
OMAHA PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, October 21, 2021 @ 5:00 P.M.

Millard Branch – 13214 Westwood Lane



CALL TO ORDER

The Omaha Public Library Board of Trustees met on Thursday, October 21, 2021 at the Millard Branch, 13214 Westwood Lane (Omaha). President Kennedy called the meeting to order at 5:02 P.M.

Jenna L. Garcia, Recording Secretary, took the Roll Call:

PRESENT: John Barrett
Tulani Grundy Meadows
Keegan Korf, Vice-President
Keith Lutz
Rochelle Mullen
Kristin Williams
Mike Kennedy, President
Laura Marlane, Executive Director, Omaha Public Library (Non-voting)

ABSENT ENTIRE MEETING: Jen Rae Wang, Secretary-Treasurer

CERTIFICATION OF PUBLICATION – NOTIFICATION OF OPEN MEETINGS ACT

President Kennedy stated that the meeting is held in accordance with the [Nebraska Open Meetings Act](#), a copy of which is available on the table. The Library certified [publication](#) of the meeting in the Daily Record, the Official Newspaper of the City of Omaha, on October 15, 2021.

ACTION ITEMS

President Kennedy stated that any person who has been invited to speak or has requested to speak before the Trustees is requested to be brief and to limit his or her comments to five minutes or less, after identifying themselves by name and address for public record. When more than one person wishes to address the Trustees on a Consent Agenda item or Resolution, the proponents will be invited to speak first, followed by the opponents. The proponents will be given a brief period for rebuttal of any new information presented during the opponent's presentation, after which public comments will be concluded. Trustees will ask any questions at the conclusion of any public comments, prior to voting. The President, or presiding officer, may use reasonable discretion to limit or extend a speaker's time to avoid redundancy, to assure a thorough public discussion on matters before the Board, and to end discussion.

CONSENT AGENDA

President Kennedy stated that any Trustee may remove any item from the Consent Agenda to be addressed by the Board immediately following. Unless there is an exception, these items will be approved as one with a single vote of the Board. Public comment and Board approval is today.

3. [Approval of minutes – August 19, 2021 \(Over from 9/16/2021\)](#)
4. [Approval of minutes – September 16, 2021](#)

President Kennedy opened up the public comment period on the Consent Agenda.

No one spoke, and the public comment period was closed.

MOTION by Korf, SECOND by Williams, that the Consent Agenda (Agenda Item 3 – Approval of minutes – August 19, 2021; and Agenda Item 4 – Approval of minutes – September 16, 2021) be approved.

ROLL CALL:

Yeas: Barrett, Grundy Meadows, Korf, Lutz, Mullen, Williams, President Kennedy

Nays: None

MOTION APPROVED 7-0

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

5. **Finance Committee** – Korf (Chair), Kennedy, *Vacant*

None.

6. **Facilities Committee** – Wang (Chair), Lutz, Mullen

None.

7. **Community Engagement Committee** – Barrett (Chair), Grundy Meadows, Williams

Barrett highlighted that the Library had just finished its five Strategic Planning Forums, and he attended two of these forums. The forums were well attended, and attendees had some great things to say about the Library. There is a lot of support for the Library system in the community, and many ideas were brought forward on things to do better as well as action items for the future.

REPORTS

8. **Friends of Omaha Public Library** – Jeanne Spence (Advisor/Past President)

None.

9. **Omaha Public Library Foundation** – Wendy Townley (Executive Director)

Wendy Townley, Executive Director of the Omaha Public Library Foundation, appeared and spoke, highlighting items from her report.

10. **Director's Report** – Laura Marlane (Executive Director)

Ms. Marlane appeared and spoke. She discussed the five Strategic Planning Forums that had occurred and the surveys that patrons submitted (both electronically and on paper).

11. **Board President's Report** – Mike Kennedy (President)

President Kennedy thanked Susan Koenig and staff for their work with the Strategic Planning Forums. He added that the public is always welcome to comment at Board meetings and to contact Board members via email or phone. The Board is committed to transparency.

President Kennedy stated that there is no plan to privatize the Libraries. If there are changes to the Library system, they will be discussed openly within the public body in accordance with the Nebraska laws.

President Kennedy continued by thanking Rachel Jacobson and Heritage Services for identifying the Library as one of Omaha's "crown jewels". He asks that the Board hears the entire proposal and all conditions that the donors have first before having public discussions. The City would still need to sign off on any proposals made, making any project pass through many layers of approval first with many questions. The Board cares about the Library system and its patrons and only wants the best for the community.

He added that the Library has great employees, and many people do not see the ways that these employees interact with people daily. These employees are one of the greatest assets that the Library has.

12. **Library Liaison Reports – Library Trustees**

Korf stated that she has spent time at her three assigned branches the past month (Willa Cather, South, and Washington), meeting with each of the Branch Managers at those locations, as well other meetings, phone calls, emails, and conversations with others from the public. Korf affirmed that she has never heard as much love for the Library system in the last month and she is very appreciative of that. This is an exciting time with the opportunity for gifts, but it is also scary and the engagement needs to continue for consistent City funding.

STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION

13. **Susan Koenig, Facilitator**

Susan Koenig introduced herself and gave a brief background of what has led up to this point.

When the COVID-19 pandemic happened, Library staff was already assessing and implementing new service priorities. Ms. Koenig joined the team in August 2021, and the team began more deeply assessing the data they already had and began meeting and preparing a SWOT analysis. The team also helped to develop a timeline for taking input from stakeholders, which is how we got to the public and staff surveys as well as the Strategic Planning Forums. The depth of engagement at the Forums was impressive, and Ms. Koenig stated she was happy that everyone was finally hearing this love of their Libraries. Individuals need to feel safe when providing their thoughts and feelings, and that is often where the problem occurs.

The patron and staff surveys were developed, opened, and will conclude tomorrow. Data will be analyzed, and goals and objectives created in the next couple of months. In January 2022, the full Strategic Planning Team will reconvene to review the data analysis and finalize the goals and objectives, while brainstorming 12-month activities for 2022. In March 2022, the plan will be presented to the Board of Trustees at the March 17 meeting.

Ms. Koenig stated that the commentary from the Strategic Planning Forums has, overall, been in alignment with previous data – exceptional quality of librarians at Omaha Public Library; patrons want accessibility and are concerned about the needs of the most vulnerable in the community; the most basic technology support is needed; wireless printing is needed; need for a branch in the southwest portion of Douglas County, as supported in the 2017 Master Facilities Plan.

Ms. Koenig opened the floor up to the Omaha Public Library Board of Trustees, Omaha Public Library Foundation Board of Directors, and Friends of Omaha Public Library Board of Directors to offer their thoughts.

Jo Giles, President of the Omaha Public Library Foundation Board, appeared and spoke. She introduced the following individuals from the Omaha Public Library Foundation Board: Mark McMillan, Secretary; Mary O'Donohue, Board Member; Katie Bruno, Board Member; and Ms. Townley, Executive Director of the Omaha Public Library Foundation.

Barrett stated that we need to consider what is important to the patrons that are using the Library today – what do they want to see – and also what can the Board, Library, and City do to increase user ship and participation of the Library.

Mullen stated that she has been very interested in hearing what the staff has to say and what new opportunities and services the Library could be providing, such as providing more technology and collections. We need to figure out what is the best for Omaha and how to provide the best services with the money that we have.

President Kennedy stated that one of his concerns is accessibility of foreign language products and services at the Library, as well as accessibility of technology for those who need it most (such as applying for jobs, doing homework, working on a resume, etc.). The Libraries are a bit behind with technology as well. President Kennedy also added that staff development is a priority of his, so he thinks it is important that they receive input from all staff on what is needed. Final item of concern addressed is ensuring that services are offered across entire system to try and maintain a sense of equity.

Korf emphasized that each Branch has their own specific needs, so while we want to ensure equity across the Library system, we need to be cognizant of the needs of each Branch and neighborhood. She continues that while she loves innovative technology, there are also basic technology needs that need to be met for patrons that must be sustainable first.

Mullen stated that the community's input is essential when moving forward with this project.

Ms. Giles stated that the Foundation wants to find a balance between how patrons currently use the Library system and innovation. Omaha is a browsing community. She added that we must look at how the Library system is funded, and how funding is sustainable.

An Omaha Public Library Foundation Board member spoke, raising concerns that while the Board of Trustees is open to take suggestions on the project, others involved in the project may not be open to suggestions. Mullen stated that she would answer this, stating that she has been involved with Heritage Services for seven years now discussing a library project. She does not have a concern that the Board of Trustees will not have a say in the project. She believes that Heritage Services will come to the Board of Trustees with a proposal with a set of conditions from their donors, and it will be a transparent process. Nothing from Heritage Services has been presented to the Board of Trustees, and no final version is complete – it continues to change.

Jeanne Spence, Advisor/Past President of the Friends of Omaha Public Library, appeared and spoke, stating that an important item to remember when planning a project are physical spaces, like a space for a book club or book sales.

PUBLIC INPUT, COMMENTS, AND QUESTIONS

President Kennedy stated that any member of the public may address the Board on a topic of relevance to the Omaha Public Library, after identifying themselves by name and address for public record. Trustees may engage in questions and discussion of any topic presented, but any desired action will be placed on a future agenda.

14. Input, Comments, and Questions

President Kennedy opened up the public comment period on Agenda Item 14.

The following persons appeared and spoke:

Amy Wenzl, Branch Manager of the Charles B. Washington Branch, 2868 Ames Avenue
Erik Oberg, Omaha Public Library staff member
Michael Worshek

EXECUTIVE SESSION

15. The Board may recess and go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing litigation, personnel issues, and/or any other matter allowed by law.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mullen, SECOND by Korf, that the meeting of the Omaha Public Library Board of Trustees be adjourned.

ROLL CALL:

Yeas: Barrett, Grundy Meadows, Korf, Lutz, Mullen, Williams, President Kennedy

Nays: None

MOTION APPROVED 7-0

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 6:26 P.M.

Jenna L. Garcia, Recording Secretary

Jen Rae Wang, Secretary-Treasurer

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