

**St. Tammany Parish Library
Board of Control Meeting
August 25, 2025
St. Tammany Parish Council Chambers
21490 Koop Dr.,
Mandeville, LA 70471
6:30 P.M.**

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Charles (Chuck) Branton, Board President. Kelly LaRocca, Director, called the roll and declared that a quorum was present.

Present (6): Glenn Baham, Chuck Branton, Parish President Mike Cooper, Tamarah Myers, Dinah Thanars, Travis Thompson

Absent (0): None

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

T. Thompson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. Branton explained the meeting rules and the rules for public comment. He noted that a comment card was submitted for Agenda Item 1, a presentation honoring former Board members, and asked E. Couvillon to address the matter. E. Couvillon explained that public comment is only required when a Board vote is involved, per Louisiana's Open Meetings law. There is no public comment period for presentations.

1. Presentation – Thank you for service to the LBOC

C. Branton and K. LaRocca expressed gratitude and appreciation for the privilege of working with Ann Shaw and Jill Kesler during their time on the Board. A. Shaw and J. Kesler were not in attendance; library staff will ensure they receive their plaques in gratitude for their service. K. LaRocca also took a moment to acknowledge former Library Director Donald Westmoreland, who was laid to rest earlier that day.

2. Approval of the minutes of the meeting of the Library Board of Control that was held on July 28, 2025.

MOTION: T. Myers moved to approve the minutes of the July 28, 2025, LBOC meeting. It was seconded by G. Baham.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Lisa Rustemeyer – She stated that she did not raise the topic of book challenges at the previous meeting, but instead mentioned books that are currently censored in schools that are attended by military families. She asked the Board why the proclamation from the previous meeting was not on the agenda.

Sonnet Ireland – Regarding a question about her place of work, she stated that she would like it added to the record that her public comment at the previous meeting was given as a resident, taxpayer, and voter, as she attends the LBOC meetings on her personal time, and does not represent anyone but herself.

DISCUSSION: T. Myers asked how many Young Adult (YA) books are left to be reviewed. T. DiMaggio answered that there are 2,793 titles remaining, which is 30% of the YA collection.

M. Cooper congratulated board members who were voted in as officers at the previous board meeting.

VOTE: Baham: Yes Cooper: Yes Myers: Yes Thanars: Yes Thompson: Yes Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to approve the July 28, 2025, meeting minutes carried. (Unanimous – 6)

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. Presentation of the 2024 Audit – John Murray, LaPorte

J. Murray presented the 2024 audit, a full copy of which was provided to each board member and was included in the board packet available to the public on the library's website. The auditors gave a clean, unmodified opinion that the financial statements present fairly, in all material aspects, the respective financial position of the governmental activities and each major fund of the Library as of December 31, 2024, in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. J. Murray reviewed the details of the financial statements throughout the report. He reported that no deficiencies in internal controls were identified. He stated that there were no instances of noncompliance or other matters that are required to be reported under *Government Auditing Standards*. He thanked K. LaRocca, D. Cuevas, and B. Geiger for their assistance with the audit.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no public comment.

DISCUSSION: M. Cooper asked for clarification on if there were any findings in the audit, and J. Murray confirmed there were not.

MOTION: D. Thanars moved to approve the 2024 audit report. It was seconded by T. Thompson.

VOTE: Baham: Yes Cooper: Yes Myers: Yes Thanars: Yes Thompson: Yes Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to approve the 2024 audit report carried. (Unanimous – 6)

B. Financial Report – July 2025

K. LaRocca reviewed the financial report for July 2025. The library has received 100% of what was expected in Ad Valorem Revenue and State Revenue Sharing. The budget percentage should be 58.3% in July. Revenues are at 58.54% and Expenditures are at 56.49%. K. LaRocca gave explanations for lines that were over or under 58%. Most variances are due to expenses being paid early or late in the year and will be in balance by the end of the year.

The cost of the millage election was only \$18,000 and that line will be adjusted at the budget amendment next month. The Computer/Printer Supplies is over budget due to the increasing cost of toner. K. LaRocca clarified that Juvenile Programming refers to Children's Programming. She explained

that the names of the budget lines have been this way for many years and can be updated if the Board wishes. The \$196,000 in operational funds for the Mandeville Branch capital project (approved by the Board in the May 2025 budget amendment) has been sent to the Parish. It will be introduced with the Parish's budget amendment in September, voted on in October, and then put out for public bid.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Lisa Rustemeyer – She complimented the financial report and thanked the library staff for providing excellent information for the public. She provided statistics from the State Library, spoke of the Mobile Library Lobby Stops, and complimented the library's promotional social media videos.

Sonnet Ireland – She complimented the financial report. She agreed with updating the names of budget lines for clarity and transparency.

DISCUSSION: There was no Board discussion.

MOTION: G. Baham moved to approve the July 2025 financial report. It was seconded by D. Thanars.

VOTE: Baham: Yes Cooper: Yes Myers: Yes Thanars: Yes Thompson: Yes Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to approve the July 2025 financial report carried. (Unanimous – 6)

C. Director's Report

K. LaRocca reported recent updates to facilities, I.T., marketing and outreach efforts, professional development opportunities, programming highlights, new staff, contracts, strategic plan implementation updates, Statements of Concern, Capital Project updates, and the transition of materials from the YA collection to the Adult Collection. She reviewed the results of the community input sessions for the Lacombe Branch replacement and Slidell Branch expansion projects. The ribbon cutting for the Mobile Library service is tentatively scheduled for November 18. She reviewed the service statistics for July 2025 and the year-to-date statistics.

G. Baham expressed appreciation that the Media Production Specialist position has been filled. He also stated that he attended the Genealogy program about Pope Leo XIV and learned that the Pope is related to the Bahams from Madisonville.

D. Summer Reading Wrap-up Presentation

The Public Relations Department presented the Summer Reading Challenge Wrap-Up video that showed highlights from many of the programs that took place throughout the Parish this summer. The Children's Programming Coordinator and Adult Programming Coordinator provided a recap of this year's successful Summer Reading Challenge, highlighting an increase in registrations compared to last year. They also noted an impressive number of teen volunteers, totaling 72 this summer.

E. 2026 Budget (Resolution # 25-019)

MOTION #1: C. Branton moved to open the 2026 Budget Hearing. It was seconded by G. Baham.

VOTE: Baham: Yes Cooper: Yes Myers: Yes Thanars: Yes Thompson: Yes Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to open the 2026 Budget Hearing carried. (Unanimous – 6)

K. LaRocca reviewed the proposed 2026 Budget. The St. Tammany Parish Library will operate on a revenue of \$13,318,920. The primary source (97%) of the library's 2026 income will be a 4.35 mil property tax millage. The remaining (3%) of the library's income comes from State Revenue Sharing, fines and fees, interest, and donations. K. LaRocca explained that the economy continues to affect the cost of supplies. Implementation of the library's Strategic Plan will continue and the Mandeville Branch renovation should happen in 2026. Many of the increases and decreases you will see in the individual budget lines will be due to the implications of these conditions. K. LaRocca provided explanations for each section of the budget. She reviewed the fund balance in detail, noting that the balance does not equate to cash and includes receivables for next year's budget and payables. She reviewed the dedicated savings and declared a balanced budget for 2026.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no public comment.

DISCUSSION:

M. Cooper thanked K. LaRocca for holding budget meetings with board members the previous week to review the budget and answer questions, clarifying that no quorum was present.

MOTION #2: D. Thanars moved to close the 2026 Budget Hearing. It was seconded by G. Baham.

VOTE: Baham: Yes Cooper: Yes Myers: Yes Thanars: Yes Thompson: Yes Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to close the 2026 Budget Hearing carried. (Unanimous – 6)

MOTION #3: C. Branton moved to adopt the 2026 Budget (Res. 25-019). It was seconded by G. Baham.

VOTE: Baham: Yes Cooper: Yes Myers: Yes Thanars: Yes Thompson: Yes Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to adopt the 2026 Budget resolution (25-019) carried. (Unanimous – 6)

F. Statement of concern decision – *House of Earth and Blood*

K. LaRocca presented the Statement of Concern (SOC) for the book *House of Earth and Blood* by Sarah Maas. The statement was submitted by Frances Smith. K. LaRocca read the statement aloud.

The recommended action by F. Smith is: "Restrict from minors from reading this book/take it off the shelves."

Reason given: "It is obscene. Children should not be allowed to read it. Goes against the Law."

K. LaRocca reviewed the book résumé which includes the publisher's summary, number of print copies STPL owns (4), total circulation on all print copies (76), total circulation on E-book (286), comparable library system statistics, reviews by *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, and *Shelf Awareness*. Also noted are awards and lists featuring this title. A total of 1,965 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Adult Fiction section at STPL. K. LaRocca reviewed the committee's evaluation of the title which includes demographics of the committee members, the committee's report, and the committee's recommendation. Since the complainant cites the Louisiana Criminal Law Revised Statute 14:91.11, the book was evaluated based on the criteria set forth in the statute. The committee did not find a violation of the statute. The committee recommended that the book remain shelved in the Adult Fiction collection.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Frances Smith, the individual who submitted the Statement of Concern for *House of Earth and Blood*, was offered five minutes for public comment. She was not in attendance but submitted a written statement by email which was provided to each board member and was included in the board packet available to the public on the website.

Terri J. – Covington, LA. She stated that the book in question is in the library, but was told by staff that it cannot be checked out. B. Geiger and T. DiMaggio clarified that the library has four circulating copies of the book that are checked out by other patrons at this time. There are non-circulating reference copies of challenged books available at the Covington and Slidell Branches for in-house use. Terri J. was in favor of the book remaining in Adult Fiction.

Pauline Appleby – Mandeville, LA. She read the library's mission statement aloud and urged the Board to follow their rules and regulations. She expressed concern about there being 113 pending SOC's. She spoke in support of professional librarians and freedom of access to literature.

J. Caron Minge – Covington, LA. She spoke in favor of the book remaining in the Adult collection. She expressed concern about the SOC and the letter from F. Smith, stating that F. Smith has mischaracterized the law regarding child grooming and has made very serious, offensive, and defamatory accusations. J. Caron Minge brought a copy of the law and read it aloud for clarification.

Rebecca Bohm – Mandeville, LA. She agreed with the previous speaker and spoke in favor of the book remaining in the Adult collection.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Mandeville, LA. She agreed with the previous speakers and spoke in favor of the book remaining in the Adult collection. She questioned whether F. Smith had read the book and suggested that the information may have come from the website Book Looks.

Sonnet Ireland – Slidell, LA. She stated that the book is an Adult book in the Adult section, is very popular, and was on several best sellers lists. She stated the book is not accessible to children without a parent's permission. She noted that there was board member conversation during public comment.

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. She stated that the book is an Adult book in the Adult section and there is no reason to restrict any further. She spoke of the tiered library card system which enables a parent to decide what their children read.

Jean Wiggin – Abita Springs, LA. She questioned why the Board is discussing concerns about Adult fiction books. She suggested sending a letter to individuals who submitted SOC's for adult books, stating that the material is shelved in the Adult section and no further action will be taken. She stated that she trusts the librarians.

DISCUSSION:

G. Baham explained that it is required by current state law for the Board to review the challenged books. He added that disparaging individuals who raise objections is unnecessary and stressed that the Board must not violate anyone's rights.

MOTION: C. Branton moved to affirm the committee's recommendation for *House of Earth and Blood* to remain in the Adult Fiction collection and to deny the request for removal. It was seconded by T. Myers.

VOTE: Baham: Abstained Cooper: Yes Myers: Yes Thanars: Yes Thompson: Yes Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to affirm the committee's recommendation and deny the request for removal carried. (Yes – 5 | Abstained – 1)

G. Lease Renewal for the Administrative Office

K. LaRocca stated that the lease for the Administrative Office expires in December. She noted that some board members have asked whether the library should continue leasing or explore purchasing a property. She confirmed that leftover operational funds can be used for capital purposes, but purchasing a building at this time is not feasible due to existing funds being set aside for other purposes. The current building owners indicated they would consider selling if the library is interested when the lease is up for renewal. K. LaRocca recommends renewing the lease to the Administrative Office for five years. The lease amount will be \$6,300 per month.

T. Myers asked if we pay the property tax and insurance and K. LaRocca confirmed that both are included in the triple net lease agreement. When asked about a lease-purchase option, K. LaRocca explained that is not possible for a governmental agency, but the owners may consider selling the building in five years.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Sonnet Ireland – She agrees with renewing the lease and agrees with looking into purchasing a space.

DISCUSSION:

M. Cooper recommends renewing the lease and agrees with looking into purchasing a building in five years or including the Administrative Office in an expansion of one of the library branches. C. Branton agreed with M. Cooper.

MOTION: C. Branton moved to approve the lease renewal of the Administrative Office. It was seconded by D. Thanars.

VOTE: Baham: Yes Cooper: Yes Myers: Yes Thanars: Yes Thompson: Yes Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to approve the lease renewal of the Administrative Office carried. (Unanimous – 8)

H. Resolution # 25-016 Resolution amending Rules and Regulations Update Section 106 – E or F Code of Conduct (Baham)

G. Baham presented a revised draft of a proposed Code of Conduct (COC). He explained that the draft serves as a standard starting point and can be reviewed and amended as needed moving forward.

MOTION #1: G. Baham moved to adopt the Code of Conduct. It was seconded by T. Thompson.

Following E. Couvillon's recommendation and board discussion, it was decided to place the COC in Section 106, Paragraph F. A new item, Number 11, will be added to read: "Abide by the Code of Conduct." The full text of the COC will be included in Appendix C, which will be added to the existing appendices.

MOTION #2: G. Baham amended his motion to adopt the Code of Conduct to specify its placement in Section 106, Paragraph F, Number 11, with the full text to be included in Appendix C. It was seconded by T. Thompson.

VOTE: Baham: Yes Cooper: Yes Myers: Yes Thanars: Yes Thompson: Yes Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to amend and specify the logistical placement of the Code of Conduct carried.
(Unanimous – 6)

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Roxanne Newman – She stated that the (COC) references LA R.S. 25:215 and states that the Board employs the Director and other staff. She interprets the statute to mean the Board employs the Director, who then recommends and oversees the hiring of other staff. She added that Boards are typically not very involved in staff hiring or firing. She stated that allowing all board members to request documents and information from any employee is inefficient.

Jean Wiggin – She began to clarify her earlier comments regarding a previous agenda item and was reminded that the current public comment period must relate to the current topic.

Rebecca Taylor – Slidell, LA. She emphasized the Board's role in hiring, supervising, and evaluating the Library Director, who supervises the daily operations of the library. She stated that this structure maintains a separation between the Board's policymaking and the Director's operational management of the library. She noted several important omissions in the current COC draft compared to the original. She suggested revising the COC, as she feels it needs additional changes.

Lisa Rustemeyer – She agreed with the previous speaker that the COC needs more work. She suggested considering other Codes of Conduct for other libraries and consulting with the State Library. She did not agree with omitting several of the original statements from the current draft. She is in favor of Rules and Regulations committee meetings to work on this policy.

Sonnet Ireland – She agreed with the previous speakers. She asked if the Board has talked to anyone from the State Library about this policy. G. Baham stated he has spoken to the State Library staff and staff in other states. She stated that the current draft of the COC is problematic, particularly regarding asking staff for information rather than going through the Director. She stated that there is no mention of the Louisiana Open Meetings Law included in the policy.

Kristen Luchsinger – She thanked the Board for continuing work on the COC and urged against rushing the process, stressing the need for transparency and fairness. She suggested adding an anti-harassment clause and encouraged board members to engage with all groups to avoid the appearance of partisanship.

Joan Simon – She stated that this is too important to rush. She stated she believes the Board has good intentions, but the document needs more work. She is concerned with the issue of requesting information from staff rather than the Library Director.

DISCUSSION:

G. Baham reiterated that the policy can be amended over time, noting that the Constitution was not written in one fell swoop and has several amendments. He noted that all board members are already required to follow Open Meetings Laws, so it does not need to be restated in the COC. He noted that the

sanctions are pretty clear – board members are appointed by the Parish Council and can be removed by the Parish Council. He stated that if a board member acts in a way a member of the public considers unlawful or derogatory, they should contact their Parish Councilperson.

MOTION #3: D. Thanars moved to postpone indefinitely to continue working on the policy and bring it back up at a later date. It was seconded by T. Myers.

M. Cooper stated he is not yet prepared to approve the policy and there were valid points raised by the audience. He asked for background on the origin of this policy, which C. Branton provided. M. Cooper suggested forming a committee to work on this with G. Baham. C. Branton stated that would be the Rules and Regulations Committee. He also noted that there is no Parish-wide COC that governs all of the agencies that the Parish Council oversees.

T. Thompson stated that he does not see a reason to postpone and feels that it is a good document. He reiterated that the Parish Council governs the LBOC and can appoint or remove board members, so he does not see a need to postpone.

VOTE: Baham: Yes Cooper: Yes Myers: Yes Thanars: Yes Thompson: No Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to postpone indefinitely carried. (Yes – 5 | No – 1)

OFF-THE-FLOOR MOTION – Requires a unanimous vote

C. Branton stated that K. LaRocca has accepted a position at the State Library.

MOTION: C. Branton moved to add an off-the-floor item to the agenda to establish a personnel committee (pursuant to Section 115 of the Rules and Regulations of the LBOC) to help administer the process of vetting and hiring a new Library Director. It was seconded by G. Baham.

C. Branton explained that the committee would consist of no more than three board members designated by the LBOC President. He emphasized that the hiring decision will be made by the full Board at a public meeting. He explained that this is the very beginning of the process and it will not be done overnight, as this will be a lengthy process. The Board will need to discuss job descriptions, research what resources are available from the State Library, and consider the possibility of hiring a consultant.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Becky Bohm – She asked about appointing an Interim Director. C. Branton stated that is one of the matters they have to discuss.

Sonnet Ireland – She questioned why this was not proposed for the next board meeting in September, allowing time to understand what this means and for an Interim Director to be appointed. She also expressed concern that the matter was raised late in the meeting, after much of the audience had already left.

M. Cooper asked what will this committee do between now and the September board meeting. C. Branton stated that the committee would reach out to the State Library, other libraries across the state, gather job descriptions, and reach out to consultants. He noted that there is currently a vacancy on the Board and he would like a full Board to be involved in the process. He added that initiating the process

now would help ensure continued progress and allow the new Board member to be brought up to speed efficiently.

Roxanne Newman – She asked who would be responsible for selecting the committee. C. Branton responded that he would, as Board President, and referenced Section 115 of the LBOC Rules and Regulations Manual, which states: “The Board President shall appoint the members of any committee and designate its chairperson.” R. Newman stated that there should be a fair distribution of points of view on the Personnel Committee. She expressed concern about the qualifications that will be required of the new Director and emphasized that the qualifications should not be lowered, as has occurred in other Parishes.

DISCUSSION:

M. Cooper noted that the rules also state: “The Board President shall be an ex officio member of any committee.” C. Branton noted that the committee may include only himself and two other Board members, as a group of four or more would constitute a quorum. M. Cooper confirmed that K. LaRocca’s last day will be September 22nd, which is the date of the next board meeting. He asked whether the Board President, Vice President, or any Board member could begin gathering the previously mentioned information in preparation for establishing the Personnel Committee at the next Board meeting, and whether the absence of a formal committee would preclude the Board from collecting the information C. Branton suggested. C. Branton stated that it would not preclude the gathering of information, but there would be no formal mechanism for the Board members to discuss it among themselves. C. Branton explained that there are only three more scheduled board meetings this year and he does not want to delay this process.

VOTE: Baham: Yes Cooper: No Myers: Yes Thanars: No Thompson: Yes Branton: Yes

RESULT: Motion to add the off-the-floor item to the agenda failed due to a lack of unanimous consent.
(Yes – 4 | No – 2)

4. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by G. Baham and was seconded by D. Thanars. All were in favor, none were opposed, and no one was absent. Motion carried.

APPROVAL:



Tamarah Myers, Board Secretary/Treasurer