

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the
Lafayette Public Library Board of Control

February 3, 2021

The special meeting of the Lafayette Public Library Board of Control was held in the meeting room on the 2nd floor of the Main Library at 301 West Congress Street on February 3, 2021. Doug Palombo, President of the Board, called the meeting to order at 5:34 PM.

I. Roll Call and Pledge of Allegiance

Board Members Present: Doug Palombo, Board President; Hilda Edmond, Board Vice-President; Joan Wingate; Adele Blue; Stephanie Armbruster; Landon Boudreaux; James Thomas via Zoom

Other Staff Present: Terry Roy, Library Administrator; Larry Angelle, Library Operations Manager; Danielle Breaux, Director's Executive Secretary; Adam Melancon; Chuck Savoy; Dan Crowley; Danny Gillane; Lisa Jones; Cara Chance; Angie Hurling; Linda Broussard

Members of the Public: Michael Hebert, Assistant City-Parish Attorney; Claire Taylor, Acadiana Advocate; Kaylee Normand, KATC; Blake Blanchard, KATC; Leslie Westbrook, Acadiana Advocate; Jeremy Monts; Heather Fox; Sheree Harper; Lynette Mejia; Jean Menard; Jarred Breaux; Vicki L. Chrisman; Desiree Cormier; Olivia Morgan; Laura Truxillo; Roxanne Guillory; Mary Guercio; James Driscoll; Elias Bartel; Ian Auzenne; Claire Amy Schultz; Marja Broussard; Keith Faulk; Wallace Senegal; Tara Fogleman; Jamal Taylor; Cory Levier

Doug Palombo led the board in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Board President explained the Board's position for not approving the LEH grant "Who Gets to Vote?". He re-emphasized the Board's goal to ensure that the Library remain apolitical. He defended the Board's actions and reiterated that the retired director had not complied with their directive to present both sides of the issue.

Hilda Edmond stated that while she is appointed by the Mayor-President, she does have the privilege to make her own decisions when voting on library matters. She and the Mayor-President both support LEH and the grant that was offered.

Joan Wingate indicated that she thought that Teresa Elberson followed the spirit of the request by reaching out to the LEH presenters. She stated that the denying of the grant smacks of retaliation because of disappointment in how the request was handled.

Doug Palombo moved IV. Comments from the public on any other matter not on this agenda to the beginning of the meeting.

Jamal Taylor spoke against the Library Board of Control's actions concerning the LEH grant and the fact that the Board President was not following the agenda as posted. He also stated that the Board was bashing the former director without her being present to defend herself. He stated that the Board should focus their energies on the North East Regional Library and making it easily accessible for people to have open discussions.

Marja Broussard, NAACP Louisiana State Conference Vice President of District D, State Chair for the Political Action Committee, spoke of her concern with the decision to cancel the LEH grant. She stated that NAACP looks for facts, and she asked the Board to provide the public with facts because the canceling of the grant was one more way of continuing racism. She questioned how the Board determined the speakers were too far left, and stated that the program should have been allowed to happen as it was presented. She stated that there are no two sides to voter suppression.

Landon Boudreaux stated that the history of voting rights is not political nor should it be. The electoral process, electoral college, mail-in ballots, secretary of state vs. state legislature is political. Voter ID laws, disenfranchisement of incarcerated Americans, etc. are topics that have been politicized. He stated that these topics were the topics that the Board wanted to have two speakers on, not on the history of voting rights.

Keith Faulk said that the Library Board made the topic political by stating that the speaker was too far left, and this was a form of systematic racism. He stated that there has never been a point in United States history when white people have systematically and institutionally valued the lives of black people as they do their own. He then called for resignation of Board members who voted against the grant as a form of systematic racism.

Wallace Senegal addressed the Board and stated that black votes do matter because black people weren't always allowed to vote.

Jeremy Monts asserted the following: The Board violated library programming policy, and stated that it is not the Board's decision to pick programs. The programming policy states the ultimate responsibility for programming at the Library rests with the Library Director, who administers under the authority of the Library Board of Control. The Library Director delegates the authority for program management to the Head of Programming, who works with librarians and staff members whose job responsibilities involve program development and delivery. All Library programs are free of charge and open to the public. Library sponsorship of a program does not constitute an endorsement of the content of the program or the views expressed by the participants. Program topics, speakers, and resources are not excluded from programs because of possible controversy. The Library adheres to the principles endorsed in the Library Bill of Rights.

Tara Fogleman stated that she was insulted as an activist that the Board would stop education of the children in the community. She stated that the other side of voter suppression is the actual suppressor.

James Thomas addressed the Board in hopes that the Board could recognize the mistake that was made with the vote. Even though he understands that Board members had concerns, that was the point of the discussion. He stated that this is a dark time not just for the Board but for the community, and the Board should be encouraging dialogue of this nature. James Thomas asked Jamal Taylor if, during his time on the Board, the Board was ever asked to approve grants of any nature. Jamal Taylor said that the Board hired Elberson because she was the expert, and only had a fiduciary responsibility to protect the library, and did not encroach on programming.

II. Approval of Minutes

Stephanie Armbruster asked that pages be numbered on minutes henceforth. She asked that the last paragraph on Unfinished Business A. be changed to state Stephanie Armbruster asked the staff to address any flat roof issues at the same time as shingle roof issues are being addressed. She asked if a second microphone could be included in the meeting room because audio has been hard to understand. She asked that the third paragraph of Unfinished Business B. be changed to Stephanie Armbruster asked if Director Elberson was recommending the elimination of a librarian position. Teresa Elberson stated she would rather eliminate a position if it would allow the library card policy to remain unchanged. She asked that the paragraph starting with Hilda Edmond be changed to add a clause stating that Teresa Elberson suggested the position being eliminated would likely be at the Main Library. She asked that the second sentence on the paragraph starting with Teresa Elberson be changed to LPL is funded by Lafayette Parish property taxes. She asked to add in all comments from 1:29 to 1:32:45. Stephanie Armbruster noted that up until that point in the meeting, the minutes appeared to be nearly verbatim, and inquired why the sections about Gale Analytics and the LEH Grant were not verbatim like the previous sections. She also expressed concern that there were discussions unfavorable of the Director that were omitted from the minutes. She asked staff to listen to 1:34 through 1:58 and add discussion to the minutes.

Mike Hebert, Assistant City-Parish Attorney, stated that minutes do not have to be verbatim, and many smaller public bodies do not present verbatim minutes. Revised Statute 42:20 states that all public bodies shall keep written minutes of all of their open meetings. The minutes to be kept by the legislature and legislative committees and subcommittees shall be governed by the provisions of R.S. 42:21. The minutes of all other public bodies shall include but need not be limited to: the date, time, and place of the meeting, the members of the public body recorded as either present or absent, the substance of all matters decided, and, at the request of any member, a record, by individual member, of any votes taken, and any other information that the public body requests be included or reflected in the minutes. There is also no legal requirement to approve the minutes. A more scaled down version of minutes would get rid of the need to approve the minutes. These minutes must be posted within a reasonable time and if the Board waits until the following meeting to approve said minutes, this will not be within a reasonable time.

A motion to modify the minutes as suggested and table the approval of the minutes of the January 25, 2021 Regular Board Meeting was made by Stephanie Armbruster and seconded by Joan Wingate.

Yeas: Palombo, Edmond, Wingate, Blue, Armbruster, Thomas, Boudreaux
Nays: None
Abstained: None
Absent: None

III. New Business

A. Appointment of an Interim Library Director

Joan Wingate asked if anyone showed interest in the Interim Director position. Doug Palombo stated that he was made aware of people on staff that were interested in the position, but suggested Larry Angelle on a provisional basis for ease of transition.

Danny Gillane was asked if he was interested in the permanent Director position. He stated his qualifications and said that he would be interested in the permanent position.

Jamal Taylor stated that he wished the Board would be able to ask Director Elberson to come back, as they were in violation of their own policy. He also suggested trustee training through the American Library Association and United for Libraries before appointing an interim or permanent director.

Corey Levier spoke of grievances of himself and others in the community with the board rejecting the LEH grant. He stated that the Board members censored Teresa Elberson. He called for the resignation of the Board members that voted against the grant and asked them to write apology letters to LEH.

It was determined that Larry Angelle would take over the interim position until the next regular Board meeting, and staff would be allowed to apply for the interim position by submitting resumes to the lpboard@lafayettepubliclibrary.org email address until Monday, February 8 at 5:00 PM.

Larry Angelle asked for expectations and limitations of him from the Board.

James Thomas asked if it was possible to grant only signatory authority at the time being instead of appointing an interim director. Mike Hebert stated that was lawful.

Larry Angelle said he was willing to step forward into the role as requested for the benefit of the library system.

Mike Hebert also stated that an Interim Director would be afforded all authority granted unto a permanent Director.

A motion was made by Joan Wingate to appoint Larry Angelle as Provisional Interim Director until the next regular board meeting with a 25% increase in compensation and the vote for a longer term Interim Director be placed on the agenda of the next regular board meeting prior to the expiration of Mr. Angelle's time in the Provisional Interim Director position and was seconded by Hilda Edmond.

Yeas: Palombo, Edmond, Wingate, Blue, Armbruster, Thomas, Boudreaux

Nays: None

Abstained: None

Absent: None

B. Discussion of timeline and preliminary strategy for hiring process

Joan Wingate and Adele Blue were both on the Board during the previous Director's search. Adele Blue stated that she was not a part of the small Director's Search Committee. Joan Wingate stated that the Board did engage in a national search that did not pan out.

Mike Hebert stated that not only does the Library Director have to have an MLIS degree, but must be state certified.

Danny Gillane stated that in Louisiana, Directors are typically given a time frame for getting state certified, as those out of state candidates would typically not have the Louisiana certification.

Landon Boudreaux stated that he thought it reasonable to have one month for applications and then one month to interview candidates.

IV. Comments from the public on any other matter not on this agenda

This was moved to the beginning of the meeting.

V. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Larry Angelle, Secretary