

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

December 16, 2009

6:30 pm

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER: Danna Wood Webb who presided called the meeting to order at 6:58 pm.

Present were: Millie Burns, Chris Hansen, Julie Mills Worthey and Arlene Roberts Grant, Trustees.

Also present were: Mike Hekle, Attorney, Jackson Lewis; Gary Newman, CSEA Unit President; Cheryl Berent, Thea Blessitt, Debra Bracey-Harris, Scott Griffith, Doris Hackett; Leroy Lea; Shawn Lucas-Dunnom; Deborah Ramsey, Kevin Robinson, Cheryl Thomas; Christopher Williams, Library Staff; Hamilton Blessitt, Robert Brent, Robert Gardner, Chanelle Hyde, Ms. S. Jones, Robert Lattimer, Taryn Vanderburg; Library Patrons; Opal Brown Lindsay, Director; Willie Lou Gayles, Chief Account Clerk and Mary Harper, Administrative Assistant.

MINUTES:

The minutes of the meeting of November 18, 2009 were adopted.

COMMUNICATIONS:

The board received an invitation to the inauguration of Comptroller, Maureen Walker.

PERIOD OF PUBLIC EXPRESSION:

Gary Newman read a news article regarding inadequate safety measures in the library. The article stated that the lack of a contract had prevented the library from putting a violence policy in place. Mr. Newman expressed what he called bad faith negotiations from the library administration. He stated that the board is trying to renege on the grievance procedure agreement and change the language in the contract, in order to make it more difficult for the union to win its grievances. He said that the board is blaming everything on the contract negotiations, even the recent incidents of violence in the library.

Mr. Newman said if the grievance procedure is degraded the entire contract will be degraded.

Gary Newman stated that the library security gates had been moved and there was no guard when a kid was beaten up in the library.

Mr. Newman stated that the guards had been given other responsibilities beyond security, such as spying on the library staff.

Christopher Williams discussed the memo sent to the staff by the library board. He said that now is the time to settle the contract while the money is still available. He said if the library cares about the staff at all, they will not return the money to the city. He does not know how the administration believes the staff can go on when they are not shown any respect.

Mr. Williams said that the public identifies the library with the staff whose faces they often see, not with the board. He said that the staff is well deserving of its raises and asked why the money would be sent back.

Cheryl Thomas spoke about the fact that library aides are doing the work of a Librarian III. She said that civil service tests are given for a reason. Ms. Thomas stated that the problems start at the top.

Scott Griffith questioned whether the entire board had knowledge of what was going on or if only one person was making the decisions for the board.

Chanelle Hyde said that she is not new to the dedication and commitment of the library staff. She urged the board to consider generating the new contract.

Robert Brent said he felt the board seemed apathetic to the staff's concerns. He said that the board would not work if they were treated the way they are treating the staff.

Ms. Jones said that she had complained about an assault on her daughter in the library several months ago. She said since then things appeared to have gotten worse. Ms. Jones said that she no longer allows her kids to come to the library.

She said that the library does not yet have a written violence procedure. If the library wants to provide safety and security for the patrons, it should also be provided for the staff.

Ms. Jones said that a lack of a new contract should not prevent the library for putting a violence procedure in place.

Taryn Vanderburg said that it was nonsense, a lack of a new contract does not negate following the law and putting a workplace violence policy in place.

She said that according to the board's memo, money has already been put aside for the staff raises. This money must be somewhere. The money going to attorneys could be used for staff raises and library improvements.

The library cannot negate state law. It must have a workplace violence policy.

She said that the library should get a safety plan in place, settle, its contract and not spend money on attorneys. She said the contract should have good fair wording in place that is not a detriment to the employees.

Doris Hackett said that safety had always been an issue since she has been at the library and always will be in a public place. She said if good safety plans are in place that may ward off some things.

She said that it needs to be made plain that all of the moneys wasted on attorneys fees are not spent on contract negotiations. She said that money spent on attorney's fees for silly things that violate the contract is a waste of taxpayers' money. The board cannot sit back and let the administration do whatever it wants.

Robert Lattimer said that the library has an excellent staff and if the contract were settled the moral would be better.

He said that the same situation occurred in the 1990's with a completely different trustee board. He said that the library should try to consolidate activities with the city and the board of education.

The staff needs protecting. A security plan should be put in place. The library needs to control who comes into the building.

It was asked if there were money in the budget for salary increases for 2007 through 2009. Chris Hansen said only if the contract was signed in 2009.

Doris Hackett said that the money that was in the budget for raises since 2006 is supposed to be there whether the budget changes or not.

Gary Newman said that the city gives the library a single line in its budget and the library has the power to do what it wishes. If the negotiations go until 2010 the money should still be there.

Arlene Grant said that all available funding for the community had to be looked at. There are instances where the money is no longer available because it is needed for essential services. If allocated money is not used, the community has the authority to take it back.

Gary Newman said that the union had already agreed to substantial givebacks and the staff had reached its limit. He said this is about the entire staff, not just him.

Mr. Newman said regarding the grievance language in the contract no one is in a position to present all relevant facts. You cannot be expected to have a full case until you get to arbitration. It is a national standard. He said that the library has reneged on its agreement and was bargaining in bad faith.

GRIEVANCE:

After hearing the Workplace Violence Prevention Grievance at Step III; the board moved to sustain the grievance and direct management to form a committee and meet in consultation with the appropriate city agencies to develop a Workplace Violence plan prior to the January 2010 Board meeting. In performing this task, the board suggested management also consult with patrons and staff.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT:

Board President, Danna Wood Webb and director, Lindsay met with the City Council regarding the 2010 budget. The council's response was cautious; but they were impressed with the increased volume and usage at the library.

REMARKS OF THE TRUSTEES:

Julie Mills Worthey attended a community meeting held in the library to address the incidents of violence and to express the concerns of the board and staff. The police department has offered resources for the library.

The library will move forward with security measures, including cameras. It will also continue dialog moving forward to develop a plan.

Mrs. Mills Worthey will continue to represent the board at the Operation Protect meetings.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Library Director, Opal Brown Lindsay reported the following:

The Library Foundation had filed for a \$50,000 grant which was never received. The library is trying to retrieve the money.

Opal Brown Lindsay and Francine Vernon of WLS met with School Superintendent Sawyer to discuss community services including starting a tutoring program.

Librarians Rebecca Steere and Rebecca Newman will meet with the school media specialists.

A temporary Business Manager has been hired. Civil Service will place an announcement for the permanent position, as well as for other library exams.

The library is trying to incorporate with the city to get security cameras.

The library received an Arts Alive grant geared towards Senior Programming.

The grant "Through the Years" will capture the history of Mount Vernon. It involves theater performances and recordings.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

The board entered executive session at 8:40 pm on a motion by Chris Hansen, seconded by Julie Mills Worthey.

The Board returned to regular session at 10:04 pm. No decisions were recorded

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Secretary