



Meeting Minutes

Library Board

Tuesday, October 3, 2023

5:00 PM

La Crosse Public Library
Auditorium (Lower Level)

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Meeting called to order at 5:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Sue Anglehart, Kathy Ivey, Katie Bittner, Araysa Simpson, Jess Thill, Aaron Engel, Mac Kiel, Ross Seymour

ABSENT: Erin Raymus

STAFF: Shanneon Grant, Dawn Wacek, Elaine Petersen, Cole Zrostlik, Daniel Whitmore, Russ McClintock, Anita Doering, Cynthia Arauz, Barry McKnight, Brooke Newberry

Agenda Items

1 2024 Winding Rivers Library Resource Contract

This is an annual contract. As the resource library for WRLS, La Crosse Public Library (LPL) is provided with additional funds for popular materials to circulate throughout the Winding Rivers system. Ms. Grant requested that WRLS staff make several changes/updates to the language of the long-time contract. It was noted by Ms. Ivey that, as LPL representative on the Winding Rivers Library System Board, she has noticed that smaller WRLS libraries appreciate the support that LPL, as resource library, provides. Once changes are made, the Board will receive an updated version of the contract and approve at a later meeting.

2 2024 Operating Budget

Two letters written by Board members to the City Council were shared. In light of potential budget cuts across all City departments in FY 2024, both letters emphasized staff and budget cuts experienced by the library over the past 13 years and asked that the City Council and Board of Estimates take those into account when making budget decisions this year and for the sustainability of the Library. LPL has undergone a 20% reduction in staffing since 2010 due to flat or decreasing budget allocations from the City; staff FTE was down even before the 2020 major reduction in force and staff furloughs. Other letters are in the works from the Friends of the Library (FOL) and others who plan to emphasize that tax-payer dollars do not fund the majority of Library programming (the FOL contribute over \$30,000/year to the LPL programming budget, which, along with Don and Gertrude Gordon Funds, funds from the Washburn Board, and other restricted gift funds all contribute nearly \$100,000 annually to help offset expenses not provided through the operating budget.)

It was noted during the meeting that the Library returns value to the community through book, materials, and tool checkouts, programming, education, and services. There is demand for even more programming and City operating funds are vital to the essential services provided to the community. This would not be possible without staff to run said programming.

Ms. Grant noted that, despite decreased staffing, grant funding has been steady lately, especially for the Creation Space.

The Library is anticipating a 2% budget cut for FY 2024. Any budget cuts would go into effect January 1, 2024. The Board of Estimates (BOE) meets on October 9, then all will have a better idea of what the 2024 budget will look like.

At one point, the Library was receiving \$5 million+ from City allocations. The estimated City allocation in 2024 is \$4,681,245.38 (down \$95,535.62 from \$4,776,781.00 in 2023). For more than a decade, the Library has been doing more with less, but has reached a tipping point. Ms. Grant stated that LPL is taking budget cuts very seriously and that impacts to overall services and to the La Crosse community are at the forefront of all budget considerations. She pointed to recent survey data (part of Strategic Planning) that spells out the immense value community members place on LPL programs and services. Ms. Grant stated that, in order to sustain Library programs and services, LPL needs long-term solutions.

Council Representative Mac Kiel stated that right now the City Council is interested in creative solutions. It was also noted that without long-term solutions, the LPL Board will need to continue making budget cuts every year.

Ms. Grant presented three scenarios that could be used to meet the projected 2% budget cut.

Considerations that went into these scenarios included short vs. long-term impacts, alignment with the recently Board-approved Strategic Plan, impacts to overall services and the community, and effects on Library staff.

Target reduction amount: \$95,536

Option A: Eliminate or freeze ALL vacant positions. (This measure would save \$90,434.46 and cut 77 staff hours/week. Additional reduction would come from the materials budget. This would impact service throughout the organization, not just the currently under-staffed Circulation Department.) Impacts would include reduced programming and outreach as well as increased strain on staff.

Option B: Intermittently furlough ALL staff and close all locations on those days. This would amount to 7 closed days in the calendar year 2024 in which staff would not be paid. Ms. Grant noted that this option puts the financial burden entirely on staff. If this were a viable solution, intermittent closures would be once a month for 7 months excluding summer. Based on past experience with closing the Library intermittently, it is confusing and frustrating for patrons. This option does not align with commitment to service or our goal of staff retention. It was mentioned that this option would effectively reduce staff compensation in an amount that would cancel out step raises for Library employees.

Option C: Permanently close South Branch (SCL) and reduce positions accordingly.

In closing the South Branch Library, LPL would lose one of the vacant positions currently open, and reduce a half time custodial position to a quarter FTE. LPL would save \$43,774 in salary and benefits and \$51,762 in non-personnel savings “year one” (utilities, materials, repair and maintenance, automation at the branch). There would be a higher level of savings in subsequent years (expiration of contracts, etc.). This option allows LPL to keep the most staff without furlough and allows LPL to retain two currently vacant part-time positions. Programming would move to a new location, or could be reimagined as outreach. South is currently open 12 hours a week and staffed by two rotating staff people at a time.

Closing the South branch would result in an estimated \$1.2 million capital savings over next 20 years.

While recognizing that some in our community have a great deal of nostalgia and sense of connection with the South branch, Ms. Grant emphasized that a recommendation to close SCL is not a reduction in the Library’s commitment to library services. Instead, it is a necessary strategic move to ensure long-term sustainability and effectiveness of La Crosse Public Library (LPL) as a whole.

With a 20% reduction in staff FTE since 2010, LPL has reached a tipping point. South Library is only 1.6 miles from Main Library. Ms. Grant noted that Main Branch allows LPL to serve the most people with the widest range of offerings and spaces. It was noted that Main programming cannot be replicated in a small space and that programming (especially children’s) is nearly at capacity at Main. Main is also better suited for special events, has meeting spaces and quiet study rooms. South has evolved to a holds pick-up location. La Crosse is the only city our size in the state with three library locations and this is no longer sustainable. While this is hard for many of us to acknowledge, we have been grappling with this situation for many years.

LPL not only strives for equitable services, but is working to be more mobile/agile to serve neighborhoods with the highest needs. LPL exists in a lot of places in our community and services can be increased without the limits of the building.

Adjournment at 7:12 p.m