues are at 8.40% and Expenditures are

at 9.76%. K. LaRocca explained that some expenditure lines are spent earlier or later in the year, depending on when the payments are due. The Workers' Compensation line is at 48.59% because a large portion of it is due at the beginning of the year. The Publication of Legal Notices line is at 36.67% due to the length of the meeting minutes that are published in the St. Tammany Farmer. The Grounds and Lawn Maintenance line is at 11.18% because of cleanup that is done at the beginning of the year.

The Polaris Maintenance and Web Design Consultants lines are expended at the beginning of the year. The Pest Control line is at 14.57% because a large portion is due at the beginning of the year. Most of the funds in the General Liability Insurance line are expended at the beginning of the year. The Office Supplies line is at 11.04% due to increasing supply costs and will be adjusted in the budget amendment. Some Programming lines are above budget due to purchasing the supplies needed for Spring programming. The PC Network line is at 64.32% due to purchasing computers that are due for replacement this year. The Lease/Purchase Books line is at 98.93% because we have paid for all leased book credits for the year.

A. Shaw asked about the Lease/Purchase line and whether or not there are still funds to purchase patron requests. K. LaRocca explained that the leased books program is a different process than purchasing items for the collection. The library pays for a certain number of lease credits for the year. As popular titles are released, the library leases a number of copies to keep the patron waiting list time shorter. The leased books are returned to the vendor when the titles are no longer popular. The credits are paid at the beginning of the year so that books can be rotated in and out through the year.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: C. Butler moved to approve the January 2023 Financial Reports. It was seconded by M. Reneau. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. (J. Airey arrived before the vote.) Motion carried.

B. 2023 Spring Budget Amendment

Discussion: K. LaRocca explained the differences in revenue and expenditure forecasts between the 2023 Original Budget and the 2023 Spring Amendment. State Revenue sharing has been adjusted upward to reflect the first payment of this year. The Fines and Fees line is adjusted upward due to increased circulation and printing. Interest Income is adjusted upward as the current economy has significantly affected interest rates. Most of the increases and decreases in expenditures are based on how the library ended 2022, increased supply costs, and the Annex building replacement. K. LaRocca reviewed adjustments to budget lines with explanations for each adjustment. The Board was provided with the budget amendment and savings spreadsheet

along with the explanations. The current Unassigned Savings is \$452,021, which puts the library in a good position to begin work on goals identified during the strategic planning process.

The Budget Analysis shows an overall increase in revenue of \$83,887 due to more Ad Valorem funds as part of normal growth and an increase in interest income. The amendment shows an increase in expenditures of \$86,803 to cover the increased costs of supplies, cybersecurity measures, new laptops for the Slidell Branch, and the Technical Services building move. The budget is balanced, leaving \$752 of revenue unbudgeted.

M. Reneau asked what happens to the old laptops. K. LaRocca explained that in the past they have been used by staff during the pandemic while they were working from home. They can be declared surplus with the option to discard if they are unusable or to pass them onto non-profits or schools who can use them.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

K. LaRocca read the resolution aloud.

Vote: M. Reneau moved to approve the 2023 Spring Budget Amendment. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

C. COVID Leave Policy and Procedure Renewal

Discussion: B. Geiger reviewed the COVID Policy that was approved on March 29, 2022 and expired at the end of 2022. The Board has the option of extending COVID leave for 2023. The policy gives full-time employees 40 hours of COVID leave and part-time employees 20 hours of COVID leave. B. Geiger reported that there were 45 employees who used COVID leave in 2022 for a total of 1338 hours, and the total cost to the library was \$22,673.

B. Taylor asked if there was a reduction in the number of COVID cases towards the end of 2022. B. Geiger stated that the cases stayed consistent through the year and he did not notice a spike or reduction.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: C. Butler moved to approve the COVID Leave Policy and Procedure Renewal for 2023. It was seconded by A. Shaw. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

D. Admin Building Lease Renewal

Discussion: K. LaRocca reported that the current lease for the Administration Building at 1112 W. 21st Ave., Covington, LA 70433 will expire on March 31, 2023. The library has the option to renew for two years. The terms of the current lease remain the same. The Board will need to vote in order to take the option and extend the lease. There is a typo on the lease that will need to be corrected before signing. Section two should state the term as two years, not five. The lease renewal shall commence on April 1, 2023 and terminate on March 31, 2025. The cost of the lease will be \$5,488.23 each month and the rate will increase each year due to the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index. Emily Couvillon, legal counsel, noted a misspelling on page 12. Number 34 should state the word Subordination.

Public Comment: J.P. Warner – Asked if the Admin building could be sub-leased if the library leaves before the two-year term is reached. K. LaRocca stated that we do not have plans to leave prior to the completion of the two-year term.

Vote: C. Butler moved to approve the Admin Building Lease Renewal. It was seconded by M. Reneau. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

E. Extension of the Hwy. 36 Lease

Discussion: K. LaRocca reported that the current lease for the Technical Services/Maintenance building (Annex) will expire on April 30, 2023. Our new building is likely to be under construction starting in March. Construction is estimated to last 90 days. The library has the opportunity to extend the lease until June 30, 2023 at the same rate of \$3,000 per month. The same conditions as the previous lease apply, except that Maintenance will need to move their items into storage. The building owner owns a carpet company and would like to use the back of the warehouse to store carpet. The Board will need to vote to extend the lease.

M. Reneau asked what would happen if the new Annex building is not ready by June 30th. K. LaRocca stated that the Technical Services Department would have to temporarily move into a library meeting room, though she does not anticipate that happening. A. Shaw asked if we will incur additional expenses by moving the Maintenance Department's items into storage. K. LaRocca stated that the move will be minimal and on a month-to-month basis, as we will be discarding old and unusable items.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: M. Reneau moved to approve the extension of the Hwy. 36 lease. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

F. Resolution Regarding Graphic Novels

Discussion: K. LaRocca introduced a resolution regarding graphic novels that depict sexual conduct. This is different from the two previous resolutions that were considered. This resolution is narrower and only applies to graphic novels that depict sexual conduct as recently defined by the Attorney General. K. LaRocca met with Technical Services and they estimated the library has 1,728 titles that are graphic novels. She is only currently aware of five that this resolution would affect. She stated that we will have to review all 1,728 titles to check for sexual conduct as defined in the resolution and Exhibit A. Staff would be assigned to review the titles during their work day.

E. Couvillon recommended proceeding with public comment and then returning to discussion by the Board. The Board agreed.

Public Comment: Diane Bruni – Stated that literature in books form images in your mind. Referenced the book *Oryx and Crake*. Stated that the book references bestiality, rape, and naked children. Stated that it is not appropriate for children or adults and is a pollution of the human spirit. Told the Board that if they are Christian and not standing up to this, shame on them. Stated that God sent her to the meeting to warn that there is a millstone being prepared for people who allow this to go on.

Sonnet Ireland – Stated that Shakespeare, the Bible, classical literature, and Greek mythology have references to bestiality as well. Shared a story of her mother passing away due to cancer and how graphic novels helped her through that loss. Spoke in general about the beauty of finding books you never knew you needed. Stated that visual components such as graphic novels help those most vulnerable, as Louisiana is the 5th state in the country with the lowest literacy rate.

Roxanne Newman – Stated that the determination of obscenity requires that the average person applying contemporary community standards would find that the conduct taken as a whole would appeal to prurient interests, is presented in an offensive way, and lacks literary, political, or scientific value. She asked when staff will have the time to review an additional 1,728 books in their entirety in addition to the 150 challenged books. Stated it is red flagging and is a slippery slope.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Stated that passing the resolution would cause shame for those seeking the books in question. Stated that it appears to be logical and may get the library off the hot seat, but no one should have to ask permission to access the books, as it opens people up to judgement, is unnecessary and harmful.

Erin Kennedy – Spoke of her past experience reading over 500 graphic novels. Stated that the library does abide by obscenity laws. Stated that most graphic novels intended for mature audiences are found on the Hoopla app, which is regulated by Hoopla and has its own rating system. Asked why there are 150 challenged books if there are only 5 items that may be considered obscene.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Stated that she is new to graphic novels because they have been central to this issue. Stated that she has more empathy for those represented in the books. Stated that authors of banned books are thankful that their readership numbers have soared. Stated the graphic novels challenged in our system are already in the adult section and she trusts the librarians to follow the standards that have worked for 50 years.

Joan Simon – Stated that the resolution is an effort to satisfy a group of people who have already stated that they are not satisfied with the resolution. Stated that the St. Tammany Parish Library system is excellent and has done everything necessary to safeguard children from a manufactured, non-existent threat.

Jeri Creson – Stated that the accountability group presents things out of context for shock value to mislead our community. Referenced the book *Beyond Magenta*, noting that Connie Phillips stated in the Statement of Concern that it should be shelved in the adult non-fiction section. J. Creson stated that the book is already shelved in the adult non-fiction section, not the children's section.

Jonathan Varnado – Stated that he agrees that enough is enough and would rather be reading than fighting book bans. Shared a story of how books played a role in his life. Stated that the library was a lifeline for him as a child and while he was deployed in Iraq. Stated that it is ironic that he is now in Madisonville, LA in the United States of America standing up against censorship and radical fundamentalism.

Margie Vicknair-Pray – Stated that she first saw pictures of nude people in National Geographic at the Slidell Library when she was a child, yet National Geographic was never removed from the library. Stated that censorship is about control over others accessing information and is not what the library system is for. Stated that she knows some teenagers who only read graphic

novels. Stated that parents should be in control of what their children learn. Stated that adults and even young adults should have the right to choose what they read.

Camille Thompson – Asked when are we going to do something about protecting children. Stated that there are age restrictions on smoking and getting a driver's license, and there is an appropriate time and age for children to learn about sex. Stated that she would like her tax money to go towards books that teach children about honesty, courage, hard work, perseverance, selflessness, cooperation, generosity, patriotism, self-control, Godliness and virtue.

Fran Smith – Stated that her brother read books like these, he hurt her, and was a pedophile. Stated that the library is a beautiful building that provides porn for young children. Stated she does not see how reading these books helps people. She read the summary for the book *Push*. Stated the book contains themes such as explicit sexual activity, incest, molestation, nudity, frequent profanity, derogatory terms, controversial racial commentary, drug use, and self-harm. Stated that reading things like this hurts your mind and soul.

Kitty Carmody – Stated that she is terribly sorry for the previous speaker's experiences. Regarding the mention of bestiality, she stated that she views it as more of a cautionary story, rather than glorifying bestiality. Stated that some books portray people who have suffered at the hands of a molester. Stated that putting books behind the counter because of sexual content excludes victims who might see themselves in these books and are seeking help. Stated that they are less likely to ask a librarian for a book if it is behind the desk.

Christian Suprean – Stated that he loves everyone here and does not judge anyone. Stated that we have to keep this away from kids. Stated that the author of the book *Gender Queer* writes about masturbating while thinking about his gay-ish relationship. Stated that it is a comic book for kids, not adults, no matter where it is located in the library. Stated that the library should not have pornography and pedophilia.

Jeannene Kogler – Spoke about the book *Living Dead Girl*. Stated the main character was abducted by a pedophile at the age of 10 and he abused her for five years. Asked if this book is one of the books that was pulled from the shelves. K. LaRocca stated that it is currently behind the circulation desk while it is in the challenge process. Stated that the eye acts as a gate to the soul. Stated that a demonic soul tie can take hold, like it did with Fran Smith's brother.

Jean Wiggan – Stated that it is a waste of time moving books behind the counter. Stated that what children can see on a computer is 10 times worse than what is in books in the library. Stated she is opposed to the resolution.

Laura Dinapolis – Stated that she is opposed to the resolution. Stated that it is censorship and an unnecessary burden on the library staff and that there is already a procedure in place to prevent minors from checking out these types of books.

Michelle Gardner – Stated she is a disabled veteran and that there is no expiration date for the oath she took to defend the Constitution. Stated that there is a difference between sexuality and pornography. Stated this is unlawful censorship. Stated she is discouraged by the harsh language and the hatred that is happening. Stated that one book taken off the shelf is not going to save a child, but one book on the shelf might. Stated that her job as a Christian is to love people and apologized for the Christians who have called librarians derogatory names.

Robert Smith – Stated that censorship is not good and that the library is where people learn. Spoke about the graphic novel *Maus*, which is about the Holocaust and is set in a format to allow a for a broader audience. *Maus* was one of the first graphic novels he read. Stated that he takes his kids to the library and they do not peruse the adult shelves. He asked that the Board oppose the resolution.

Arthur Laughlin – Parish Councilman for District 11 in Slidell. Asked how many books have been challenged and what is the time limit on decisions. K. LaRocca stated that 151 titles have been challenged and the Board extended the time to 120 days. She stated we are awaiting legal advice before recommending a decision on the challenged books. A. Laughlin asked if they are out of circulation in the meantime. K. LaRocca clarified that they are not out of circulation, but are located behind the circulation desk. They can be checked out upon request using the appropriate library card. Stated that he went to the library to see the books, but was not able to view them because they were not on the shelf. A. Laughlin stated that there are brave people who are concerned about these books and are being ridiculed for expressing their faith. Stated that great guidance was given by the Attorney General and the District Attorney. He stated that his community would like to participate and create a lay board of diverse citizens to help shoulder the burden.

Maureen O'Brien – Parish Councilwoman for District 10 in Mandeville. Stated she is against anything that has been determined by appropriate authorities to be sexually explicit or lewd being available to children without parental consent. She shared the story of Corrie ten Boom asking her father about sex. The moral of the story is that some knowledge is too heavy for children to carry.

Casey Rushing – Read excerpts of the book *Born on the Bayou* by Blaine Lourd aloud. He asked if the book will be included in the resolution. K. LaRocca stated that *Born on the Bayou* is not a

graphic novel, however it is located behind the circulation desk because a Statement of Concern for that title was submitted on February 20th.

Jan Miner – Read excerpts of the book *Tricks* by Ellen Hopkins aloud. Stated that this book is not part of the resolution.

Cynthia Weatherly – Stated that people are confusing churches with libraries and that this is a place of knowledge and human experience, not a church. Stated that there is already a tiered library card system. Stated it is a parent's personal responsibility to monitor their child's literature. Stated that *Oryx and Crake* was written by Margaret Atwood, one of North America's greatest authors. Noted that Atwood also wrote *The Handmaid's Tale*, which she says is where we are headed if we ban books. Stated that we already have a panel of diverse community members that make up the Library Board of Control.

J. Airey stated that voting for or against an action involving emotional topics such as this will make some people happy and some people upset. He stated that the resolution at hand is narrow and will not affect the vast majority of the graphic novels. He stated that putting the graphic novels with sexual images in a restricted area of the library is a very narrow, reasonable accommodation to some people. He explained that he does not believe that having a book in the adult section of the library that someone finds offensive means that we are endangering kids. He stated that he believes there is a dichotomy between parents being responsible for their kids in the library and moving items that the vast majority of people would say are graphic.

He noted that there have been Statements of Concern submitted on books with full-text that are not graphic novels, and those are not the type of books that are referenced in the resolution. Those books are currently located behind the desk while they are being challenged and are only accessible by adults or minors with parental permission on their library card. He stated he understands people are upset that we are not addressing both the graphic novels and full-text books all at once, but he does not think that is possible. He explained that taking certain passages out of a book that consists of all written words is different in context to the sexual images in graphic novels. He stated that he cannot speak about the full-text novels that were challenged, as he has not read them yet and agrees that they should be read in their entirety before discussing.

J. Airey added that his statements are his views and opinions only and he does not represent President Cooper or the Parish Council. He stated to the Board that he is only one vote and that no one has to vote the same as him just because he is a Council Member. He urged Board members to do what they think is right and what helps the Board and librarians do their jobs. M. Reneau stated that the public library is an institution that is committed to providing information that is needed or asked for by its community. She explained that librarians

understand that there are categories of books – Children, Young Adult (YA), and Adult. If a book is classified as an adult book it is shelved in the adult section. She stated that the library has a tiered library card policy, which allows parents to approve or restrict materials their children check out. If we move materials out of an adult area that has unsupervised children going into a section of the library that is not designed for them and does not have literature for them, we are restricting adults from accessing adult books. Adults will have to ask for permission to check out those restricted adult materials.

M. Reneau agreed that there are books that contain descriptions of things that are inappropriate, but does not think that small children are pulling books with 300-400 pages to see what is inside. She repeated the statement that the Board is considering removing adult books to a restricted area and telling adults they have to ask permission to check the items out.

B. Taylor reiterated that the resolution only applies to graphic novels containing sexual conduct. M. Reneau asked if the graphic novels are categorized. K. LaRocca replied that the Children's graphic novels are in the children's section, YA graphic novels are in the YA section, and Adult graphic novels are in the adult section. M. Reneau asked for clarification that the books are identified as adult graphic novels. K. LaRocca confirmed that they are.

K. LaRocca read the resolution aloud.

Vote: J. Airey moved to adopt the Resolution Regarding Graphic Novels. It was seconded by A. Shaw.

Yeas: J. Airey, C. Butler, A. Shaw, B. Taylor

Nays: M. Reneau

Absent: Dr. A. Morgan

Abstain: None

Motion carried.

G. Director's Report

Discussion: K. LaRocca reported that Maintenance washed all library buildings and sidewalks. M. Natal was the lowest bidder for the renovations at the new Annex building in the Alamosa Business Park. Their contract amount will be \$107,036. The library is working with the Parish Engineering Department and architects on the final plan revision for the outside remodel and repairs at the Covington Branch.

K. LaRocca reported that the library has received 13 public records requests (PRR) since the beginning of November. Seven are currently outstanding. Some have been easy to answer, others have required extensive search of paper and electronic documents. Email searches are done by I.T. but then have to be redacted and reviewed for relevance by the DA's office. As an example, because of the broad nature of the email searches one of the uncompleted public records requests yielded 30,459 emails that are waiting in line to be reviewed/redacted. Library Administration had already planned to hire a part-time file clerk this year, but has decided to make it a full-time position. There was no one particular person responsible for public records requests and we will need this help moving forward.

To date, the library has received 188 Statements of Concern on 151 titles since August 2022. Seven statements were reviewed by staff and two of the books were appealed and decided in December 2022. The status of the remaining Statements of Concern are still pending review. Committees have been formed and staff are reading the books for all statements submitted November 3, 2022 through December 2, 2022. There were 10 committee meetings in January to review books in this group. These committees have not submitted recommendations yet, because they are waiting for legal guidance from the hired attorneys on how to apply the standards outlined in Louisiana Revised Statute 14:191.11.

Staff promoted the Witness to Change grant program and Mardi Gras library events on The Lake and The Highway radio stations. Staff offered outreach services to the following locations and events: Regina Coeli Child Development Center, Kidz Klub House, Kinder Haus Montessori, Riverside Elementary Literacy Night, Lakeshore High School's Career Day, and the St. Tammany Parish School Board's College and Career Expo at the Harbor Center. The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities (LEH) grant program called Currents: Witness to Change is underway. The Knitting Group at the Bush Library is making scarves to send to the D-Day Museum for men and women living in Veterans Homes.

New Reference Librarians: Emily Stephan at the Madisonville Branch and Kellie Nelson at the Covington Branch.

Staff attended the following conferences, meetings, and webinars: Lib Learn X conference in New Orleans, the Commission on Families meeting, Louisiana State Library's Summer Reading Workshop, State Annual Report and Data Entry and Training Update webinar, and the Fourteenth Colony: The Forgotten Story of the Gulf South During America's Revolutionary Era.

Website statistics: December 2022 – 70,858 sessions. 63.37% were new users. January 2023 – 63,654 sessions. 55.37% were new users.

Contracts: SpringShare, LLC for LibCal meeting room calendar, DATA443 Risk Mitigation for ransomware, Daiken Applied for HVAC services, Electronic Protection Systems for security systems at Covington and Slidell branches, Stanley Access Technologies for automatic doors at Covington Branch., Quest Software for Desktop Authority Support, Comprise Technologies for Smart Pay, and BiblioCommons for BiblioCore and BiblioWeb.

K. LaRocca reviewed the January 2023 service statistics.

B. Taylor asked for a brief summary of the remodeling and repairs at the Covington Branch. K. LaRocca explained that the work will consist of installing fencing around the HVAC equipment, repairs to the backflow preventers, improving parking lot accessibility, and updates to the grounds and landscaping.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

3. OLD BUSINESS

A. Strategic Planning Committee

K. LaRocca reported that the Community Advisory Committee met on February 27, 2023 to review reports previously presented to the Board in October and to see the draft of the mission, vision, and goals. Carson Block and Susan Kent will be visiting on March 25, 2023 to present the final draft of the strategic plan for the Board's review.

B. St. Tammany Library Foundation

There was no report from the Foundation.

C. Friends of the Library Report

There was no report from the Friends of the Library.

4. Public Comment

Lisa Rustemeyer – Stated how grateful she is for the library and that the library feels like a safe place. Stated it upsets her to see how other people have been treating public servants. Stated that she is glad that the library is a member of a professional organization like the ALA, just like lawyers, doctors, and accountants are members of their professional organizations.

James Harlan – Stated he was impressed with the quality of the Board. He referenced Exhibit A and the statute used for guidance. He noted that the guidance is based on the standards of an average person, but the people who spoke so vociferously tonight are not representative of the average person. Noted that the Attorney General does not make the law, the legislature does. He stated that Exhibit A should include some of the language in the statute since it is part of the law that Exhibit A refers to.

Laura Dinapolis – Stated that it is a misconception that only conservative Republicans live in St. Tammany Parish. Stated that these are our neighbors and citizens in the community. Stated the following terms that a group has used to describe librarians: evil, sexualizers, degenerates, Neo-Marxists, dysfunctional, simpletons, groomers, pedophiles, and trolls. Stated that she cherishes her librarians and library staff.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by A. Shaw and seconded by M. Reneau. The motion carried.

Handwritten signature of Rebecca Taylor, President.

Mary Reneau, Secretary