

North Central Washington Libraries
Board Minutes

April 16, 2020

I. Call to Order:

Denise Sorom called to order the March meeting of the North Central Regional Library Board of Trustees at 1:05 PM March 19th, 2020. The meeting was held as a Zoom Teleconference and was open to the public.

II. Attendees:

The following persons were present: Board Members Gail Huntley, Denise Sorom, Kathleen Allstot, Deborah Moore, Katherine Meade, Jim Mitchell, Jim Brucker. Barbara Walters, Executive Director, Angela Morris, Director of Public Services, Michael Macy, Director, Finance and Administration, Chad Roseburg, Associate Director of IT, Kim Neher, Project Manager, Tracy Hazen, Director of HR, and Tim Dillman, Executive Assistant

* All attendees participated via Zoom.

III. Visitors:

Future Board Member Lisa Karstetter was present for the entire meeting. Aaron Payne, Senior Marketing joined the meeting at 2:49 pm.

IV. Consent Agenda:

Denise asked if there were questions for items in the Consent Agenda which included the:

- a. April Meeting Agenda
- b. Minutes of the March 19, 2020 regular board meeting
- c. Payroll & Vouchers
 - i. March Payroll for \$506,672.16 and Benefits for \$186,527.90
 - ii. March Accounts Payable for \$476,969.59
 - iii. Staff Reports

Jim Brucker moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Deborah Moore seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Barbara Walters gave a brief introduction of Lisa Karstetter who will complete Gail Huntley's term as the board representative for Grant County. Lisa made some remarks about her optimism in joining the board.

V. COVID-19 Response

Kim walked the board through the district's progressive responses to the COVID-19 pandemic since the last meeting.

The library entered Phase 4 closing library branches. No staff have been reporting to work. 17 staff are teleworking, and 16 staff are on call. All other staff have been on leave using the board

adopted leave. Basic operations have continued (executive team, payroll, communications, IT). An expanded digital services team of 12 staff have been actively creating and connecting patrons to new digital content as well as promoting our traditional digital resources. Kim presented the PLA Survey on Library Coronavirus responses and compared it to NCRL's response.

Kim then outlined the development of a phased opening approach in the recovery stage. This plan will include the order of events for reinstating physical services, supplies needed to protect staff and patrons, and how to handle and process materials.

Kim also spoke about the letter that was sent out to state representatives and county commissioners. Board members were asked to contact those representatives as a follow up. Barbara added that those talking points could be used in any meetings to inform the conversation regarding the library's response.

Denise mentioned that this season may be a good time to get patrons trained on digital resources and see a long-term transition from mail order usage to digital platforms.

VI. Supplemental Leave Extension

Tracy walked the board through a presentation explaining the research that went into the supplemental leave extension. The 160 hours of supplemental and emergency leave previously passed by the board is set to be exhausted April 21st. Stay home directives are scheduled through at least May 4th and potentially beyond that date. Tracy explained the options that would be available to employees if additional supplemental leave is not provided. Tracy also shared PLA and ALA surveys which show how other libraries across the country are responding. Tracy described the online, from-home learning that has been developed for staff who are at home.

VII. Resolution 20-12

The resolution expands upon Resolutions 20-10 and 20-11, extending supplemental leave for 8 weeks through June 17th.

Jim Mitchell moved to approve the resolution. Kathleen seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

1184

VIII. Director's Report

Barbara shared her report with the board, describing the challenges and highlights that have presented themselves over the last month. Barbara notified the board that the Department of Commerce Library grant deadline has been extended. She also expanded on the partnership between NCRL, GWATA (Greater Wenatchee Area Technical Alliance and Wenatchee School District to provide Wi-Fi hotspots to students in need.

Denise asked if there have been any communication regarding the Winthrop Library campaign. Barbara shared that she received an update today letting her know that FOWL met their goal for of \$2 million dollars for the matching funds from the state. The project is in the value

engineering phase.

Barbara shared that the city of Royal City have decided not to support the new library building project. The friends of the library is going to continue to pursue options for the project.

Coulee City has also notified NCRL that they intend to apply for the Department of Commerce Library Grant.

IX. Branch Report

Angela shared that supervisors have been checking in with staff at home weekly. Angela also shared some of the positive feedback from staff about the communication they are receiving and the ways this time is building teamwork and engagement from staff. Angela shared photos of the masks that have been 3D printed and donated to the Humane Society.

X. Salary Study and Resolution 20-04 and 20-05

The board reconsidered Resolutions 20-04 and 20-05 which were tabled at the March meeting. Barbara asked Michael to share the feedback received from the County Treasurer. Michael showed a chart which outlined revenue rates from 2004 through 2019 as well as the percentage change in levy rates year over year. The County Assessor assured Michael that library tax revenue is relatively reliable as levy rates will go up if property values go down. Michael also shared that NCRL has close to 13 months of tax revenue in cash reserves.

Barbara reiterated the points made in a letter sent to board members before the meeting. She reminded board members that the greatest impact in passing the new compensation plan would be for the branch staff. Barbara spoke to the question of optics and said she feels strongly that the compensation is defensible and will boost morale in difficult times. Barbara also mentioned that passing the new compensation plan could be a bulwark to unionization.

Denise commented that all board members had been provided with Barbara's points in advance of the meeting. Denise shared that her view of the issue had changed since the previous board member and she is in favor of correcting the inequities in pay. Denise pointed out that expenses have gone down, and revenue appears to be on target to remain steady.

Gail said that she would like to see the board approve the new schedule to correct the salary inequities.

Deborah made the comment that the library's revenue comes from taxpayer dollars and that must be kept in mind. Her opinion has not changed, and she is not in favor of passing the new salary schedule. Increasing unemployment, local area pay cuts, and library assistant layoffs, make now an untimely season to pass the measure. While the library has reserves and revenue appears to remain predictable, there is no guarantee. Deborah is in favor of revisiting the measure in a month or two. In Deborah's opinion, the optics are not good to give pay increases when so many people are losing their jobs.

Jim Brucker agreed with the comments that had been made. He is in favor of the eventual approval of the salary study but feels the timing is bad. He would prefer to delay the decision a

month or two.

Barbara clarified that she believes the new salary schedule only “right-pays” staff, instead of giving raises.

Kathleen asked how many employees are usually lost in a year and to whom they are lost. Michael responded that many staff are with NCRL a very long time and leave due to retirement. Barbara responded that the salary study showed NCRL is not competitive with the school district or the NCESD. Tracy added that 79% of positions are below the minimum for market. Michael and Kim both voiced that recruitment challenges are a greater issue than employee retention. Kim added that with retirements comes the need for recruitment.

Denise mentioned that several years ago NCRL had a lot of scrutiny about large cash reserves, which were the result of continued underbudgeting without reducing tax revenues. She encouraged the board not to head down that path again. Denise commented that holding back on the salary increases when a revenue shortfall is not anticipated could get NCRL back in the position it was in before. If NCRL can be a steady source of fair pay, it may provide support to the economy and a steady source of employment.

Angela commented on the timing. Staff may need it the most currently if spouses and family are experiencing cutbacks in their pay.

Denise added that it is a 7% increase on NCRL’s budget. Kathleen asked if the resolution would be retroactive to January or would go into effect at another time. Barbara answered that she was hoping it would be effect in April.

Kathleen again spoke to the optics of the issue. Much of the public is unaware of what a librarian does and that raises at this time could create confusion and disagreement. Barbara responded that those naysayers would voice concerns regardless of the timing.

Deborah said that the information will get out and the public will hear that library employees are getting more money at a time when others are losing their jobs and missing mortgage payments. Denise asked when Deborah thinks the right timing would be. Deborah was uncertain but thinks it should be taken a month at a time.

Denise asked the board to consider what the short and long term damage of bad publicity over this issue could be. Kathleen asked Barbara to comment on Moses Lake. Barbara said there is no update since meeting with Allison Williams. Kathleen said her point is about communities looking at the cost of providing a library and considering not providing library buildings. Deborah responded that so much goodwill has been built up, but this issue could cause people to scrutinize the budget more closely.

Barbara mentioned that several retailers are giving increases to staff that work with the public. The library staff will be on the frontlines. Barbara believes that the optics of continuing to underpay staff would be worse than the optics of passing the new salary schedule.

Kim added to Barbara’s comments, saying that with the study in the public record, as well as NCRL having passed a budget that includes this expense and having done the homework on

anticipated revenue, it might be hard to justify not giving more money to staff who can then put that money to work in local economies.

(Jim Mitchell left the meeting at 2:07 pm)

Deborah asked how to answer the question about laying off over a hundred employees and then giving other employees a pay raise. Kim responded that the assistants are substitutes that do not have regular hours and were hired to fill gaps in the schedule that don't exist when the libraries are closed. Those staff will also be seeing an increase in their pay rate when they return to work.

Jim affirmed Kim's point regarding the increase being effective for supporting local economies. Jim also commented on the inequity of being underpaid as a school district employee in the Okanogan County when other educators were paid at market rates.

Katherine said she thought all the points had been good. But she is not ready to pass the salary study. She would want to delay taking action. Lisa added her input saying, most philanthropies/foundations will be down in funding 50-60% this year. At the same time usage for non-profit and foundation services will be up 3 to 4 times the typical need. Lisa agrees that salary equalization needs to happen, but the timing is really unfortunate.

Kathleen asked when the library would know how the tax revenues for April looked. Michael said the treasurer's office is trying to have it posted by late May or early June. Kathleen asked if that money comes in from mortgage companies. Michael answered that about 60% of NCRL revenue comes in from the April tranche. The board would have a better sense of the income by June.

Denise said the longer the conversation goes on the stronger she supports it since the expense was budgeted for, the revenue stream looks steady, and librarian will be an important piece of recovery in every community. She suggested the option of tabling the resolution until June when a better sense of the economy and the tax revenue will be available.

Kathleen said she does think the staff should be paid at market rates, but she is concerned whether the taxes will come in to support this and how it will be explained to communities that are losing jobs and not getting the pay adjustments. Gail responded that the study was ongoing for the last six months and exposes pay inequities that the board agrees should be corrected. She believes putting it off because of public perceptions is the wrong decision.

Tim echoed Angela's earlier comments about staff being able to utilize their increased pay to support family members and other community members who are harder hit. He added that it is defensible in a disaster to offer pay increases to the first responders on the frontlines, and NCRL librarians will be an integral part of the recovery response.

Denise ended discussion and entertained a motion. Gail moved to approve Resolution 20-04 to approve the salary schedule. Denise seconded. The motion failed.

Katherine moved to revisit Resolution 20-04 at the June board meeting. Deborah seconded. The motion passed.

It was determined that Resolution 20-04 and 20-05 must be considered together.

XI. Financials

Michael reiterated that the revenue is projected to remain steady as budgeted. The expenses are 12% under budgeted, largely due to the delay in implementing the salary schedule as budgeted. NCRL has approximately fourteen months of cash on hand.

The Wenatchee Public Library project has been put on hold to comply with the statewide direction on construction. It will cost \$10,000 a month to continue to rent the temporary Wenatchee Avenue location. Shelves for the new library will be delivered next week and stored in the garage at the distribution center.

XII. Rebranding and New logo

Kim introduced Aaron Payne, Senior Graphic Designer. Aaron has been working on rebranding as the lead for the Goal 9 project. Several new logos were designed and voted on by a team of staff. A final logo design has been selected. Aaron presented several graphic slides to show how the new logo would be implemented across various branches. The board thanked Aaron for all his work and the high-quality end product. Denise commented on the incredible value NCRL receives by having Aaron's skills in-house and not contracting with an external designer.

XIII. Announcements

Kathleen moved to adopt resolution 20-09. Deborah seconded. The motion passed.

V. Announcements:

Denise recognized that this was Gail Huntley's last meeting as a board member. Denise read a recap of Gail's ten years on the board. Several board members expressed their appreciation for Gail and how much they would miss having her serve on the board.

Denise thanked all members for their input and involvement.

Jim Brucker asked what would be happening with the NCRL Reads author Tommy Orange. Angela said NCRL staff are in talks with his representatives and are hoping events can be scheduled in October.

Deborah thanked Denise for her leadership walking through difficult conversations during the meeting and providing opportunity for everyone to express their viewpoints.

The next regular meeting of the Board of Trustees is scheduled on May 21, 2020, location to be determined. There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 3:08 pm.

