



**Regular Meeting of the Library Board of Trustees  
July 18, 2017 – Central Library  
3:30 p.m.**

Minutes of Actions and Decisions of the Library Board of Trustees of the Bellingham Public Library as authorized by RCW 27.12.210 and SEC. 7.02 Charter of the City of Bellingham.

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**Board Members Present:** J. Gordon, Rachel Myers, Rick Osen, Rebecca Craven and Jim McCabe

**Library Staff:** Nancy Kerr, Beth Farley, Bethany Hoglund, and Jennifer Vander Ploeg

**Others Present:** BERK Consultants: Annie Sieger, Project Manager, Claire Miccio, Library Services Analyst, and Emily Percival, Financial Analyst; April Barker, City Council Liaison; Faye Hill, Friends of BPL

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**Call to order and introductions:** Regular session was called to order at 3:35 p.m. by Chair, J. Gordon.

**Approve/modify agenda:** Rebecca Craven moved to approve the agenda. Rick Osen seconded. Motion carried.

**Sustainable Funding Consultant Study:** Please note that the format of this portion of the meeting minutes differs slightly from the norm to be able to include key points of the conversation with the BERK consultants.

Annie Sieger introduced herself as the Project Manager from BERK and distributed copies of the project schedule. Claire Miccio introduced herself as a BERK Associate who will be handling the service analysis component of the study. Emily Percival, also an Associate, will be handling the fiscal and financial component.

Annie: We want to talk a bit about what we intend to do with this project, but we also want to use this time to hear from you; the board and others in this room are important stakeholders. What we learned in the kick off meeting this morning was how complex an issue this is, it touches not only on how BPL operates, but also how the city operates and how other systems impact BPL. This project is about what the future could look like based on different funding models. We are here to develop some policy options, to start a conversation for policy makers about how to sustain a really important cultural asset here in Bellingham that is criminally underfunded at this point. I'll start by walking through the project schedule. I'd like to take any questions as they come up to keep this conversational.

We intend to come back to you, likely in September, once we have firmed up some options. Then we can have a discussion about what is missing from the analysis so we can refine the options so they'll be ready to be presented to policy makers. One thing I'll note is that we don't intend to make a recommendation. Our experience is that this is something that needs to be a community conversation – ultimately the community funds and uses the library. Because we have strict limitations on stakeholder engagement on this phase, we expect to come forward with policy options, then we would think about and potentially recommend a second phase for community engagement. What really matters is what your community is willing to invest and what level of service they expect for that investment.

This is our formal project kick off, but we've been working on it for a couple of weeks. Nancy and Brian Heinrich, from the Mayor's office, have provided us with materials such as the initial study committee report, which was an internal report about potential annexation with WCLS; a previous community analysis about the library needs assessment around the Central Library building; some comprehensive financial reporting; current staffing levels and also statistics in terms of usage, which are amazing – this is a loved, well-used system. We've also looked at the Level of Service documents that you adopted in the last 6 months to a year as well as your Strategic Plan. All of these give us context as to what we need to do here. One of our next steps will be to request additional data that has some more specifics. We've looked at your comprehensive financial reports, but we haven't looked at the detailed forecasted revenues and expenditures, or your budgeted revenue and expenditures. We haven't looked in detail at capital improvement programs or any deferred capital maintenance needs. We're also going to do stakeholder interviews targeting those people who can inform us as to what we need to understand at this point. That will include the Mayor, WCLS staff, BPL staff, city staff, and potentially others in the community.

Rachel: What kinds of questions will you be asking?

Claire: One of the topics is what issues they think the library and city should take into consideration when thinking about potential funding strategies. This helps us define possible trade-offs for different strategies in terms of political feasibility or long-term sustainability. We also want to know in what ways the library currently meets contemporary demands for service and in what ways it doesn't. We can see from our tour that you have figured out how to make things more efficient, but at some point you hit a wall. We'll want to hear about that from library staff. In terms of forecasting we would like to know in what ways do you see residents' demand for library services changing over the next 10-20 years. Library staff will have one sense of that, city administrators might have a different sense – we want to see where those gaps are and the impact on the financial analysis. Also, what are you interested in learning from this studies?

April: When you're looking at stakeholders, how are you going to be sure they are representative of the full community?

Claire: We are not at that phase of the process where we are going out into the community and asking how they think the library should fund itself. What we are trying to get in this phase is subject matter expertise in the city and in the libraries. First we have to identify the policy options, then go to the community to make sure you have the widest range.

Annie: April, it's worth saying that in a perfect world we would like to do 20-25 stakeholder interviews, but we have a limited budget to do this work. This step is really about identifying policy options and trade-offs. At the kick-off meeting earlier today we discussed providing an understanding of the limits of this report and documenting the type of engagement needed if we are going to move these policy options forward to a recommendation.

April: A preface to my question is that you can see through our Comprehensive Plan that we've grown and we've grown very differently. Usually people who are engaging are living in the more affluent areas. When we start looking at what services are needed, there are different viewpoints that aren't voiced. I want to make sure we are keeping that in mind.

J.: I think it is important to note that this is more of a 30,000 foot elevation report, looking at the finances and policy and how to get the people that are most knowledgeable about that information. We are looking at 3 or 4 funding options and this first phase might eliminate 1 or 2 of them because they will not serve the community. We just don't know yet where this is going. Then we will need to communicate to the public.

Rachel: It's really *internal* stakeholders. When we hear 'stakeholder' I think, similar to what April is mentioning, people that have a stake in the library which is a very broad cross section, but this is really internal experts.

Claire: I think 'subject matter expert' would be a better term. We aren't looking at any of these stakeholders as representatives of any part of the community, it's that we are getting information from them around policy options and what additional information we might need that we don't see in the numbers.

Jim: In your opening comments you mentioned being underfunded. Are there any other issues that jump out at you so far?

Annie: The number one thing that jumped out at me was that this issue has been around since the 1970's. There are a number of studies on the table so I think this is an opportunity to treat this as a decision making point. This is an opportunity for your policy makers to use the study to make a change because I do think the library is getting to a point where you cannot manage to keep on the track you are on. One of the ways we'll look at that is not only the historical view but also thinking ahead to the future – even 10 years will tell a story about where the library is headed and the impact on the community if changes are not made. The other thing I would say is you have a really wonderful library. We took a tour and saw a lot of people using your library. You have amazing statistics and your staff is pretty efficient, they do an amazing job.

Once we get through the situation assessment we will be in a position to design a cost model. That word is a little misleading because this is not just about cost, but also about services and about trade-offs. Once we do the cost modeling then we'll want to come back to you. The first thing we do is provide a baseline, what would it look like if we maintained the status quo. We'll also want to look at some options related to WCLS. Right now we have a consortium model and annexation is on the table. Last we'll look at some funding options for dedicated, earmarked funding for the library and those could be a levy option or other

options. The biggest thing we learned today is that there are so many other issues going on in Bellingham – the jail, park levies, the proposed Regional Fire Authority, the homeless shelter – and these are all topics that have an impact because you are part of the city. We are going to want to look at all of those things before we strongly identify what those options look like, because we don't want to present an option that is not feasible.

I want to flip the conversation now, to hear from all of you. What does product success look like? What things do we need to know about?

Rachel: When people find out I'm part of the library, I hear "Why aren't you guys open more?" Especially at the branches.

Rebecca: I'd like to see the report produce comparative numbers in terms of hours open, but also other Level of Services, such as materials, facilities or staff, compared to other libraries, either in the area or libraries about the same size in other cities (by population and other demographic parameters).

Jim: I come from the private sector and so I'm wondering how do you look at the alternatives in this sort of financial analysis, when you're not looking at profit and loss?

Annie: It's much simpler when you can look at it from just a financial perspective because you can just say that one of these options is the least expensive and so from that standpoint it's the best and that's what we are going to do. We will do that to some degree, we will want to evaluate cost and will want to understand the degree to which each of these options may be more or less costly than the others, but there's a number of trade-offs in a public system that we also need to explore. One of the primary issues related to finances is understanding the relative tax burden each of these issues will have, how does it impact residents and what do they get for their tax dollar. Part of that question can be answered quantitatively because we can say these are the expected levels of service, in terms of open hours and access to materials, but part of it really is qualitative because there are things that your community gets intangibly from having the library here, from having the library that they govern through April and the other elected officials. Residents have representation as to how library services are delivered. So when we get to the final analysis, we won't want something that is strictly quantitative, it isn't as simple as saying A is cheaper than B.

Rachel: How do you approach that second phase in getting qualitative input from the community?

Annie: At BERK we do a lot of community outreach, but we really have to get there before we can design a process. There are obvious things we know, such as you are going to need outreach to diverse communities, you are going to need to think about your potential annexation areas and you'll want to ensure you're getting deep insight, not just asking what do you want, A, B, or C.

Nancy: I think you have to narrow your focus and decide what it is you're asking the community's opinion on, not just everything in the world or there's no way to compile the information in a meaningful way.

J.: If you go to the community and say, "Do you want to have a better library?" everybody is going to say yes, but you have to say this is what it is going to cost you and there are these other things that are out there (jail, parks, etc). How do we prioritize and have that honest conversation.

Rachel: On the other hand, we've been patiently waiting for 10 years. We are nice library people so we say, "someone else can go next." I'm done letting other people go next.

April: I think it goes back to my original question – who's going to be informing you as to what the desires of this community are as you look at funding and what a successful library looks like. We've grown very disproportionately and therefore a lot of people informing our process are not people who live in those areas. Soon there won't be affordable housing in the immediate area of the library and we'll have to be extending our services just to get to the communities that are really in need.

Annie: This is something that we will have to explore. One of the pieces that is secondary here is the capital aspect. There will be things that are not answered by this report, this is a very streamlined, efficient effort. These are big questions – the role the library plays in the community, homelessness, and the ability of the library to be a provider for those kinds of human services. We are not asking about what the role of the library is right now. We are saying that, based on the current status quo around role and expectation, what will it take to deliver high quality library services.

April: That's the part for me and for the council members putting money towards this, we want to have something meaty that we can move forward. We are already not providing, in my opinion, equitable access to services in our library system and I think we could have been doing a far better job had we been given the funding that was needed. The case is that we are disproportionate in the people we service. If we are looking at what we currently have and how to keep this going, we are still lopsided.

Claire: I have a question for Nancy about this, about the equity you are talking about. We have library stats, we have LOSs, is there any data that reflects that services are disproportionate in the community?

Nancy: I don't know if there is a lot of hard data, but in speaking to what you said, we are not in any way saying that what we have now is optimal. We know there are discrepancies and we know if you look at the LOS documents that we are not at an optimal LOS, or even at an average LOS on anything. So when we are looking at sustainability, I feel that we are at a point where, because of increased costs and increased demands on libraries and a lack of increase in funding, we are already slipping. I agree with you, we are not meeting the needs of a diverse population. When we are talking about projections I don't think we are talking about our current service levels. It's a real concern for all of us that we are not meeting needs of a diverse population.

April: The school district statistics might help you understand where the growth is happening and you can also talk to the planning department to see where the bloom in growth is.

Nancy: Brian is going to send some of that information. We did talk about the areas that are being considered for annexation.

April: I just want to make sure it is addressed. It will come out in the second phase and if we can't say that we were looking at and understanding it, it will blow back up.

Claire: What you are talking about is definitely information that we will bring in to the situation assessment. We have a GIS team that, depending on what sort of data we can get, can show something that would take pages to write.

Rebecca: Just before I was appointed to the board, the board had a retreat with the directors of the Seattle and Spokane libraries to talk about how they had gone through this process. Both of those systems considered annexation with their county systems and both rejected it early on. I'm curious how you intend to approach WCLS because both Seattle and Spokane essentially determined that neither side was interested in consolidation.

Annie: They are definitely on our list of stakeholder interviews. There's been a lot of work on this over the last few decades, it is not unexplored. We don't want to fall back on old assumptions or rely on old information to make this decision, but I would say we already know some things about the potential of annexation or additional consortia with WCLS. We know how they operate, we know how they are funded and we know what the requirements on the city would be to maintain their own facilities. You already have a number of efficiencies with WCLS, but we need to identify if there are other opportunities.

Rebecca: Another thing that came out in the conversation at the retreat was what the Seattle director called a 'cultural audit' to talk about the different ways the two systems approach their services. Are you going to have the opportunity to poke at that with WCLS? There are stark differences in population served and services provided.

Claire: Yes, we will poke at that, asking both systems what are the things that we need to keep in mind. One big thing is it would have to go to Bellingham voters. We will be speaking to the director, who also has experience here, and we will be speaking to a branch manager. That will be included in the report.

Rick: I don't think it is clear to city officials what an annexation would mean – what the city would still be on the hook for and what it would cost the taxpayers. I also don't know if city officials understand the loss of control. I think the report will be informative.

Jim: As to the GIS aspect, a strong component of the Transportation Commission's bike plans was equity. I think there must be demographic databases that the city used for that.

Claire: I think equity needs to be part of the data gathering to understand in conjunction with the LOS statistics that we have, just to make sure it's captured.

April: Equity is the antidote to inequality and libraries are so crucial and important. I don't think any of us would be here if we didn't believe they impact people's lives for the better. It's a place where you can go and find all kinds of people – that's rare.

Annie: Our next step is to dig into the situation assessment and I would expect we will provide an update on that, facilitated by Nancy, at the next board meeting or the one after that. In September we expect to come back to you with some options and we expect to finish this sometime near the end of October.

April: We had originally discussed that we would have a joint council and board meeting to discuss the outcome of this study. Is end of October an appropriate time or should we wait until later, when we engage the community?

Annie: I would expect that there would be some lag time when you, as policy makers, will want to look at it and decide what you would like a community outreach process to look like before we design it because it really could depend on how many options we identify as feasible.

**Public comment:** No comment.

**Consent agenda:** Rick Osen moved to approve the June 27, 2017 Regular meeting minutes and the June 2017 performance and activity measures and financial reports. Jim McCabe seconded. Motion carried.

**Board member reports:**

- Jim attended the WCLS board meeting this morning and found it interesting. He appreciated the Trustee Education focused on the collections process. Rick commented that we have done this before and it would be a good time to review our collections policy – it is not just about how much you have, but how you use it. Rachel added that we used to have Trustee Education frequently but it sometimes took up about half of the meeting. It was determined that a concise 10-15 minute staff presentation could be included periodically.
- Rick spoke about our funding study at the Cornwall Park Neighborhood Association board meeting.
- Rebecca read an article about an Omaha Public Library study similar to our study. She will send it to Nancy.
- Rachel used the Help Desk recently to pick up a book club kit and drop something off. She was impressed with the enhanced, efficient service she received.

**City Council liaison report:**

- Council voted 5-2 to support the jail agreement; County Council also passed the agreement, 4-3. 25% of the income the city gets back is going to be used for diversion programs. The voters will ultimately decide.
- Recently City Council discussed rental barriers and concerns. 54% of our community are now renters and it is rapidly growing. Currently landlords can specify no felons, no animals, and no Section 8; low income renters are not a protected class. If you want to view any of the discussions, go to the City Council webpage, click on Hot Topics, then Housing.

**Friends of the Bellingham Public Library report:**

- Faye reported that they are not holding board meetings this summer, but the work definitely continues – processing books, reviewing by-laws and writing board position job descriptions.

**Library Director report:**

- Our open clerk/driver position has been posted. The Head of Digital Services position is in the queue and will be approved soon for posting. One of our new security attendants was not able to stay, and we hope to fill that position from the previous recruitment.
- We continue to work on updating job descriptions, a process that is slowed by Union negotiations. We will someday reach a point where job descriptions are reviewed on a scheduled basis to avoid long-term lapses and ensure that existing job descriptions are relevant.
- Approximately 30 WA Library directors met in Federal Way last weekend, along with the State Librarian and several outside speakers. Topics of discussion included lobbying, lid lifts and levies, managing meeting rooms, State Library updates, and improving access to public spaces.
- The roofing project is underway, and on schedule. Janice and I attend weekly meetings and receive thorough updates on project progress. Despite some challenges posed by large skylights and protective mother seagulls, all is going well. Staff members have been cheerful about noise levels and the necessity of parking farther away.
- The Fairhaven project continues also, with a few patrons expressing displeasure at the disruption. The book drop had to be moved to ensure ADA compatibility. Both the Central roofing project and Fairhaven road project will result in positive changes.
- Beth found and forwarded information on Library Journal's upcoming Design Institute, which will be held on Friday, October 20, 2017 at the Vancouver, WA Community Library. If any of you are interested in attending, the early-bird rate applies until Friday, July 28. Topics will include building, renovating, and retrofitting spaces and design challenges presented by your current buildings.

**Elimination of \$.50 hold expire fee:** Nancy discussed this with the Mayor, who is okay with eliminating this fee. Rick Osen moved that we amend the fee schedule to eliminate the \$.50 hold expiration fee and that it should be amended in tandem with WCLS. Rachel Myers seconded. Motion carried.

**New business:**

- No new business

**Meeting adjourned** at 5:08 p.m.

**Next Regular Library Board Meeting – August 15, 2017** at the Central Library, 210 Central Avenue, Library Board Room – at 3:30 p.m.

Chair, Library Board of Trustees

ATTEST

Secretary, Library Board of Trustees