

Comments on April 1, 2013 BLT Agenda Items

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

Jim Mosher (jimmosher@yahoo.com), 2210 Private Road, Newport Beach 92660 (949-548-6229)

Item 4. Approval of Minutes - March 4, 2013, Regular Meeting

I noticed just one minor typo, a couple of extraneous words midway through the first full paragraph on page 4: "~~On Monday~~, City Hall staff will move into the new location on Monday, April 8, and on Monday, April 15 will be open for business."

Under "Roll Call" on page 1, I have no personal objection to having my name, and those of other members of the public, listed in the minutes, particularly when addressing the Board, but I also think the Board should be aware the people of California have a protected right to attend and speak without providing any identifying information. And it is conceivable some might feel intimidated or otherwise put upon by knowing their names would be listed. The Board might, therefore, wish to consider limiting the "Roll Call" section of the minutes to giving a count of the public present, and in the body of the minutes providing the names (and any other identifying information) of public speakers only when that information is voluntarily provided.

If the Board wishes to add clarity to my comments as they appear in the draft minutes, I would suggest modifying the final paragraph on page 1 to read:

"He suggested that the Trustees use Google ~~to help in material selection, and~~ to review the collection policies other libraries have. The current Library Circulation Policy is not on the Library website or on the City website, and is lacking in content, as it does not give guidance to the staff on what customers would like in the library. ~~In his search~~ ~~he~~ ~~He~~ named a public library in another state (Racine Public Library) that had a very definitive collection policy that the Board may wish to view."

And in the first paragraph under Public Comments on page 5:

"He suggested that Library staff look into services for the disabled, particularly the blind and reading impaired, as there is currently nothing on the Library's website in this area."

Should it still be of interest, the 67 page Racine (Wisconsin) Collection Development Policy I was referring to in the first comment can be found at:

<http://www.racinelib.lib.wi.us/PDFS/Policies/collection%20development%20policy.pdf>

It may differ from the current policy of that Board. The latter public comment included specific references to the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped offered by the Library of Congress, Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic (now called Learning Ally), and the National Federation for the Blind's Newsline service.

Item 5.A.1. Customer Comments

A recurring theme in the comments is persons, often from out of the area, asking staff to add a link to their website or eBook. Staff normally replies (for example, in Comment 3; see also Comments 4 and 5 in the March agenda packet, Comment 8 in February, etc.) that it is against policy to act on such third-party requests, but contrary to this claimed policy, a recommended eBook was added to the Library's on-line content in response to Comment 4. The standard reply ("*Newport Beach City policy prevents us from adding links to our website at the request of third parties.*") makes it sound like a suggestion from a third party permanently eliminates the suggestion from consideration, which is a strange outcome considering the library claims to be actively encouraging suggestions. I think that if there is a correct procedure to submit a suggestion (for links or books) for formal consideration that is what should be communicated.

Staff appears to be referring to City Council Policy D-5 ("City Websites"), and since all ideas originate somewhere, the Board may wish to consider whether the prohibition against links suggested by third parties (in transactions between government and governed who is a "third party" anyway?) is a good policy, or even applicable to the Library, since it appears to give administrative control to the City Manager, contrary to the powers given to the Board by the people in City Charter Section 708.

Item 5.A.4. Board of Library Trustees Monitoring List

Comments on specific items:

- **Annual Budget Update** held on Feb 4, 2013: Under Charter Section 708, the Board has a duty to "*Consider the annual budget for library purposes during the process of its preparation and make recommendations with respect thereto to the City Council and City Manager,*" and through the Board, this is the public's primary opportunity to be made aware of that budget, and have a chance to influence it. Since the Council considers the budget in May and June, I had assumed the Feb 4, 2013 Update was what it was agendized as: an update rather than a formulation of the Board's final recommendation. However, the minutes of that meeting indicate the budget had been submitted to the City Manager on February 1, prior to the Board meeting, and that at the meeting the Board (with two members absent who I believe were also not on the Budget Committee) approved the budget as submitted. Since this action was not clearly agendized, I believe the public, and two of the Board members were deprived any meaningful opportunity to review and comment on the budget for Fiscal Year 2013-4 being submitted to the City Council and City Manager.
- **Review FY 2013/ 2014 Holidays / Meeting Schedule** scheduled for Jun 3, 2013: I would suggest that the "Meeting Schedule" part of this be deferred to the July meeting, since there will be a new trustee who may wish to suggest changes to the current schedule.
- **Election of Board of Library Trustees Officers** The Board may wish to know that with passage of Measure EE in November, 2012, the requirement for boards and commissions to elect a presiding officer as soon as practicable after July 1 of each year was (for reasons unknown to me) eliminated. Although such a requirement is still found

in the Library Board's By-laws, the Trustees are now free to change or eliminate that requirement.

In addition to the above, I would suggest *adding* the following items to the Monitoring List:

- An annual review of the Library's role in the community, and the adequacy of its physical infrastructure. The reasons for this suggestion are as follows:
 - A recent local article by *OC Register* reporter Mike Reicher (on line as "[*Costa Mesa libraries seek to stay relevant, vital in digital age*](#)," in print front page of "Local" section, April 1, 2013) contains telling comments from County Supervisor John Moorlach, which are probably reflective of the attitudes of a large segment of the public being taxed to pay for our own Library:
 - "I am not a library user. I buy my own books and I don't lend them to anybody."
 - "There are certainly trends, and you better figure out where those trends are going. Maybe some people are telling you libraries aren't part of the future."
 - "Libraries are changing. You can get what you want for a couple bucks on Amazon or at Barnes and Noble on a Kindle... I see libraries like watch companies. Kids aren't going to buy watches when they can look at (their smart phones)."
 - I myself have an 84 year old uncle who, in the 60 years he has lived in the City of Orange, has never had a library card, and although he strongly objects to the \$200+ yearly cost of subscribing to the *Wall Street Journal*, would not even consider walking the couple of blocks to the Orange Public Library where he could read it for free, or check out a video he would enjoy watching. I am also unable to think of any of my immediate relatives who regularly use public libraries.
 - The suggested annual review would consider whether the Library is offering relevant services, and what could be done to make them more relevant to a larger fraction of the public.
 - Assuming libraries are still relevant (despite Supervisor Moorlach's opinions to the contrary), the physical infrastructure aspect of the annual review would consider whether the physical layout, including the number and location of branches, is as good as it could be. I was surprised, for example, to recently come across City documents related to a property at 6000 West Coast Highway (adjacent to "[*Cappy's*](#)") which the City acquired in the 1970's (if I remember correctly) for a branch library, but later sold without ever using it. Since then, numerous annexations and residential developments have materially changed the distribution of population, and it is unclear the City's library system has responded to that.

- Pursuant to the Trustee's potential duty under Charter Section 708 to "*Approve or disapprove the appointment, suspension or removal of the Librarian*" (the initial recommendation coming from the City Manager), much as the City Council annually reviews the performance of its appointee (the City Manager, the City Clerk, and the City Attorney), I believe the Board should coordinate with the City Manager to play a more active role in what I assume is an annual review of the Librarian's performance. I would see something on the Monitoring List in which the Board would meet (in closed session if the Librarian so desires) with the City Manager and Librarian for that review, and at the very least for the Board to publicly supply input to the City Manager on its expectations for the coming year, and whether the goals for the preceding year had been met.

Item 5.B.1. Marketing Update

I believe that making staff presentations available in advance of the meeting, similar to the staff reports submitted to the City Council and most other governmental decision making bodies I am aware of, would (by allowing an advance review of the key points to be raised) greatly improve the quality of comments and questions raised at the meeting, as well as the quality of the decisions made.

In the absence of any advance report, about all I can say is that since the Board controls the administration of the Library pursuant to its Charter role, it should be using the marketing that it controls to more vigorously advertise its own existence and promote public interest in its activities. That would likely involve both doing interesting things, and making the public aware that it will be doing them and that they can participate.

As of 11 am on April 1, I am pleased to see a prominent announcement of tonight's Board meeting on the Library's homepage. I did not see it on Friday, and do not recall seeing it yesterday. A paper agenda is posted at Mariners Branch, but the second page, with the action items, is not visible.

Item 5.B.2. Study Room Policy

Again, in the absence of any advance report the public cannot comment intelligently on this. From the agenda alone, we know neither what the problem is, nor what the proposed solution may be.

A related question is how this policy fits into the general policy scheme. Although the text is available on-line on the Library website under "[About us... Library Policies...](#)," it is not among the policies that have been submitted to the City Council for inclusion in their [City Council Policy Manual](#), and Heather at the at Mariners Branch was unable to find a printed copy, or even an entry for it, in her Librarians Policy Manual. The Board may wish to inquire how many other non-mainstream policies there are, and whether they need review.

Item 5.C.1. Civic Center Update/Library Services Director Report

I suspect the March 16-31 closure of the Central Library inconvenienced many members of the public in ways that will not be adequately reflected in Customer Comments reviewed by the Board.

It might be helpful to relate my own experience. On the day of the last City Council meeting (starting at 3:30 pm on March 26), I planned to be at a public meeting in Corona del Mar which I expected to last from about 10 am to noon, and forgetting the Central Library would be closed (as many others did, despite the wide publicity), I thought it would be a good place to go to in the interval from noon to 3:30, providing a quiet environment in which to research, write and print out my comments for the 3:30 Council session. As a backup, I had along a Wi-Fi enabled laptop with the initial files I wanted to work on, but no means of printing. Arriving at the Central Library a little after noon I observed the signs indicating it was closed, and thinking that the CdM branch would be available, I may not have checked out carefully enough whether alternate opportunities for internet research and print out had been set up at Central for the duration of the closure (perhaps in the Friends Room?). Arriving at the CdM branch at about 12:30 (I was travelling by bicycle), I found only 4 adult computers available, all in use and with a waiting list, and for reasons unknown to me my laptop was unable to detect the Wi-Fi signal. It did not occur to me to inquire if there were City-owned laptops available, but seeing that there would likely be an hour or more wait to use one of the 4 main computers, and that I would likely be kicked off after 60 minutes of use, it seemed prudent to take the rather long ride to the Mariners Branch, where I assumed things would be better. At Mariners, not only were all the adult workstations in use, but the men's restroom was closed for a restoration project (changing the sink top, I believe). In the end, since I had already moved very far from my intended destination at the new Civic Center, I decided to pedal the few extra blocks to home and work from there.

To supplement the story, on Friday March 29 I was in the City of Orange to visit (this time by car) the aforementioned 84 year old uncle, and again looking for a convenient place to use my Wi-Fi enabled laptop, which was employing its last minutes of battery reserve to very frustratingly refuse to connect at any of the usual places. Although I knew that the City of Orange Public libraries had been closed on Fridays for several years due to budget cutbacks, I thought their Wi-Fi connection might still be available, for the laptop's remaining few minutes, in the courtyard of their Central Library. Arriving there I was surprised and delighted to see a large banner announcing they were open on Fridays, once again. Despite Supervisor Moorlach's belief that libraries have become irrelevant, I can report the place was so packed I had difficulty finding a place to plug in the power supply for the laptop – and that once I did, I found their Wi-Fi connection worked just fine, and I very much appreciated the quiet (despite the crowd), restful public space in which to work.

I think the moral is that people may not complain loudly when library facilities are not available – like the Supervisor, most can find other ways to meet their information and technology needs – but when they *are* open, at least some show their appreciation by voting with their feet.

Another moral is I think our own library could have done a better job of reminding the public of alternatives available during the closure. And perhaps also, finding a better way even in normal times, of reminding the public, many of whom may not be aware of it, that laptops are available when the public workstations are full.

Item 7. Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

I will likely speak about the extent to which the library should be a distribution point for free newsstand type publications.