

St. Tammany Parish Library  
Special Board of Control Meeting  
January 3, 2023  
Madisonville Library  
1123 Main St.,  
Madisonville, LA 70447  
6:30 P.M.

**MINUTES**

The meeting was called to order by Becky Taylor, President. Kelly LaRocca, Director, called the roll and declared that a quorum was present.

Present: Bill Allin, Carmen Butler, Mary Reneau, Becky Taylor, Susie Tosso

Absent: Dr. Argiro Morgan, Ann Shaw

B. Taylor explained the rules for public comment. A three-minute time limit is established for each member of the public wishing to speak (for or against) an item on the Agenda.

**1. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. 2022 Budget Final Amendment – Addition of two lines**

K. LaRocca reported that the library was selected as a recipient for a Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities (LEH) book discussion series called Currents. It is a requirement of the grant that we have a separate line for the grant income and expenditures. This amendment only funds these two lines and no other changes are made to the budget. The grant total is \$2,400 and was received and deposited in December 2022. The discussion series is called “Witness to Change: Conversations on Coastal Impacts” and includes the following titles: *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore* by Elizabeth Rush, *The Water Knife* by Paolo Bacigalupi, *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward, *Bayou Farewell: The Rich Life and Tragic Death of Louisiana’s Cajun Coast* by Mike Tidwell. The scholar for the program is Bruce Craft, an English professor at Southeastern Louisiana University. K. LaRocca referred to the budget spreadsheet showing the two budget lines. The program begins in January and will run once per month through April at different branch locations. The program can hold 20 attendees per session and patrons can attend one or multiple sessions. Patrons may register online for each program. The press release was publicized on December 29, 2022.

K. LaRocca read the resolution aloud. B. Taylor asked for public comment. There was no public comment. B. Allin moved to adopt the Fiscal Year 2022 Operational Budget Final Amendment Adoption resolution. It was seconded by M. Reneau. All were in favor, none were opposed, and two were absent. Motion carried.

**B. Resolution regarding extension of time to allow for procedural due process of Statements of Concern**

K. LaRocca introduced a resolution for an extension of time to allow for procedural due process of Statements of Concern. The previous resolution adopted December 13, 2022 covered the time period of November 21, 2022 to December 13, 2022. To date, the library has received 150 Statements of Concern. The resolution states a total of 120, but an additional 30 statements have been received since this resolution was drafted.

K. LaRocca stated that it takes time for the committees to read the titles and review the concerns. The committee's recommendations will be mailed to complainants and the Library Board on a rolling basis as they are completed. B. Allin commented that it is a reasonable request, as the library is being flooded with Statements of Concern. He stated that the entire book needs to be read in order to make a fair determination. He questioned whether or not those submitting the challenges have read the books in their entirety. C. Butler stated that this process takes time, as staff are working on this in addition to their regular job duties.

B. Taylor asked for public comment. There was public comment from the following people:

Roxanne Newman – Stated that she sympathizes with the task in front of the Board and staff. Stated that she does not have an objection to the extension of time. She noted that the number of challenged books have more than doubled. Stated that she objects to moving books off the shelves while they are being challenged.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Complimented the Abita Springs Branch library. Stated that the number of challenged items is an intentional bogging down of library business. Stated that it takes time away from regular staff duties. Stated she is concerned about how long the items are out of circulation because people do browse the shelves.

Terri Lewis Stevens – Thanked the library for their service. Asked when this wave of concern began in St. Tammany Parish. Stated that there seems to be a concerted effort to attack the library. Suggested adding an affidavit to each Statement of Concern noting whether or not the complainant read the book from cover to cover. Stated that she will submit a public records request to see if it is the same group of people challenging the titles.



K. LaRocca read the resolution aloud. S. Tosso moved to adopt the resolution to allow an extension of time for procedural due process of Statements of Concern. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and two were absent. Motion carried.

### **C. Resolution regarding graphic novels**

K. LaRocca explained that the previous resolution introduced at the December 13, 2022 board meeting asked for all graphic novels to be placed behind the circulation desk. That resolution was tabled to allow further review by the Board. K. LaRocca stated that Library Administration met with the Civil Division of the District Attorney's Office to discuss other options.

K. LaRocca introduced a new resolution that would direct Library Administration and staff to create a policy similar to that utilized by the MPAA for R-rated movies that would identify graphic novels with adult themes, adult activity, hard language, intense or persistent violence, sexually-oriented nudity, drug abuse, or other elements that would warrant placing the material behind the circulation desk, and making it only available to adult library card holders, or to minors whose parents or guardians have chosen a Juvenile Unrestricted card. This resolution would also move the aforementioned types of graphic novels behind the circulation desk while development of the policy is pending. All graphic novels that do not have the aforementioned elements would remain on the shelves.

M. Reneau asked if the R-rated movies are located with all the other movies. K. LaRocca confirmed that they are located in the Adult DVDs section of the library, which also includes PG-13 and G-rated movies as well. K. LaRocca explained that each library has a separate Children's DVD section. K. LaRocca added that the graphic novels are also currently shelved separately in the Children's, Young Adult, and Adult sections of the library.

M. Reneau reiterated that the R-rated movies are out there in the library and not behind the desk. K. LaRocca explained that they are on the shelves because the R-rated content cannot be seen by opening the DVD case or looking at the cover art. She explained that the content in a graphic novel can be seen by opening the book. M. Reneau asked for clarification if patrons have to go to the Adult section to get a graphic novel that is labeled Adult and R-rated. K. LaRocca confirmed that is true, however the graphic novels do not have ratings, therefore librarians would have to rate the materials. M. Reneau asked for clarification that Adult graphic novels shelved in the Adult section are going to be evaluated for Adult content. K. LaRocca confirmed that is correct.

B. Allin stated that parents are worried about their children coming into contact with items sitting on the adult shelves. He stated that was the reasoning for developing the policy for Section 409 – Access to Library Materials by Minors at the previous meeting.

S. Tosso asked for clarification that the graphic novels that are determined to be R-rated would be moved behind the circulation desk and can only be checked out with an Adult or Juvenile Unrestricted library card. There was discussion between the Board and K. LaRocca regarding the number of graphic novels that would need to be evaluated.

M. Reneau stated that her concern is that the library will be denying adults access to books that are labeled for adults just because a child may wander into the adult section and open one of the books. She stated that she has a problem with this and that it is censorship.

B. Taylor asked for public comment. There was public comment from the following people:

Terri Lewis Stevens – Asked if the library charges a babysitting fee, because it is not the library's responsibility to monitor what book someone's child is viewing. Stated that it did not become a problem until June 2022, when this wave of issues from Lafayette Library made its way to St. Tammany. Stated that the library should not encourage LGBTQ hate in any way.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Stated that the library is a safe place with so many positive things. Stated that no child has been harmed by a graphic novel. Stated that Attorney General Jeff Landry and District Attorney Warren Montgomery stated on November 28, 2022 that no items in the library rise to the level of pornography. Stated that moving the books is censorship.

Roxanne Newman – Stated that she opposes materials being moved behind the circulation desk. Asked when the staff will have time to read and evaluate 600 graphic novels in order to rate them. Stated the definitions in the resolution are vague and over-reaching. Stated that a rating system is also known as red flagging and is a form of censorship.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Stated that the library is trying to appease a small group of people. Stated it will put a burden on those who want free access to the library. Stated it is a slippery slope and a smokescreen for LGBTQ and racial issues. Stated that she understands that the Board has a tough job. Stated that this is censorship and prejudice.

Jean Wiggan – Stated that she is opposed to putting adult books behind the circulation desk and that it is censorship. Stated that kids can look up anything they want on a computer. Stated that all this will do is hurt the adults that want to browse for those books. Stated that what is being proposed is horrifying and she asked the Board not to censor books.

Barbara Hargrove – Stated that she does not like the idea of putting books behind the circulation desk. Stated that taking books off the shelves makes it seem as though there is something wrong with the book. Stated that people who browse are not going to see the books. Stated people have



different tolerances when it comes to adult content. Stated that she once watched Game of Thrones and decided it was not for her, but many people love it. She asked who would make that determination for others.

Criss Cazayoux – Thanked the Board for their service to the community. Stated that in 399 B.C. Socrates was put to death for impiety and for corrupting the youth. Stated that we just started a new year and asked if we are going to go back in time to these kinds of decisions.

Cynthia Weatherly – Asked if reference books with pictures are going to be placed behind the circulation desk. Stated there are books about sexually transmitted diseases and other medical books in the reference section. Stated that they would have to go through every book in the library to look for dirty pictures and pull them.

Erin Kennedy – Stated she has read about 500 graphic novels in the last seven years and agrees that not every graphic novel is for everyone. She agrees with a rating system only if it helps patrons make a more informed decision when checking out. Stated that there is a rating system on Hoopla. Stated she does not agree with shelving adult books behind the circulation desk. Stated that it removes the ability to browse the shelves and alludes that the books are shameful.

M. Reneau stated that the criteria for removing a book off the shelves should be whether or not we are violating the law. Stated that if we are breaking a law by a book being on the shelf, let us see the law.

B. Allin stated that we are in the middle of a storm and this is a very conservative parish. He stated the graphic novels with sexually explicit content are the flame of the fire. He stated as long as there are parents concerned with their kids seeing these books in the stacks, he is willing to make that exception and adopt this resolution. He asked how far each side intends to go with this situation and asked if they would “burn the building down” to save it. He said this is an attempt to be reasonable and hold the center ground.

B. Allin moved to adopt the resolution regarding graphic novels. No one seconded the motion. Resolution failed due to lack of a second.

## **2. Public Comment**

Bonnie Schmidt – Thanked the Board for their efforts. Stated she is pleased with the new card system for juveniles. Stated that some books are approaching best-seller status due to the attention this has brought to them. Stated that her grandchildren are rushing to the library to read

the banned books. Stated this is a slippery slope. Stated next month the complainants will be concerned about critical race theory and will want books about slavery removed.

Jamie Segura – Stated that banning books is a violation of our 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment rights. Stated there is no evidence that children become LGBTQ from books. Stated she has been gay her whole life and there were no books on the shelves that made her that way. Stated that these books went unnoticed for years until June when someone saw an opportunity for their 10 minutes of fame.

Casey Kugler – Stated that the people who have a vested interest in making a more inclusive St. Tammany are here. Asked the board to please include those whose voices are here calling out to be included.

### **3. Adjournment**

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by S. Tosso and seconded by C. Butler. The motion carried.

  
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Mary Reneau, Secretary