



City of Oregon City

Meeting Minutes

Library Board

625 Center Street
Oregon City, OR 97045
503-657-0891

Wednesday, July 14, 2021

Online via Zoom

5:30 PM

1. Call to Order:

David Goldberg called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

Members Present: Cynthia Andrews, Heidi Blackwell, Nick Dierckman, David Goldberg, Kari Linder, Larry Osborne, and Elizabeth Zinter.

Staff Present: Greg Williams, Library Director, and Denise Butcher, Library Operations Manager.

2. Approval of Minutes:

Cynthia Andrews moved to approve the minutes of May 12, 2021 with the addition of a correction reflecting that Kari Linder was present at the meeting. Kari Linder seconded the motion. Cynthia Andrews, Heidi Blackwell, Nick Dierckman, David Goldberg, Kari Linder, Larry Osborne, and Elizabeth Zinter voted to approve. The motion passed.

3. Library Director's Report:

Greg Williams highlighted the reopening phases of the library. Greg shared that the Children's room reopened for browsing June 22. On June 29, the teen and adult upstairs areas reopened. Greg reported that the phased reopening had gone well.

On June 30th, library operations shifted to reflect the lifting of all COVID-related distancing, capacity restrictions, and masking requirements previously required by the governor. Greg said patrons and staff are still welcome to wear masks.

Greg reported that the original timeline of resuming normal library operating hours had been planned to start Tuesday July 6, and a soft launch occurred Saturday July 3. The library had then been closed July 4 and 5 for the Independence Day holiday and a day of staff training and had maintained normal operating hours since.

Greg reported that Library staff were excited to offer full services again and that he was pleased with the reopening.

Greg reiterated that the configuration changes made to the library were made with consideration so that if another public health situation were to occur, the library would be better positioned to continue safely offering services and to increase library operational efficiency. Greg reported that staff and patron feedback had been positive.

David Goldberg commended the transition back to full library operation and shared appreciation for the staff's efforts.

Greg thanked David and recognized the staff's adaptability, Denise Butcher's invaluable assistance, and the Library Board's support during these tough times.

Greg thanked Larry Osborne for his work in completing a grant application to the State Library Board

of Oregon on a tight deadline. Larry stated that Greg had prepared the application materials and that Larry had formatted them. Greg reported that the application had been for roughly \$160,000 dollars, the award pool was roughly \$1.25 million, and that the sum of the applications totaled roughly \$7 million. Greg anticipated award notifications on July 15, 2021.

David Goldberg asked what purpose awarded money would be put towards.

Greg stated that the grant structure required identification of specific projects and that would direct what projects were realized. The submitted application contained five projects related to post pandemic furnishings. Two other projects were concerned with providing access to materials: providing an automated equity audit of collection materials to identify gaps in the collection and adding a “hi-lo” collection. Greg explained that a hi-lo collection provides high interest or high informational content materials tailored to readers with low reading abilities. Another proposed project was a digital magazine subscription service. Greg explained that this would be a way to offset the reduction of physical periodicals in the collection as well as expand access to users who may not regularly physically visit the library.

Greg shared that the summer reading program was in full swing and that registration had increased as patrons returned to the building. Greg referenced recent community feedback included in the report and expressed thanks to the Oregon City community for their support and patience in during a challenging time.

Greg asked if there were additional questions about the report or other subjects that the Board wanted to discuss.

Heidi Blackwell recognized Barratt Miller’s monthly visits in support of the Oregon City School District and her ability to forge partnerships. Heidi also recognized Sabrina Tusing’s attendance and participation in the Summer Bridge Program, wherein ninth graders identified problems and proposed solutions.

Nick Dierckman asked Greg to share information about the usage numbers since reopening. Greg said that by the people counter’s count that on non-weekend days there were about 350 people per day, which was more than anticipated. Greg compared that with a pre-COVID average of approximately 600 people per day. Greg shared that there was publicity about to be released to alert more people to the fact the library was open and had new hours.

4. Public Comments: none

5. Discussion Items:

Overdue Fine Policy

Greg Williams referenced an article that had recently been published regarding overdue fines.

Greg reviewed that during the COVID closure there were some policies changed countywide including a lengthening of checkout times, a freeze on overdue fines, and an increase in the account limit as the LINCC Library Directors realized that it would be difficult for patrons to visit often and there would likely be other hardships occurring. These policy changes were revisited regularly throughout the pandemic.

Greg shared that the LINCC Director group had recently met and voted to end the suspension of overdue fines, although it was agreed that each member library could make decisions to best serve their community.

Greg acknowledged that while those in the Library field know that fines present an equity issue, many libraries were dependent on fine revenue to pay for operations and services and that this was

a difficult reality for libraries to navigate.

Greg referenced a study that he had sent to the Board concerning overdue fines. Greg shared that philosophically, his stance on library fines were overdue fines were an inequitable practice and created a barrier to access and would like to not have them.

Heidi Blackwell asked about impact of overdue fines to Oregon City Public Library's budget.

Greg stated that the Library Budget in pre-COVID years generally anticipated \$40,000 per year in fine revenue and that that amount was close to what was generated. Greg shared that due to COVID, this amount had been revised to be \$40,000 for the biennium, \$15,000 and \$25,000 per fiscal year. Greg said that due to Oregon Budget law, revenue must match expenses which meant that at such a point where overdue fines were done away with permanently, the library would either need to cut expenses or find another source of revenue.

David Goldberg asked about the costs of collecting fines.

Greg referenced a study by one system he'd read that tracked the amount of money spent to collect fines and found that the money spent collecting fines generally equaled the amount of fines collected, had a negative impact on patron experience, and disproportionately affected certain populations.

David asked for clarification about if this discussion was involved fees associated with damaged or lost items. Greg confirmed that it did not.

Heidi asked if patrons had to physically visit the library to pay or if there was an online option. Greg replied that it currently had to be done in person, that enabling online payment was a work in process and had been so for some time and hoped it would be operational by the end of the year.

Greg shared a slideshow covering overdue fine data for LINCC which covered terminology, explained that currently overdue fines were collected by the library that took the money, not the library that owned the overdue item, and that the data was gathered on July 9, so it reflected information current through July 8, 2021. Greg shared breakdowns of outstanding late fees by user home library location, item home library location, and patron age range breakdown of late fees. Greg also shared that the temporary block limit (upper amount that a patron could have in fines and still use library services) would be reduced from the COVID temporary threshold of \$150 back to \$25 on September 6, 2021, which would mean that approximately 500 people would not have library service access based on their overdue fines.

Greg asked if there were questions up to that point.

Nick Dierckman asked if during COVID fines were suspended or if they did not accrue. Greg answered that they did not accrue as the fine amount was set to zero. Nick asked if the \$56,000 of fines Oregon City Library patrons had were from prior to March of 2020. Greg confirmed this was mostly the case, but there were some fines that were assigned in 2021 due to some fines assigned to items that changed into lost status.

Nick asked for clarification on the Lost item status. Greg clarified that when an item was 90 days overdue, it changed to lost status and the cost of the item was charged to the patron's account. Notices requesting the return of the item were sent at regular intervals during the 90-day period. Denise clarified that an item billed as lost did not charge the patron overdue fines but if the lost item was returned, then the patron was billed for overdue fines associated with that item.

Nick asked for clarification as to who was included in the 500 patrons impacted. Greg stated that there were approximately 500 people with account balances where the presence of overdue fines

was enough to push the account balance above \$25.

Larry Osborn asked for clarification about the 500 patrons and asked for confirmation that the 500 patrons were going back to their status prior to the COVID era. Greg confirmed that that was the case. Greg stated that he did not have data about how many of the 500 patrons had utilized library services that they would not otherwise have been able to use.

Nick asked if Oregon City Public Library pursued active debt collection. Greg stated that Oregon City Public Library did not use any debt collection agency and if a patron came to the library and was unable to check out due to account balances, staff were empowered to waive fees.

Greg shared that at the county level accounts that have had no activity for three years are purged from the system unless there is a balance of \$1000 or more still on the account. Greg shared a spreadsheet showing the amount of funds eligible to be purged over the course of several years and showed how that even though it might initially show that there were fines owed, a substantial portion of that amount would not be realized.

Nick asked if patrons who had been purged were then eligible for a new card. Greg confirmed that patrons would be at that point.

Nick asked how many Oregon City Library patrons had fines of any amount. Greg said roughly 7,000.

Heidi asked for clarifications on other ways to clear fines. Greg stated that the first line of contact was staff, and that staff could do a lot of waiving. Greg also referenced previous canned food drives that were used to offset fines. Denise added that it had been one dollar per item. Greg acknowledged that canned food drives required more management from staff as staff could not accept some types of food. Denise also acknowledged that each can must have its expiration date checked, which was a labor-intensive process for larger donations. Greg said that half off fine events also occurred. Denise added that historically during a week in April (in celebration of the Library's birthday) and a span of time in November and December, the library matches the amount the patron pays towards their fines. Greg added that sometimes children's programs included fine vouchers.

Cynthia Andrews excused herself from the remainder of the meeting and pointed out that she had never missed a meeting. David assured her that it would not count as miss.

Greg stated that the goal was to get patrons able to use the library.

Elizabeth Zinter asked if the Library website had messaging inviting patrons to visit and talk to staff if their account fines were a barrier to access. Greg said he would check with the web team and if it was not, it should be added.

Denise clarified that staff were unable to work with lost or damaged fees for items belonging to other libraries.

Nick asked if Oregon City Public Library could choose not to charge fines even if the rest of the LINCC libraries continued to charge them.

Greg responded that that was technically possible although it was preferable to do things as a group.

Nick stated that this seemed like it would be a good thing to bring up in LDAC as the subject pertained to operations, governance, and finance and floated the idea of bringing the topic up there. Greg agreed and stated that it would be very important to take into consideration the needs of member libraries who depended on the fine revenue to function before implementing changes. Nick agreed.

David noted that in the interest of time, the group should move on to the next topic and stated that he expected this topic to reoccur in future meetings.

Greg shared with the Board that staff currently was checking returned items in on a fine free basis and planned on continuing this until Labor Day and the resumption of the old account limit. Greg wanted to alert the Board to this process and ensure that this was not concerning to the Board. David asked if the Board had any concerns about this. No one voiced concerns.

Elizabeth requested messaging encouraging patrons to talk to staff about fines that might block access to library services.

Greg reported that the American Library Association passed a resolution stating that fines were inequitable and a barrier to access and calling on local governments to remove this barrier.

David asked if the Library Board was ready to resume in person meetings. Larry said it made no difference to him and David agreed. David proposed having the next Library Board meeting in person. Greg said he would check with the City Commission.

Greg also shared that the Oregon Legislature had recently passed a bill that required all government organizations to make all public meetings accessible via electronic means and while that was designed for the public, it also would open the possibility of virtual attendance for Board Members. Elizabeth Zinter requested advance notice of meeting length. Greg also shared that in the past when meeting in person the meeting start time was 5:00 pm rather than 5:30 pm the virtual meetings had been starting on and Greg anticipated meetings would resume their 5:00 pm start time.

David Goldberg shared that he, Greg, Denise, and Foundation had been brainstorming ways to expand library service to the patrons in rural service areas, particularly through developing community partnerships and automated systems. Heidi suggested utilizing community boards as advertising platforms.

Greg spoke to the possibility of formalizing the relationship between the Library Board and other advisory groups, including Teen Advisory Group and Because Access Matters Advisory Group, in which the Advisory groups might become subcommittees of the Board. Greg outlined a liaison structure. David asked if this would be similar to the Board's current relationship to the Friends of the Library and the Library Foundation. Greg said yes.

6. Communications:

Library Foundation

Greg Williams expected to be able to report more information concerning the potential addition of drop boxes throughout the community.

Library District Advisory Committee (LDAC)

Nick Dierckman reported that LDAC had met in June, the annual reports were caught up to 2018-2019 fiscal year, and that the next meeting would occur September 27 and the annual reports would be reviewed and plans for the Task Force would be solidified.

Friends of the Library

Larry Osborne shared that the financials were good, all COVID restrictions were done, Science Fiction and Classics were selling well in teen customers, and the last shipment of DVDs sent by the library had been a little overwhelming.

7. Future Agenda Items:

David Goldberg stated that discussion would be needed around updating the Library Strategic Plan and that Greg Williams had been exploring possibilities. Greg suggested that it might be better worked over in a work session.

8. Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 6:37 PM.