

April 7, 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 (March 3, 2014, Meeting)

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

Page 3, Item 2: “*The new chairs are stored on chair ~~trolleys~~ dollies which are portable.*”

Page 3, Item 3: “*The reporting will continue in this format in order to show the pension contributions that ~~employee's~~ employees make.*” [note: I'm not sure the earlier statement is correct that the same information the Trustees saw was presented in a budget report to the City Council. If it was, it was not at a public meeting. By way of further explanation, as explained to me by City Finance Director Dan Matusiewicz in response to my inquiry after the end of the most recent Council Finance Committee meeting, the positive “PERS Employee (“EE”) Rate” line in the new budget format represents the theoretical obligation that PERS expects City employees to pay towards their benefits. At one time, the City paid all of this for most of them. It is still listed as if it were a budget expense/outlay, but the City currently actually pays none of the “EE” line item. The negative amount listed on a separate line as “Employee Contribution” is the amount the employees, through their employment agreements, have deducted from their salaries and sent to PERS. For the average library employee, this currently exceeds the basic obligation. Combining the two lines gives a negative result indicating how much the employees pay beyond the “normal” PERS “EE” expectation.]

Page 3, last line: “*She will remain the ~~Brach Branch~~ Librarian for the Corona del Mar ...*”

Page 4, Item 4: “*Trustee Prichard reported that the DSLS Committee lecture attendance has been good, and that the committee members attended their retreat at the end of December ...*”

[note: I suspect the earlier part of the sentence may have been intended to read: “Trustee Prichard reported that the DSLS ~~Committee~~ lecture attendance has been good, and that the ~~DSL~~ DSL committee members attended their retreat ...”]

Page 4, Item 4: “*... they are able to also provide a new and more ~~streamline~~ streamlined podium and stage along with the chairs for the Friends Meeting Room.*”

Item 5.A.1. Customer Comments

Comment 6: Regarding the safety of the Central Library staircase, I would again like to suggest to staff that they examine the *outdoor* stairways in the rest of the new Civic Center complex, including those in the parking structure: they have inlaid non-skid safety strips at the edge of every step, not just the first and last steps of each flight, as is the case for the Grand Staircase in the Central Library. Adding such a feature to the intermediate steps would help to alleviate the anxiety caused by the low, raking, camouflage-like lighting.

Comment 7: This item reminds me that I forgot to comment at the last Trustees meeting, where the written activities report mentioned staff's decision to provide the Central Library with a drive-up book drop in the new Civic Center parking structure. My intended comment was that although I am not big on recommending a proliferation of signs, for the new book drop to serve

more than a handful of “insiders” who know about it, it would seem necessary to provide signage indicating how to get there from the locations where patrons are more likely to look for a book drop. As a prior example of this need, the Mariners Branch (on Irvine Avenue) has a drive-up book drop on *Dover Drive* near the *old* library location. I am not aware of any signs in the current parking lot on Irvine Avenue directing patrons to this very unobvious location. As a result, I have frequently seen motorists (probably unaware of the Dover Drive drop) parking in the fire zone to get out and use the drops in the building entrance. I can similarly imagine that motorists seeing the drops in the outside wall of the Central Library may double park to use those, unaware a drive-up drop is available at another location. I would think a sign visible to motorists, indicating how to get to the new Central Library drive-up drop, would be useful both there (near the existing in-wall book drops) and on Avocado (where they might naively be expecting to find a drop). A sign visible to motorists near the Mariners entrance, directing them to the drive-up drop on Dover, would seem similarly helpful.

Comment 8: With regard to how ebooks are selected for inclusion in the Library’s collection, in the [Orange County Public Library’s](#) implementation of OverDrive, when a search comes up empty the user is prompted to recommend acquisition of the title to the library. Likewise, their Advanced Search page offers three options: (1) “*All Titles*,” (2) “*Available Now*,” and (3) “*Additional Titles to Recommend*.” The Southern California Digital Library version (which NBPL provides) offers only a “*Show only titles with copies available*” filter. Is there some reason the “recommend a title” function is not implemented? And if it were, would NPBL know about requests coming from NBPL cardholders so that even if the overall Southern California Digital Library consortium were not interested, our own staff might consider adding them to our custom set?

Item 5.A.2. Library Activities

In the description of new amenities on page 1, it probably hasn’t escaped the Trustees’ attention that the space opposite Bistro 24 Express remains untenanted. Some library or literacy related use would seem appropriate, or perhaps it could be used as an additional location to showcase the City’s art collection?

Item 5.A.3. Expenditure Status Report

1. In the main monthly expenditure report, I can’t recall if the large unanticipated expenditure of more than \$43,000 under line “*7211 HEALTH/DENTAL/VISION PT*” has ever been explained. I would assume this line would represent insurance premiums, which should be relatively stable and predictable. Did the Library have to directly pay an uninsured claim?
2. Likewise, I’m not sure the nearly \$23,000 overrun in line “*9000 OFFICE EQUIPMENT*” has been explained.
3. In the quarterly reports on the status of the expenditure of Foundation and Friends donations, the ending date used to prepare the “YTD” figures is not indicated. In both cases, it looks like a considerable part of the gift amounts designated for “*Programming*”

and “*Pitch an Idea*” has not been spent. Is there a plan to spend these? If not, does the Board have the authority to re-direct the moneys towards some other use?

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

Since no items are listed, is it the intention to cancel the May meeting?

I would think it would be an opportunity for the Trustees to check the status of the budget approaching the end of the fiscal year, and give direction to staff so the Library will not be left with unspent balances that need to be returned to the General Fund.

Item 5.B.2. Young Adult Advisory Committee Report

The report does not make clear if the YAAC was originally created at the request of the Board of Library Trustees, or an invention of staff, but it is good to see the report, since formal interaction between the two groups seems to have been minimal in recent years.

Yet paragraph 4 indicates that at some time the YAAC “*made recommendations to the Library Board and other strategic planning groups.*” That would seem to me to be both a good learning experience that should be reinstated, and also helpful to ensure staff is not getting and responding to conflicting direction from different bodies. At least in my view, the BLT is the only body formally charged with setting the direction for the library, and the guidance staff thinks it is getting from other sources should be filtered through the Board.

Item 5.B.1, 3, 4 & 5

It is difficult to provide advance comment on the remaining items since no materials relevant to them have been provided with the agenda packet.

However, having seen previous BLT reviews of the annual “Wish Lists” prepared by library staff for presentation to the Foundation and Friends, I find it particularly unfortunate that those lists are not available for advance consideration. Placing the BLT in a position where it has to make instantaneous decisions with minimal forethought or public airing gives at least this member of the public the impression that the setting of Library priorities and the allocation of discretionary spending for the coming year is almost exclusively a highly non-transparent staff- (or Friends- or Foundation- ?) driven exercise rather than a Trustee-driven one.