

St. Tammany Parish Library  
Board of Control Meeting  
January 24, 2023  
Slidell Branch Library  
555 Robert Blvd.  
Slidell, LA 70458  
6:30 P.M.

**MINUTES**

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

Present: Carmen Butler, Mary Reneau, Ann Shaw, Becky Taylor  
Absent: Bill Allin, Dr. Argiro Morgan, Susie Tosso

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 on an item on the agenda. B. Taylor stated that proper decorum is expected of all meeting attendees, asked that attendees refrain from applause, and asked attendees not to interrupt speakers or reports.

**1. Approval of the minutes of the meeting of the Library Board of Control that was held on December 13, 2022 and the special board meeting on January 3, 2023**

**Discussion:** December 13, 2022 minutes - B. Taylor asked for an addition on page 10, section J. Statement of Concern Appeal – *My Rainbow*. She asked to add that the patron who submitted the Statement of Concern, Diane Bruni, was offered five minutes for public comment. D. Bruni did not appear for public comment. B. Taylor asked for a correction on page 13 under Raven Creech's public comment. In the first sentence, the word "cannot" should be replaced with the word "could".

M. Reneau moved to approve the minutes of the December 13, 2022 meeting with the stated corrections. It was seconded by A. Shaw. All were in favor, none were opposed, and three were absent. Motion carried.

January 3, 2023 minutes – M. Reneau asked for a correction on page one under the roll call. She is listed as both present and absent under the roll call. Ann Shaw should be listed as absent and Mary Reneau as present.

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

**Vote:** C. Butler moved to approve the January 3, 2023 special meeting minutes with the stated correction. It was seconded by M. Reneau. All were in favor, none were opposed, and three were absent. Motion carried.

## **2. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Financial Reports – December 2022**

**Discussion:** K. LaRocca reported that no new funds were received in December 2022. The library received all expected Ad Valorem and State Revenue Sharing funds for the year. Revenues are at 100.32% and Expenditures are at 97.31%. The library remained within budget for the year.

K. LaRocca explained that the Library Salaries line is at 96.35% due to the payment date of the final payroll of 2022 falling in 2023. The line will be in balance when the auditor moves those funds to 2022 during the annual audit in March. The Publication of Legal Notices line continues to be over budget due to longer library board meetings and board meeting minutes which are published in the St. Tammany Farmer. The Fuel and Lube, Electricity, and Water lines were over budget due to paying bills in December that were due in January. The Office Supplies, Book Preparation Supplies, and Computer/Printer Supplies lines are over budget due to the increasing costs of supplies. The Capital Outlay-Library Resource Acquisitions line is under budget at 99%.

**Public Comment:**

Donna Bonnoitt – Stated she has been paying property taxes in St. Tammany Parish for 35 years. Stated that the Money Hill Fire District has just enough money to send one firefighter to a fire, yet the library has \$11,000,000 to \$14,000,000. Stated that the library is using that money to groom children in the Parish. Stated that the ALA (American Library Association) is running the library and that Kelly LaRocca has been in contact with the ALA since June. Stated that the library has reported people who have challenged books to the ALA and accused the library of doxing her.

**Vote –** A. Shaw moved to approve the December 2022 Financial Reports. It was seconded by M. Reneau. All were in favor, none were opposed, and three were absent. Motion carried.



## **B. RFP for a Classification and Compensation Study**

**Discussion:** Brent Geiger reviewed the final draft of the RFP (Request for Proposal) that was presented to the Board in September 2022. The library is asking for a company to review job descriptions, classifications, and compensation levels of other libraries as compared to ours. The RFP was sent for legal review and adjustments were made based on that review.

B. Taylor asked B. Geiger to explain what this study will do for the library. B. Geiger explained that staff would have updated job descriptions, additional job descriptions, and the compensation study would adjust the current range and step chart that is used to calculate compensation. M. Reneau asked if the comparison study will be local or national. B. Geiger confirmed that it would be local libraries and government agencies. M. Reneau asked how the RFP will be advertised. B. Geiger stated that it will be published in the newspaper and on the library's website.

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

**Vote:** A. Shaw moved to approve the RFP for a Classification and Compensation Study. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and three were absent. Motion carried.

## **C. Resolution regarding legal counsel for La R.S. 14:91:11**

**Discussion:** B. Taylor stated that the Board approved a similar resolution in 2022. The Attorney General's Office requires a different format for the resolution with additional information. B. Taylor explained that there have been allegations that the library has violated La R.S. 14:91:11. The St. Tammany Parish District Attorney, Warren Montgomery, has recused himself from providing legal advice on this issue, which requires that the Board seek special legal counsel regarding the allegations so that they can adequately respond to statements of concern and make any necessary adjustments to policy and procedure. B. Taylor read the resolution aloud.

### **Public Comment:**

Fran Smith – Asked why there is a need for legal counsel if the library has not done anything wrong. Stated that the citizens are paying for this and the majority of the citizens do not agree with what the library is doing. There was verbal disruption from the public in attendance. B. Taylor called the meeting back to order. F. Smith stated that her grandson visited the library. She told him to be sure to show the book that he checked out to his parents. There was more verbal disruption from the public in attendance. B. Taylor gave a final warning and called the meeting back to order. F. Smith stated that she never thought she would have to protect her children from the library.

M. Reneau asked the public in attendance to be considerate and respectful. She stated that everyone has the right to express their opinion.

Emmett Johnson, Sr. – Stated that he has never seen so much hate before. Stated that he does not want books banned, just locked up where children cannot access them. He compared it to *Playboy* magazine being kept behind the desk at stores. Stated it is not about homosexuality. Stated that sex should not be important in a child's life. Stated that if a tornado were to hit, everyone would be helping each other, but instead everyone has anger in their hearts.

Sonnet Ireland – Stated that the reason the library has to pay for a lawyer is because the District Attorney recused himself. Stated that legal counsel is necessary and vital in protecting the library and the Parish from lawsuits. Stated that she prefers her tax dollars to be spent on preventative consultations rather than on lengthy court battles. Commended the Library Director, the Board and staff for their professionalism and integrity when under attack.

Donna Bonnoitt – Stated that Kelly LaRocca has been in contact with legal counsel for the ALA. Stated she was verbally attacked by Cynthia Weatherly and Bill Allin after the December library board meeting and reported it to police. Stated that the police report showed that they both have the same attorney, Buddy Spell, and asked if the library is paying for C. Weatherly's legal aid. Stated that she does not trust any of the Board or Library Administration and wants them all gone. Stated that she will do her best to defund as much of the library as possible.

Jamie Segura – Asked what is the premise or reason for the District Attorney recusing himself.

Rebecca Bohm – Stated that it is a shame that the library has to get a lawyer to protect books that are not pornography. Stated that because of today's society, children need to know about sex at a younger age and should be able to read about it. Thanked the Board for their efforts.

Roxanne Newman – Stated how disingenuous it is for D. Bonnoitt to question the need for legal counsel. Stated that the Board has been put in this position by the very people who have accused the Board and library staff of unspeakable things. She stated that the Board and Library Administration are acting within the scope of their employment. The Parish has a duty to defend the library. The library has no choice but to defend itself and the Parish has a duty to pay for it.

Emily Couvillon answered questions that were asked during public comment. Regarding J. Segura's question about the District Attorney (DA) recusing himself, E. Couvillon explained that she is the Assistant District Attorney for St. Tammany Parish. The DA's Office serves as legal counsel for the library, as the DA is the legal counsel for Boards and Commissions in St. Tammany Parish, as well as Parish Government. She stated that the DA's Office is continuing to



serve in that capacity for all issues except for the limited issue of the allegations that certain books in the library's collection violate La R.S. 14:91:11. The DA has recused himself from that issue alone because the DA is the person who receives criminal complaints that are raised. In order to prevent a conflict of interest, the DA has recused himself and advised the Library Board to seek special counsel for that limited purpose. In reference to D. Bonnoitt's question about legal counsel for the library, E. Couvillon stated that the special counsel referenced in the resolution is Smith & Fawer, LLC, not Buddy Spell.

**Vote:** C. Butler moved to approve the resolution to retain special counsel. It was seconded by M. Reneau. All were in favor, none were opposed, and three were absent. Motion carried.

#### **D. Director's Report**

**Discussion:** K. LaRocca reported that internet fiber has been installed at the new Technical Services, Maintenance, and I.T. building. The build-out on the second floor of the building is almost complete, including A/C for the server room. The pre-quote meeting for the first-floor renovation of the building was on January 19<sup>th</sup>. The quotes will be opened by the Parish's Procurement Office on February 7<sup>th</sup>. New gutters were installed at the Bush Branch.

Advertising was purchased to promote LibraryCon. Children's librarians and small branch managers offered outreach services to Lacombe-Mandeville Headstart, Chahta-Ima Elementary School, A-Z Preschool, 1<sup>st</sup> Class Academy, Abney Elementary, Southern Magnolia Montessori School, Kidz Klub House, Kinder Haus Montessori, and the Northshore Behavioral Center. Staff attended the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration at the Greater Covington Center and offered a craft activity for children. Staff provided outreach to the Council on Aging St. Tammany in Folsom.

Jacquelyn Riecke is the new Public Relations and Community Coordinator. Staff attended Ozobot Training, a St. Tammany Commission on Families meeting, Northshore Non-Profit Round-Up, and the Library Foundation meeting.

Santa Claus visited all six large branches as well as Abita Springs, Lee Road, Bush, and Folsom in December. Storytime began the week of January 9<sup>th</sup>. The popular LibraryCon program returned after a two-year hiatus on January 14<sup>th</sup>. 350 people attended including children, teens, and adults. Byron Holdiman, Genealogy Librarian at the Covington Branch, held a new program on January 19<sup>th</sup> called DNA for Genealogy: Basics. Current teen programs include Study Hall, Volunteer days, Teen Volunteer Council meetings, and Home School Hangout. Several staff attended virtual webinars.

Two new databases were added in January: National Geographic – People Animal World Subscription 1888 – current and MyHeritage Library Edition. Contract renewals include: Advantage Fire Specialists, Innovative ArcServ, Innovative Maintenance and Licenses, Polaris Syndetics, Sage 50C, Transformyx Cisco AMP, Transformyx Proofpoint, Quest KACE Desktop Authority Management Suite, and Zoobean, Inc. reading program. New contracts: Transformyx Network Penetration Test (State contract).

There has been a total of 193 Statements of Concern on 150 titles submitted. Staff have volunteered to serve on committees and have been assigned books. Committee members have been reading their assigned books and committee meetings are in the process of being scheduled.

K. LaRocca referenced the statistics for December 2022 and the 2022 service statistics. Total circulation for 2022 was 967,327. That is an increase of 78,000 from 2021. A total of 607,420 items were physical items and 359,907 were virtual items. Total door count was 541,040. Total computer usage was 92,385. Total amount of children, teen, and adult programs were 2,205 with a total of 44,012 people in attendance. The branch wireless internet inside total was 85,603 and the wireless outside total was 86,233. B. Taylor commented how wonderful and significant it is that over ½ million people walked into our library branches last year.

**Public Comment:**

Gnanse Nelson – Stated that the Board, Kelly LaRocca, and library staff have done a wonderful and extraordinary job. Stated that she wants to publicly state how appreciative she is for the services the library provides. Stated she hopes that they continue working as they have done to protect citizens' 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment rights.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Complimented the staff at the Abita Springs Branch. Stated that Kay Redd is wonderful and welcomes the entire community into the library. Stated that Kay still asks her about all of the teachers who frequented the library while R. Terry Sipos coordinated the homebound program for the school district.

Roxanne Newman – Thanked the Board and library staff for everything they do. Stated that Kelly LaRocca is very passionate about her work and it shows. Stated that she realizes that everyone's jobs have gotten harder during this situation. Stated that she appreciates them and their efforts to keep the library a place for all people to access.



### **3. OLD BUSINESS**

#### **A. Strategic Planning Committee Update**

K. LaRocca stated that the report has not changed since the last report in December. Consultants Carson Block and Susan Kent are ready to present a draft of the goals and a new mission and vision statement. The presentation is on hold for a short time until the Board and Library Administration can give strategic planning the time and attention needed to complete the process. The plan is to have the consultants visit in-person again sometime in March.

#### **B. Rules and Regulations Committee Update**

K. LaRocca reported that the committee has not met since the last update. The next meeting is not scheduled yet. When the next meeting is scheduled, the date and time will be posted on the website and the door of the branch where the meeting will take place.

### **4. Public Comment**

Ruth Terry Sipos – Stated how much she appreciates the Board. Stated that this has turned into a tough situation. Thanked the Board for being kind and for helping to navigate this tough time. Stated that the Board has her full support.

Catalina Reyna – Stated that the numbers from 2022 are very enthusiastic. Stated that the situation with the books that have been challenged are minute in comparison to the wonderful job the library does. Stated that out of the 967,327 items circulated in 2022, the 150 challenged books only represent .015% of those items. Stated that there is a lot of misinformation spreading that is based on fear.

Jamie Segura – Reiterated her opposition to taking books out of circulation even while challenged. Stated that it is censorship, banning, and against the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment. Stated there is no evidence that any of these books cause harm to any child. Stated that librarians are not babysitters. Stated that there may be many books that a child should not see until they are old enough to understand, but it is the parent's job to oversee that.

B. Taylor clarified to J. Segura that the library has not taken the challenged books out of circulation. They have been temporarily placed behind the circulation desk and are available for checkout with an appropriate library card.

Kitty Carmody – Stated that she is also a taxpayer. Congratulated Kelly LaRocca and the staff for the fantastic circulation statistics for 2022. Stated that she is anti-censorship. Stated that there are very few people submitting the statements of concern, and there is no way they are reading all of the books at the rate they are submitting them. Stated that the books should be read in their entirety.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Agreed that the entire book should be read before submitting a challenge. Stated that public records requests show that one complainant submitted 37 statements of concern in one day. Stated that the same complainant has challenged over 80 titles in total, which is more than 50% of the 150 challenges. Stated that the content of the statements of concern were copied and pasted from one statement to another and from Booklooks.org, which is a book reviewer that aims to censor books according to their values.

Johanna Miner – Stated that all board members are not present and that they must be embarrassed by this situation. Stated that this is not about the LGBTQIA+ community, it is about protecting children. Stated that Mary Reneau asked about the rights of adults at the meeting on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. Stated that it is about protecting innocent children from looking at filth and pornography. Stated that the Board, Library Director, and Assistant Directors need to be removed. She asked B. Geiger what his salary is. He stated that she can submit a public records request for salary information.

Rosemary Manint – Stated that we would have to keep children in a bubble to protect them from things that hurt children. Stated that the library has nothing to do with hurting children. Stated that an unnecessary problem has been created. Stated that it is very disheartening to listen to all of this and she is sorry that the library has to go through this. Stated that it is politics, fear, discrimination, and hate driving the situation.

## 5. Adjournment

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

  
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Mary Reneau, Secretary