

FINAL

**LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Kilton Library Community Room OR
Remote Via Microsoft Teams
LebanonNH.gov/Live
November 16, 2022
7:00 PM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Francis Oscadal (Chair), Emma Wunsch, Morgan Swan, Donna Hartford, Michael Stebbins, Ann Sharfstein, Phil Bush (alternate)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Doug Whittlesey (alternate), Susan Valiante

STAFF PRESENT: Sean Fleming (Library Director), Nikki Rheume (Services Director), Amber Coughlin (Children's Librarian)

1. CALL TO ORDER – Chair Oscadal called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM

Chair Oscadal explained that the Board would first hear from Library Staff and then accept public comment. The Board will then discuss the issue among themselves. If the Board wants to take action, it could entertain a motion. Without a second, the motion fails. If there is a second, the Board will entertain a vote and move forward accordingly.

Chair Oscadal read excerpts from the Welcoming Lebanon document, as portions may be pertinent to this meeting. This document was passed by a vote of Lebanon residents.

2. Drag Queen Story Hour Discussion

Nikki Rheume stated that she stands behind the proposed programming. She believes this will help children to develop empathy and learn about differences. Inclusion and education of this type can be life changing and lifesaving. The Lebanon Public Libraries are dedicated to inclusion for every attendee, regardless of age, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, or religious belief. She showed a clip of how the story hour may work, based on a similar event run in Weston.

Amber Coughlin stated that she believes this will be a lovely addition to the Library's story programming. The Library serves all families and provides a wide variety of resources. She trusts patrons to make the best choices for their families. Families are the best judges as to which resources are best for their children. This literacy-driven program will be a great service to patrons.

Amber Coughlin read a statement from Amy Lappin, Deputy Library Director. The statement read that Drag Queen story hours are not new to libraries and the first was noted in 2018. These programs help to promote literacy, diversity, and community. The Library has hired experienced professionals for this program and believes it will be joyful. As with all Library programs and

materials, it will be up to families to decide if this event is right for them. She noted that she has beloved queer family members and believes it would have been great to bring them to something similar when they were younger. She stated that it is distressing to her family to know that this family friendly event has been deemed “controversial”. She believes that libraries have an unwavering commitment to be inclusive to all.

Director Fleming stated that presenting programs, and displays are what libraries do. He believes that if the Trustees involve themselves in vetting content of programming at the Library, it may encourage staff to self-censor their ideas. The content of this program will be familiar, as it will present books and a craft to children. He asked that the Board support and trust the staff.

Chair Oscadal asked for public comment.

A resident stated that Director Fleming noted it to be an imposition upon staff if the Board is involved in programming. In his point of view, as this is the first-time programming of this nature has been proposed in the community, it should have been brought to Board first. He noted that Board members are elected, where staff is not. Mistake. He asked if there are any policies regarding how such as activity will take place. He asked if the performers will be vetted, if there will be defined rules for the program, and if there will be supervision on site. He stated that he hopes, as an activity where children are involved, that rules and supervision will be in place. While he agrees that there should not be discrimination involved, this topic deals with differing points of view, and so should have come to the Board first. The Board’s job is to represent the community and make good decisions regarding these items. He noted that things that can be seen as discrimination in one way, can be seen as being over bounds in another way. He stated that the material this program was advertised to readers with, contains a link to a website, on which there is embarrassing material.. He is concerned that this program was not well thought out. He believes the Board should write guidelines for activities sponsored by the Library.

Chair Oscadal stated that this item has come before the Board. The Board meets once a month. Programming material is reviewed by Library staff review and is then arranged. For this program, that process occurred between Board meetings. A few days ago, he was contacted by Director Fleming regarding this item and noted that the whole Board should be made aware, as some believe the item to be controversial. Someone on the Board asked for it to be discussed at a Special Meeting. This can be conducted with 48 hours’ notice to the public. The Board was polled to see who was available for a Special Meeting.

The previous resident stated that he believes the Board should be more proactive regarding subjects that deal with different points of view. Chair Oscadal stated that this item deals with a matter of timing. The Board rarely involves itself with the day-to-day operations of the Library. The staff, Director and Deputy Director are excellent and professional. This program was presented and is now being addressed publicly due to a request internally from the Board. The resident stated that he believes this should have been brought initially to the Board as part of normal practice and not as a result of a concern. Chair Oscadal stated that he would agree to disagree on this matter. He stated that he has been on the Board for 17 years, and believe the staff needs to be trusted and supported in its decisions.

Another resident stated that she has a longstanding respect for libraries. She stated that she is a founding member of the Foundation which built this Library. She noted that all of the things that the Library does, such as acquiring materials, hiring staff, and setting up programming, should not be first brought before the Board. It is likely that all the Library does and concerns itself with will have different points of view. She asked how the Library could function if every single acquisition and material purchased needed to be reviewed due to differing points of view. She stated that the value of public libraries is in their diversity of materials and programs. To serve everyone means to truly serve everyone. She believes that the proposed story hour seems great. She does not believe the Board should micromanage every decision of the Library staff.

A Library Assistant stated that staff takes child safety extremely seriously. There is a Child Safety Policy that can be reviewed through the Library website.

A resident stated that she attends story time at the Library. There is always supervision, both by staff and parents. Parents can always choose not to attend this story time. She noted that her 4-year-old is a gender diverse child, and this program would be meaningful to her family. She is also a clinical social worker and noted that there are a lot of gender diverse children that need support and struggle to find this. She noted that accepting this kind of programming can be scary for some. She believes this type of programming has received positive responses from other communities and believes Lebanon is ready for this. She stated that libraries in general are inclusive, and this is part of library culture.

The first resident stated that he would like to make sure the Library staff and elected Board members will make sure that proper supervision is made to promote programs that will not go haywire. He stated that the link provided for this program is haywire in his opinion and does not provide the right amount of supervision.

Ms. Coughlin stated that staff does vet performers. The proposed event includes two professional performers from VT. They have performed to great acclaim in libraries all across VT. She stated that she is honored these performers are able to come to Lebanon.

Chair Oscadal asked Board members for comments.

Ann Sharfstein explained that the Board set a special meeting as soon as it was clear there were differing opinions on this program. She supports the event and appreciates the extended discussion from the community on it. She stated that she trusts the staff to plan events that are beneficial to the community, and then believes that residents will choose whether or not to attend. She believes this is important for the community.

Donna Hartford stated that her biggest concern is the fact that there was no time to properly approach other residents in the community who may have different points of view regarding this meeting. This event was scheduled, knowing it would be controversial. She stated that children are so confused at that young an age. She believes that the Library could bring in someone who dresses up but questioned why this needs to be drag queens. She noted that she does not see drag queens often walking down streets of Lebanon all dressed up. She stated that in googling 'drag queens' disgusting information was displayed. She is concerned that children will see the drag

queens' program and research more information. She stated that she was asked her opinion and gave it. She wanted to make sure it is known what will be read and what will be worn by the performers.

Chair Oscadal stated that this is a legitimate viewpoint. There are many in society who feel the same. He agreed that the timing for this meeting and process were not great. He wished that more residents had shown up to this meeting. He received some emails, but all were positive. He noted that any costumes worn by the performers must be appropriate for children. He stated that this event is to support a group of people who have been marginalized and victimized for centuries. Finally, it is getting to a point that this group is being treated kinder and more openly. This event is a way for families to be exposed to a sliver of this community, and this can be a positive experience. Kids at this age can be confused, but also wide-eyed and excited to see performers. He believes it is important for children to have different experiences. He is glad the Library chose this programming.

Donna Hartford stated that she is not homophobic or against these groups. She believes children should be exposed to these groups in story times. However, she questioned this being done with drag queens. She noted that the history of drag queens seems to be rooted in trying to do away with families as we know it.

Morgan Swan stated that there are individuals in society that are committed to be less afraid of these topics. He stated that he was raised to be afraid of people unlike himself. He believes it is very important in society to take opportunities to make all-inclusive environments and engage with those unlike us.

Director Fleming noted that the Library has a magician come in sometimes who tailors the program specifically to children. He remembered a time when there was a man who was clearly dressed as a woman who brought a child to story hours on a regular basis. That person was clearly not welcomed by the group, and it seemed even staff was a little awkward around the person. That person felt shunned, but still had persistence to come to library programs. He thought of that person when reviewing this programming.

Michael Stebbins thanked staff for showing the clip of the Weston Drag Queen story hour. He believes this better illustrates how the program will happen. This will not be a night club show. He believes it will be fun and engaging for children.

Emma Wunsch stated that she supports this program because she believes it is important for families. She questioned how she would feel if programming was proposed that she does not support. While she likely would not take her kids to it, it should still be supported, or at least discussed, as long as it followed the rules of the Library. She expressed that it is important to be open to all views, even if you may not agree with them.

It was noted that, without a motion from the Board, the programming would move forward as currently scheduled. No motion was made.

3. OTHER BUSINESS - None

4. ADJOURNMENT:

***Ms. Wunsch MOVED to adjourn the meeting.
Seconded by Ms. Sharfstein.***

**** The Vote on the MOTION passed (6-0-0).***

The meeting was adjourned at 8:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude
Recording Secretary