

Washington County Library Board

March 29, 2021

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in compliance with Minnesota Statute 13D.021, the Washington County Library Board held its January 2021 meeting via WebEx and telephone.

Present Board: Burke, Foster-Huot, McCulloch, Reeves, Olufson, Commissioner Johnson

Guests: Cindy Kallstrom, Scott Vrieze

Staff: Stenftenagel, Nelsen, Kaple

1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Recognition of the Public

McCulloch started the meeting at 6:35 p.m. Two guests attended. No additional members of the public were present. McCulloch asked for a motion to call the meeting to order. Reeves made the motion, and Burke seconded. The board unanimously approved calling the meeting to order at 6:46 p.m.

2. Adoption of Agenda/Consent Calendar Approval

McCulloch asked for a motion to adopt the agenda, the consent calendar, and the minutes from the last meeting. Olufson made a motion to adopt the agenda, consent calendar, and the minutes from the last meeting and Reeves seconded. The board unanimously accepted the agenda, the consent calendar, and the minutes from the last meeting by a roll call vote.

3. MELSA Presentation

Guest Scott Vrieze, Executive Director for the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA), shared a slideshow explaining MELSA's role collaborating with the Twin Cities Metro Public Libraries including Washington County Library. Vrieze shared maps showing MELSA's relationship to other regional and federated boards in the state of Minnesota and member libraries. He discussed MELSA's role as a federated agency providing communication, collaboration, shared purchasing, common goals, and mutually reinforcing activities. He talked about the benefits to member libraries which include collaborative services like Homework Help, shared electronic resources such as Alldata (a popular auto repair database), and Legacy-funded programs like Club Book and Teen Lit Con. Vrieze also presented slides detailing revenue sources and funding distributed to member libraries. He concluded with what is next for MELSA: strategic planning, advocacy, continued development of collaborative approach to resources and programs, and an increase in virtual programming.

McCulloch asked if Help Now is billed by use (MELSA pays a negotiated flat fee based on the size of the metro) and how Help Now works (it is content-based with subject matter experts hired specifically to provide support). McCulloch mentioned the need for getting information out about the availability of the resource to schools and parents and suggested sharing with media specialists. Vrieze stated cooperation with schools is often mixed with some schools and media specialists invested while others are not. Smaller communities and schools are generally easier to reach with high schools and larger areas experiencing more challenges. McCulloch asked about the summer learning program, if it is

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branded the same, and Stenftenagel answered that it used to be but now they follow similar themes and market the program at the system level. Burke asked who MELSA's customers are, and Vrieze responded by saying everyone in the metro area. MELSA services are being used every day at most locations. McCulloch asked if MELSA supported directors during the pandemic response, and Stenftenagel responded with "absolutely!" Library directors really appreciated the weekly meetings organized by MELSA to discuss pandemic services and response. Burke expressed an interest in the spreadsheet with the financial details. McCulloch asked for any additional questions, and there were none.

4. Staff Updates

COVID-19 Update

Stenftenagel discussed current library services. WashCoLib continues to offer Express Service and is returning some furniture and expanding meeting room use due to the governor's latest executive order. Six vacant positions are being filled as the library prepares to return to full hours and services as soon as we can based on staff and community vaccinations. There has been no increase in the number of positive COVID-19 cases among staff; the number remains at 5 with contact traced back to family not the library. Vaccines have been offered to youth and teen services based on state guidelines, additional staff have the opportunity through the county's standby system, and federal guidelines list library staff as 1c essential workers.

Reeves asked if staff had experienced any serious issues enforcing guidelines. Stenftenagel stated that staff has had to deal with resistance every day, although nothing has required law enforcement intervention. She appreciates how well staff has handled the resistance and the challenges and stressed the importance of getting staff access to the vaccines. Kallstrom asked who is responsible for the vaccine, and Stenftenagel stated that for staff it is Public Health and Environment (PHE). Commissioner Johnson asked how many staff are estimated to have received the vaccine, and Stenftenagel estimates 20-25 through PHE, 25-30 including people who have received the vaccine through their own sources. Johnson also asked if we anticipate anyone turning down the vaccine, and Stenftenagel relayed that there have already been a few.

Statistics Update

Stenftenagel shared a slideshow with the latest library statistics including number of visitors, express locker use, library card registrations, email and chat interactions, computer use, circulation of digital and physical resources, and CARES Act device usage.

Olufson asked if anything was surprising about the statistics, and Stenftenagel mentioned a significant spike in the use of lockers in January, the number of email/chat interactions and library card registrations as a happy surprise, and the dip in digital use that may be linked to a change in how magazine checkouts are recorded. Olufson asked if now was the time to discuss adding locker systems or dreaming of vending machines at other locations, and Stenftenagel said she has been looking at possibilities. McCulloch suggested looking at areas where people do not have access or have limited

access to libraries, particularly related to walking distance or socioeconomic barriers. Burke mentioned that the Marine Library is now open part-time which might reduce locker use in that location.

Facilities Update

Stenftenagel discussed Oakdale's upcoming repairs including roof work in 2021 and parking lot maintenance in 2024/2025. She also advised the board that Park Grove and R.H. Stafford are listed under consideration for bond sale in 2022, but no final decisions or amounts have been determined. Commissioner Johnson confirmed that information. There was no additional discussion.

5. Board Member Discussion

Reeves asked Stenftenagel and Johnson what challenges they expect to face coming out of the pandemic and how the board could help with those challenges. Stenftenagel mentioned three potential challenges:

- If people are slow to return to the library post-pandemic, the library board may be called upon to share the needs of the community to help the library meet those needs.
- After the county delivers their strategic plan, the library will develop their own strategic plan and will rely on the board to assist.
- As the library handles media interest around removing materials from the collection, we will be talking about policy to ensure we make the appropriate decision, and the board's perspective and role as the voice of the community will be helpful.

Commissioner Johnson discussed the large amount of funds the county will be receiving with little guidance as to how to spend the funds. He stated having a three-year time frame will provide the county an opportunity to consider how best to use it without rushing into spending. He suggested it might be possible to think big and outside of the box to see what we want our libraries to be, what we want them to look like, and perhaps use this opportunity to do things we might not have thought possible in the past. Johnson also discussed the challenges to materials and the idea that the arts are not designed to make people feel comfortable. Books are to educate, and he acknowledges some are not comfortable with everything that is out there. He expects that issues will come up more and more, and we will need to have discussions about how to deal with those issues.

Reeves also mentioned the conversations and productivity that would occur before and after meetings when the board met in person, and Commissioner Johnson inquired as to the library hours. Stenftenagel stated current hours and mentioned that pre-pandemic hours were until 8 p.m. most nights. Olufson asked about the possibility of holding meetings in person again. Stenftenagel stated that with the governor's recent order we could potentially hold in-person meetings with up to 15 people as long as county guidelines were met. Holding a future meeting in-person will be considered.

6. Adjournment

McCulloch asked for a motion to adjourn. Olufson made a motion and Reeves seconded, and the meeting officially adjourned at 8:03 p.m. by Roll Call.

The next scheduled meeting of the Library Board is Monday, May 24, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. Location TBD.