

**Washington County Library Board**

January 25, 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, Olayinka**

**Staff: Stenftenagel, Rosten, Kaple, de Sobrino, Schulte**

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

McCulloch called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. No members of the public were present.

**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. Election of Officers**

McCulloch opened the floor for nominations. Burke asked for clarification on which positions are open. McCulloch clarified that she and Olufson are currently chair and vice chair. Reeves nominated McCulloch to serve a second term as chair. Olayinka seconded McCulloch's nomination for chair. There were no other nominations. The board unanimously elected McCulloch chair by roll call vote. McCulloch opened the floor for vice chair nominations. Olufson nominated Olayinka to be vice chair. Reeves seconded Olayinka's nomination. The board unanimously elected Olayinka as vice chair by roll call vote. Commissioner Johnson thanked the nominees for the time and dedication to the library board.

**4. COVID-19 Update**

Stenftenagel shared a COVID-19 service update. Beginning in December 2020, the library started offering an "express service model." Stenftenagel explained that the library removed all excess seating and closed meeting rooms at the beginning of December due to the governor's guidelines. In January 2021, the library reopened one meeting room at each branch and returned some seating. Stenftenagel noted that internally some staff are now referring to this as "expanded express service." The library continues to suggest that visits be limit to 1 hour, but that guideline isn't strictly monitored or enforced. During the express service model, staff have noticed verbal announcements in buildings with intercom systems have been very effective for maintaining safety.

During the library's current express service model, computers, meeting rooms, holds pick-up, and curbside pick-up are available. Stenftenagel noted that curbside pick-up numbers have decreased substantially from when the library was closed April-June 2020, but the service is still being used

*A great place to live, work and play...today and tomorrow*

throughout the county.

Stenftenagel shared that at the time of the last board meeting, in November 2020, there are been a total of two positive COVID-19 cases amongst library staff. As of January 25, 2021, there has been a total of five library staff who have tested positive for COVID-19. The five total staff is a cumulative number throughout the pandemic, and all positive cases have been traced back to family. Stenftenagel opened the floor for questions from the board. Olufson said he believes the library has been handling COVID-19 very well. Stenftenagel said that staff are to thank for following safety procedures and working hard to keep each other safe. Reeves asked how patrons are handling the restrictions for gathering and library service changes. Stenftenagel said that library users are mostly remaining civil, but some people don't want to follow procedures. The library received a number of complaints during December when the meeting rooms were closed and the seating was removed. Stenftenagel recognized that staff deal with angry and unhappy patrons, but that overall communities are handling the changes well given the current situation. Reeves said he would like to second Olufson's comments about how well library staff have handled the pandemic. Reeves said to please pass along the library board's thanks to the staff for supporting a civil society. Olufson added that the library board likes to brag about the great library staff in Washington County. Burke commented on the low rate of staff turnover despite the unprecedented situation. Stenftenagel recognized that Washington County Library has been fortunate to retain much of their staff during this time, but that there have been some retirements and resignations. Olufson recognized that a long time Wildwood Library staff member, Barb Lunn, did retire recently. Olayinka asked how the library handles positive COVID cases. Stenftenagel said the library staff are lucky to work for a county that documents everything well. Due to the county's guidance, staff know to notify a supervisor, who then notifies the director and Human Resources (HR). If someone tests positive, everyone at a specific work location is notified, the county's building services department deep cleans the worksite, and the staff follow HR and public health guidance for quarantining and testing. Library managers typically use a decision tree and HR guidance to guide staff through making these decisions.

## **5. Staff Updates**

### **2020 Statistics Updates**

Stenftenagel shared statistics comparing library usage in 2019 and 2020, including visits, express libraries, library card registrations, computer use, circulation, and email and chat interactions. In 2020, the lowest number of visits was when the library was closed from April-June. The graph visibly shows visits increasing later in 2020, but not anywhere near 2019 visits. Stenftenagel noted that the express lockers are a more positive statistic because they have been in-demand during the pandemic. Stenftenagel enthused that there has been a large increase in email and chat use during the pandemic. Using a graph to depict the increase, Stenftenagel showed that email interactions and chat interactions have increased and noted that this is one way staff have continued to stay busy when visits are down. The number of physical items that have been borrowed has continued to regain throughout the year. Stenftenagel noted that the library surpassed 2019 circulation numbers by 10% in December 2020. Stenftenagel shared that digital circulation has been rising throughout the pandemic, and is currently

up 23% total from 2019 to 2020.

Reeves asked what percentage of days the library has been closed in 2020 compared to other years. Stenftenagel said the library has not quantified the closure in that way yet. Olufson said quantifying the closure in that way could help the library make more comparisons. Stenftenagel agreed and said she would ask library staff to look into it. Olufson noted that from his perspective in 2020 the stats were equal to or better than most of 2019 despite the pandemic. Olayinka said he wanted to recognize library staff for their creativity in continuing to come up with alternative ideas during a difficult time. Commissioner Johnson asked if digital refers to ebooks and commented that ebooks cost more than physical books. Commissioner Johnson asked if this means that the library is spending more of their budget on eBooks. Stenftenagel noted that MELSA is contributing to the cost as well, but that the electronic materials are very expensive. Commissioner Johnson shared that he is now on the MELSA Trustees Board for Washington County and he is looking forward to continuing to learn more. Olayinka asked if the library discourages people from borrowing electronically because eBooks cost more. Stenftenagel said the library does not discourage people from using eBooks. Stenftenagel elaborated by saying, "if people want to read it, we will find a way to loan it to them." Commissioner Johnson said it is great to make electronic materials available but that it is good to keep the costs in mind.

#### **CARES Device Update**

Stenftenagel shared an update about the circulation and use of CARES funded devices. CARES funded devices in Washington County Library include Chromebook kits (hotspot and Chromebook), hotspots, and laptops. The library owns a total of 400 hotspots, and as of January 22, 2021, 229 are on-loan. The library owns a total of 100 Chromebook kits and as of January 22, 2021, 92 are on-loan. The library also purchased 50 laptops for in-library used. It was decided not to have the laptops available during the limited express service in December 2020 due to the limitations on seating and meeting rooms. The laptops are not available yet, but staff are working on plans to make the laptops available in the next month.

Commissioner Johnson asked how the library can track hotspots when patrons have them. Stenftenagel said that borrowers must use a library card to take hotspots, so there is accountability. Stenftenagel added that the hotspots are on a data plan and staff can monitor the usage. Commissioner Johnson asked if a borrower keeps a hotspot past the due date, can the library deactivate it. Stenftenagel said yes, the library can deactivate hotspots if they go missing. Commissioner Johnson asked what the incentive is for a borrower to return a hotspot. Stenftenagel noted that Washington County Library doesn't charge daily fines, but eventually a borrower is charged a processing and replacement fee. If borrowers don't pay those fees, their account is sent to the county collections department. From that point, borrowers could end up in court or have their taxes garnished. Burke asked if there is a policy for broken CARES devices. Stenftenagel said the library is considering those situations on a case by case basis and noted that there is a one year warranty on the items that will cover some damages.

#### **CareerForce and Hardwood Creek Library partnership**

Rosten shared an update about CareerForce services in Hardwood Creek Library. Rosten explained that in late 2020 a CareerForce Career Lab had physically moved into the Hardwood Creek Library and subsequently opened in January 2021. This move was a collaboration between the Washington County

Library and Washington County Community Services. CareerForce is a division of Washington County Community Services that also receives funding and guidance from the state. Rosten clarified that the CareerLab in Hardwood Creek Library shares the current library computer lab but has a separate desk and open hours for CareerForce staff. The current hours are Wednesdays 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. and Fridays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Rosten shared that there are plans to expand these hours when CareerForce has efficient staffing and when the library returns to non-modified services.

Reeves commented that he thinks this is a great service and mentioned how COVID has increased unemployment. Olufson added that he encourages combining county services for convenience and that it makes the library even more important than it already is. Olayinka asked if the library is promoting this new embedded service. Rosten said that the library is promoting it unison with CareerForce, but neither have made a large announcement due to the library's express service model and a current shortage of staff in CareerForce. Rosten said there are plans for wider promotion in the near future. Stenftenagel noted that CareerForce is part of the state and DEED and that this is the first Career Lab to be embedded in a library. de Sobrino shared that she works at Hardwood Creek Library and has heard more than one person say that they couldn't have gotten the career resources they needed if CareerForce wasn't available at the library.

#### **Park Grove Snack Program**

Schulte shared that prior to COVID-19 closure, Park Grove Library offered weekly snacks during the summer five days a week in 2019. The snack program is supported by the Youthprise Nutrition Program. Due to COVID-19, the service model for the snack program had to change in 2020. Instead of receiving snacks on a daily basis just during the summer, the food has been repackaged into grocery bags for a weekly pickup and expanded to continue past summer. The repackaged snacks amount to seven meals and seven snacks in a grocery bag. Anyone under 18 is eligible to receive a bag. Parents can also pick up the groceries for their children. Schulte said that this program has been very impactful in her community where a lot of people that have lost jobs. Schulte explained that this program does not require anyone to register, people simply need to show up and tell library staff how many bags of food they need. Schulte shared that it has been rewarding to see the children who usually spend a lot of time in the library in a different way and that her staff feel this is an important service.

In addition to weekly groceries, Park Grove Library applied for a Youthprise Emergency Grant in December. Schulte explained that this grant required a very quick turnaround and resulted in ten-thousand dollars of groceries for families in the library's service area. Schulte said that after she and Stenftenagel partnered with the Washington County Food Insecurity Unit to source ten-thousand dollars in fifty dollar Cub Food gift cards and identify people in need. The fifty dollar gift cards were disbursed in multiple ways: given away at Park Grove Library on a food pickup day in December, sent to people identified by the food insecurity unit, and given to temporary shelters and emergency housing facilities in Washington County. Schulte said she witnessed people breakdown in tears and express extreme relief at receiving the funds for food.

Olufson asked if the library is a good place to find information about community services. Schulte said yes, library staff have resource lists and can connect people to resources like crisis lines, shelters, the sheriff's department, and Washington County's homeless unit. Schulte commented that the library often

plays the role of connecting people to basic needs. Olufson asked if there is an online resource for people to use to find the services. Stenftenagel commented that the library has those resources on its website and highlighted them during COVID. Commissioner Johnson said he wanted to recognize everyone involved for the role they play in helping children. McCulloch commented that some food pickup times are difficult for students and this seems like a flexible good option. Reeves commented that it seems like there is a lot going on at the county level and he wondered how much coordination and sharing of resources happens. Commissioner Johnson said that the county coordinates a lot with different food shelves and other organizations, as well as internal departments. Commissioner Johnson said there is a lot of information on the County website and Facebook page and those are good places to find that information. Commissioner Johnson recognized that there is always room for improvement. Burke asked if the food program timing of 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. was for a reason. Schulte said that the timing was originally designed for afterschool hours and has been maintained during the school closures due to the community knowledge of that time.

#### **Program Update: Winter Reads**

de Sobrino shared information about the annual Winter Reads program supported by MELSA. de Sobrino explained that it is a program that requires adults to submit book reviews to receive prizes. This year prizes include branded socks, bookmarks, masks, and book bundles. The book bundles are comprised of good condition books that have been donated. Typically, a decorative display is a part of this program but that wasn't included this year. Due to that change, library staff turned to YouTube to share recommended reading. de Sobrino shared a slide that features Librarian Leah Egersdorf recommending children's books to read, and noted that Leah also created a beautiful display at the Lake Elmo Library.

de Sobrino shared Winter Read participation statistics for 2020, explaining that the Winter Reads data compares how many card holders each library has. de Sobrino noted that the smaller branches typically have the highest participation. de Sobrino went on to share information about Write in our Midst, a series of author talks schedule to coincide with Winter Reads. In the weeks leading up to each author talk, the library is conducting a scavenger hunt for a book by the same author and posting clues on social media. This activity is designed to create more interest in the author talks and provide a fun activity. Olufson commented that Allen Eskins is a great local author and he was happy that he was included in the author lineup. Olufson asked what happens with donated books in good condition that aren't added to the collection, put into a book bundle, or sold. de Sobrino explained that the library sells most items or set them aside for prizes. Olufson asked if we have donated books to Africa. de Sobrino said that the library does not currently donate materials through a program. McCulloch commented that she appreciated the diversity in the authors include in the series.

#### **6. Facilities Update**

Stenftenagel said that Washington County is still talking with the City of Woodbury about potential changes to R.H. Stafford Library and Central Park. Stenftenagel said that Washington County had planned to do a feasibility study for Park Grove Library this year, but has since learned from the City of Cottage Grove that there will be a referendum on the November 2021 ballot to see gauge interest in building a community center in Cottage Grove. Due to that change, the library will wait to conduct a feasibility study until after the community has voted. Commissioner Johnson noted that there are a

number of factors in this decision and it is important the City and County take time to evaluate how to move forward.

## **7. Board Member Discussion**

McCulloch shared that Ramsey County Library is loaning snow shoes and she thinks this is an interesting way to help people try something new at no cost. McCulloch also shared that she thought Ramsey County Library might have a homework help phone line. Stenftenagel said Washington County Library has loaned games and other items, but hasn't explored winter sports yet. Stenftenagel said that she believes the phone line McCulloch noticed is the Homework Help website that all MELSA libraries feature. Commissioner Johnson asked about the Oakdale Library's facility. Stenftenagel noted that Oakdale Library is the only location with a sliding door and the sliding door broke at the end of December. Oakdale Library had to close for 3 days due to the door issue, but were still able to offer curbside pickup. Kaple and Stenftenagel confirmed that the problem is now resolved. Olufson said he would be interested in helping a homework hotline if it exists. Stenftenagel noted that there is something interesting about the phone idea because everyone is getting too much screen time right now.

Stenftenagel noted that she spoke with Scott Vrieze, the executive director of MELSA, and he has agreed to join the Library Board meeting in March to talk about what MELSA is and how it functions.

Olayinka thanked all of the board members for their vote of confidence in nominating and electing him as the vice chair.

## **8. Adjournment**

McCulloch asked for a motion to adjourn. Olufson made a motion and Burke seconded, the meeting officially adjourned at 7:54 pm by Roll Call.

The next scheduled meeting of the Library Board is Monday, March 29, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. Location TBD.