

March 3, 2014 BLT Agenda Item Comments

Comments on the Newport Beach Board of Library Trustees (BLT) agenda items, submitted by:

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Item 4. Approval of Minutes

Changes to the passages shown in *italics* are suggested in ~~strikeout~~ underline format.

February 3, 2014, Regular Meeting

1. On page 1, under Item 3 (“PUBLIC COMMENTS”), paragraph 2: “*He noted that he had verified that the public can read the OverDrive books despite the warning, without using their own device. They are able to do this by choosing the OverDrive READ format. He also noted that logging onto Internet Explorer ~~with a~~ on that public computer, ~~and going through~~ opened the Yahoo commercial service. If an individual accesses the ~~OverDrive-service~~ internet this way they may be totally unaware of what the Library offers through the Library website.”*

Note: what I did not say, because I didn’t know it at the time, was that not all the OverDrive books can be borrowed in the [READ format](#) (which allows them to be viewed in the web browser). This is now explained in some detail in the Library’s [OverDrive Downloadable Books FAQs](#).

2. Page 3, Item 2, line 1: “*Support Services Coordinator Melissa Kelly distributed a list of the 2014 adopted, amended and expended year to date salaries and benefits, operating expenses, and capital outlay expenses with breakdowns and descriptions for each area within each of these categories ~~were listed~~. Prior to this meeting Melissa reviewed the budget ~~was by~~ with Trustees Robyn Grant and John Prichard. ... A supplemental request of \$8,087 to increase the City’s contribution to move the Literacy Coordinator position from .4 to .5 of full time was discussed. The totals listed in this report do not include the Library support ~~group’s groups’~~ donations, as these donations cannot be accounted for until received.”*
3. Page 3, last paragraph: “*The Board asked staff to bring a list of the larger budget request items such as new carpet for the Friends Meeting Room for review to a future meeting sometime prior to **November** when the **completed** budget is due at City Hall.*”
[November does not seem like a correct due date for a completed budget, since the City Council approves the budget by the end of June. Is this a typo or a reference to items to be included in the FY2015-6 budget, which might start to be considered (but certainly not “completed”) in November 2014?]
4. Page 4, paragraph 1: “***Motion** made by Trustee Grant and seconded by Trustee Prichard and carried (4 - 1) to approve the budget as presented, and ~~approval of~~ approve the \$8,087.00 requested for the Literacy Coordinator position as presented.*”
[note: I rather thought the motion was contingent on a clarification of the large new negative \$305,125 “7445 MISC RETIRE CONTRIB” line item in the draft budget [handout](#)]

Item 5.A.1. Customer Comments

1. Regarding Comment 1 (WiFi capacity), I share the patron's concern that the limitation to use of one WiFi "connection" at a time seems arbitrary and unnecessary. The "spot licenses" requiring individual library card sign-in, which were introduced a year or two ago, certainly seem burdensome on library users, and the Board might benefit from a presentation on why they were introduced, and what benefit they provide. For example, I know that if I use something other than one of the public internet terminals, I rarely remember to log out of the spot license when I leave the building. I don't know if this means the library is somehow being charged for my unused connection many hours later, or if it limits how many of the remaining patrons have access to WiFi. If it is simply to monitor usage it seems completely unnecessary. It might also be noted that from near the Civic Green entryway to the Central Library one can sometimes connect to the City Hall public WiFi network, which has no such restrictions or sign-in requirement. As with throwaway newspaper distribution, it seems strange that the City Hall seems a less restricted public forum than the public library (which one would have thought would be the freer information hub).
2. Regarding Comment 8 (late return of overdue items), the Board might consider clarifying the policy on how fines are assessed on "late" items. My experience has been that an item due on a particular day is regarded as having been timely returned if it is in the return queue when the branch at which it was returned next opens (which can be a day or more later). What is unclear to me is if being in the return queue requires placing the item in the bin some hours before the opening hour, or if any time prior to opening (even a minute before) is sufficient. For the benefit of those with "late" items that might not actually be counted as late, it might be helpful to have this clearly spelled out in a policy readily accessible to the public.
3. Regarding Comment 11 (Valueline and Morningstar subscriptions), it would seem helpful to inquire a bit more deeply into what features the patron feels are lacking, as it appears Natalie has attempted to do. On a related matter, it is unclear to me how much public input went into the decision to change the once popular former large business collection reference room at Central into a Teen Center.

Item 5.A.2. Library Activities

1. **Support Services:** I think the Board should have been more involved in understanding the decision to put the Central Library book drop in the new Civic Center parking garage. From prior Customer Comments, it seems clear the public's preference was for a location on Avocado or in the main surface parking lot. My guess is that many patrons do not yet associate the parking structure with the Library, and from the description, I am not even sure where in the structure it will go. If, as the report says, it requires driving through the structure from north to south (entering on Civic Center Drive?), considerable signage may be needed for patrons to be able to find it.

2. **Branch and Youth Services:** Regarding the completion of the RFID tagging effort (also reported under “Support Services”), my recollection is that the decision to convert from barcodes to RFID tags was made largely without Board direction. Since legitimate personal privacy, and other, issues connected with RFID tagging have been raised in other jurisdictions, I think that to ensure those concerns were properly addressed by the system chosen, [the issues](#) should have been presented to the Board, and the decision made by them (because of these concerns and despite its acknowledged convenience, the San Francisco Public Library Board apparently still does not allow RFID technology in their facilities, per their [Privacy Policies 12-14](#)). It is also unclear from the report if the scanners being installed at CdM and Balboa are barcode or RFID.
3. **Adult Services:** Regarding “*What’s Cooking*,” I have always had some difficulty seeing this as a literacy type activity, but I have once again reminded the Newport Beach [Restaurant Business Improvement District](#) (a City-sanctioned organization to which all food selling establishments are compulsory contributors) of this program. It would seem like coordination with Newport Beach establishments could be better.

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

Given the change in meeting date from the first to the third Monday of the month, as approved in Item 5.B.3 at the February 3rd meeting, 14 days need to be added to the future dates listed, starting with “May 5, 2014” (to be corrected to “May 19, 2014”).

Item 5.B.1. Balboa Branch Update

Since no information has been provided in advance of the meeting it is impossible to comment on this, or to guess what kind of “possible action” might be contemplated.

Item 5.B.2. NBPL Foundation Gift

Although the staff report says “*No funding requirement*,” this is, of course, a commitment to spend \$31,471.20 of donations to the Library that could have been used for something else.

Unless a gift was made for this specific purpose (something that is not clear from the staff report), it would seem to me that the need to spend the Library’s limited resources on this should have been brought first to the Board, and only if the Board prioritized it over other things should staff have approached the Friends or Foundation for funding it. Although the Foundation is a useful conduit for soliciting and receiving gifts, it is not clear to me they should be influencing or deciding how general gifts are used.

It is also unclear what will become of the existing chairs, which we have learned are not that old.

Item 5.B.3. Budget Clarification /PERS Accounts

This item refers to the draft budget [handout](#) provided in connection with Item 5.B.2 at the [February 3, 2014, meeting](#). Despite the explanation, I find continue to find this very confusing.

My vague understanding is that participation in CalPERS (which promises a “defined benefit” to retirees – that is, a lifetime guarantee of a percentage of final salary with cost of living increases) requires a relatively fixed required employee (“EE”) contribution (something around 9% if memory serves) plus a highly variable employer (“ER”) contribution (which picks up the slack necessary to provide the promised benefit, based on number of current and retired employees and the return on the investment pool).

For several years, as I understand it, Newport Beach voluntarily paid the entire “EE” part, and is going back to a system in which employees pay that full required “EE” amount through deductions from their paychecks.

If I understand the explanation from the Finance Department, I think I have a philosophical difference with counting the employees’ part of the “EE” contribution as a negative line item offsetting their salaries (“*Less Employee Contribution (Acct 7445)*”). My thought is that employees have *many* expenses they use their salaries to pay. The taxpayers pay the salaries, and the things the salaries are used for are not normally regarded as negatives offsetting them.

In any event, what puzzles me is that reading the previous budget handout in light of the new explanation we have:

PERS Employee Rate (Acct 7439) : \$229,261

Less Employee Contribution (Acct 7445): \$305,125

This implies the employees have gone from paying *none* of the required “EE” part to paying *more* than the total “EE” amount being sent to CalPERS.

That would be very generous of the employees, but the Board may want a further clarification of whether that is really what the draft budget is trying to convey.