

MINUTES FOR REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH LIBRARY BOARD OF CONTROL  
**MAIN LIBRARY**  
**FIRST FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM**  
**7711 GOODWOOD BOULEVARD**  
**BATON ROUGE, LA 70806**  
**JULY 22, 2021**  
**4:00 P.M.**

**AGENDA**

CALL TO ORDER – Jason Jacob, Board President (4:04 p.m.)

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Donald Luther, Jr.

- I. ROLL CALL – Rosana Sotile, Assistant to the Deputy Library Director  
Jason Jacob, Board President – Present  
Candace Temple, Board Vice President – Present  
Martha Guarisco, Board Treasurer – Present (4:21 p.m.)  
Delores Watts – Absent  
Donald Luther, Jr. – Present  
Kathy Wascom – Present  
Nicole Allmon-Learson – Present (4:21 p.m.)

*A quorum was present*

STAFF PRESENT – Spencer Watts, Library Director; Kristen Edson, Deputy Library Director; Mary Stein, Assistant Library Director; Patricia Husband, Assistant Library Director; Rhonda Pinsonat, Library Business Manager; Ronnie Pierce, Library Assistant Business Manager; Rosana Sotile, Assistant to the Deputy Library Director; James Fagan, Network Technician I; Autumn Rice, Library Technician I (1/2)

OTHERS PRESENT – Cpt. Blair Nicholson, East Baton Rouge Sheriff’s Office; Frank Hillyard, Metro 21; Bob Fenet, public attendee

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF JUNE 17, 2021 – A motion to approve was made by Donald Luther, Jr. and seconded by Candace Temple. **The motion was carried unanimously.**

III. SPECIAL ORDERS – There were no Special Orders.

IV. REPORTS BY THE DIRECTOR

A. FINANCIAL REPORT – Rhonda Pinsonat (4:05 p.m.)

- For 2021, operating expenditures through June 30<sup>th</sup> are 39.50% of the operating budget. Through June, we should have spent no more than 50% of the budget.
- Cash collections from Property Taxes for 2021 remain marginally ahead of those collected in 2020, as we are approximately 0.40% ahead of the same seven months last year.

B. SYSTEM REPORTS – Mary Stein (4:09 p.m.)

- “Around the Parish” slideshow and descriptions of Library programs.
- Participants in the children’s summer reading program logged over 1 million hours of reading time; reading is recorded via Beanstack or with traditional paper logs; 10,000 members so far, which is three times as many as last year during the previous summer’s phase of the pandemic.
- The Baton Rouge Concert Band performed at the Main Library outdoor plaza on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July; next free concert will be in late September; Harpist Ginna Paredes and Friends will also be performing at the Main Library on August 18<sup>th</sup>, and the Civic Orchestra of Baton Rouge will perform at the Bluebonnet Regional Branch Library on August 28<sup>th</sup>.
- “Ziggy’s Arts Adventure” will premier August 1<sup>st</sup> at the Main Library, in partnership with LPB, and with puppeteer Clay Achee and musician John Gray; children will be able to meet the puppets backstage.
- Author Julie Sternberg will premiere her novel, *Summer of Stolen Secrets*, on August 1<sup>st</sup> at the Main Library; exhibits currently on display of the author’s iconic Baton Rouge department store, Goudchaux’s.

- A time capsule was recovered during demolition of the Cortana Mall in Baton Rouge; contents will remain in the Library's archival deep freeze to prevent mold and insects.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Mid-City Micro-Con will be held at the Main Library August 5<sup>th</sup> – August 8<sup>th</sup>; focus is on graphic novels, comic books, artists and cosplay.
- The next Business Forum speaker will be Patrick Lencioni, president of The Table Group, on August 11<sup>th</sup>; the topic will be "Building a Healthy Culture"; the Library continues to be a sponsor for the Business Report's monthly series.
- The Baton Rouge Mini Maker Faire will be held in-person at the Main Library October 18<sup>th</sup> – October 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- Salina Yoon is this year's selection for the 44<sup>th</sup> annual Author-Illustrator program, October 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> at the Main Library.

## C. OTHER REPORTS

1. MAINTENANCE AND ADDITIONAL CAPITAL PROJECTS – Kristen Edson (4:17 p.m.)
  - Interior and exterior windows were washed at all library locations; glass on the grand staircase at the Main Library was also washed.
  - A new grout cleaning contract has been established; cleaning has begun at all library locations.
  - Pressure washing of all concrete pony walls in the front of the Main Library has been completed in preparation of painting.
  - The energy management system upgrade was slightly delayed at Baker Branch Library due to replacement of a relief valve and ignitor on the boiler; should be completed by next week.
  - Air scrubbers and UV lights were installed at Bluebonnet Regional Branch Library; two valves still need to be installed to complete the energy management system upgrade.
  - Compressor replacement has been completed at Zachary Branch Library; several sensors were replaced earlier this week to restore the chiller's functionality.
  - Landscaping and irrigation repair work have been completed at Carver Branch Library along Terrace Street.
  - Air handling units were refurbished at Jones Creek Regional Library; the contractor repaired the control panel.
  - A leak on the backflow preventer at River Center Branch Library was repaired on July 15<sup>th</sup>.
  - Two quotes were received for the partial roof replacement at Carver Branch Library; quotes were higher than anticipated due to the backlog of materials available and pricing increases for construction materials; the low bid acceptance will appear on next week's Metro Council agenda.
2. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS – Spencer Watts (4:21 p.m.)
  - COVID-19 Update:
    - There have been three to four exposures to the virus by Library staff; no cross-transmission; exposure was from family/external sources.
    - The Library ended its quarantine on books and other circulating items on July 5<sup>th</sup>; studies over the past year have shown that surface transmission has become less of a concern; many other libraries have also discontinued the quarantine of items.
    - Operating hours have been reinstated until 9:00 p.m. for those libraries that originally closed at that time; the Main Library originally closed at 10:00 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, but will remain at 9:00 p.m.; may shift back to 10:00 p.m. after the start of the school year.
    - Library staff who have high contact with children continue to wear masks in public service areas to protect the young patrons; other staff at high contact service areas also continue to wear masks.
    - On July 20, BREC began requiring masks or "proof of vaccination" to enter indoor spaces but the City-Parish has not; the Mayor-President continues to review data as it is received and has a good track record throughout the pandemic; the Library continues to rely on the Mayor's judgment and decisions for any new restrictions or protocols.
  - The Library has received a grant from the American Rescue Plan Grant; the grant is used to buy additional acrylic barrier shields for patron computer stations, as well as new network switches to improve capacity and capabilities.
  - Library staff members, Kristen Edson and Bryce Tomlin, have been working diligently on the research necessary for the Dark Fiber E-Rate and Emergency Connectivity Fund programs; they are important to the budget process because the Library must provide upfront costs that will later be reimbursed.
  - Other community agencies have asked the Library for support, including the Safe Routes to Public Places Project and the Scotlandville Parkway Mobility Network; the Safe Routes Project is designed to improve pedestrian access and safety on Scenic Highway, as well as improving street frontage, and will include the installation of a new median island and a high visibility crosswalk at the Scotlandville Branch Library; about

37% of the Scotlandville Branch patrons walk to that library location; the Library also wrote a letter in support of the Parkway Mobility Network which includes a series of bike and pedestrian paths to improve the existing infrastructure in the Scotlandville and Delmont areas; this would make it possible to reach the South Branch Library from that northern region.

- Question from Kathy Wascom regarding how the percentage of pedestrian traffic at the Scotlandville Branch Library compares to other library locations: Spencer Watts explained that it varies among the locations, some branches have higher pedestrian use, such as Eden Park and Delmont Gardens Branch Libraries; bus riders are also usually counted as pedestrian traffic, as well as school children who walk from a nearby school; Kathy Wascom commented that it's important to have pedestrian access since some people don't have the ability to gain access to a vehicle for driving.
- The Library's PCI Compliance is nearing completion; a Self-Assessment Questionnaire and a final report on the Library's credit card environment should be completed by the end of the month; the final task includes a firewall scan, which will be arranged by Kristen Edson.
- The Virtual Desktop Initiative project was delayed by the HVAC and fire suppression upgrades for the server room; the project deadline has been extended; after the VDI migration, installation of the workstations will begin at the library branches that have not yet moved to the system, which should occur within the next few weeks.
- Circulation from the self-check kiosks represents 21.8% of loans year-to-date; slightly lower than from before the pandemic.
- Management Partners consultants were on site July 13<sup>th</sup> and July 14<sup>th</sup> to conduct focus group sessions with Library staff; six groups met with around 12 to 14 staff in each group, around 72 staff total; a detailed report should be available at the end of the month.
- Regarding a national discussion on DVDs as outdated technology, the East Baton Rouge Parish Library will continue to maintain its DVD collection as long as there is a demand for it and there currently still is; during the switch from VHS to DVD, there remained a demand for VHS, especially for children; it is possible that a similar situation will happen with the DVD format.
- Scotlandville Branch Library Update:
  - A photo of the existing facility layout was shown to the Board.
  - Architects have presented two options for the new layout of the building to Library staff; possible locations of expansions included the areas around the courtyards.
  - Architects would like to maintain the current defining features of the central part of the current building; patrons and staff mention how aesthetically pleasing it currently is.
  - Areas of concern for expansion include the Teen Services and Children Services spaces; restrooms will remain in that general area but will be improved and expanded; small study rooms and programming rooms were included in the proposed layouts.
  - The proposed archival space is a major part of the project and serves an important system-wide function; would be a separate building; Facilities Services would also have a separate work area; architects suggested placement of the space to south of the library branch, near Mengel Road; possibility of constructing the archival building first, to use as a temporary library, but is not the preferred option.
  - Architects reviewed the building infrastructure and prioritized their recommended changes:
    - A new roof
    - Providing sufficient hot water to the building
    - Replacing the pumps at the boiler
    - Replacing the HVAC system
    - Replacing the Air Cooled Chiller and Pumps
    - Renovating the North Courtyard; likely will be both courtyards
    - Adding approximately 3,000 sf. to the branch; goal is actually 4,000 sf. or more
    - Archival building requirements
  - Optional upgrades included the following:
    - Replacing the boiler
    - Renovating the parking lot; this is more likely a necessity
    - Replacing the Energy Management System
    - Replacing the monumental sign
    - Widening the south exit to allow entrance and exit
    - Changing to a sewer lift station
    - Adding a generator

- Expanding the courtyard and adding a pavilion or other feature such, as a canopied area or a pergola
- Question from Kathy Wascom regarding what will be the timeline for the Scotlandville Branch Library renovation and how long will the library be closed; Spencer Watts explained that those details are still being discussed, but normally it would be a two-year project; will also depend on the length of the design process, which may be longer than usual because of the construction of two buildings and navigating pandemic issues.

Board President Jason Jacob asked for public comments. No public comments were made.

V. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES – There were no reports of committees.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. UPDATE ON SOUTH BRANCH LIBRARY – Patricia Husband (4:56 p.m.)

- A photo of the proposed architectural site plan was shown to the Board.
- Library staff met with the architects the last week of June to review options based on the greenbelt revisions; two options were presented, both providing the following adjustments:
  - 18,000 sf. total for the building
  - The mechanical space inside the building is consolidated into one location
  - The storage in the circulation area has an entrance behind the circulation desk, allowing for better access control
  - An additional stall in each public restroom, as requested by staff
  - A wider courtyard, which will allow placement of seating while also preserving the space needed around the oak tree
  - Approximately the same amount of square footage in each set of large meeting rooms
  - The same number of public computers throughout
  - Staff workrooms circulation storage, the branch manager’s office and the housekeeping closet were modified to fit the new, slightly wider, middle area of the building
  - The site plans included the following similar features:
    - 70 on-site parking spaces
    - A consolidated mechanical yard located on the east side of the parking lot
    - Relocation of the backflow preventer to the northwest side of the lot; it will be screened by vegetation
    - Pre-construction pruning and support work will be required to maintain the courtyard oak tree’s viability throughout the construction process
- The first option provided the following differences:
  - A location that is 11’6” from the greenbelt
  - Meeting rooms are longer and narrower, with a different storage room location
  - Adult computers located in one area
  - Adult copy alcove located near the Reference desk
  - A laptop bar located along the north side of Adult Services
- The second option provided the following differences:
  - A location that is 4’6” from the greenbelt
  - Meeting rooms are wider and shorter; meeting room storage located near the gallery
  - A shorter, wider Teen Services area
  - No laptop bar provided
- Library staff chose option two; meeting room storage would be more easily accessible to attendees; computers near the entrance would be more convenient; could possibly rearrange the collection to accommodate a laptop bar.
- Library staff also met with the project technology consultant and were provided a floor plan with data and power markups; Library staff submitted comments to the consultant, who will update the layout and submit it for another revision.
- Comment from Donald Luther regarding recent social media remarks on if whether or not the South Branch Library will be built: The Library does have the money set aside and is making efforts to move forward with building the branch and to please contact him with questions on how the Library is spending its money; the Library is planning to make South Branch a premier library for its system.

Board President Jason Jacob asked for public comments. No public comments were made.

## VII. NEW BUSINESS

### A. VOTE TO ADOPT PROPOSED 2022 LIBRARY BUDGET – Spencer Watts (5:05 p.m.)

- Comments from Spencer Watts:
  - The budget process is a very serious process that involves a wide cross-section of Library staff working collaboratively, as well as the Library Board of Control, with reviewing and assessing, and making changes; it's a very carefully crafted budget, yet restrained and prudent, and does not go beyond the bounds of fiscal responsibility
  - The Library is proposing an operating budget of \$48,653,900, which is an increase of a little over 2.5% from last year's budget; this year's budget includes a capital component of just over \$4 million in capital improvements, which will come from the pay-as-you-go savings; capital improvements include the South Branch Library project, and the Scotlandville and Baker Branch Library projects; there has been an increase in construction prices over the past year, and the budget reflects a 15% increase based on recommendations from Architectural Services, the City-Parish, contractors, and developers; if any money is left over, it will be moved to the Central, Zachary, and Delmont Gardens Branch Library projects.
  - The budget also reflects the Library's commitment in its core services, such as collection development, with a \$5.875 million investment; will continue to provide a strong and diverse collection of content that patrons utilize.
  - The budget will also allow the Library to maintain its traditional programming in Children and Teen Services, as well as Career Services, Bookmobiles, and Outreach Services, including services to disadvantaged communities and small-scale entrepreneurs.
  - New enterprises within the budget include enhanced efforts related to early childhood literacy that will extend outreach efforts further into the community and families; an Emergency Connectivity Fund grant request; an RFP and investment funding for a Dark Fiber/IRU program which would be reimbursed through the E-Rate program and can bring enhanced broadband to libraries, neighborhoods and communities.
- A motion to adopt the 2022 Library Budget was made by Donald Luther, Jr. and seconded by Candace Temple. **The motion was carried unanimously.**

### B. BUDGET AND REVENUES; DISCUSSION OF LONG TERM BUDGET PLANNING AND PROPOSALS TO REDUCE REVENUES – Spencer Watts (5:16 p.m.)

- Since the last meeting, Library staff have generated several financial projections on what the impact of the millage reduction would mean for the Library during the entire 10-year cycle; also evaluated other millage reductions; greatest concern is that it erodes public trust in the millage process.
- The Library recognizes the community's concerns about drainage and could be to contribute; extra savings from the pandemic in 2020 are available, as investments in programming were reduced; the Library cannot operate for another 10 years as if still in a pandemic; the Library could accept a reasonable alternative to what is being proposed, but needs to be something that does not diminish the Library's core operations or undercut its mission; the Library is not an amenity, rather a necessity for the community.
- Personnel costs account for 56% -57% of the Library's budget; a 1.0 millage reduction over 10 years would mean reducing staff by 50-65 positions, or 48 FTE positions; would occur rapidly, early in the 10-year period; the Library would do everything possible to avoid laying off employees; loss of staffing would result in reducing operating hours, especially in the evening hours; would lose 8 hours or more of public service hours a week, system-wide.
- Other costs in the Library's budget are fixed costs, such as WI-FI, databases, landscaping, grass cutting, maintenance, and utilities; more than 1,000 programming sessions per year would be lost; notable problems with the 1.0 millage rededication includes the \$1.6 million annual operating costs of the new South Branch Library that was not factored into the proposal, nor was inflation throughout the 10-year cycle; the fund balance has also been misinterpreted as extra money when it is dedicated funds, over half of which is next year's operating budget; it was also overlooked that the Library has dedicated and saved \$22 million from the previous millage election in the fund balance to be used for capital improvements to the Zachary, Central and Delmont Gardens Branch Libraries; other funds include the small reserve fund, and the casualty and liability fund; if the millage cycle is to be extended to 2031, the Library would still have to account for other projects planned to take place from 2025 to 2035, such as Eden Park, Carver and Pride-Chaneyville Branch Library renovations.
- Discussion regarding next week's Metro Council meeting to vote on the proposed resolution; Board members discussed appearing and speaking at the meeting.

- Comment from Kathy Wascom regarding her experience with a similar situation in 1985 that affected her personally while working at the Library and the original creation of the Library's dedicated tax; she explained that the Library has no debt and how it has become to be nationally recognized as a five-star library; she suggested that the Library submit a millage proposal to help with drainage issues once the current millage cycle is over; she is opposed to interrupting the millage cycle and feels the wording of the Metro-Council proposal may cause voters to not realize they would be voting against dedicated funding for the Library over an extended period of time.
- Comment from Jason Jacob on whether the Board should present a resolution to the Metro Council at next week's meeting, as a formal statement in opposition to the millage rededication proposal.
- Comment from Donald Luther, Jr addressing a member of the public in attendance who would like to speak; Bob Fenet stated he is a concerned voter in East Baton Rouge Parish who feels the proposed millage rededication is a violation in trust for voters; the Library is an integral part of society that encourages reading and literacy; the Library Board of Control should have a united and forceful voice to tell the Metro Council they oppose the proposed resolution; he shared with the Board personal stories of a similar situation that affected his family in the 1980's, and how he sees the pay-as-you fund the same as a mortgage escrow fund.
- Donald Luther, Jr. responded that he is ready to fight and is counting votes; he expressed that the Library has made promises that it keeps, and that there is money put aside to move forward with constructing the South Branch Library, along with other branch renovations across the parish; he stated that Mr. Fenet is the first member of the public to attend a Library Board of Control meeting in a long time, including members of the media, and he encourages people become more involved; he shared his memories of getting his first library card as a child and enthusiastically checking out books; he wants members of the community to know that the Library is doing its best job to offer the best services for the community, and will continue to improve the system.
- The Board discussed how to compose a resolution to present at next week's Metro Council meeting; they agreed to have a special meeting on Tuesday, July 27 at 4:30 p.m. to vote on the resolution; Library staff will email the Board members a draft of the resolution before the meeting. A motion to set a special meeting of the Library Board of Control was made by Donald Luther, Jr. and seconded by Kathy Wascom. **The motion was carried unanimously.**

Board President Jason Jacob asked for public comments. No public comments were made.

VIII. COMMENTS BY THE LIBRARY BOARD OF CONTROL – No comments were made.

IX. ADJOURNMENT – Board President Jason Jacob requested a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Candace Temple and seconded by Nicole Allmon-Learson. **The meeting was adjourned at 6:01 p.m. by unanimous vote.**