

**Rapides Parish Library
Board of Control
January 17, 2023**

Minutes

The regular meeting of the Rapides Parish Library (RPL) Board of Control was called to order at 3:30 p.m. at the Westside Regional Library, 5416 Provine Place, Alexandria by President Le'Anza Jordan.

Board members present were Ms. Jordan, Mr. Michael Fairbanks, Ms. June Arrington, Ms. Irene Hobbs, Mr. Ralph Roach, Mr. James Morgan, Ms. Lana Havens, Ms. Dana Cox, and Mr. Morris Taft Thomas.

Also present were Library Director Celise Reech-Harper, ten staff members, and about 130 members of the public.

Ms. Jordan led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Agenda

Mr. Thomas moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Fairbanks. On unanimous vote, the motion passed.

Minutes

Ms. Havens moved to approve the December minutes, seconded by Ms. Cox. On unanimous vote, the motion passed.

Public Comments

Regarding agenda item 13a, Discussion & vote on Collection Development Policy Amendment, thirty members of the public spoke in favor of the amendment and sixteen members of the public spoke against the amendment. Regarding agenda item 14c, Discussion & vote on Johnson Branch contract, two members of the public spoke in favor of extending the contract.

Financial Report

Business Manager Stacy Dubrock said that she anticipates some overage from the 2022 budget, and that a full year-end report will be made at the next regular meeting.

Director's Report

Library Director Celise Reech-Harper reported on the following:

- There were recently some short-term branch closures due to weather and illness.
- Contractors at the Boyce Branch are working to fix any remaining construction issues.
- The Friends of the Library are finalizing a grant for telehealth kiosks at some branches.
- 2022 statistics, which are still being compiled, show library physical item usage continues increasing, hopefully reaching pre-pandemic levels soon.

Direct Services Report

Direct Services Coordinator Lenna Mouton reminded everyone that there is an IRS kiosk at the Martin Library and reported that branches are currently cleaning, organizing, and refreshing their locations for the new year.

Human Resources Report

Human Resources Manager Jackie Brown reported that the Personnel Committee met to discuss the Director's evaluation and employment contract. Their recommendations will be presented to the Board later in the agenda.

Programming & Outreach Report

Programming and Outreach Supervising Librarian Karla Kirby announced that 582 Letters from Santa were sent out this year, and the Library participated in many holiday events around the parish. Karla and Craig have begun a children's literature video podcast which will air monthly on YouTube.

IT Report

Systems Manager Janie Primeaux was pleased to report that IT and ILS have resumed visiting branches to provide on-site assistance and assess technological needs. The Martin Library will be receiving ten laptops for in-house check-out.

Public Relations Report

Public Relations Officer Jennifer Smarr promoted upcoming health classes, general interest programs, and Black History Month events.

Old Business

Mr. Morgan motioned to open the floor to discussion on the proposed Collection Development Policy amendment, seconded by Mr. Fairbanks.

The amendment, which would be applied to the children's and teen collections, states:

"These collections shall not include materials containing obscenity, sexual content (including content regarding sexual orientation and gender identity), or any other material that is unsuitable for the children and teen collections. Library events and displays for children shall be held to the same standard."

Mr. Morgan asked that the Board consider whether the amendment would cause books to be banned, which led to debate about the language of the amendment and whether it was specific enough to be implemented in an enforceable way. Ms. Jordan expressed concern that the language was broad and open to individual interpretation, and so called for advisement from attorney Greg Jones on the legality of the amendment as written.

Mr. Jones advised that the amendment as written may not withstand a strict scrutiny review and, if challenged, could be overturned as unconstitutional. He recommended that the Board seek an advisory opinion from the Attorney General's office before voting on the amendment. He also recommended the formation of a standing committee to address policies and reconsideration requests.

Upon conclusion of the discussion, Mr. Morgan moved to adopt the amendment as written. Ms. Jordan put forth a substitute motion to seek advisement from the Louisiana Attorney General's office before proceeding further. Ms. Havens seconded the substitute motion, initiating a roll call vote:

Ayes: Arrington, Cox, Havens, Hobbs, Jordan, Thomas

Nays: Fairbanks, Morgan, Roach

Abstain: None

Absent: None

By majority vote, the substitute motion was passed. Mr. Jones will assist the Board in drafting their request for advisement from the Attorney General's office.

Ms. Jordan reminded everyone that there is currently a procedure in place for the review of challenged books, but she would like the Board to take up the matter of forming a committee to review reconsideration requests and policy amendments. The item will be added to the March agenda.

New Business

Ms. Cox moved to approve the 2023 regular meeting dates, seconded by Ms. Arrington. On unanimous vote, the motioned passed.

The Library's Conflict of Interest Policy requires all employees and board members to submit an updated form annually. The Director has learned that this is not mandated by law and that requiring employees and board members to report potential conflicts as they occur would better work to ensure staff and Board members always keep ethics in mind. Mr. Fairbanks moved to accept the amendment to the Conflict of Interest Policy, seconded by Mr. Roach. On unanimous vote, the motioned passed.

Mr. Fairbanks spoke on behalf of the Properties Committee regarding the upcoming contract renewal for use of the Old Lecompte High School building, which houses the Johnson Branch Library. Based on health and safety concerns, the committee recommends a one-year lease renewal, with the stipulation that work be done to the building to improve air quality and ensure safe conditions. Ms. Hobbs moved to renew the Johnson Branch contract for one year as recommended. Ms. Cox seconded, and on unanimous vote, the motioned passed.

Ms. Havens spoke on behalf of the Personnel Committee, stating that the Director had earned a 100% rating on her annual evaluation this year. The committee recommends the standard 3% raise based on this evaluation. Ms. Havens moved to approve the pay increase for the Director, seconded by Ms. Cox. On unanimous vote, the motioned passed.

The Director's contract was provided to all board members for review at the December regular meeting of the Board. Since that time, revisions were made during the review period at the request of the Personnel Committee, including changing the contract period from five years to three and the addition of language pertaining to pay freezes in cases of fiscal necessity. Ms. Havens moved to accept the revised contract as recommended, seconded by Ms. Arrington. On unanimous vote, the motioned passed.

The next Library Board of Control meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 21, 2023 at the Westside Regional Library.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Celise Reech-Harper
Secretary

Le'Anza Jordan
President