

**St. Tammany Parish Library  
Board of Control Meeting  
April 24, 2023  
St. Tammany Parish Council Chambers  
21490 Koop Dr.  
Mandeville, LA 70471  
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, Mary Reneau, Ann Shaw, Becky Taylor

**Absent:** Carmen Butler

Emily Couvillon with the Civil Division of the District Attorney's Office was also present as legal counsel for the library.

B. Taylor explained the rules 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 regular meeting of the Library Board of Control that was held on March 27, 2023 and the special meeting that was held on March 25, 2023.**

**Discussion:** There were no suggested corrections to the minutes of the March 27, 2023 regular meeting.

**Public Comment:** There was no public comment.

**Vote:** M. Reneau moved to approve the minutes. It was seconded by A. Shaw. Roll call vote:

Airey – *Yes*   Butler – *Absent*   Reneau – *Yes*   Shaw – *Yes*   Taylor – *Yes*

Motion carried.

**Discussion:** There were no suggested corrections to the minutes of the March 25, 2023 special meeting.

**Public Comment:** There was no public comment.

**Vote:** A. Shaw moved to approve the minutes. It was seconded by M. Reneau. Roll call vote:

Airey – *Yes*   Butler – *Absent*   Reneau – *Yes*   Shaw – *Yes*   Taylor – *Yes*

Motion carried.

## 2. NEW BUSINESS

### A. Financial Reports – March 2023

**Discussion:** K. LaRocca reported that the library received another portion of ad valorem funding on March 30, 2023. We have received 96.8% of what was budgeted for the year. The next portion of State Revenue Sharing should be received this summer. The budget percentage for this point in the year should be 25%. Revenues are at 25.13% and expenditures are at 27.43%. K. LaRocca reviewed the revenues and expenditures and gave explanations for lines that were over or under budget. Most of the lines that are over budget are paid early in the year and will be in balance by December 2023.

The Publication of Legal Notices line continues to be over budget due to longer board meeting minutes that are published in the St. Tammany Farmer. The Office Machine and Equipment Repair line is over budget due to repairs to a disc cleaning machine. Some insurance and claims lines are over budget because they are paid early in the year. The Library Property Insurance line is at zero because we have not yet received the bill from the Parish. The Library In-service Training and Juvenile Programming lines are over budget due to purchasing Ozobots and Ozobot training. Those funds will be reimbursed by the Library Foundation.

#### **Public Comment:**

Kevin Marino – Mandeville, LA. Spoke of the cost of working on the amount of Statements of Concern that have been filed. Stated that he emailed the Board suggesting that they quantify the amount of time and money spent on the process by gathering data to show the amount of time and resources that are wasted on the process.

Johanna Miner – Asked if all the information the Board is referring to is on the website. K. LaRocca confirmed that the Board packet is posted on the website. J. Miner stated that the library continues to allow pedophilia and pornography in the children's and teen sections of the library. Stated that her group represents 99% of St. Tammany Parish and they will continue to fight.

**Vote:** A. Shaw moved to approve the March 2023 Financial Reports. It was seconded by M. Reneau. Roll call vote:

Airey – *Yes*   Butler – *Absent*   Reneau – *Yes*   Shaw – *Yes*   Taylor – *Yes*

Motion carried.



## B. Director's Report

**Discussion:** K. LaRocca reported that the Parish Procurement Department opened the quotes for the South Slidell roof replacement project. We are waiting to hear which roofing company received the contract. The Maintenance Department moved out of the Annex building on Highway 36. They are working out of a small satellite office at the Slidell Branch and out of their trucks. Work at the new Annex building on Commercial Way has begun. Lockstep Technology Group performed an internal penetration test on our data security and commended the I.T. Department for its work to maintain a secure environment. They offered a few recommendations that the I.T. Department will be implementing.

Staff offered outreach and promoted the library to the following organizations and events: Northshore Food Bank, Kiwanis of Greater Covington's Youth Wellness Fair, The Lake and The Highway radio stations, St. Tammany Commission on Families, and Junior League's Girls Health Day at Lakeview Hospital. Children's librarians performed Storytime at the following schools: Fontainebleau Children's Academy, Kidz Klubhouse, and Kinder Haus Montessori. Reference librarians offered the following outreach classes: Northshore Leadership Senior-to-Senior Tech Help at the Slidell COAST Center, Tech Talk orientation for Seniors at Northshore High School, and Tech Time at the Abita Springs Branch. Byron Holdiman, Genealogy Librarian, held the following genealogy programs: French Influence and Genealogy Time at various branches.

The library is promoting Food for Fines in celebration of National Library Week. One dollar will be waived from library fees for every nonperishable food item donated. The food will be donated to the Northshore Food Bank, the Samaritan Center, and First Baptist Church of Slidell. Staff attended the Summer Reading Challenge Workshop, various committee meetings, training sessions, and webinars.

The library's yearly audit is complete with no findings reported. This is the first year that entities in St. Tammany Parish are part of the state-wide agreed-upon procedures. We have previously been tested in two or three categories, but now are tested in all categories at the same time.

We have received 19 public records requests since the beginning of November 2022 and eight of those requests are currently outstanding. The requests consist of extensive email searches that are in line for redaction. A combination of electronic and paper documents will need to be sorted and organized to ensure completeness of the records.

To date, the library has received 203 Statements of Concern on 163 titles since August 2022. Library staff continue to read titles, hold meetings, and make recommendations. The remaining

Statements of Concern are still pending review. The Board will be deciding on four more titles at the next board meeting on May 22, 2023.

Renewed contracts: Uniti phone services, Bibliocommons BiblioSuggest for patron suggestions on our website, SHI cyber security and Solar Winds ticket system renewal, Transformyx for cloud security, New York Times Online, and New England Historic Genealogical Society Membership.

K. LaRocca reviewed the March 2023 and year-to-date service statistics. K. LaRocca noted the State Library Report statistics from 2022. B. Taylor asked about the number of library branches and support locations. K. LaRocca responded that there are 12 library branches, which consists of six small branches and six large branches located throughout St. Tammany Parish. Large branches have longer hours and are open 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Small branches are open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. They are open on Wednesdays from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. K. LaRocca stated that there are also two support locations, which are the Annex and the Administration building. The Annex houses the Technical Services and Maintenance Departments. The Administration building houses various departments of library administration.

B. Taylor asked about the number of public service hours for last year. K. LaRocca stated that there were 30,200 public service hours for 2022. B. Taylor asked how many full-time and part-time staff are employed. K. LaRocca stated there are 150 staff members; 108 are full-time and 42 are part-time. B. Taylor asked if the library system is responsible for the insurance, utilities, and maintenance of all library buildings. K. LaRocca confirmed that though the library does not own the buildings, we are responsible for all of the costs to operate the library. B. Taylor noted that St. Tammany Parish Library is one of the top six library systems in the state by size.

A. Shaw asked if all positions are filled. B. Geiger responded that there are two open full-time positions and four part-time positions. T. DiMaggio stated that all librarian positions are filled.

**Public Comment:** There was no public comment.

### **C. Rules and Regulations Update – Section 407 Challenged Materials**

T. DiMaggio reviewed the update to Section 407 Challenged Materials in the Rules and Regulations manual. The Board was provided copies of the original, revised, and final policy. Due to the number of multiple Statements of Concern that are submitted on one title, the Rules and Regulations committee researched other libraries and found that it is not uncommon to have time limitations set for how often a single title can be challenged within a certain period of time.



The committee revised the section to introduce a time limit on any new Statement of Concern for a specific title, program, or display topic after the Board makes a decision concerning that title, program, or display. The revision is as follows: "The decision on a Statement of Concern about specific materials, programs, or displays will remain in effect for five years. Within this five-year period, complainants submitting a new Statement of Concern on a decided title, program, or display shall receive a copy of the Board's current decision."

**Public Comment:**

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. Agreed with the revision of Section 407. Asked for the policy to be amended to remove the requirement that books will be kept behind the circulation desk during the challenge process. Stated it is a violation of the First Amendment and is known as red flagging.

Rachel Rhodes – Mandeville, LA. Thanked the Board. Agreed with the revision of Section 407. Read her transgender daughter's speech aloud. Stated that removing books based on their content is a violation of freedom of speech and is a dangerous step towards creating a society based on ignorance and fear. Spoke of transphobia, homophobia, and history repeating itself.

Candice Mallard – Stated that five years is a long time and wishes the Board would reconsider the time limit. Stated that books that sexualize, groom, and steal children's innocence are there to entice them into perversions. Stated it is more dangerous than filling the children's section with razor blades, needles and knives. Accused the Director and Board of subverting parents' decisions, indoctrinating children, normalizing, and promoting alternative lifestyles.

Kevin Marino – Mandeville, LA. Gave a copy of proposed policy changes to the Board and library administration. Stated that challenged materials should stay on the shelves. Spoke about First Amendment violations. Suggested creating a monetary fee for filing excess amounts of Statements of Concern. Stated that the group is abusing the system.

Rebecca Steele – Folsom, LA. Stated that she grew up not represented and feels that positive representation saves lives. Stated that parents can end up harming their children by not giving them the chance to be who they are, which could cause children to take their own lives. Stated that requiring a parent to give access to certain books is not the best way because many of the parents do not find it acceptable.

Julie Vitrano – Mandeville, LA. Stated she is disappointed in the library's decision to keep books featuring radical gender ideology on the shelves. Stated it is purposeful targeting of children with an ideology based on fantasy and deception that targets developing minds. Mentioned the following titles specifically: *I Am Jazz*, *Julian Is a Mermaid*, *My Rainbow*, and *When Aiden*

*Became a Brother*. Stated she does not want her tax dollars going towards a blatant political movement.

Lawrence de Quay – Slidell, LA. Stated he consulted with an attorney with expertise in constitutional law and it is a violation of the First Amendment to remove the books from the shelves. Stated that it does not matter who is in the majority, as the Bill of Rights was put in the Constitution to protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority. Stated that books such as *Sex Is a Funny Word* could help children understand the signs of sexual abuse.

Bonnie Schmidt – Slidell, LA. Concerned with books being taken off the shelves during the review process. Stated she went to the library to find the challenged books and they were on a cart that was rolled out from the back. Asked the Board to amend the rules to place the books back on the shelves until the decision process is complete.

Kim Turner – Mandeville, LA. Spoke about the cost of meetings, resources, and reviews of materials. Suggested that the completed statements should be hand-written to eliminate repeated copying and pasting of complaints. Mentioned the cost of having four police detail officers at the board meeting and noted the metal detector. Stated that if the person who challenges the book cannot be present, the submission should be considered withdrawn.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Supports the changes to Section 407, but said it needs more work. Stated that whether or not the book was patron-requested should be taken into consideration. Stated that the Accountability Project is causing delays in other library business and has cost time and money. Opposes taking books off the shelves.

Erin Kennedy – Folsom, LA. Stated that this is a moral panic fueled by misinformation and preying on our instinct to protect ourselves from the “other,” which in this case is queer people. Spoke of those who were killed because they were accused of being witches in Salem and other examples of panic throughout history. Stated that children’s input is valuable and suggested that parents ask their children what they are currently reading.

Gary Lacoste – Abita Springs, LA. Stated his concern for the content in certain books, such as illustrations that are sexual. Stated that the books should not be on the shelves for children to see. Stated he does not want to ban them or burn them, just wants them in an appropriate area.

**Discussion:** There was no discussion by the Board.

**Vote:** M. Reneau moved to approve the changes made to Section 407 of the Rules and Regulations manual. It was seconded by A. Shaw. Roll call vote:



Airey – *Yes* Butler – *Absent* Reneau – *Yes* Shaw – *Yes* Taylor – *Yes*  
Motion carried.

#### **D. Rules and Regulations Update – Section 205 Materials Display**

T. DiMaggio reviewed the update to Section 205 Materials Display. The Board was provided copies of the original, revised, and final policy. She explained that the purpose of the revision is to clarify who is responsible for creating displays in the branch, the purpose of displays created by library staff, and guidelines for staff to use when creating displays. T. DiMaggio read the final policy aloud.

#### **Public Comment:**

Erin Kennedy – Folsom, LA. Referenced a comment made at a previous meeting from a representative of Slidell who suggested creating a communal Board who could screen books for displays. Stated that library staff are best qualified for such screening, as they are familiar with maintaining the shelves, collections, assessing items for disrepair, and general everyday handling of library materials.

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. Expressed concern with displays reflecting “all viewpoints on a given subject where appropriate.” Stated that it could lead to the inclusion of Mein Kampf in a Holocaust remembrance display or books about the alleged benefits of slavery during Black History month. Stated there has to be objective criteria to determine what materials are included or excluded. Stated she trusts the current staff and library leadership, but is concerned about the long-term endurance of the policy with future staff and leadership.

Nadia Slisarenko – Covington, LA. Asked that the Board revise the statement about “striving to include a wide spectrum of opinions and viewpoints” for displays. Stated the statement favors opinion over fact and could be inadvertently or intentionally misused. Stated that the statement “all viewpoints on a given subject where appropriate” is vague and open to misuse.

Johanna Miner – Stated that she asked the library in June 2022 about displays and how they were chosen, but was never answered. Referenced the displays being chosen by staff and asked if the staff are young or old. Stated she is not asking for banning or censoring, and this is not about transgender or LGBTQIA people. Stated it is about protecting the innocence of children. Stated transgender books should not be on display in the children’s, teen, or young adult sections.

Jamie Segura – Covington, LA. Stated that a display during Pride Month started this disaster. Requested the discontinuation of all displays at every library for all holidays and dates of

historical or religious events. Suggested only having displays to promote what is in the library. Spoke of the separation of church and state in the First Amendment.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Abita Springs, LA. Stated that displays are a compelling hook that grabs patrons passing by them in the library. Stated her concern with how hard it is to accommodate everyone and called it a slippery slope.

Kevin Marino – Mandeville, LA. Supports the changes to the section, but is concerned about the “all viewpoints” statement as well. Stated he agrees with the previous comments and thinks it should be removed. Stated that people are concerned about their children seeing certain books, but the library already has a policy that states children nine and under need to be accompanied by an adult. Spoke of the mental health of LGBTQ teens and access to resources for that are crucial.

**Discussion:** J. Airey stated that he likes the first part of the policy that states the procedure for approving displays, but the remainder of the policy has some repeated language. K. LaRocca noted that the Rules and Regulations Manual is a “living” document that is updated frequently and changes can be made as needed. M. Reneau stated that feelings or comments about some subjects may spur hatred. She stated that if the comments or viewpoints reflect an attitude of hatred, injustice, or intolerance, she would consider those attitudes not appropriate. She added that comments on that subject should not be part of the display. A. Shaw asked about displays of new materials. K. LaRocca explained that new material displays are not curated in any way and are just newly purchased items. One third of new books are patron-requested. There was discussion about new book displays in large and small branches.

**Vote:** M. Reneau moved to table the update to Section 205 Materials Display to a future meeting to allow more time for consideration. It was seconded by A. Shaw. Roll call vote:

Airey – *Yes* Butler – *Absent* Reneau – *Yes* Shaw – *Yes* Taylor – *Yes*

Motion carried.

### **E. Adoption of the Strategic Plan**

K. LaRocca reviewed the final draft of the strategic plan for the Board’s consideration of adoption. The draft includes the library’s first strategic plan, new mission and vision statements, and goals. The process of drafting the plan was estimated to take six to nine months, but due to COVID-19, Hurricane Ida, and the rise of concerns surrounding library resources, the process has taken two years.

The goals, mission, and vision came from stakeholder engagement and were adjusted based on feedback from the Board and Strategic Planning Committee. K. LaRocca stated that these goals



are purposefully broad, as we are working in and adapting to tumultuous times. The plan is more of a GPS rather than a road map. If adopted, library staff will work on yearly action plans that will help us achieve the goals and allow us to adapt to the environment as necessary. The action plans will consist of all the information gathered during the process. Information was gathered from over 35 focus groups as well as surveys completed by staff, the Library Board, and the community. K. LaRocca thanked the staff who led the focus groups.

**Public Comment:**

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Stated she is excited for the strategic plan to come to fruition. Appreciates outreach services that have been offered and is looking forward to the expansion of those services. Enjoyed the Harp concert at the Covington Branch recently.

**Discussion:** B. Taylor thanked the staff for conducting the focus group sessions, which provided helpful feedback for the consultants to develop a plan to help guide us through the next five years. The consultants also conducted 16 one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders in the community. She stated that this is the first strategic plan that St. Tammany Parish Library has had and she looks forward to wonderful things for the future.

M. Reneau stated that the plan is very comprehensive and is an enhancement for all of the residents of the community. Stated that the public library is designed to meet the needs of every member of the community with resources made available to them.

**Vote:** A. Shaw moved to approve the adoption of the strategic plan. It was seconded by M. Reneau. Roll call vote:

Airey – *Yes* Butler – *Absent* Reneau – *Yes* Shaw – *Yes* Taylor – *Yes*  
Motion carried.

**F. Resolution regarding maintaining the current millage rate for 2024**

**Discussion:** K. LaRocca reported that the Parish Council sets the library’s millage rate each year and we must notify the Parish Government Finance Office by May 5, 2023 of our request for the millage rate for 2023. The St. Tammany Parish Library ad valorem levy is 5.78 mils with a legal maximum of 6.07 mils. This levy was authorized by voters from 2010 through 2024. K. LaRocca explained that the library has not taken the legal maximum over the last four years. Because we have not rolled up to the maximum allowable millage and 2024 is a reassessment year, our millage and maximum millage rates will be adjusted downwards. When reassessments happen in 2024, a new lower legal maximum will be set for the library’s levy so that we will not unduly benefit from the rise in assessments. K. LaRocca noted that the bonds for the Madisonville

Branch will be paid off at the end of 2024. K. LaRocca is recommending that we request to maintain the current millage rate for 2023.

**Public Comment:**

Johanna Miner – Stated she does not feel the library’s millage will be renewed in 2024. Stated that it was “cowardice” for Connie Phillips to be called out at the previous board meeting. Stated that the books that were returned to the shelves last month were all challenged by other residents of the community last year. Quoted a Bible verse. B. Taylor advised J. Miner that her comments do not pertain to the current agenda item. J. Miner called the Board high and mighty politicians who know nothing about God’s justice. B. Taylor again advised J. Miner that her comments did not pertain to the current agenda item. J. Miner continued speaking after being advised twice, therefore her public comment period was ended.

Joan Simon – Covington, LA. Stated that the library is a wonderful institution and she supports maintaining the current millage. Spoke of people who want to destroy the library and noted that it is a national movement fueled by political interests. Thanked the Board for their efforts over the last year.

B. Taylor read the resolution aloud.

**Vote:** M. Reneau moved to approve the resolution to request maintaining the current millage rate. It was seconded by A. Shaw. Roll call vote:

Airey – *Yes* Butler – *Absent* Reneau – *Yes* Shaw – *Yes* Taylor – *Yes*  
Motion carried.

**3. OLD BUSINESS**

**A. Strategic Planning Committee Update**

K. LaRocca reported that since the Board has adopted the strategic plan, staff will be working on training for action planning as soon as Wednesday, April 26, 2023.

**B. Rules and Regulations Committee Update**

K. LaRocca reported that the committee met on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup>. Policies reviewed were Section 407 Challenged Materials, Section 205 Materials Display, and Section 111 of the Board’s by-laws, which includes Quorum, Rules of Order, and enactments. For Section 111, the committee is codifying how public comments are handled at meetings. The next committee



meeting is May 16<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. at the Covington Branch. They will be discussing Section 205 Materials Display again, Section 111, and will review financial policies.

### **C. Library Foundation Update**

K. LaRocca reported that the Distinguished Speaker event is on April 26<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. at the Beau Chene Country Club. Emilie Rhys, author of *New Orleans Music Observed: The Art of Noel Rockmore and Emilie Rhys*, will be the speaker.

### **D. Friends of the Library Updates**

There is no Friends of the Library report.

### **4. Public Comment**

Laura Dinapolis – Covington, LA. Stated it is ironic that people are saying that this conflict is not about religion, yet previous speakers said that “God is watching” and God has a millstone for us. Stated that our job as parents is to make sure our kids grow up in a family where they are comfortable being who they are.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Abita Springs, LA. Spoke about putting in an interlibrary loan request on Wednesday at the Abita Springs Branch, and she was very happy that it arrived so quickly on Friday.

Sonnet Ireland – Slidell, LA. Thanked the Board and encouraged them and library staff to persevere. Spoke of the Lafayette library which lost funding and is in a sad state of being at this time. Urged the Board not to give up hope or to be disheartened. Stated that the public is here and supports them.

### **5. Adjournment**

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by J. Airey and seconded by M. Reneau. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

  
Rebecca Taylor, President

Mary Reneau, Secretary