

MINUTES FOR REGULAR MEETING OF THE
EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH LIBRARY BOARD OF CONTROL
MAIN LIBRARY
FIRST FLOOR LARGE MEETING ROOM
7711 GOODWOOD BOULEVARD
BATON ROUGE, LA 70806
February 20, 2025
4:00 P.M.

AGENDA

CALL TO ORDER – Ms. Candace Temple, Board President (4:05 p.m.)

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Mrs. Kathy Wascom (4:06 p.m.)

I. ROLL CALL – Ms. Antoinette Poland, Executive Assistant (4:07 p.m.)

Candace Temple, Board President – Present
Donald Luther, Jr., Board Vice President - Present
Kathy Wascom, Board Treasurer – Present
Delores Watts, Board Member– Absent
Nicole Allmon-Learson, Board Member – Present
Darryl Hurst, Board Member - Present
Ronnie Pierce, Board Member - Present

A quorum was present

STAFF PRESENT – Katrina Stokes, Library Director; Mary Stein, Assistant Library Director; Lori Juge, Assistant Library Director; Rhonda Pinsonat, Library Business Manager; Tanya Allison, Library Assistant Business Manager; Rosana Sotile, Assistant to the Deputy Library Director; Antoinette Poland, Executive Assistant to the Library Director; Tameka Roby, Outreach Services Manager; Louis Castenell, Outreach Services; Zsa-Zsa Boeneke, Zachary Branch Manager; Ginger Cagnolatti, Pride-Chaneyville Branch Manager; Ashley Clark, Jones Creek Regional Branch Manager; Jonathan Anderson, Computer Services

OTHERS PRESENT – Deputy Blair Nicholson, EBRSO; Frank Hillyard, Videographer; Keith Bergseid, Patron; David Gray, Patron; Garrett Deschamp, Patron

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF – A motion to approve January 16, 2025, meeting minutes was made by Donald Luther, Jr. and seconded by Ms. Kathy Wascom. **The motion carried unanimously. (4:07 p.m.)**

III. SPECIAL ORDERS – There were no items to cover under Special Orders.

IV. REPORTS BY THE DIRECTOR – (4:08 p.m.)

A. FINANCIAL REPORT – Mrs. Rhonda Pinsonat

- For 2024, operating expenditures through December 31st were 86.72% of the operating budget. Since 2024 is still not closed, adjustments will continue to be made for at least another month. Through December, the library should have spent no more than 100% of the budget.
- Operating expenditures through January 31st was 4.83% of the operating budget. Through January, the library should have spent no more than 8.33% of the budget.

- Cash collections from Property Taxes for 2024 are still ahead of those collected in 2023, they are approximately 6.82% ahead of the same period last year. This total includes fourth quarter interest earnings, and several accounting adjustments made.
- Cash collections from Property Taxes for 2025 was ahead of those collected in 2024; the library is approximately 4.46% ahead of the same period last year.
- Donald Luther Jr. Commented on collections, percentages, the public's misconception of the library surplus and how it is used.
- Rhonda Pinsonat commented on the over collection of revenues, savings, challenges with getting purchases approved for projects, and how it relates to the fund balances surplus.
- Kathy Wascom commented on outstanding bills, saving to pay for incoming equipment and the closing of the books.
- Rhonda Pinsonat commented that the closing of the books will be for March 14, 2024.

B. SYSTEM REPORTS – Ms. Mary Stein

“Around the Parish” – Ms. Mary Stein discussed and described slideshows of library programs and events.

- In January, the library hosted events like the Calligraphy and Art Exhibition with teacher Shawn Mann; Louisiana Music: North, South, East and West; and Mid-City Micro-Con.
- On February 9th, the Main library hosted the Lifelines Poetry Project with Louisiana Poet Laureate, Alison Pelegrin, a project working with incarcerated people by helping them express their ideas through poetry.
- The Zachary library hosted African Tales from Mama Saba, a storyteller who engaged adults and children with her expressive and elegant storytelling of African tales and dance moves.
- For Black History Month the Library featured, Sean Gaskell, a musician from West Africa, who toured several branches and performed on the Kora, a 21-Stringed West African Harp.
- On February 2nd, the Library featured Creatives for the Culture – Roots of Our Own: A Legacy Project celebrating the culture of legacy between Louisiana and Ghana.
- The 2025 Mid-City Micro-Con had an attendance of 2,506, including cosplay show and tell, writing and publishing workshops, a book signing with author Alex Jennings, creator of “The Ballad of Perilous Graves.”
- Highlighted the Library's relationship with Louisiana Public Television and how the Library was able to premiere a free sneak peek preview of two documentaries: “The Public Library” and “Bike Vessell.”
- In February, the Library partnered with WRKF's Money Moves Baton Rouge, and the Capital Area United Way offering financial literacy and taxpayer help by Certified Tax Professionals. For more information visit www.ebrpl.com
- On February 23, at the Main Library on Goodwood, author and Professor Robert Mann discussed the history of the song “You Are My Sunshine”: Jimmie Davis and the Biography of a Song.
- On Saturday March 1st, the Library will host Train Day, where patrons operated train layouts, displays of model toy trains and Lego, including door prizes and a raffle for a train set.
- On March 29th from 10 a.m.-1:30 p.m., the Pride-Chaneyville Branch Library will host their 15th Annual Country Crafts and Hobbies Festival. For mor information visit www.ebrpl.com
- On Friday March 14, 2025, from 5-8 p.m., the Main Library will host a free Tailgate Kick-off Party for the 2025, 19th Annual One Book One Community series, including this year's book, Season of Life by Pulitzer Prize Winner, Jeffrey Marx. For more information visit www.ebrpl.com

- The Author Talk series continued with talks from national and international best-selling authors; genres include fiction, non-fiction, self-help, and biographies. For more information about the virtual series visit ebrpl.co/virtual
- The Business Report's monthly webcast "Strictly Business: Virtual Conversations;" featured President and CEO, Mo Vij; Founder and President, Craig Stevens; and President Paola Alvarado with a discussion on managing fast growth. For more information visit www.ebrpl.com/DigitalLibrary
- Highlighted how the Library helps people engage in leisure learning through online platforms. For more information visit www.ebrpl.com/DigitalLibrary
- Mentioned the library friends' group, Patrons of the Public Library at www.PoPLEbrpl.org, a group who cover expenses the library is not allowed to.
- Confirmed that the punch list for the new website is still in progress.
- Confirmed more speakers for One Book, One Community including, speaker, author, and storyteller, Jill Rigby Garner and CEO of the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame and Owner of the Baton Rouge Baseball Team, Ronnie Rantz.
- Kathy Wascom commented on the digital programming for learning to play music.
- Mary Stein commented on the Library's Digital Library Resource, which included, ArtistWorks, Qello, Freegal, Gale courses, and to compliment the sports theme from One Book One Community, HiveClass includes training for sports training like soccer, exercise, and mindfulness.
- Highlighted the benefits of Hive class for falls and balance such as sports and techniques to help improve balance and strength.
- Donald Luther, Jr. commented on Pride-Chaneyville Branch Library and encouraged people to visit.

C. OTHER REPORTS

1. MAINTENANCE AND ADDITIONAL CAPITAL PROJECTS – Mrs. Lori Juge

Maintenance Report for January

Main Library: Another water leak was discovered coming from the backflow preventer near the west soccer fields that required a repair on the irrigation line.

All Branches: All parking lots were restriped.

Baker Branch: Coil ruptured on air handler unit number two during the freeze and that was replaced. There were no other issues at other branches during the weather event.

Miscellaneous Improvement Projects

- Outreach
 - a. Work has been completed, and final acceptance is pending for next month.
- Multi-branch
 - a. The contractor is still working on the final items at Delmont, and they anticipate final acceptance next month as well.
- Roofing Project
 - a. There is nothing new to report.
- Boilers for Eden Park and Greenwell Springs Branch Libraries
 - a. The Project is currently in the construction document phase.

- Bluebonnet Branch Library Renovations
 - a. There is currently nothing new to report.
- Chiller Project
 - a. Work is still being done at the Baker Branch Library and the contractor will then work on the punch list items for all locations. They anticipate final acceptance in March.
- Baker Branch Renovations
 - a. Library staff met with Architectural Services this month to discuss edits to the Request for Qualifications document. They anticipate an update from Architectural Services by the end of the week.
- Facilities Master Plan
 - a. The library staff will meet with the architect to review concept drawings for each of the branches next month and Mr. Babcock of Hidell Architects and Associates will make a presentation to the board in April.

2. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS – Mrs. Katrina Stokes

- Response to Board Member Ronnie Pierce’s question about liability in case of a major weather emergency, whereas a staff member got into an accident or was injured enroute to open the library:
 - They would need to be driving a city parish vehicle for the city parish to be liable.
 - If it is an employee’s vehicle, then their insurance will have to cover it.
 - Staff go strictly volunteer when asked to open the library as a warming center.
- Council member Gaudet announced a town hall meeting to discuss proposals regarding the libraries’ millage at Acacia Church on Siegen Lane, Tuesday, February 25th, and Councilman Moak announced a town hall meeting on Thursday, February 27th, at Central Branch Library
- Council member Darryl Hurst announced hosting a town hall meeting with Councilman Anthony Kenney at the Jewel J. Newman Community Center on Monday, February 24th.
- The board would like to hold its own town hall meeting to inform patrons and the community what the library is trying to accomplish.
- Highlighted and reiterated at the library’s Special Meeting that the library’s resolution to renew the millage at a reduced rates of 10.5 mils resulted in, “No Action” at the Metro Council meeting on Wednesday, February 12th.
- Mentioned that the mayor’s resolution to roll the library’s dedicated millage back into the City Parish General Fund will go before the Metro Council to vote on Wednesday, March 12th.
- Mentioned the collaboration with the mayor and his staff was not successful.
- Director Stokes announced herself, Mary Stein and one or more board members have met with council members to discuss solutions and advice on how to move forward.
- Discussed a solution to the library dedicated millage rate, accommodation for capital improvements and the original resolution for the renewal of the 10.5 mils.
- The library will move forward with the intention of getting the resolution on the November ballot for the East Baton Rouge Parish residents to vote.
- Noted the correction of the Last Day to Commence Proceedings at the Metro Council for the November 15th election, which will be in July.
- Shared that the library was advised to send a request for independent legal counsel.
- Greg Rome of the City Parish Attorney’s Office facilitated contact for attorneys from Shae Hardy Law Firm in New Orleans: George Mueller and Jacob Young.

- Outlined how EBRPL receives its millage, the history of the dedicated tax, and the mayor's new proposal.
- Library staff direct all supporters and patrons to the library's friend group: The Patrons of the Public Library, who is forming a political action committee. For more information visit www.PoPLebrpl.org
- Mentioning herself, Mary Stein and Rhonda Pinsonat consulted with Angie Savoy in the City Parish Finance Department to help provide clarity on the financial situation and how the funds are distributed.
- City Finance Department policy instructed the library team, as a special fund agency, to keep one year'
- Donald Luther, Jr., commented on the fund balance.
- Ms. Katrina Stokes reiterated the city's policy for special fund and one years' operating budget in fund balance.
- Shared, the homeless community praised the library and staff for their efforts with putting them in touch with organizations they lost contact with.

a. INTRODUCTION OF LIBRARY BRANCH MANAGERS

1. ZSA ZSA BOENEKE, BRANCH MANAGER at ZACHARY BRANCH LIBRARY

- Mrs. Boeneke discussed her twenty-five and half year career with the library.
- She worked as a Moonlighter, Half-Time Tech, Young Adult Librarian and now Branch Manager at the Zachary location.
- She started work at the Zachary Branch, including the Central Branch, Pride-Chaneyville as a Children's Tech and then a Yung Adult Librarian.
- Two of her boys have been pages.
- Her husband does summer programming for Children's.

2. GINGER CAGNOLATTI, BRANCH MANAGER at PRIDE-CHANEYVILLE BRANCH LIBRARY

- Mrs. Cagnolatti discussed her twenty-year career with the library,
- She has worked in most departments in every capacity, starting in high school as a Page at the Zachary Branch.
- After graduating college, she returned to Zachary as a Moonlighter, then got on full-time at Main Children's for three years while working on her Master's.
- She became Reference Librarian at Central for five years, and Branch Manager at Zachary for five years.
- She has been at Pride-Chaneyville for almost six years.
- Mentioned how some kids have grown up in the library.
- Although its location is in the middle of the woods, she emphasized that the Pride Branch is important to the community because it is the only internet, restroom, fax service, and copier service for most patrons in the community.
- Discussed the branches' strong connection with the community.

3. ASHLEY CLARK, BRANCH MANAGER at JONES CREEK REGIONAL BRANCH LIBRARY

- Mrs. Clark discussed her seventeen-year career with the library.
- She has been with the library since 2007.

- Started out as a Page at the Central Branch and worked her way up to a Teen Librarian.
- Spent five years at the Main Library as the Programming Librarian for Teen Services where she helped train different teen staff on creating programming kits, and facilitation of a process system.
- Worked three years at the Greenwell Springs Branch in Teen Services before moving to Zachary in 2018 as branch head.
- After working for three years at Zachary, for three and half months she worked between Jones Creek and Zachary.
- Discussed programming including the new Seed Library, hosting Vita in one of the meeting rooms three days a week depending on availability, and Author's Row in May.

Donald Luther, Jr., commented on staffing at the Jones Creek Regions Branch Library.

Ashley Clark commented that they are almost staffed, but missing a few Pages, a Moonlighter, and the allotment of a new Library Technician position for Teens Room.

Katrina Stokes commented that the reason for the hold on Jones Creek hiring is because the library is still trying to hire for South Branch including, the installation of computers.

Board President Candace Temple asked for public comments. No public comments were made.

V. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES – There were no Reports of Committees.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS – Ms. Katrina Stokes, Ms. Mary Stein, and Mrs. Lori Juge (4:56 p.m.)

A. DISCUSSION OF 2025 10.5 TAX MILLAGE RESOLUTION – Because the resolution was discussed under Section IV., Item C. (2) Miscellaneous Reports: Comments will be made under Section VIII. Comments by the Library Board of Control.

B. UPDATE ON SOUTH BRANCH LIBRARY

- Waiting for completion of the punch list and final acceptance.
- The building is substantially complete, and staff are on site.
- The fire marshal has granted a certificate of occupancy.
- Approximately 90% have been delivered, waiting on site and will return to finish the furniture punch list for the items that arrive later.
- Interior designers have completed the punch list for the furniture that is on site, and we will return to finish the furniture punch list for the items that arrive later.
- All books have been received, and catalogers are working on shelving.
- Computers and phones should be installed within the next few weeks.
- The anticipated opening is mid to late March.
- 140 interested patrons attended the sneak peek of the new South Branch Library
- As with previous projects, the library blends the experience of the past, including fresh mistakes that arise in the creative process.
- Patrons were excited about the new building.

Donald Luther, Jr. commented on job postings.

Lori Juge said the jobs are posted on the City Parish website; candidates must apply when the job is posted.

Darryl Hurst commented on positions posted on Friday's.

Nicole Allmon-Learson asked about the oak tree in the courtyard.

Lori Juge replied, the tree in the courtyard is being cared for by an arborist.

C. UPDATE ON SCOTLANDVILLE BRANCH LIBRARY

- Bids were received for phase two of the project and Architectural Services has recommended acceptance of the lowest bid, and we anticipate this going to the Metro Council to accept the bid at the Feb. 26 meeting.
- Library Staff and Architectural Services met with Councilman Kenney to discuss a future phase two groundbreaking ceremony and to share the rendering for Scotlandville. He was excited to see the plans and to learn about the Baker Branch Library upcoming renovation.

D. DISCUSSION ON BAKER BRANCH LIBRARY RENOVATION PROJECT SCOPE OF WORK

There were no discussions of the Baker Branch Library renovation project. Mrs. Lori Juge discussed this under Item IV. Section C. Miscellaneous Improvements. She commented that this item will be addressed separately in a future meeting, and that the library has not begun the project.

Board President Candace Temple asked for public comments. No public comments were made.

VII. NEW BUSINESS – Ms. Candace Temple (5:07 p.m.) Candace Temple requested a motion to approve the library staff to plan and execute a town hall meeting within the next 30 days. The motion was approved by Darryl Hurst seconded by Donald Luther, Jr.

Candace Temple asked for public comments on the motion.

Darryl Hurst advised that if the motion approves, the meeting must take place before March 12, 2025, ahead of the Metropolitan Council board meeting.

A. REQUEST FOR EXECUTIVE ORDER: TO SET A DATE AND TIME TO DISCUSS, REVIEW AND EVALUATE THE CURRENT STATUS AND PERFORMANCE FOR LIBRARY DIRECTOR MS. KATRINA STOKES – Ms. Candace Temple requested to move Item A to March 20, 2025, board meeting so board members can vote to move into an Executive Session.

Board President Candace Temple asked for public comments.

Public comments were made supporting the library.

Candace Temple asked for board comments.

Darryl Hurst commented on the library budget.

VIII. COMMENTS BY THE LIBRARY BOARD OF CONTROL (5:20 p.m.)

Comments from Darryl Hurst:

- Announced a public meeting himself and Councilman Kenny will be hosting on Monday, February 24, 2025, from 6 p.m.- 8 p.m. at the Jewel Newman Community Center.
- Discussed the dedicated millage and lower rate.
- Commented on the city's twenty-one million deficit.
- Importance of including the library in decision-making to avoid conflicts.
- Discussed implementation for a standalone wage initiative to distribute \$25.8 million to city parish for operations.
- Mentioned results from a study that the police budget should be increased to fifty-two million based on a study.
- The library's concern of losing the dedicated tax, which could delay projects.
- Mentioned restructuring millages to accommodate the city's needs while maintaining the library's dedicated tax.
- Library willingness to negotiate if the dedicated millage is preserved.

- Commented on a finite number of millages to help the city parish.
- Noted the current plan may not pass due to lack of votes.

Comments from Donald Luther, Jr.

- Discussed protecting the dedicated millage, which costs \$50-\$60 million annually to run the facilities.
- Noted, the millage is not intended to build another main library but to maintain the existing facilities.
- Mentioned extensive planning over several years to prepare for the millage.
- Commented on the challenges of financial transparency in the city parish, and the spreading of misinformation.
- Commented on the parish attorney's office's spending of funds not supported by the Constitution.
- Mentioned the library's statistics are online and offered an invitation to discuss them.
- Commented on the limited flexibility in the budget, what sacrifices could be made, and how it could impact development of Start Centers in poorer parts of the parish and the importance of upgrading libraries in poorer parts of the parish to avoid negative community perception.
- Mentioned the importance of the library administration and the police department funding; and that they both are essential services.
- Commented on librarians being underpaid, despite having master's degrees, student loans and families to support.
- Commented that the numbers provided by others are not genuine figures or a plan.
- Discussed adjusting the library millage from 11.1 to 10.5 to cover the same expenses depending on parish growth.
- Commented that depending on inflation, the reduced millage will not affect the library's operation.
- Discussed challenges and rising costs make it harder to operate the library system.
- Mentioned he is open to negotiation but emphasizes the need to protect the library's millage and serve its patrons and staff.

Comments and discussions from Nicole Allmon-Learson and Rhonda Pinsonat

- Nicole Allmon-Learson expressed gratitude for the community's support for the library system and highlighted a way to support by checking out CDs as opposed to buying or streaming.
- Nicole Allmon-Learson thanked the community for their support for standing up and speaking out on behalf of the library system.
- Inquired about the incremental increase of the fund balance due to budgeting slightly above previous tax collections and the reduced expenditures during COVID.
- Rhonda Pinsonat commented that revenue projections are always conservative to ensure full collection, as property assessments tend to increase, leading to higher revenue.
- Rhonda Pinsonat commented that finance determines the budget based on estimated revenues, using conservative growth for property valuation in conjunction with assessor's office.
- Nicole Allmon-Learson inquired on the role of property valuation, revenue projections and tax collection.
- Rhonda Pinsonat reiterated that the finance department handles it, and that revenue collection is kept low to avoid over-collection and to maintain financial stability.

Comments from Donald Luther, Jr.

- Donald Luther Jr. mentioned the concept of rollback, city parish's issues with the exceedance of revenues collected; and the 10-year millage where the city adjusts the millage rate to keep revenue consistent if actual collections exceed projections.
- Mentioned the library currently collects 9.89 instead of the historical 11.1 due to rollbacks, which keeps the library conservative.
- Mentioned the four-year occurrence of rollbacks and agencies who request roll forwards when facing financial shortages.
- Praised the library system for operating within its means; emphasized that the Main Branch, their buildings, and South Branch are paid-for unlike other agency assets, which provides long-term value to the community.
- Favorably compared the library fiscal situation to other agencies, which may still be paying off new buildings for several decades.
- Praised the Fire Department and other agencies but criticized the mayor's office for considering reallocating funds for what the taxpayer has dedicated it for.

Donald Luther Jr expressed the desire for agencies to perform better.

Darryl Hurst explained the concept of millage adjustments, mentioning Angie Savoy's input that certain agencies roll forward millages.

He compared millage adjustments to cost-of-living adjustments, emphasizing that higher home values mean lower millage rates are needed.

Commented that rolling back millages is not sustainable due to inflation, comparing it to companies giving cost of Living adjustments.

Suggest that rolling millages forward is a better approach to account for rising costs of inflation and maintain quality service.

Candace Temple supported the library's best practices in budgeting for inflation to avoid surprises due to rising inflation costs.

Nicole Allmon-Learson praised Rhonda Pinsonat for leading the way when budgeting and accounting for inflation.

Rhonda Pinsonat commented on rolling millages forward being an option.

Ronnie Pierce clarified the concept of rolling back millage rate to maintain a steady property revenue of fifty-five million as property values increase.

Kathy Wascom highlighted her concern for the lack of cooperation and compromise from the mayor's office regarding the proposal to move the library funds into the general fund.

Donald Luther Jr. Calls on the mayor's office to delete their proposal, offering to work together to look at the budget to improve East Baton Rouge and make it a better thriving place.

- XI. ADJOURNMENT – Board President Candace Temple requested a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Donald Luther, Jr., and seconded by Nicole Allmon-Learson. **The meeting adjourned at 6:51 p.m. by a unanimous vote.**