

**St. Tammany Parish Library  
Board of Control Meeting  
October 30, 2024  
St. Tammany Parish Council Chambers  
21490 Koop Dr.,  
Mandeville, LA 70471  
6:30 P.M.**

**MINUTES**

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

**Present:** Rev. Robert Belknap, Pam Georges, Carole Gillio, Jill Kesler, Tamarah Myers, Ann Shaw, Parish President Mike Cooper

**Absent:** None

Emily Couvillon with the Civil Division of the District Attorney's Office was also present as legal counsel for the library.

A. Shaw explained the meeting rules and 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. In order to streamline the meeting, all resolutions will no longer be read aloud since they are posted online in the board packet. All votes by the Board will be conducted via roll call.

R. Belknap led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**1. Approval of the minutes of the meeting of the Library Board of Control (LBOC) that was held on October 2, 2024.**

**Discussion:** There were no suggested corrections to the minutes.

**Public Comment:**

Cynthia Weatherly – Abita Springs, LA. She stated that she appreciates the time and effort that the board members are dedicating to serving on the LBOC. She stated that it seems as though some members did not have a chance to review the salary study material prior to the previous board meeting. She stated that preparing properly for meetings would help streamline important discussions and decision making. She stated that the Board should know basic information, such as employee's salaries, and suggested that they do their homework prior to the meetings.

James Prentice – Covington, LA. He stated that he appreciates the opportunity to speak. He stated that he currently works as CIC (Commissioner in Charge) for the St. Tammany Parish Clerk of Court. He congratulated all of the sitting board members and stated that they are legitimate per a federal judge in Orleans Parish. He stated that any voice that wishes to delegitimize the Board's certification has a jezebel spirit and is speaking untruths. He stated that he prays that God's divine guidance helps the Board see through the details of the data to make informed decisions with integrity, as expected by the Parish Council who elected them and the citizens of St. Tammany Parish. He spoke about the salary

study and stated that the consultant suggested a 6% increase for 93 of the top 150 employees, which is only two-thirds of the staff. He stated that the budget spreadsheet shows a 6.75% increase for Library Salaries and noted an increase of 5.82% for Employee Benefits.

Donna Bonnoitt – Covington, LA. She questioned why the Parish needs 12 libraries and 150 employees in this age of information. She asked why spend this money when the Parish is drowning in debt. She stated that the library is bloated and overstaffed. She stated that the Parish only needs one library in Mandeville, one in Slidell, one in Madisonville, one in Covington, and maybe one rural library. She stated that Fire District 6 has enough funds to put only one person on a fire truck. She stated that spending \$40,000 on a salary evaluation is absurd. She stated that there are lawsuits paid for by the library and she would like a forensic account of library spending.

C. Gillio addressed C. Weatherly's comment regarding the need for the Board to be more prepared for the meetings. C. Gillio stated that she agrees with C. Weatherly and that it would have been nice to have been given the information that was initially requested from the consultant who prepared the plan. She confirmed that the Board has since been given some of the information, such as how many employees are in a particular position and their salaries. C. Gillio explained that she is an attorney and agrees that preparedness is important.

**Vote:**

R. Belknap moved to approve the minutes of the LBOC meeting held on October 2, 2024. It was seconded by P. Georges.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes  
Motion carried.

## **2. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Financial Report – September 2024**

**Discussion:**

K. LaRocca reported that the library has not received additional Ad Valorem funds since the last board meeting, leaving the total received as \$12,474,891.98. All State Revenue Sharing funds have been received for the year, bringing the total to \$264,301.40.

The budget percentage for this point in the year should be 75%. Revenues are at 76.44% and expenditures are at 70.29%. K. LaRocca reminded the Board that the Ad Valorem and State Revenue Sharing is credited to us in twelfths on the financial report. K. LaRocca gave explanations for any lines that were over or under budget. Most of the variances are due to when the expenses are due and paid throughout the year. Other notable line explanations are as follows: The Publication of Legal Notices line is under budget due to fewer board meetings this year. The library is required to publish the LBOC meeting minutes in the St. Tammany Farmer. The Signage line will be expended towards the end of the year. The Book Binding line is at zero because book binding is done at the end of the year. The Voice Line and Data Lines (Internet) are below budget due to receiving better pricing mid-year. K. LaRocca noted that this can be adjusted if there is another budget amendment before the end of the year. The Hurricane Disaster Costs line will be in balance before the end of the year as expenses are paid. The Pest

Control line is over budget due to adding the new Outreach Facility to our account. The Consultants line is at 89.39% due to completing the salary study.

J. Kesler asked who are the other consultants. K. LaRocca listed the following consultants who have been paid from the Consultants line this year: Denelle Wrightson, who helped with the Covington, Causeway, and Outreach Facility furniture projects. D. Wrightson helped with selecting furniture, fabric, and managed the bid process. Specialty Vehicle Service put together the specifications for the book hauler vehicle and helped manage the bid process. Transformyx migrated some of our servers, as this was specialty I.T. work that was beyond the capacity of our I.T. department. Installation of the new phone system was also paid out of the Consultants line. The new system saves a significant amount of money on Voice Line costs. As previously mentioned, Gallagher Benefit Consultants conducted the salary study.

The Web Design Consultant line is mostly expended, as payment for our apps are due towards the end of the year. J. Kesler asked if the Web Design Consultant is put out to bid. K. LaRocca clarified that it is not actually a consulting firm. It is the company and software that runs our website. It was put out to bid approximately 7 years ago. K. LaRocca explained that we are currently not in a position to migrate our website, as contracts for these services typically run for numerous years. Since our millage expires at the end of this year, we are unable to enter into a contract that extends over multiple years. K. LaRocca expressed interest in utilizing a new company and redesigning the website, but we will have to wait until after the millage renewal election in March 2025.

K. LaRocca stated that the Landscape Additions line will be expended as Covington's landscaping project begins later this year. J. Kesler asked if that project has gone out for bid yet. K. LaRocca explained that the project is below the threshold for bids, but will require three quotes. K. LaRocca explained that the Telephones & Telephone System line is at zero because the charge was coded to a different line and will be moved to correct the error.

J. Kesler asked what is Integrated Library Automation System. K. LaRocca explained that it is the server for the circulation system.

K. LaRocca stated that the lines under Capital Outlay-Library Resource Acquisitions are expended throughout the year. These are library materials such as books and DVDs. The librarians involved in collection development confirm that these lines will be on target for the year. K. LaRocca noted that we can transfer money between lines if there is a budget amendment before the end of the year.

J. Kesler asked who completes the acquisitions. K. LaRocca explained that each collection is assigned a librarian who is responsible for acquisitions related to that collection. The collections are as follows: Adult, Teen, Children, Reference, Genealogy, Periodicals, and downloadable materials. J. Kesler asked what is the process that they use to acquire materials. K. LaRocca stated that 36% of library materials are patron requests. The staff determines whether or not the item is available to purchase. If it is out of print, staff will check to see if the item is available through ILL (Interlibrary Loan). The staff looks at how many books the library already has on a topic and determines whether or not the item fits with the collection. Staff considers best sellers, circulation statistics, and they follow the Collection Development Policy that is set by the LBOC. The policy includes the criteria for selection, which states that staff cannot purchase items containing sexual conduct for the Children's and Teen collections. The Children's and Teen librarians review the materials to ensure they meet the criteria for selection.

J. Kesler asked if materials pass across K. LaRocca's desk for final approval. K. LaRocca answered no and clarified that if that were the case, approximately 250 items per week would cross her desk for approval. K. LaRocca stated that she relies on the staff to perform those duties. T. Myers asked if the criteria for selection regarding sexual content is a new policy. K. LaRocca stated that the LBOC passed the policy in 2023 to comply with state law.

K. LaRocca reviewed the Capital Expenditures and noted that the Outreach Facility refers to the new Mobile Library Branch. The Outreach FF & E (Furniture, Fixtures, & Equipment) line will be in balance as the invoices for the furniture are paid. The Outreach Vehicle line will be in balance as payments are made. Staff are currently working on the Outreach Opening Day Collection and are purchasing more large print materials. Most of the Causeway FF & E has been received and that line will be in balance as payments are made. The Covington FF & E and Acoustic Work line will be in balance as that work is completed and paid for through the end of the year.

K. LaRocca explained that the Board usually has the opportunity to amend the budget three or four times per year. She stated that she hopes to have a budget amendment in December to adjust some of the budget lines.

**Public Comment:**

Cynthia Weatherly – Abita Springs, LA. She highlighted the substantial strain that book challenges have placed on library resources. She estimated that \$72,000 was allocated to handling book challenges. She stated that the library faced 212 challenges this year compared to 1,269 challenges nationwide. She stated that it is inappropriate for staff to volunteer to read the books and that they should be paid for their time. She stated that the staff has done an exceptional job of managing the challenges while staying within budget. She noted that one of the book challengers withdrew 150 challenges after hundreds of hours were already spent addressing those concerns. She stated that she would like to know the actual cost of the book challenges for 2024.

Ruth Terry-Sipos – Abita Springs, LA. She thanked K. LaRocca for the thoroughness of the financial reports. She recalled when Jake Airey, past LBOC member and past Parish Councilman, was complimentary to K. LaRocca and stated that he wished all departments in Parish Government were as thorough as the library has been. She stated that she commends K. LaRocca and appreciates her efforts. She stated that it would be a grievous loss if there was a closure to the Abita Springs Branch.

James Prentice – He stated there was a \$2,200,000 budget increase from 2022 to 2025 for the library to enact its will upon whatever they want to accomplish. He noted a 9% increase in the Public Relations Programming lines, which include Summer Reading Program and t-shirts, Adult Programming, Young Adult Programming, and Juvenile Programming. He noted Professional Services increased by 74.45%. He stated that he wants to shed light on where the money is going and its direction, listing Payroll Services, Financial Consultants, Gallagher Consulting, and Web Design Consultant. He noted the cost of being placed on the election ballot is \$250,000 and added that he must show up for that election because he is a Commissioner in Charge of a precinct. He stated that spending \$250,000 of the public's money on a special election to "put one past the public" is an unwise and inappropriate use of funds when it could be placed on another ballot with other elections taking place. He asked if \$700,000 for furniture at Slidell sounds like a good use of public money. He stated that there are no furniture projects for the Folsom or Abita Springs Branches and the Folsom Branch needs a wobbly table replaced.

E. Couvillon addressed the comments made by J. Prentice regarding the \$250,000 election cost. She clarified that the Parish Council determines what election items are placed on the ballot. The previous LBOC did request for the Parish Council to place the library's millage renewal on the November 2024 ballot with the presidential election, which would have been substantially less expensive. She explained that the Parish Council opted not to do so, and that is why the millage renewal has been placed on the March 2025 ballot. E. Couvillon noted that there will be other election items on that ballot and the cost to the library should be less than \$250,000.

**Vote:**

P. Georges moved to approve the September 2024 Financial Report. It was seconded by President Cooper.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes  
Motion carried.

**B. Director's Report**

K. LaRocca reported on Facilities updates. Covington Branch updates include the completion of sidewalk and drainage work and study carrel "pods" were delivered. A desk, a conference table, and chairs were delivered to the Outreach Facility. Causeway Branch updates include new carpet, rearrangement of adult shelving, new circulation desk, new furniture, a new I.T. network closet, and a short wall was built to separate the children's area from the adult stacks. The Parish Procurement office placed the order for the elevator for the Technical Services building. Administration and Maintenance met with Parish Engineering staff and architect Vaughn Sollberger to go over final plans for the Mandeville renovation and the Technical Services elevator shaft. These projects should go out to bid soon. A brick wall was built surrounding the A/C chillers at Slidell Branch.

J. Kesler asked if the building that is getting an elevator is leased or owned. K. LaRocca answered that it is owned.

K. LaRocca reported on Marketing, Outreach, and Professional Development updates. Staff promoted the library on The Lake and The Highway radio stations. Staff provided outreach services to the following events and groups: Olde Towne Pumpkin Festival, COAST Resource Festival, Folsom Fall Garden Festival, Kiwanis of Folsom, Chamber of Commerce Northshore Expo, Pearl River COAST Center, Bush COAST Center, Slidell COAST Center, Bluesberry Festival, Wildlife and Fisheries: Wild Things event, Monster Mash, and the Wooden Boat Festival.

Staff attended the following meetings, conferences, and workshops: Louisiana Children and Youth Prevention Coalition, Friends of the Slidell Library's Slidell Branch parking lot landscaping project meeting, State Library of Louisiana Administrator's Conference, Leadership Northshore Social Services Day, BiblioCon Virtual conference (website vendor), American Bookmobile and Outreach Services conference, "Doing Delegation Better" webinar, DNA workshop session for the Illinois State Genealogical Society conference, Louisiana Legislative Auditor's Center for Local Government Excellence Fall workshop, and FamilySearch.org database training. All staff members attended the Annual All Staff Training Day.

K. LaRocca noted that the St. Tammany Parish Library has been chosen as an approved research facility by FamilySearch.org. This allows patrons access to more genealogical records that are usually not viewable at locations other than the FamilySearch Library in Utah.

K. LaRocca reported that the 2025 Budget public hearing was advertised for October 30, 2024, and a draft of the budget has been available for inspection on our website and at every library location since August 2024. Two public records request results have been turned over to the District Attorney's Office for review. There are no other open public records requests in the library's possession. There are 115 statements of concern on 112 titles. Library staff continue to read titles, hold meetings, and make recommendations. The remaining statements of concern are still pending review.

K. LaRocca reviewed the latest transition of materials. Since the last board meeting, two graphic novels were moved to the restricted graphic novels collection behind the desk, and 14 Young Adult fiction items were moved to the Adult collection.

K. LaRocca reviewed the September 2024 and year-to-date service statistics. The September statistics showed that total circulation was 76,182, computer usage was 6,124, door count was 40,822, wireless internet inside was 7,118, and wireless internet outside was 6,563. The year-to-date total circulation was 750,786, computer usage was 63,286, door count was 453,044, wireless internet inside was 63,616, and wireless internet outside was 58,452. There were 6,964 new patrons registered for library cards so far this year.

There was disruption from the audience. Johanna Miner asked to give public comment. E. Couvillon explained that there is no public comment on the Director's Report because there is no vote to be taken by the Board. J. Miner called out from the audience and accused K. LaRocca of lying. J. Miner stated that she has an open public records request that she submitted nine months ago in February. E. Couvillon clarified that K. LaRocca is referring to public records requests that were submitted to the library, not J. Miner's public records request to the Parish.

R. Belknap asked to confirm that the wall built around the A/C chillers at Slidell was due to an accident. K. LaRocca confirmed that someone lost control of their vehicle and hit the wall. She stated that the person's insurance covered the repairs.

### **C. 2025 Budget**

#### **Discussion:**

K. LaRocca noted that the 2025 budget covers the library's 75<sup>th</sup> year in service. K. LaRocca explained that the expected revenue numbers for 2025 were provided to the library by the Assessor's Office and the St. Tammany Parish Department of Finance. Since the figures are estimates, the revenue is budgeted conservatively. Expected expenditures are based on the three previous years, and budget discussions about the upcoming year were held with each library department.

K. LaRocca explained that the library will operate on a revenue of \$13,074,922 in 2025. The primary source (97%) of the library's 2025 income will be a 5.35 mil property tax millage – 4.54 mils for operations and .81 mils for capital improvements to library buildings. This millage rate is reduced from the 5.78 we received previously so that we do not unduly benefit from the rise in assessments. The remaining three percent of the library's income comes from state revenue sharing, fines, fees,

interest, and donations.

K. LaRocca reviewed the expenditure lines and explained that the increases and decreases are due to several factors, such as the economy affecting the cost of supplies, the strategic plan being in the implementation phase, the upcoming Mandeville Branch renovation, and the March 2025 millage election. K. LaRocca highlighted some of the notable changes in budget lines and gave explanations for each adjustment.

J. Kesler asked if a Human Resources (HR) person has been hired. K. LaRocca stated that she has not yet hired an HR person, as that position's salary is budgeted for 2025. She explained that hiring someone before the millage election would be challenging, as it would be tough to find a highly qualified candidate willing to stay long-term without the assurance of guaranteed funding. J. Kesler asked how HR is handled in the meantime. K. LaRocca stated that those duties are split between herself and the two Assistant Directors. If a serious issue arises, they confer with an HR consultant or legal counsel for Parish Government. Interviewing for open positions, hiring, and onboarding is done by Library Administration and training is done at the branches.

J. Kesler asked if K. LaRocca has anticipated how much the Books By Mail service will cost. K. LaRocca confirmed that the estimated costs for the service was calculated based on discussions with other libraries that have that service. T. Myers asked who are those who will be best served by this service. K. LaRocca explained that it will be piloted with COAST's Meals on Wheels program for people who cannot leave their house. She added that this service is a result of input from focus groups during the strategic planning process. J. Kesler asked if the library will be proactive and have the Mobile Library vehicle visit nursing homes and other locations. K. LaRocca confirmed that the Mobile Library will provide Lobby Stop service to nursing homes, and this is the primary purpose of the Mobile Library vehicle. She explained that we are piloting the program with COAST, then we will pick a nursing facility on each side of the Parish for further piloting.

In response to the increased building lease expense for the Causeway Branch, J. Kesler asked how much is the lease agreement. K. LaRocca answered that it is \$15,625 per month.

K. LaRocca explained that any unused money at the end of the year becomes Prior Years' Operating Revenue. After all bills were paid for December 2023 and after the auditors made their adjustments in March 2024, the cash on hand was \$5,881,020. Based on the projected year end of 2024, where we have a planned usage of savings, we will have \$5,764,390 on December 31, 2024. This figure is less than half of one year's operating revenue. These savings are dedicated to the following specific purposes: Operational reserves needed to run the library until the first significant portion of our millage is received from the Parish, disaster and emergency funds, and a proposed dedication of savings in the amount of \$250,000 for the millage election. K. LaRocca noted that if the library is not on the ballot alone, the number can be reduced accordingly. Funds for the furniture projects for the Mandeville, Slidell, and Lacombe branches are designated, but not budgeted. The furniture purchases will be coordinated with the start of those projects.

This leaves a current Unassigned Savings of \$254,390, which puts the library in good stead to fund any projects identified as we continue to implement the strategic plan. K. LaRocca is forecasting an increase in revenue of \$239,970 due to an increase in Ad Valorem taxes as part of average growth. She anticipates an increase in expenditures of \$102,587 due to the increased costs for employee salaries and

the cost of the millage election. Other than the planned usage of savings for the millage election, the operational budget for 2025 is balanced.

C. Gillio followed up on J. Prentice's earlier comments about the \$700,000 cost of furniture for Slidell. She stated that she was also perplexed at the amount upon her initial review. C. Gillio clarified that she now understands that the \$700,000 is not budgeted to be spent on Slidell furnishings in 2025. Regarding the millage election, she mentioned that we are asking the public—who are already unhappy with high insurance costs and new assessments—to vote for an additional tax in March. She stated that it would be helpful to have more detailed explanations regarding certain costs and asked K. LaRocca to briefly explain how procurement for furniture takes place.

K. LaRocca explained that the Capital Projects spreadsheet shows the funds that are earmarked for remaining projects. Over the last 10 years, furniture at each branch has been replaced, except for Mandeville and Slidell. Any furniture projects over \$30,000 has to go out to bid, which is why the library uses consultants to help with the bid process. K. LaRocca noted that the Covington Branch furniture replacement project cost was \$550,000 about five years ago. Furniture throughout the branches is systematically replaced over time due to aging and the furniture at the Slidell Branch is now 35 years old. All of the small branches have gotten a refresh of new furniture, including new circulation desks, new tables and chairs, shelving, and rearrangement of the spaces. K. LaRocca reiterated that the money is estimated and earmarked, but is not budgeted. She clarified that the Board would have to vote for the funds to be part of the budget for those funds to be spent. She stated that the funds will stay earmarked unless the Board wishes to use it for another purpose.

M. Cooper asked if the cost of the furniture is higher due to being institutional furniture. K. LaRocca confirmed that institutional furniture is more expensive because it has to last a significant amount of time and it endures heavy duty use by the public. Institutional furniture used in schools and libraries is designed to a higher construction standard, making it a worthwhile investment as it is built to last for over 30 years. M. Cooper asked if this furniture cost is for the addition to Slidell or the existing space. K. LaRocca stated that it is for both the replacement of existing furniture and new furniture for the addition.

R. Belknap addressed an earlier comment about salaries. He stated that he wants to make sure that people understand that K. LaRocca, as well as the two Assistant Directors, opted out of receiving a raise in order to ensure that employees on the lower end of the scale will get a raise. K. LaRocca confirmed that is correct.

**Public Hearing:**

A. Shaw called for a motion to open the public hearing for the 2025 budget. M. Cooper moved to open the public hearing. It was seconded by R. Belknap.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes  
Motion carried.

**Public Comment:**

Cynthia Weatherly – Abita Springs, LA. She commended the program being piloted with COAST. She stated that she is happy to pay \$35 per year for libraries across the Parish. She spoke highly about library



services. She spoke about the strain placed on the library's resources and stated that it is crucial to consider strategies for future budgeting, handling book challenges, and potential lawsuits. She stated that budgeting for robust intellectual freedom policies and transparent challenge processes can help minimize the operational strain and financial impact of book challenges. She stated that it is important to balance the needs of the entire community. She asked for the Board to include additional budgetary funds for current and additional staff to handle book challenges.

Joan Simon – Covington, LA. She stated that she would like to correct some statements made earlier by other members of the public. She stated that she casts no aspersions to anyone on the Board and appreciates their work, but the legal challenge has not been exhausted yet. She stated that there was a preliminary injunction that was denied and there is still a pending court case. She asked for the public to stop spreading misinformation. She stated that all of the reports show how well that K. LaRocca manages the library's money and is an excellent steward of the library. She stated that St. Tammany Parish has a diversity of citizens and the library has a diversity of services. She thanked the staff and the Board for their work. She asked the Board to approve the budget.

James Prentice – He gave a cost analysis for an individual to visit the library. He stated it was \$22 per visit in 2022 and is now up to \$22.75 per visit in 2024. He stated that if you forget your library card or an overdue book in your vehicle, the cost goes up to \$45.44. He asked if the LBOC has met with the community advisory committee or library staff. He stated that those groups are responsible for the strategic plan. He stated that the strategic plan lists the names of all the people on the community advisory committee and names of people who gave personal interviews. He stated that Parish President Mike Cooper was involved in that process. He stated that the key themes are digital inequity, marketing and communications, customer service, technology, and RFID (Radio Frequency Identification). He asked what is RFID. He mentioned that the LBOC has been in place for five months and inquired whether they are meeting with all the right people to ensure that they can make intelligent and informed decisions. He stated that the board members were elected because of the integrity they showed in their interviews with the Council.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Mandeville, LA. She stated that she is always impressed and amazed at the presentations and K. LaRocca's ability to keep track of data and field questions. She stated that she trusts the librarians to know what the community needs and they are always working and adapting to changes. She read excerpts from LA R.S. 25:31 that refers to citizens' rights to convenient access to library resources. She stated that libraries are so much more than furniture. She spoke about the value the library provides to families and the training and education available to job seekers. She stated that she is in support of the budget.

Johanna Miner – She thanked everyone on the Board for offering their service. She stated that the Board does not get paid for their service, but the Director and Assistant Directors do get paid. She stated that she is praying and hoping that the Board will be helpful in stopping what is happening in St. Tammany Parish. She stated that she does not agree with the budget and feels that the library spends way too much money. J. Miner accused K. LaRocca of lying and stated that she sent a public records request to the library. A. Shaw informed J. Miner that her comments should stay on the topic of the proposed budget. J. Miner stated that she has the public records request and referred to paperwork that she had in her hands. She asked who is protecting Jeff Corbin, a Parish Councilmember.

Rebecca Taylor – Slidell, LA. She referenced the 2023 statistical report from the State Library of Louisiana (*Public Libraries in Louisiana: A Statistical Report*) which is available on the State Library of Louisiana’s website. She compared St. Tammany Parish Library’s local per capita revenue to four other parish library systems that are similar in population. Shreve Memorial Library - \$85.54, Calcasieu Parish Library - \$76.63, New Orleans Public Library - \$59.93, Lafayette Parish Library - \$46.84, and St. Tammany Parish Library - \$39.45. She urged the Board to view the report and stated that it is a very important publication produced by the State Library and contains innumerable statistics for libraries across the state. She stated that the budget should be approved for 2025. She thanked the Board for their time.

Donna Bonnoitt – She expressed her disapproval of the budget and called for a forensic audit of the 2025 budget. She stated that \$700,000 for furnishings is outrageous. She explained that she is a designer and places furniture in homes. She stated that a beautiful house can be built for \$700,000. She referenced the Books by Mail partnership with COAST. She stated that people have computers and that electronic passage of data is very affordable. She stated that she has placed commercial and industrial furniture in places and that \$700,000 is ridiculous. She referenced the lease at the Causeway Branch and stated that \$15,000 to rent a commercial location is ridiculous. She stated that the Causeway Branch is not in a good location, as it is hard to access and hard to park. She stated that there is something fishy going on and she does not approve of the budget.

Becky Bohm – She referenced the salary study and stated that she hopes it is implemented, but stated that it is still barely a living wage. She stated that the previous speaker’s store is not a good comparison, as the store was not as big as the library system. She stated that the partnership with COAST is beneficial to senior citizens who cannot access a computer. She stated that libraries are here to serve all of the community.

Jeff Corbin – Slidell, LA. He stated that he is speaking as a private citizen. He referenced the earlier question from J. Prentice regarding RFID. He explained that it is simplistic technology where an RFID tag is placed inside a book and helps with checking out items. He encouraged the Board and the audience to take a look at the presentation from the community meeting that was held in March 2024, as it answers a lot of questions. He also suggested reviewing a presentation that was given to the previous Parish Council located on the library’s website. He stated that he supports R. Taylor’s comments regarding the per capita revenue and noted that the median cost is relatively low compared to those around us. He stated that there were questions raised about the total value of the library budget and explained that the library is running 12 facilities. He noted that other entities, such as the District Attorney’s Office, operate in facilities that are provided to them and they do not own the buildings. He encouraged the public to look at the facts and information, as it is readily available on the library’s website. He stated that he supports the budget.

A. Shaw called for a motion to close the public hearing for the 2025 budget. C. Gillio moved to close the public hearing. It was seconded by R. Belknap.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes  
Motion carried.

**Discussion:** There was no further discussion by the Board.

**Vote:**

P. Georges moved to adopt the 2025 Budget. It was seconded by R. Belknap.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes  
Motion carried.

**D. Designation of Capital Funds – Lacombe Branch**

**Discussion:**

K. LaRocca referenced the Capital Projects spreadsheet. She noted that the items highlighted in green are projects and funds that have been designated by the LBOC and budgeted by the Parish. The items in yellow are the projects being discussed at the board meeting. The items in blue are not yet designated by the LBOC or budgeted by the Parish. K. LaRocca explained why the RFID project is delayed and why she is not yet asking the Board to dedicate funds for the core costs of the Lacombe Branch replacement and the Slidell Branch expansion and renovation. The reason is that the funds will be needed to run the library if the millage renewal fails in March 2025.

K. LaRocca explained that she is asking for the Board to dedicate capital funds for the architectural and design services needed for the Lacombe Branch replacement. The land for the new library is a parcel of vacant land located on the south side of Highway 190. The back of the property lines up with the Tammany Trace. It is near Bayou Lacombe Middle School and is on the same side of the street as Chahta-Ima Elementary School, which is within walking distance. Those students would no longer need to cross the street to visit the library. The lot should be able to support a 6,000 - 7,000 square foot building, which is approximately the size of the South Slidell Branch. The new branch will include a meeting room and study spaces. K. LaRocca noted that the current Lacombe Branch was the most heavily visited small branch in 2023.

K LaRocca reported that after speaking with the Parish Engineering department, it was determined that \$300,000 should be more than enough for the architectural and design services. She explained that any leftover funding will go towards the construction of the new branch. She clarified that this resolution does not designate funds for the project itself, as we must wait until after the millage election before moving forward with designating funds for the construction. In the meantime, the architect can collect and record the input of the community, library staff, and the library board on what they would like to see in the new library. In order for the Parish to secure an architect, the LBOC will need to adopt a resolution to designate the funding.

J. Kesler asked if this will be put out to bid. K. LaRocca explained that the library does not oversee this task, as it is handled by the Parish. E. Couvillon clarified that architectural and design services cannot be put out to bid, per Louisiana's Public Bid Law. Instead, the Parish goes through an RFQ (Request for Qualifications) process and the applications are reviewed. The cost cannot be considered as a determining factor, as they must consider the best quality of services over the least expensive option.

C. Gillio asked if the \$300,000 is for architectural services only. K. LaRocca clarified that it is for architectural and design services from beginning to end, which includes drawing the plans and

overseeing the management of the project. She explained that the cost is typically calculated as a percentage of the cost of the building. K. LaRocca reiterated that the Board is only designating enough funds for the Parish to find an architect to do the work.

C. Gillio asked how long the entire project will take. K. LaRocca stated that it usually takes a couple of months to get an architect under contract and collecting input from the community will take another couple of months. K. LaRocca said she is hopeful that the plans will be drawn up by the end of 2025. She stated that a project like this takes a couple of years to complete from beginning to end. C. Gillio asked how many square feet is the building anticipated to be. K. LaRocca answered approximately 6,000 - 7,000 sq. ft.

A. Shaw asked K. LaRocca about her discussions with Parish Engineering. K. LaRocca stated that they anticipate the cost of the design services to be under \$300,000, but wanted to make sure enough funds are designated in order to avoid going back and forth to request and designate more money. She reiterated that any unused funds will roll over to construction costs.

C. Gillio asked if the Lacombe Branch will be going from 1,500 sq. ft. to 7,000 sq. ft. K. LaRocca expects it to be closer to 6,500 sq. ft. and compared it to the size of the South Slidell Branch.

**Public Comment:**

Cynthia Weatherly – Abita Springs, LA. She disagreed with an earlier public comment stating that the internet is widely available and inexpensive. She stated that 17% of Louisiana residents do not have internet access. A. Shaw reminded C. Weatherly that her comments should be related to the Lacombe library. C. Weatherly stated that Lacombe is experiencing expanding growth, which increases the need for library resources. She stated that libraries serve as community centers offering educational programs, computer access, and job searching resources. She stated that more space will enable the library to provide these services more effectively. She stated that libraries are not luxuries.

Johanna Miner – She stated that she knows the community well, as she has volunteered at many schools in St. Tammany Parish. She stated that she does not believe that Lacombe needs a new library. She stated that mothers and grandmothers have taken kids to the Lacombe library and have found egregious books. She stated there is no reason to expand the library to include more filth. She stated that she prays that a new library in Lacombe does not happen. She stated that she prays that the Director (K. LaRocca) and two Assistant Directors (B. Geiger and T. DiMaggio) will eventually be gone and she blamed them for purchasing the books.

Becky Bohm – She stated that she supports the new Lacombe Branch and stated that Louisiana has the 5<sup>th</sup> lowest literacy rate in the United States. She stated that there are no sexually explicit books in the library due to the new law and the library has gone above and beyond to ensure that. She stated that librarians just want children to read and any access to libraries is beneficial to the community.

Donna Bonnoitt – She stated that she does not agree with the Lacombe Branch replacement. She stated that \$300,000 to oversee the building of a 6,000 sq. ft. building is unrealistic. She stated that prices are increasing every week for construction. She stated that she does not understand why there is a \$14,000,000 budget next year. She asked why we cannot use money already in the coffers. A. Shaw reminded D. Bonnoitt that her comments should be related to the Lacombe library. D. Bonnoitt stated that she is on topic and speaking about the budget. A. Shaw explained that the Lacombe library is the

agenda item being discussed, not the budget. D. Bonnoitt stated that it is an unrealistic budget for that library.

Joe Impastato – He thanked the Board for serving and thanked K. LaRocca for her hard work. He stated that the Lacombe Branch was back up and running three days after receiving significant damage from Hurricane Francine. He spoke highly of the future location of the new branch and its proximity to Chahta-Ima Elementary School. He stated that he is working on safer connectivity from Bayou Lacombe Middle School to the new library location. He stated that there is no community with a greater need for a new library than Lacombe. He stated that his primary goal in running for office was to make improvements for the children in the Lacombe and District #7 community, as well as throughout the Parish. He stated that the new Lacombe library will be the jewel of the improvements in District #7. He encouraged the Board to support the project.

Lisa Rustemeyer – She stated that she lives closer to Lacombe now and referenced the census showing that some Lacombe residents live below the poverty line. She stated that the library is a tremendous value to the residents and it is important to uplift the community. She stated that she trusts the librarians to understand the needs of the Parish and the need for a new Lacombe library.

R. Belknap asked how many more employees will be needed to service the new facility. K. LaRocca stated that is one of the reasons for the people counters, as they will provide accurate statistics of where staff are needed. She estimates needing at least two additional employees for the new branch, but plans to redirect staff from other branches.

C. Gillio asked if the design services are being capped at \$300,000. K. LaRocca confirmed that capping it at \$300,000 is the best way to describe it. She explained that the Parish will get quotes and the cost is expected to be under \$300,000. C. Gillio asked if there will be a general contractor over this project. K. LaRocca confirmed that contractors will bid on the construction portion of the project in the construction phase. C. Gillio clarified that she has no problem with designating funds to build the Lacombe library, but is taken aback by the \$300,000 for the architect. She stated that the amount appears to be too high.

**Vote:**

R. Belknap moved to adopt the resolution to designate \$300,000 in capital funds for the architectural and design services needed for the Lacombe Branch replacement. It was seconded by P. Georges.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Abstained Kesler: Abstained  
Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes

Motion carried.

**E. Designation of Capital Funds – Slidell Branch**

**Discussion:**

K. LaRocca reported that the Slidell Branch Addition is part of the capital projects list presented to the Parish Council. The goal was to add 4,000 - 6,000 sq. ft. to the building, but due to the need for a roof replacement the amount of additional space will be contingent on the cost of the roof. The plan includes renovations such as carpeting, painting, and reorganizing the space in the existing building. The addition

will possibly include study rooms, a storytime room, and a maker space. K. LaRocca explained that there are rooms with those functions at the Madisonville and Covington branches, but none on the east side of the Parish. The goal is for the Parish to find an architect that will find a solution to the roof along with drawing up the plans for the addition. K. LaRocca explained that the addition will need to tie into the roof replacement.

K. LaRocca reported that after speaking with the Parish Engineering department, it was determined that \$300,000 should be enough for the architecture and design services. They indicated that the project's cost will indeed be near the estimated \$300,000 due to the need for an engineer to develop a plan for the roof replacement. Any leftover funds will go towards construction of the project. K. LaRocca clarified that the Board is not designating funds for the project itself, as we must wait until after the millage election before moving forward with that phase of the project. K. LaRocca reiterated that the funds for that project will be needed to run the library if the millage renewal fails. She emphasized that the roof will need to be replaced whether the millage renewal passes or fails. In order for the Parish to secure an architect, the Board will need to adopt a resolution to designate the funding.

J. Kesler asked if there is a way to split the two projects. K. LaRocca explained that the goal is to ensure that the roof and the addition fit together seamlessly. She confirmed that once the time comes to designate funds for construction, it can be designated in phases, and the Board does not need to designate the full amount at once.

R. Belknap asked if additional employees will be needed due to the increased size of the branch. K. LaRocca replied that there are no plans to add more staff.

C. Gillio stated that she completely understands that both an engineer and an architect are needed for this project.

**Public Comment:**

Cynthia Weatherly – Abita Springs, LA. She thanked the Board for the opportunity to advocate for an investment that can transform the community. She stated that libraries have been a pillar of our education, opportunity, and community growth. She stated that 15.6% of Slidell residents live below the poverty line. She stated that the library is a necessity. She stated that well-funded and well-maintained libraries can break down barriers by providing accessible tools for education, building skills, job preparedness, and creating opportunities for advancement.

Johanna Miner – She stated that K. LaRocca is not telling the truth regarding J. Miner's public records request. She asked who is protecting Jeff Corbin, then asked if Mike Cooper or Collin Sims is protecting Jeff Corbin. J. Miner left the podium.

C. Gillio declared a Point of Order for everyone in attendance following disruption in the audience.

Becky Bohm – She stated that she supports the funding for the improvements to the Slidell Branch.

Donna Bonnoitt – She stated that she is concerned about unrealistic expectations for these improvements. She compared building a library for \$300,000 and furnishing one for \$700,000. She stated that the roof will cost more than \$300,000. She stated that she would like to know how many

people come in and out of the library. She asked if the library keeps track of busy times. She stated that the expenses in the library are ridiculous.

C. Gillio asked for clarification that the \$300,000 is for architectural design and engineering, not the cost of the roof or construction. K. LaRocca confirmed that is correct.

R. Belknap asked if it is state law that the architect who designs the building has to supervise the construction and that they will be there to ensure that it is built in accordance with the plans and specifications. E. Couvillon confirmed that is correct.

A. Shaw asked K. LaRocca to further clarify that the cost of the architect is not the cost of the building. K. LaRocca reiterated that the \$300,000 is not for the actual construction. It is for the engineering and architectural services, as well as the cost for supervising the project.

R. Belknap stated that it could cost less than \$300,000 and K. LaRocca confirmed that is correct. K. LaRocca reiterated that it is the Parish who handles selecting and managing the contract.

**Vote:**

R. Belknap moved to adopt the resolution to designate capital funds for the architectural and design services needed for the Slidell Branch addition and renovation. It was seconded by P. Georges.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes  
Motion carried.

**F. Board Meeting Schedule 2025**

**Discussion:**

B. Geiger presented the board meeting schedule for 2025. There are nine meetings scheduled, most of which are on the fourth Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m.

J. Kesler asked why there is no January meeting. B. Geiger explained that the end of year financial statement is usually not ready in January, so the first meeting takes place in February. J. Kesler noted that between now and February 2025 there is only one meeting in December. B. Geiger confirmed that is correct. K. LaRocca explained that the bylaws require that the Board meets five times per year. She explained that the month of June is skipped due to the Summer Reading Program, confirmed B. Geiger's explanation of why there is no meeting in January, and stated that there is no meeting in November due to Thanksgiving.

T. Myers asked about the door count for Madisonville Branch on the service statistics for September. She asked if the door count was a misprint, as it seems low compared to the other branches. K. LaRocca stated that she will verify the figures and will report back to her.

In response to J. Kesler's comment about the number of meetings, E. Couvillon clarified that if time-sensitive business comes up during the year, the Board can schedule special meetings with 24 hours' notice to comply with Louisiana's Open Meetings law.

**Public Comment:**

Cynthia Weatherly – Abita Springs, LA. She stated that she is concerned about how the Board is going to address 150 book challenges over the next year with this limited schedule. She suggested increasing the number of meetings so that the issue can be addressed, unless there is another solution.

**Vote:**

C. Gillio moved to approve the 2025 Board Meeting Schedule. It was seconded by P. Georges.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes  
Motion carried.

**3. Adjournment**

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by R. Belknap and was seconded by P. Georges. All were in favor, none were opposed, and none were absent. Motion carried.

  
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Pam Georges, Secretary/Treasurer