

Bellingham Public Library



**Special Meeting of the Library Board of Trustees
Getting to a Sustainable Future
Monday, February 27, 2017 – Old City Hall
1:00-5:00 p.m.**

Minutes of Actions and Decisions of the Library Board of 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:** J. Gordon, Marilyn Mastor, Tom Barrett and Rick Osen
- Library Staff:** Nancy Kerr, Lola Estelle, Beth Farley, Bethany Hoglund, Janice Keller, Jennifer Vander Ploeg and Wendy Jenkins
- Others Present:** Marcellus Turner, Seattle Public Library City Librarian; Andrew Chanse, Spokane Public Library Director; Faye Hill, Friends of BPL; Christine Perkins, WCLS Executive Director; Marvin Waschke, WCLS Board Trustee; Rebecca Craven, BPL Trustee applicant; Julie Guy, citizen
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Welcome and introductions: Nancy welcomed everyone and introduced guest speakers Marcellus Turner from Seattle Public Library and Andrew Chanse from Spokane Public Library.

Retreat goals/setting the stage: J. provided an overview of the relevant history for Bellingham Public Library: he was appointed to the Board in 2006 when the focus was on building a new Central Library. The recession hit and building plans were set aside. We have never quite recovered. The Mayor has shared her financial challenges including long-term liabilities that many cities are struggling with. The City is exploring things like a Parks district and a Fire district to determine if there are efficiencies and cost savings to be gained. The City has also asked us to explore annexation with the Whatcom County Library System as a viable option. J. added that annexation is a much bigger question – not just a financial question. This retreat is the opening conversation in educating the Board as to what the options are. We are hoping to learn from library systems that have already explored sustainable funding options – Seattle and Spokane.

J. asked Marcellus and Andrew if they would first share their general vision for the library of the future:

Marcellus responded that he enjoys this type of conversation. Joseph Janes edited a book titled, Library 2020, in which 20 library directors were asked to answer that question – Marcellus was one of the contributing directors. Libraries are increasingly being asked to help address social issues such as poverty and homelessness, leading towards a more socially conscious library. Marcellus envisions more professionals from other professions, such as

social workers, reporters, research staff or teachers which could provide the opportunity to answer more questions. Libraries will not just be reference and programming, but take on other issues. Every day the public ask for something we haven't thought about. The public have already transitioned, so we need to adapt.

Andrew answered that he agrees with much of what Marcellus said. Libraries are changing. The way that information lived – stacks, books, indexes – has shifted; now information is social. Spokane Library is partnering with other agencies; the public is a partner as well. As far as social services, he agrees with Marcellus. In Spokane, the library started the conversation, then the perception of the Mayor and Council changed as they saw what a library could accomplish. One program they have is Community Court on Mondays where they have 30-40 different social agencies helping to break down barriers for people so that they can be successful in their lives. When neighboring downtown businesses complained about homeless people hanging around the library, staff were able to have a conversation with the business owners and identify the few people that were causing trouble – the problems dissolved once the problem folks found housing through the Court program. First, the library needs to be a welcoming place, then it is really about the community.

Seattle Public Library's experience: Marcellus explained that in Seattle Public's current 3-year Strategic Direction they are focused on developing a business model, including determining what professional development to provide to staff; looking at city social justice issues such as homelessness, aiming to be strategic in communications so that the public understand; being intentional with programs and services in terms of creating experiences rather than transactions; and looking at long-term sustainability.

Seattle Public passed a levy in 2012 which will expire in 2019 – they are starting the process for 2019. The Mayor's office has committed to 2019 but has not indicated the vehicle they will use. Marcellus feels that the city is supportive, but understands there are many levies on the plate – the Mayor doesn't want one division getting ahead of another. For the 2012 levy, part of the work was already done when Marcellus arrived. Being part of the general fund, the library is always up against police and fire. During the recession the city faced severe financial challenges resulting in Seattle Public needing to reduce services and have staff take furloughs. They kept the libraries open, but they were still losing ground. A joint Mayor, Council and Library Board committee considered sustainable funding options. The Library was asked to come up with a statement: Marcellus distributed copies of *Library Funding Statement of Legislative Intent – Funding Options*, which includes a spreadsheet of the funding options considered:

- Special Taxing District – amend current legislation (RCW 27.12) authorizing creation of a Rural Library District to permit creation of a Municipal Library District
- Special Taxing District (e.g. Metropolitan Park District) – amend or duplicate current legislation (RCW 35.61) to include libraries
- Base funding commitment from City General Fund and a levy lid lift for excess funds (e.g. Families and Education Levy, Bridging the Gap transportation funding)
- Earmark a portion of an existing tax or revenue source for the Library (e.g. the charter revenues dedicated to parks funding)
- Local option sales tax

- Increase revenues to the General Fund in order to sustain funding to the Library as well as other General Fund departments
- Annexation with KCLS – not identified as an option but listed on the spreadsheet because this option is mentioned when funding for SPL is discussed with the public or press; KCLS has no interest in pursuing this option

A Taxing District was more of a challenge because the legislation would need to change and then would need to be communicated to the community. There are 36 municipal libraries in the state; it would be good to bring all together to work to change the legislation rather than have one library taking on the fight. Seattle Library supports the idea of a Taxing District option, but with a possible levy in the near future for Seattle, it would be a conflicting message to be working towards a different funding option – it is a timing issue. One of the things that made their 2012 levy successful was that Seattle really loves the library – the collections, programs, staff and buildings. Confident that they had the support, the Mayor/Council/Board committee were able to come up with a strategy.

Questions:

Marcellus mentioned a Mayor/Council/Board committee, was this a special planning group or the whole groups? The committee was made up of representatives, the Library was represented by Trustees and staff.

Before the levy the City had funded the Library, did this change after the levy? The City made it clear it would reduce the General Fund by 5 million to supplement other departments; the levy was used to replace that. There was opposition to the levy because some people felt the General Fund should fund the Library.

How was the amount of the levy determined? There was a determined amount developed with a polling process; it wasn't only about what we wanted, but how it fits in with other levies.

Spokane Public Library's experience: Andrew pointed out there are a lot of parallels between Seattle's experience and Spokane's. They had received a flat contribution from the General Fund and had to make cuts year after year. Early in 2012 they had a conversation about a Municipal Library District, but decided to put a levy up for vote. It was put together very fast, in just a couple of months, and there wasn't a lot of discussion concerning whether or not the public would go for it – either it would pass or they would have to close branches. It passed with 66% of the vote and added 1 million to their yearly budget. They were able to keep all branches open, maintain technology, add to their collections and even expand some hours.

When Andrew arrived in Spokane in July, 2013, it was like stepping back into a time machine. They hadn't changed much in the approach to service, it was still very much about books. They weren't meeting modern needs and there was fear surrounding making changes. It helps to know you are going through a process and that it isn't just about the collection, but about the culture of the library and the community. Their levy is only for 4 years, so it is up for renewal on the April ballot. Andrew thinks there will be great support for it again.

The options they considered were a Municipal District, annexation, a parks model with a percentage of the General Fund and a levy. As they looked at the options they recognized they had a good thing and the City was open to sharing elements such as legal and Human Resources. There was a lot of opportunity to partner with the City yet still have autonomy. They did also consider an annexation model, but there really wasn't much interest. Spokane is an urban environment and it takes more resources to serve a large downtown; the County was not interested. There are different expectations, different needs, and different programs. The main focus of the County was to move books throughout the county; the City focus is about partnering and social services. The City Council felt strongly about serving the people with a library. They determined a levy was the best option so they weren't relying solely on the General Fund. With the levy they have been given an opportunity for growth. They took a hard look at operations and staffing to get a sense of what was going on. They hired Andrew and there was a lot of conversation about what direction they wanted to go. Part of the study was about facilities and how they need to function, but the levy was not enough to solve facility problems. That would probably require a bond and Spokane is small enough that they have to be concerned about other departments – they want to wait and let the public see the results from the street and park bonds. Andrew is surprised how much support there is for future vision; the public is ready to engage in the thought process. Spokane has 6 branches and their circulation keeps going up, by 10% last year. They are giving people another reason to come in and engage, plus they are getting out more into the community. For example, they are taking programs into Sacred Heart Children's Hospital and speaking with different community groups. They are working to change the community's perspective.

Questions:

Why did you choose 7 years for the levy coming up on the ballot? We know we want to implement some major changes to our facilities. Seven years will get us to completion of the process. After that we will determine if we can stay the same or need more on an operational level.

Was the timing determined at the joint board/council session? In Spokane the levy has to go with the general election. We have a council liaison on our board who is not a voting member.

Andrew distributed copies of Spokane Public Library's January, 2016 report, *Facilities and Future Service Plan*. Andrew explained that they wanted something they could act on even if the levy doesn't pass, so they developed this plan. The new levy includes a 'facility update', but it is not a set value. Spokane Library's budget from the General Fund stayed flat until last year, when they finally had a convincing conversation with the City: other departments were getting cost of living increases and the library should also. This has been helpful. When the Council and Mayor realized the library wasn't going to go out of business, the conversation began to turn.

When you mentioned looking at annexation did you say the money worked out that the County would be subsidizing the City? That study was done before Andrew arrived in Spokane, but he knows that City and County finance departments did the modelling. Andrew will forward the information.

Can you tell us more about the idea of actively positioning the library as a partner as part of the solution for community concerns? Andrew responded that they offer essential service value as the Council and Mayor are trying to make decisions on how to solve homelessness. Marcellus added that Seattle has looked to the library to help solve issues. They get tangible results because they can get information out to the public. The City recognizes that the library is a trusted entity with the community. The library gets many requests for partnership, but priorities have to be determined. The library is a business and we need to make intentional decisions about what is our business and what is not our business.

What is staff reaction to the idea of a Library as a business? Marcellus answered that staff tend to not like the term 'business', but we let them know that they need to just focus on service, deliver great service, and we will take care of the business side.

How much time to you spend seeking donors? Andrew responded that they have a half-time staff member who focuses just on that. It is a long game, but they are starting to have people come to them asking to fund something for the library. They are starting to see new things happening. They are still trying to get good at this, determining who the large partners are.

Tell us more about how you did a 'culture audit'. Andrew answered that they had a consultant come in. They were a traditional top-down culture. Staff were not allowed in the administration area. We took a different approach, communicating that we want to hear from staff. We had a team, staff who knew what we were trying to do, meet with about 85% of the staff and ask really good questions. We documented things we wanted to look at and change such as the structure of who reports to whom and streamlining areas of service. Typically, if you aren't well funded you keep piling on the work without taking the time to think about how to do it better. We are making a lot of changes. Twice a week we have management team members visit two parts of the system asking staff questions. Staff can see changes so the barrier is breaking down.

Have you implemented single point of service? Andrew responded yes, but it is a different beast because we have multiple floors. We are remodeling this year, cross-training staff and transitioning to not having professional staff on desk as much. We have created another layer of management with split duties – the branch manager is responsible for the professionals, then an assistant manager is responsible for others. Marcellus added that Seattle is also moving towards a single service desk. By consolidating the desk, staff are able to get out and program. It is a better service for patrons when we don't have to send them to another desk, much more efficient.

Interactive discussion, all attendees: Rachel asked everyone to take 5 minutes for personal reflection about what they've heard and write down answers to 2 questions:

- What stands out to you?
- What questions are on your mind based on what you've heard so far?

Rachel then assigned everyone to a small group to consolidate their comments and questions. Groups then provided an overview of their discussions.

Group 1:

- A close relationship with the City is key; helping to solve their problems equals potential for funding and support.
- Are we telling our story effectively?
- The relationship with the public is key.
- What would money do for us? What change could it bring about?
- The idea of a Cultural Audit stood out; we recognize the importance of staff morale.
- The Spokane levy campaign is a 2 month success story.

Group 2:

- The sooner we answer the annexation question, the better, because other decisions flow from that.
- The library of the future will likely look different for each community.
- How do we find out what our community actually wants?
- How do we reach/serve new residents?
- What are fundraising and donor development options?
- What would a levy look like; we would need to be mindful about how it is put together.
- How to creatively utilize volunteers, maybe retired professionals?
- Are we as forward thinking as we should be?

Group 3:

- Very intrigued with the ideas of the future of libraries and bringing in professionals.
- Intrigued by the 'social conscience library' concept; we are in that world, but not using the language yet.
- Universal challenges: organization structure; funding; how we fit into the community; how we fit into government; how to address social issues.
- How do we get buy-in from key stakeholders and gain advocacy outside the library family?
- Donor development and fundraising is key to the future – how to do more of that?
- There is love for the library in the community.
- Interested in understanding more about collaboration with the county and annexation.
- What branches and services do we need?
- How much did the Spokane study cost?
- Questions about levies: understanding the cliff at the end of a levy; the appropriate time to run; how to determine how much is enough, but not too much.

Group 4:

- We like the phrase 'Strategic Direction' rather than 'Strategic Plan' – it is more flexible.
- Appreciation of library staff.
- We value the relationships established with the community.
- Need to communicate what services we offer beyond books.
- Need to educate stakeholder groups; future is about community service.
- How to engage the public about what they want – educate first.

- How to establish community partners.
- How to quantify what we do, show our impact.
- What are the differences between a levy and a bond.

Some common themes were:

- Traditional roles are still there, but we need to expand in new ways.
- Relationships are key – what information are we sharing?
- What can we do best; go beyond pre-conceived idea.

Final questions for Andrew and Marcellus:

How did you effectively engage the community? Andrew answered that he spent a lot of time setting up initial meetings, going out and meeting partners, asking what expectations they had about the library. When they engaged the public, they had guided conversations, guided questions to keep on track. Marcellus agreed with Andrew, adding that we have hired Nancy and have a great team to assist her. We'll need to communicate where we are going with a focused message. We can also use our partnerships, but need to know how many we can manage. Marcellus suggested choosing three key partnerships in each area, for instance for Youth Services, schools would be one key partnership. For Tech Services choose three partners. Since Nancy is not from Washington, she can go to the board for advice on who she should be talking to about partnerships. You have to say no to some partnerships.

How much was the Spokane study and do you have any advice on how to craft our study? Andrew responded that the Spokane study, for 6 branches, cost \$120,000. The biggest learn was that the public is ready for the conversation – they could have had a more advanced approach if they realized that. Marcellus answered that one of their challenges was that their study was out of control – it is helpful to narrow the focus, to control the content. He agreed with Andrew that the public is ready for the conversation, more so than staff, so it would be helpful to prepare staff. As Seattle prepares to roll out their Strategic Direction, they are meeting with all groups asking, "What if the levy doesn't go through?" Both felt it was helpful to have a one page, or less, synopsis so that everyone can understand it. A one page document can also help to say no – if it is not on the page, it is not a current priority.

We have \$50,000 earmarked from the Mayor's office, plus limited resources that we can contribute to the study. What are the questions we should be asking so as to not get lost in a huge study? Marcellus said that we are putting a lot on one study. The topic of annexation sits on top of everything. If we are considering a levy, annexation will be a topic. If there are things that we know won't work, don't waste time on them. Look at the feasible options. What are our pressing questions? How quickly can we move to a sustainable option? A brilliant consultant can offer much good information. Western Washington University is right here, perhaps they have a professor who could help. Andrew added that for the financial outlook, answer the annexation question first – that will inform the next thing. Lola mentioned that the University of Washington offers a technology impact survey that costs \$500. As part of the study, this might be helpful.

Rebecca commented that aside from J.'s mention, at the start of the meeting, of a new building, this has not been part of the conversation today; the focus has been on operations

– is this intentional? J. answered that, yes, the Mayor has requested that this not be part of the current conversation. The Capital Facilities study is still in draft form, it has not been launched. We still haven't resolved what the future of the library is. The Mayor is still struggling with financial obligations and we are trying to be mindful of the City's situation.

Christine mentioned that, years ago, Lynden Library was its own municipal library, but they needed a new building. The City of Lynden did not have money for a building. The Mayor at the time, Jack Louws, worked out a deal that the City would support annexation to the county library district (saving on operational costs) and he would relocate budget for a building. The City continues to cover facilities maintenance.

Meeting adjourned at 4:38 p.m.

Next Regular Library Board Meeting – March 21, 2017 at the Central Library, 210 Central Avenue, Library Board Room – at 3:30 p.m.

Chair, Library Board of Trustees

ATTEST

Secretary, Library Board of Trustees