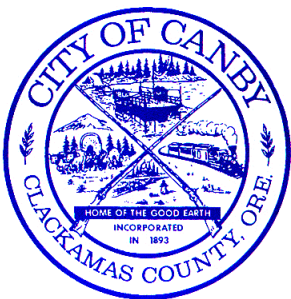


CANBY PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD MEETING MINUTES March 16, 2021



5:30 PM Virtual Meeting

Present: Suzy Stutes (chair); Linda Warwick, Kathleen Myron*, Denise Fonseca, Judi Jarosh, Jessica Hines, Meridian Lattig (board members); Danny Smith, Lizzie Figueroa (library staff); Chris Bangs (City Council Liaison); Scott Archer (City Administrator); and Kathleen Mulligan, Gayle Elizabeth, and Mary Ellen Laird (members of the public).

* Because of technical difficulties, Kathleen Myron was unable to communicate during the meeting. She submitted her votes and feedback by email afterward, and those are included in the Appendix.

Absent: no one

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. January minutes were approved.

Public Comments.

No comments were offered at this point.

Review of January Action Items.

- a. **CHRIS BANGS, NEW CITY COUNCIL LIAISON, WILL ATTEND BOARD MEETING.** Councilor Bangs attended the meeting, and invited suggestions on ways to improve communications between City Council and the Library Board. There were no specific suggestions, other than encouraging him to attend every Board meeting, and asking him to relay agreed-upon messages to the Council.
- b. **DANNY WILL SEND OUT SURVEY TO BOARD MEMBERS ON THEIR PREFERRED CONTACT INFORMATION.** Danny sent out the survey, and has received responses from all but one Board members.
- c. **SCOTT ARCHER, NEW CITY ADMINISTRATOR, WILL ATTEND BOARD MEETING.** Mr. Archer attended the meeting, and expressed willingness to return in the future, if desired.

City Council Liaison Report.

Councilor Bangs expressed his intention to regularly attend the Library Board meetings. He then related his impressions of the last City Council meeting, where concerns about the *BookPage* publication were raised. Councilor Bangs asserted that a city council was not qualified to determine what is or isn't appropriate for a library collection, and expressed his regret that the decision to cancel the subscription had been made so quickly. He read an excerpt from a letter from a member of the public, which repeated the false accusation that library staff had passed out pornography to children.

Related to other concerns, Councilor Bangs is aware of the impact of the lost fine revenue on the library's budget this year, and would like to find some source to replace that. And regarding the question of whether the student Board member should be granted a vote, he encouraged the Board to support this proposal.

***BookPage* Subscription.**

Suzy gave a brief update on the situation. After the initial complaint, Kathleen Myron contacted *BookPage* directly to ask about the item in question. Apparently, it was not part of the magazine's original content, but was an ad placed by a publisher. The magazine staffer who spoke to Kathleen expressed the intention of more carefully reviewing future ads for inappropriate content.

Danny reported that the library's subscription has been cancelled (there was only one month left before it was up for renewal). A handful of other Clackamas County libraries also subscribe, and some of the content is available online.

The Board discussed the recent controversy. Several Board members expressed concerns that a few individuals would be able to block the rest of the community from accessing a resource (a Friends-funded giveaway magazine, meant to supplement reader's advisory services) that the few found offensive. Board members also pointed out that the publication was never marketed or distributed to children. They agreed that First Amendment concerns were at stake, and stated that they didn't want to open the door to further censorship of the library's collection.

The members of the public in attendance also spoke up at this point. Ms. Elizabeth suggested that the *BookPage* should simply be placed with adult materials, and that the few people who complained at the City Council meeting shouldn't get to decide for the entire community.

Councilor Bangs acknowledged the difficult position that the Library Director and City Administrator were in, as both are still new to their jobs. He pointed out that the City Council's next meeting would be the following day (3/17), and invited everyone to make a public comment in that venue, as well.

City Administrator Scott Archer thanked the Board for inviting him to the meeting—he’s trying to visit all the boards and committees in Canby, and get a feel for what every group does. He thanked the Library Board members for volunteering their time and service to the City. Scott agreed with Councilor Bangs that he and the new Library Director were in a difficult position. He accepted responsibility for the decision to cancel the *BookPage* subscription. But he offered to converse further about it, and is open to reviewing the decision with the Library Director in the future. Scott has experience working with libraries in the past, and understands the concerns about censorship.

Board members asked about the initial complaint, and who responded. Danny did not receive the complaint directly, and had no further information about what response, if any, was offered to that person. He pointed out that public libraries receive challenges to materials all the time, but this one escalated unlike anything he’s seen in the past. Scott mentioned that he had not received any direct complaint, either—just feedback from City Council members. He knows that the library has a procedure for handling materials challenges, but that was bypassed in this case. There was no opportunity for a conversation.

Councilor Bangs explained that an email had been sent to Mayor Hodson, and then additional complaints were made at the City Council meeting. He asked if the Library Board had any message for him to bring back to City Council.

Linda Warwick added another point—that no library in the LINCC consortium (Canby Public Library and 12 others) had the actual book that was advertised—for a member of the public to read a passage from that book out loud at the City Council meeting, she had to have gone to considerable trouble to obtain it. Linda also found it ironic that, by doing so, the member of the public had done far more to disseminate the supposedly offensive content than the library ever did. She isn’t a regular reader of the *BookPage*, but knows that the Friends get a lot of thanks and positive comments about it from patrons.

Meridian suggested that the Board make a public statement on the issue. Councilor Bangs said that either a public statement or a private vote would be helpful—his task would be to relay the Board’s thoughts to City Council. He suggested letting things cool down for a few months, and then discussing the question of renewing the subscription.

Suzy agreed with the idea of holding a vote. She pointed out that no one at the library reviews third-party publications to approve all content. This cancellation opens the door to future censorship by community members, because of the personal tastes of a few people. There’s plenty that Suzy disagrees with in the library, but she doesn’t bring her complaints to City Council and ask them to remove those materials from the collection. This was a very quick decision—it went immediately from complaint to cancellation.

Danny shared that because *BookPage* was not an official part of the library’s collection, the Collection Policy and normal challenge procedure didn’t protect it. He has discussed the Library

Bill of Rights with the City Administrator. Both feel that, if the challenge had been to an actual library book, they would have had a stronger case for pushing back. But this was a gray area.

Jessica expressed her agreement with the other Board members. Allowing one instance of censorship opens the door for the community to nitpick over the whole collection. She has tried to think of another path (something between ignoring the complaint and cancelling the subscription), but doesn't have any ideas.

Ms. Elizabeth suggested separating the *BookPage* from the library materials, and only offering it in the Friends-run bookstore, or possibly posting a disclaimer. She wants to find a way to make it available for readers, but not expose people who might be offended.

Ms. Laird thanked the Board for discussing the issue. She stressed the importance of being able to point to documentation explaining the decision.

Denise asked whether this question should be included in the upcoming community survey—should the public at large weigh in on whether to renew the subscription? But Linda stated that this was a bigger issue than one single magazine. And members of the public may not know or care that it wasn't part of the library's official collection. She knows it was never distributed to children. Her main concern is that the City Council acted to censor the library, and she doesn't want to tacitly approve that action.

Suzy called for formal action on the question. Judi moved to support bringing back the *BookPage* at some point (not necessarily immediately). The motion was seconded, and passed by a vote of 5-0 (with Kathleen Myron abstaining).

Denise expressed appreciation for the City Council, City Administrator, and Library Director. Had she been in their position, she might have erred on the same side as them. She commended them for doing their best. But looking at the library and its users, she would consider bringing the publication back in the future.

Linda made a motion to state to the City Council that reacting in the way that they did was an act of censorship, and was unbecoming. There was no second, and the motion did not pass.

Denise suggested omitting the last part, and simply stating that the City Council reacting the way they did was an act of censorship. Linda agreed to the amendment. Denise seconded. The motion passed by a vote of 5-0 (with Judi abstaining). Councilor Bangs will convey this message to City Council. (At this point, Councilor Bangs had to leave the meeting.)

Consideration of Voting Rights for Student Board Member.

Suzy asked whether the student position on the Library Advisory Board should be granted a vote, along with the other 7 members (Carol's former seat is currently vacant). Meridian is going to graduate in a couple of months, and voting rights might make it easier to recruit a new

student to volunteer. Another Board member pointed out that the various boards across the city are not consistent on this point, and it would be helpful if there was a uniform guideline to follow. Linda mentioned that the number of voting members is specified in the City Charter, so making a change would necessitate a change to the bylaws. Meridian reported that she has been talking to various high school students about possible interest in volunteering, but a common question that comes up is how helpful a student member can truly be without a vote. She encouraged the other Board members to pass this motion, to improve the input and participation of future student members.

Linda made a motion to grant the student Board member a vote. Denise seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a vote of 6-0. Danny will talk to Melissa Bisset (City Recorder) about next steps. Meridian offered to help with the process, if needed.

Library Staff Report Highlights.

Postponed.

Friends of the Library Report.

Postponed.

Teen Liaison Report.

Postponed.

Board members' reports, concerns and comments.

Suzy mentioned that the Board would need to discuss Meridian's successor at the next meeting. And the Board is scheduled to review the question of meeting frequency at the next meeting (whether to continue meeting every other month, or revert to a monthly schedule).

There being no other concerns, reports or questions, the meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 18, at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom.

Action Items:

- Councilor Bangs will convey the Board's message to City Council.
- Danny will consult Melissa Bisset about updating the bylaws to grant the student Board member a full vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Lizzie Figueroa

Circulation Supervisor

MINUTES REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE LIBRARY DIRECTOR AND LIBRARY BOARD ON MAY 18, 2021.