

Special Meeting of the Board of Library Trustees
Friday, August 04, 2006 - Library Board Room
02:30 PM - 04:30 PM

Minutes of Actions and Decisions of the Board of Library Trustees of the Bellingham Public Library as Authorized by RCW 27.12.210 and SEC. 7.02 Charter of the City of Bellingham.

Board Members Present: Chairperson: Tim Douglas, Vice-Chairperson: Alan Kemble, Faye Hill, Vicky Marshall, David Edelstein

Board Members Absent:

Library Staff: Pam Kiesner; Lizz Roberts; Jane Lowrey; Suzanne Carlson-Prandini; Gladys Fullford

Others: John Watts, City Council Liaison, Tom Glenn, Friends of BPL, Tim Stewart, Planning Director, Jon Gambrell, Bellingham Herald, Joan Airolidi, WCLS Director, and Linda Langey, Member Guide Meridian/Cordata Neighborhood Association

Called to Order: Meeting was called to order by Chairperson, Tim Douglas. Agenda Approved. Tim congratulated Joan Airolidi on the anonymous gift to the Ferndale Library. Joan said it was an incredibly wonderful turn of events.

Public Comment: Linda Langey is here on behalf of the Guide Meridian Neighborhood, the fastest growing neighborhood. They are hoping for a branch library in their area.

Communications: Pam provided a copy of an email from Joan Beardsley in the Board packet. It is in response to Linda Langey's letter and Pam's response.

Strategic Planning: Tim Stewart, Planning Director, spoke about population projections and what will be needed to accommodate them. The Growth Management Act requires cities and counties to accommodate growth assigned by the state. Bellingham's zoning capacity is higher than actual because zoning allows greater heights in downtown. Whatcom County has many five acre parcels vested with development rights. The County could accommodate with sprawl; the City with tall buildings. The City provides balance between with in-fill and filling up the sides with various types of housing. Variables of the market are difficult to predict. The numbers are good indicators of the trends we are facing. The City does not control where growth areas will be; that is a County decision.

Alan Kemble asked how the City comes up with the different urban growth areas. Tim answered the nature and character of the land should speak first as it relates to the natural topography. The land is sectioned into manageable planning units. Faye Hill asked about the high growth in Guide Meridian area. Tim said the raw land and zoning density are part of the calculation for infill. Variables and changes in time can create more capacity, such as the waterfront. The newer urban focus is a mixture of commercial and residential. The market will drive construction and density.

The County's perspective of the Urban Growth Areas update may take months. Bellingham is a sub-area in the plan. Pam Kiesner asked how the UGA's will be settled. Tim answered that it is up in the air. The City could require annexation.

Tim Douglas commented on the concurrency piece of the growth management. It often falls by the wayside. When land develops, infrastructure of water, sewer, roads are in place. Services such as the library are part of the secondary infrastructure. The ideal is that they would develop concurrently. Often it is growth, demand, sprawl; and then pull back and provide concurrency.

Tim Douglas asked where growth is most likely to occur. Tim Stewart replied there is no better estimate than the data provided in the estimated population maps. The only variable is the topography of the

north county area's southern boundary. There is not much room to change and it will not have enormous growth compared to other areas. Barkley is not a major growth center. Cordata seems to be expectant of the highest growth. Growth management is short-sighted when it is considered that land use deals with 20 years, compared with water pipes lasting 100 years, and roads forever. We should establish a 50 year growth boundary. There are limiting factors on the south and east. Northern growth is where it will be. John Watts commented that we may be limited by availability of water before availability of land.

Pam noted that Haggen's Barkley store draws drop-off from several northern neighborhoods. It might be surprising where patrons would come from. It depends on the provided services.

Tim Douglas remarked that the public needs to understand the cost of operating a branch library. Consideration should also be made of traffic and accessibility to Guide Meridian and Cordata areas. Tim Stewart said the City is encouraging transit for a sustainable system. City Council recently passed a concurrency management ordinance that should help to fix the infrastructure with a good transportation modeling system. Tim suggested that Planning Department staff could bring more information to the Board about travel times. Pam said one standard for driving time to a library is 15 minutes. Another standard that has been used in the past is one square foot of library per capita.

The library is more than a collection of books; it is a community center. The building benefits and enhances the community. The challenge is how to play out services to meet the community's needs. Alan asked who makes decision on community centers. John answered that when the community demands funding, City Council makes the decision after a proposal is presented.

Jane Lowrey mentioned that some time ago the library kept track of patron usage of Fairhaven Branch. The second highest use of Fairhaven came from the First Ward in the north. The Library now serves 15 outreach facilities -- 5 are in the Cordata area, 4 are in the north side of town, and another is under construction. Many retirement patrons are somewhat mobile, but do not drive Meridian. A northside presence would take the pressure off of Outreach Services, which is at its maximum. John said WTA will build a transfer station in Cordata. That will make travel downtown easier.

Linda Langey said many condo complexes have clubhouses. They call the paperback exchange their "underground library." Jane said we deliver to 3 clubhouses. Because of the clubhouses, the need for meeting rooms is less. However Whatcom Literacy Council needs space.

Lizz Roberts will head a north-end presence project, working with other staff members. They will gather information. There is a variety of kinds of service from a kiosk to a stand alone library branch. We will continue to be in touch with the Talbots in the Barkley area.

Tim Douglas discussed the merits of the northern areas. Barkley is convenient, and has something to enhance a sense of village. Cordata has a large growth potential and a mix of social and economic population. It may eventually need a branch. David Edelstein agreed the Barkley area makes sense, but is too close to the Central Library for a full branch. Cordata is a good 20-year view, but what about the 50-year view. Demographics and transportation may speak to east of Guide Meridian in the future. A two-fold need is to consider if Bellingham has the population to cause us to build a branch, and what is the reasonable distance to expect people to drive.

Vicky Marshall would like to see the Board work with community groups. There may be a business opportunity to come up with funds to build libraries. David suggested when the time comes for a branch, we should have a Request for Proposals. The RFP would be for anyone who may think of having a branch library represented on part of their property or for gift property for a library or park. Alan sees a northside small facility with pick-up and drop-off as a reasonable compromise. Pam mentioned that a library presence gives us the opportunity to try out the area, but cautioned that a presence always grows, and you can never close it.

The Library Board has the opportunity to set library square footage for the community. It is now .63 square foot per capita.

John said that rather than having people think the City will bestow on the community, they need to realize it needs funding. Fairhaven has paid land and building, but there is approximately \$170,000 per year operating costs. Alan asked Joan Airoidi about costs of county libraries. Joan said it costs more to operate small branches. Tim Douglas said it may be easiest to find property and build; the biggest problem is the tap on the operating fund to continue operations. When there are budget crunches, the most pressure is on the cultural departments. Tim urges caution in asking for someone to step forward to open a branch and to be careful about building expectations that cannot be sustained. Vicky suggested if a donor built a facility, there could be a survey to see what services the community would prefer. Pam said at best we are an information delivery system. We need to think how to distribute materials to people. It could even be a locker system where the place becomes secondary. Joan said the reality of where society is financially, we cannot afford big beautiful buildings. We need to look at other opportunities. If someone else owns the building, the library would be liable to their guidelines. We need to know our responsibility to the taxpayers.

Tim Douglas reminded the Board that we cannot form our own taxing district under state law. He suggested something like cooperation with Whatcom Community College, bringing the community on campus. Jane said there is a precedent for this with a main public library on the corner of San Jose University's campus. We need to investigate with the state on WCC funding. Could we chip in to make it a college/public library? Pam said the literacy council is connected with WCC. They are desperate for space. We could do something in partnership. All parties must be interested to make it work. The missions of both institutions must be kept in mind. It is a long process to work out a deal.

Alan mentioned the public can buy a membership and use the library at WWU. Jane said a lot of students come here because our library is easier to use.

David remarked that a new opportunity to look at a new site could come up every year. He said the Board should decide if they want to wait forever or make a decision if this is the best time to pick the best available site. He suggested each member write down their five site choices and bring them to the next meeting. The Board would go on a field trip to each site, and comment on each site's pluses and minuses to have more direction. Tim agreed that the Board has been careful and methodical, but the community is waiting for the Board to make a decision. Pam will have the criteria for site evaluation with an updated list of all the sites in the Board packet. Tim said any privately owned property would be discussed in Executive Session. David would like to leave the next regular meeting with five sites to look at.

The next regular meeting on Tuesday, August 15, will start at 1:30 p.m. The tour date will be at 1:00 p.m. on August 29th.

Tim has a copy of WTA's review and strategic plan. It is an idea for how to proceed and approach City Council. City Council could meet at the Library rather than in the Council Chambers. The Board needs to think how to present to the public.

Next Regular Library Board Meeting – August 15, 2006 will begin at 1:30 p.m.

Library Tour – August 29, 2006 at 1:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Chair, Library Board of Trustees

ATTEST

