

Comments on February 4, 2013 BLT Agenda Items

Comments on the Newport Beach Board of Library Trustees agenda items by:

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Item 4. Approval of Minutes (January 7, 2013)

I notice two minor problems:

1. In the list of time capsule items, the *Los Angeles Times* is repeatedly referred to as *Los Angeles Time* (third and fourth lines from bottom on page 1 and fourth line from top on page 2).
2. At the bottom of page 2, although it cannot be deduced from the draft minutes, the January 7 Consent Calendar consisted of four items. The minutes reflect the separate discussion of the fourth item, but fail to indicate whether the Board approved the remaining three – or what they were. I believe there may have been a separate motion to approve them, or else Trustee Grant's motion is incorrectly stated, and it was actually to approve the consent calendar with the exception of the Monitoring List, which was pulled for separate discussion and action.

To avoid such confusion in the future I might suggest the Board consider adopting the minutes format used by the City Arts Commission, as well as by the City Council, Planning Commission and most other boards and commissions. In that format, the numbered meeting agenda (stripped of some extraneous header and footer information) is used as the basic text. That automatically provides a clear framework of headings and recommendations under which the discussions and actions taking place at the meeting can be listed. The present BLT minutes format is similar to that, but the removal of the numbers and some of the agenda verbiage (such as the recommendations that were listed under Consent Calendar), make it difficult, without referring back to the agendas, to verify everything has been reported on, or exactly what some actions consisted of.

Item 5.A.2. Library Activities

Comment 1 – Overflowing Book Drops:

I am often a bit confused as to the periods covered by the Library Activities reports, but have come to believe the written versions approved on the Consent Calendar are intended to memorialize and expand on the information presented orally under Item 5.C ("Monthly Reports") at the previous meeting. That is, at their meetings early each month, it appears the Trustees hear an oral report on Library Activities for the month just completed, while on the Consent Calendar receiving and filing written versions of the Activities Reports for the month before that.

In view of this, I was disappointed to find it so hard to locate in these written records of December activities any follow-up to the information presented orally at the January meeting regarding the problem with book returns at Central during the December construction/holiday

closure (see page 4 of the January Draft Minutes under "Library Services Director Report," as well as Customer Comment #1). As I recall, the oral presentation at the January meeting mentioned rain damage to materials left outside the overflowing book drops, the extent of which was being assessed.

I know staff is well aware of the problem and I assume it will be more properly addressed in the future, but the detail under "Circulation" on page 2 of the present written Activities Reports barely alludes to the problem, and gives the Trustees no hint as to how many, if any, materials were lost or damaged.

Comment 2 – "Weeding" of Library Collections:

Page 2, under "Library Services Mgr / Circ & Tech Processing Coord.," mentions the "weeding" of the Central Library's audiovisual collection that took place during the construction closure. I hope the Trustees will at some point agendize a discussion of how staff determines what materials should be "weeded" from (as well as added to) our collections. My understanding is that unlike a university or research library designed to expand in physical size to accommodate an ever growing collection of archival items, a public library such as NBPL is designed on the assumption of an essentially fixed size collection, with each new acquisition likely requiring the removal of an existing one. As a public institution, it would seem important that the public have input into this process, including a clear role in determining what items are added and what happens to those that are removed. I hope the BLT will add oversight of this policy to their Monitoring List.

Item 5.B.2. Committee for Possible Art in Public Places

Having attended the most recent meeting of the City Arts Commission, I believe their three-member "Art in Public Spaces" subcommittee wants to seek input from one or two Library Trustees, one or two Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commissioner, and possibly others, with the intent of formulating a list of locations suitable for placing public art. In addition, for reasons unclear to me, it seems important to them to do this without invoking the niceties of the Brown Act (which include inviting the public to attend meetings with clear agendas).

The irony of this is that there is nothing currently preventing them from meeting with such people as much as they like, provided they do not formally make them part of the Committee nor give them a vote in formulating its recommendations, nor expect them to act as consensus-building messengers from their respective bodies. Should they do so, then the "joint" committee would automatically be subject to the Brown Act even if it contained a single "outside" member of whatever sort.

The further irony is that from all appearances the Arts Commission's "Art in Public Spaces" subcommittee, as well as most of their other less-than-a-quorum subcommittees, are permanent standing bodies (as opposed to "ad hoc" ones with a definite termination date), *already* making their meetings fully subject to the Brown Act, whether they involve outside parties or not.

Item 5.B. 4. Letter Sizes for Possible NBPL Foundation Donor Recognition

I assume "Possible vote on recommended schematic proposed by Steve Chaitow, AIA" refers to the proposed naming of rooms in the Central Library expansion after donors, but I find this confusing since I was unaware the Trustees had made any decision as to whether to allow such naming, or not.

As the draft minutes of the Board's December 3, 2012 say: "NBPL Foundation Update on Naming Opportunities in the New Library Space. Tracy Keys asked to table this item until all five Board of Library Trustees have had a chance to spend time viewing all potential naming locations. It was moved, seconded and passed (Trustee Grant/Trustee King) to continue this item at a future meeting, date unspecified, in which all Board of Library Trustees are present and have had an opportunity to view the proposed naming locations. Motion carried by acclamation."

To the best of my knowledge, the matter was not agendized, discussed or resolved at the January 2013 BLT meeting.

I do not feel naming public facilities or spaces after living donors based solely on the amount of their monetary contributions is a good idea. However public spirited the donors may be, providing prominent public recognition sends a "pay to play" message completely inappropriate for local government. Please keep in mind that the Central Library is part of a larger Civic Center. Imagine the message that would be sent by a sign in the new City Council Chamber, or Planning Division, saying the facility was made possible through the generosity of a major developer such as the Irvine Company, or the name of the owner of a major street paving company adorning a conference room in the Public Works Department.

Naming library rooms after donors seems little more appropriate to me. Among my concerns, it is unclear to me that the person being honored actually paid for the bulk of the facility honoring them, making it especially unclear why they should be singled out over the many less visible taxpayers (and small donors) who actually made it possible. In fact it seems an insult to the many other less well acknowledged contributors, who, seeing someone they may not particularly care for being honored, may be discouraged from participating or contributing in the future. As previously mentioned, knowing early on that the new facility at Mariners Park was going to be officially(?) known as the "Donna and John Crean" Mariners Branch Library certainly deterred me from contributing to what was in fact a much wider community effort.

Again, if library rooms need to be named, I think the names chosen should be of persons who deserve to be honored because of their contributions, not of money, but to literacy, such as famous authors of the past. One would hope there are donors who would be willing to endorse such a concept in return for lesser recognition of their own names.

Should the Board choose to enter this thorny arena, they will have to decide such things as whether corporate promotions would be allowed as well as individual names, and what promise is being made in the event of future remodeling, or a more lucrative donor being found.

Item 7. Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

Comment 1 – Thanks for ending book donation dumping:

I would like to thank staff for addressing the problem of book donation dumping at the Mariners Branch (as commented upon at the previous two meetings). I seem to recall seeing one episode immediately after the January BLT meeting, but none since.

I of course do not know what is happening now to the donated books, but I hope they are being more carefully screened and going to the good homes the donors intended. I also hope staff has inquired as to whether a similar problem exists and needs to be corrected at the other branches.

Comment 2 – Continuing under-the-radar BLT meetings:

Regarding the minimal participation by the public in BLT meetings, I would like to note that this is the second month in a row for which the existence of the meeting is not announced on the NBPL homepage that patrons see, nor on the NBPL on-line calendar. I suspect few patrons – especially those using the branches -- know there exists a forum through which they, as common citizens, can participate in the governance of their library, nor how to go about doing so.

As frequently mentioned by me, I think a different meeting room and a more interactive format would also help to boost participation, and encourage the few who attend to come back.

Paper notices of upcoming BLT meetings posted in the branches might help, too.

Although prominently mentioned under “Meetings and Events” on the *City* homepage (separate and distinct, and at a quite different URL from the library webpages), to the best of my knowledge, the only way a branch library patron would become aware the Board is meeting tonight would be to click on the “About Us” tab on the library homepage, then under that discover “Board of Library Trustees,” and under that find the “Click here to view Agendas and Minutes” link, and after doing all that notice today’s date and click on it.

Comment 3 – Mariners parking lot flooding continues:

During a recent episode of morning rain showers I noticed the parking lot at Mariners again flooded, making about six of the already small number of spaces inaccessible without wading through ankle-deep water. I also noticed a City vehicle was in the lot during this particular episode of flooding, possibly assessing the situation. I hope something can be done to correct it.