

**Special Meeting of the Board of Library Trustees**  
**Tuesday, June 08, 2010 - Library Lecture Room**  
**09:00 AM - 10:35 AM**

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.

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**Board Members Present:** Chairperson: David Edelstein, J. Robert Gordon, Marilyn Mastor, Rachel Myers, Vice-Chairperson: Faye Hill

**Board Members Absent:**

**Library Staff:** Pamela Kiesner; Christine Perkins; Colleen Morse; Marc Poulsen; Doug Dickinson; Alison Dickinson; Margaret Ziegler; Beth Bevens; Beth Farley; Deborah Brewer; Donna Grasdock; Shari Emley; Sue Kenney; Helen Scholtz; Judy Swatosh; Bethany Hoglund; Jane Lowrey; and Gladys Fullford

**Others:** Michael Lilliquist, City Council Liaison, David Webster, Chief Administrative Officer-City of Bellingham, Regan Robinson, WCLS, Christine Walsh, Friends, Kie Relyea, Bellingham Herald, Vicky Marshall, Julie Guy, Beverly Jacobs, Pam Went, Howard Levitt, Marilyn Olsen, and John Servais

**Called to order:** The Special session was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chair David Edelstein.

**Approve/modify agenda:** A Public Comment period was added to the agenda.

**Public Comments:** Vicky Marshall stated she was very much in favor of no staff cuts. Vicky suggested using the interlibrary loan program and publishing a wish list of materials that the public could donate. Any donated materials would have a note, "purchased by the public." We can always get materials; we cannot always replace staff.

Margaret Ziegler said it was heartbreaking to think that cuts to branches were on the table, but the Central Library is vital and critical. Margaret would rather see a branch cut or temporary closure than deeper cuts at the Central Library. Keep the Central Library the strong point.

Beverly Jacobs stated in this time of unemployment and job loss, people need to use computers at the public library. Access to computers is important.

Colleen Morse works in the Outreach Department. Outreach took a severe cut last year and further cuts are now being considered. Outreach is currently serving only health care facilities, assisted living, and a few patrons via home service. Colleen hopes there is some way to keep the program going.

Julie Guy has been working to start a north end branch. They would like to use volunteer librarians, but the union does not allow this. Julie encourages the Board to renegotiate with the union. Many people would volunteer a few hours each week to keep the library going.

Helen Scholtz said the library staff was interested in furloughs during the last budget cuts. Helen heard there is a possibility of the library looking at furloughs rather than permanent cuts.

Pamela Kiesner passed copies of a letter from staff member Liz Smith to Board members. Liz is unable to attend the meeting today.

**Bellingham Public Library Budget – 2011:** Library Director Pam Kiesner explained the City Budget Office has directed the Library to propose a reduction plan of \$372,441 by June 18. This is an 11% decrease to the 2010 budget. Since this is the Library Board's budget, the Board is being asked to recommend their reductions to reach this target number. All departments were asked to do this exercise

and nothing has been decided yet. The Mayor will take all the proposals from all city departments and decide on the reductions he will recommend to the City Council.

A list of potential library reductions was distributed. Initial cuts in early 2009 included materials, staff training, and computer hardware. The second round of cuts included the elimination of several staff positions. Materials have been cut 30% since 2008. Books and other library materials now represent approximately 10 % of the budget. Personnel costs are approximately 70% of the budget. The remaining 20% are chargebacks from the City, equipment and supplies.

The directive from the Mayor was for each department to propose a 5% cut to their 2010 budget. Departments must also absorb any increases in salaries, benefits, and city charges. This adds up to an 11% cut for the library.

Pam reviewed several reduction options. Some staff have indicated support for furlough days. We've calculated a savings of \$7,900 per day or \$39,500 for 5 days. Because the city hasn't endorsed furloughs, if this is an option the Board wants to include, we should have an alternate plan ready that will achieve the same level of savings.

Michael Lilliquist suggested the Board develop their philosophy to rank or prioritize options.

J. Gordon mentioned the suggested transportation tax. Is there any similar opportunity to try to get help for the library? Michael Lilliquist answered the Capital Facilities Task Force looked at funding mechanisms for the library. Certain taxing vehicles do not work for a municipal library because they are intended for county library districts or multi-county districts.

Pam Kiesner said the concept for a Parks and Library operating levy has been mentioned, but not explored.

Michael Lilliquist remarked that it is hard not to try to look for better funding mechanisms, but we need to look at the reality of cuts.

As one option, Pam suggests eliminating the vacant Head of Circulation Services position and using a small portion of the savings to help fund a Page Coordinator position. This would provide daily supervision of our Page staff. The Assistant Director would continue to handle all other responsibilities of the Head of Circulation Services position in addition to Assistant Director duties.

Pam also suggests potential savings in current vacancies by filling the vacant positions with in-house candidates and not backfilling the corresponding vacant positions.

Finally, she proposes reducing librarian temporary labor. Combined, these savings add up to approximately \$232,572. We have an agreement with the professional union to fill the Head of Children's position by September. Although these changes would not result in layoffs, they would leave several positions vacant, and we will need to develop a realistic staffing plan and revisit our open hours and the ability to provide services and programs with remaining staff.

The Fairhaven Branch Library was mentioned during last year's budget discussions. Fairhaven currently costs \$51,000 in wages per year and \$78,000 for Facilities. If closed there would be a loss of approximately \$30,000 in revenue from room rentals. Thus, closing Fairhaven could result in a net savings of \$99,000 to the library. However, it would also impact other departments' budgets, such as Public Works. If closing Fairhaven is an option we need to work out the details and actual cost savings very carefully.

The Barkley Branch Library had been open 20 hours per week by contract with the Barkley Company. This year, hours have already been cut back to 16 per week, with approval by the Barkley Company.

The lease runs through February 2012. There are no facility costs since the Barkley Company takes care of it and provides the space rent-free. Staff savings from a closure would be approximately \$30,000 annually. Barkley business is doing well; conversely, Fairhaven business has not recovered since we reopened. Circulation and people counts are way down at Fairhaven. Fairhaven's new reduced hours may be difficult for some to remember, and others may have become accustomed to going to Central or Barkley while the Fairhaven Branch was undergoing repairs.

The Library Materials budget peaked in 2008 at \$557,871 or 14.4% of the total library budget. In 2010 the materials budget is \$375,000 or 10.8% of the total budget. Cuts have been realized by cancelling database subscriptions, purchasing fewer copies of popular materials, and not purchasing updated materials in key areas. The new book shelf is less than half full. Pam has proposed cutting materials by \$25,000.

Foregoing Administration 2.5% cost of living increases for the Director and Assistant Director would save \$4,744. This would be the second year of this cut.

Pam Kiesner mentioned that Friends of the Bellingham Public Library President Kathie Wilson said the Friends are willing to contribute to material costs. Pam and the Board are grateful for this continued support from the Friends. Pam cautioned the Board that library materials are a basic library service and should be primarily supported by the library's budget.

Other options are to reduce Technical Services (\$28,000) and eliminate Outreach Services (\$64,594.) Outreach costs include salary and fuel. We are now serving approximately 200 people who are essentially bedridden. Fay asked if volunteers can get the materials to these people? The dilemma is that the work has been done in a union position, and would become a union issue if turned over to volunteers. Could the work be done by a group not affiliated with the library?

J. Gordon had to leave to attend another meeting. Prior to leaving, he said that the Central Library is the core, and we need to keep it strong. Fairhaven has not recovered. Business partners at Barkley have invested in the library, and we need to honor our commitment with Barkley. J. suggests digging into the materials budget, and reach out to the Friends for help. He also suggested keeping Outreach Services as much as possible. All Board members agreed with J. regarding Barkley Branch.

Marilyn Mastor asked about bringing Fairhaven staff to Central and possibly turning Fairhaven over to the Parks Department or Facilities to keep the room rentals steady.

The Board discussed the impact of closing branches or looking at alternatives such as materials, Tech Services, or a scaled-back Outreach Services. Jane Lowrey mentioned an option discussed last year was to contract with facilities for a fee for Outreach Services. David Edelstein said we would be obligated to continue the service if we accepted fees. He would prefer that Outreach Services remain voluntary.

Rachel Myers mentioned the importance of early childhood literacy skill development. An open Fairhaven Branch would provide accessibility to fulfill an important mission. Faye Hill does not want to close Fairhaven if there is any way around it.

Christine Perkins said there is a slight possibility that Outreach Services might be able to be scaled back by limiting the number of items per person which would reduce staff time in choosing books. We currently visit 14 facilities once a month, and have 14 home service patrons.

Michael Lilliquist suggested looking at the materials budget for more cuts. David Edelstein answered that we have cut materials proportionately higher than everything else. We need to keep the quality of our materials collection high.

The Board agreed to accept the recommendation to cut the first three items on the list: eliminating the vacant Head of Circulation Services position, applying potential salary savings when filling two vacant positions, and reducing librarian temporary labor.

The board agreed that a furlough of all staff for 5 days of closure would be preferable to closing a branch. Pam asked if the Board was ready to make a decision or continue their discussion at their next meeting. The Board agreed to table the conversation and a decision until the regular Board meeting on June 15.

Pam will ask about possibility of furloughs for all library staff, and will look at the possibility of scaling back Outreach Services rather than elimination.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

Chair, Library Board of Trustees

ATTEST

Secretary, Library Board of Trustees