

Phillips Public Library Board of Trustees
Regular Meeting Minutes
June 29, 2023

Trustees present (in person or via zoom):

Brian Ernst, Meredith Hueckman, Jenny Markle, Bruce Marshall (joined part-way into public comments), Marc Peterson, Becky Steinbach, Beth Tenut, Brittany Weisrock

Trustees absent:

Galen Azbell, Kristi Speer, Laura Tomaszewski

Staff present:

Rebecca Puhl, Jody Eckert, Evelyn Azbell

Call to order/establishment of a quorum

Meeting opened by Brittany at 5:33 p.m.

Public Comments

Annie--It is important to respect the policy in place regarding taking on new books. The policy in place helps prevent emotions that are riding high to be the basis of decisions. These [Brave] books seem to violate the current policy. If they are taken into the collection, shelving should be done carefully.

Lynn Boers--She thanks the board for representing the community. She referenced the stickers on LGBTQ books and someone's letter stating this is religiously based. Lynn disagrees, stating that stickers promote easier access to all kinds of books. Also, she believes that the wishes of the majority of the community should be fairly represented. Further, separation of church and state is not part of the Constitution; rather, the Constitution upholds religious freedom in the public square.

Christian Markle--Provided written comments. He referenced his past concerns over a pro-marijuana book in the youth section and Becky's defense of it. She claimed at the time she would even have a bomb-making book in the library. Christian finds it hard to believe that a book on bombs or marijuana finds more acceptance than a children's picture book.

Joe Fox--Joe claims that the Director is banning books and hiding behind a policy. She said, "Let the parents decide." She is not discussing putting Brave books on a shelf or with a label. She wants to ban them. Joe says that this has to stop; we cannot allow this in our library in Phillips, Wisconsin.

Shirley Smith--Brave Books are about culture wars from a MAGA point of view. Liberal and cultural characters are seen as evil. The supporters promote violence, like those involved in January 6. This is not the first time groups have attempted this. Shirley compares BRAVE book supporters to the KKK. Purchasing these books would be like contributing money to a hate group.

Irene Johnson--Irene did research on Kirk Cameron, a religious activist and evangelist. She claims that these books are faith-based and belong in a church library, where religious parents can read them to their children. The public library should not promote a single religion. She also states that not buying books for a legitimate reason is not the same as banning.

Comments on questions from the public submitted at the previous meeting

- Shirley Smith--"What percentage of the funding for children's books would be taken up by subscribing to the Christian children's books series the 1st public speaker spoke of?"
 - .01% would be used, very little of the overall book budget

- "How does the circulation report put together? How does it affect the budget?"
 - Circ is tallied by checkouts at the circulation desk. IFLS Dashboard is the software that collates the tallies.
 - The budgeted money from the city is not directly affected due to circulation. Circ is traditionally used as a meter of use, so it can be used to ask for more money if circ goes up. The county formula is based on circ, use from non-city dwellers (who do not pay a library tax), and a cost per circulation figure for the year. The county pays a 70% reimbursement on the cost per circ amount for the non-city users. There are two ways to affect the formula: raise the cost per circ (amount from city) and raise circulation. This percentage of support comes from a state statute. Becky is happy to further explain to anyone who would like more information.

- 1. "Why brave books not accepted previously?"
 - Will be addressed later in the meeting

- 2. "25% [down] in circ. What's behind [lowered] circ? Obvious? (Covid is done.) Maybe staff?"
 - What is behind lower circ? Everything. And nothing. We still haven't bounced back from Covid. Libraries facing book challenges traditionally take a hit in circ. Becky does not think it has anything to do with the books they are buying. Ebook use definitely went up over Covid, and it hasn't gone down. But we don't get circ credit for those books. Perhaps county users are sticking with ebooks?

- 3. "Why do you feel the need to [raise] budget when you are buying everything you want [and] then some?"
 - We are not trying to increase the book budgets. Becky is asking for more money for raises for the staff, who make less than other city employees. Other costs are going up, and the county funds will drop next year by \$10,000. She is hoping to ask for more from the city (the PPL has been at a 0% increase for several years) to help make up for the loss.

- 4. "Why does one person decide all adult books [and] one for children? Bias would play a role. If they are not being checked out [and] are being weeded, that seems like a waste."
 - No one person is choosing all adult or children's books. All staff members are asked to help with selection of materials. If the book is five years old and not available on Baker & Taylor or Amazon, it likely won't be ordered. Multiple people do not place orders as that would lead to duplication and confusion. She tries very hard to have a

balanced collection. Patron desire for an item carries a heavy weight in our collection development policy.

- “A collection of 10 Books from Brave Books publishing was donated by many community members, to the Library, and presented to the Board on May 25, 2023. How will the Library Board monitor the community’s requested subscription and ensure this series does not get pulled. This is a request from ‘this community’--NOT other systems/communities in the M.O.R.E. system.”
 - Will be addressed later in the meeting

Communication and Correspondence

Emails sent out to board members ahead of the meeting. Becky S asked when correspondence becomes public record. Bruce indicated that it is public at least by the time of the meeting.

Approval of 5/25/2023 minutes

Motion made by Marc

Seconded by Beth

To approve the May 25, 2023, minutes as presented

Motion passed.

Reports:

1. Treasurer’s Report

No particular changes since the previous report. Current funds are about \$77,000. No action needed.

2. Director’s Report

Becky provided comments on her written report. Jody and Jake provided good reports about programs. A library website update was also provided by Evelyn. No action needed.

3. Staff Meeting Minutes

Report provided. No action needed.

4. Circulation report

Becky offered various graphs. June circ is down, but ebooks are not recording properly. Becky says even though Park Falls circ is doing well, that is not the trend overall. “My Price County” is willing to give us a discount for advertising. Becky will work on it. No action needed.

Unfinished Business:

1. Discussion/Action on Library Building Project

The new quote for shelving is in. Next week, Becky will meet with someone regarding the updated furniture options and costs. When all of the information is updated, Becky will bring it to the board. No action needed.

New Business:

1. Approval of June 2023 Bills

Motion made by Becky

Seconded by Meredith

To approve the June 2023 bills as presented--\$5142.55 above the line and \$1144.84 below the line.

Motion passed.

2. Discussion/Action on Library Donation Policy

Becky says she must take responsibility for all books added. She has never received donations at a board meeting, was caught off guard last month, and apologizes for her response.

Jenny offered a potential policy update to combine the two policies that are currently in play. Bruce is in favor of the concept but would prefer to look over the proposal for the next month. Also, he is in favor of looking over the collection development policy as a whole in the near future.

Galen sent in a letter to the board and community members in attendance; Brittany read it aloud.

Action to update the donation policy tabled by Brittany until the next meeting.

Brian and Beth asked what recourse do people have if the donations are unwanted by the director? Bruce's answer: There is no current mechanism, but one can be made and should exist that answers this and at the same time avoids micromanagement of the director by the board. The only possible future action is to adjust the policy.

3. Report on Brave Books

Brittany is in favor of adding them since they are a donation that someone wants to read. Brian agrees; he thinks several people would want these books. Jenny thinks they fulfill far more of the collection development policy than not. Also, the books were free and will not take tax-payer dollars. Meredith says they should be given a try; let's see if they circ. Bruce agrees that the policy does not require Becky to shelve these items. Bruce and Jenny think that Becky is being selective in her application of the collection development policy to these donations. Shelving these items would build some bridges, take up little space, fit well on the Family Discussion shelf, and cost us nothing. If they don't circ, they will be weeded over time. The board agrees that they cannot force Becky to accept the Brave books; it is her decision. There are benefits to adding these books to the collection. Beth thinks this would be a good way to build the community back and increase circulation; perhaps people would be pleased about this and come back to the library.

4. Discussion/Action on LGBTQ stickers in Phillips Library items

Becky would like to table this until next month so that the newer members can receive the correspondence that has come in over the past few months. Brian thought this issue was settled and that these letters were from outside the county. Becky states that we do have some from inside the county now. Becky also would like a standard response from the board for these emails/letters.

Motion made by Brian

Seconded by Meredith

To table the discussion until next month's meeting.
Motion passed.

5. Time for reading of questions from the public for comment at June Meeting

“Will the Brave books be on the shelf, or is the director banning them?”

- The director indicated that she has not yet made a decision about the books.

6. Director Evaluation & Convene into closed session to discuss Director Puhl

Motion made by Brian

Seconded by Meredith

To convene into closed session

Roll Call vote

Brian-yes

Marc-yes

Becky-yes

Brittany-yes

Jenny-yes

Meredith-yes

Beth-yes

Bruce-yes

Motion passed.

Motion made by Brian

Seconded by Jenny

To forward the packet of evaluation materials to Becky Puhl along with a board statement.

Motion passed.

7. Reconvene into open session

Motion made by Meredith

Seconded by Marc

To reconvene into open session

Roll call vote

Brian-yes

Marc-yes

Becky-yes

Brittany-yes

Jenny-yes

Meredith-yes

Beth-yes

Bruce-yes

Motion passed.

8. Discussion/Action on subject of closed session

Motion made by Bruce

Seconded by Beth

To direct that copies of anonymous Board comments and anonymous staff comments be provided to the director and included in her personnel file, to the extent that the City maintains such a file.
Motion passed.

9. Other new business to add to the agenda for the next meeting

- LGBTQ sticker discussion
- Donation policy update

10. Set date and time for next meeting

The next meeting will be held possibly on *Tuesday, July 25 or August 1, 2023*, at **5:30 p.m.**, in the library community room. A zoom link will be provided.

Adjournment:

Motion made by Beth
Seconded by Meredith
To adjourn
Motion carried.

Brittany adjourned the meeting at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Markle