

Staunton Public Library
ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
October 21, 2021

Call to Order, Attendance, and Presiding Officer's Remarks:

The meeting, held via zoom conference call, was called to order at 4:33 pm by Josh Howard.

Roll was called:

Board Members Present – Randolph Bertin, Virginia Trovato, Josh Howard, Mark Peterson

Others Present – Library Director Sarah Skrobis, Friends of Staunton Library representative Joyce Shelenberger

Absent – Cass Cannon

A quorum was present.

Approval of Minutes:

Josh made a motion to approve the minutes of the 16 September Meeting, which was seconded, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Old Business

1) John Blair – Remote Participation

John informed the Advisory Board that the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) applies to all public bodies and their meetings. Local emergency and state emergency were declared early in the pandemic, with City Council ending the local emergency in April 2021, while the State declaration expired 30 June. Under FOIA if there is not a state of emergency, you cannot have a remote meeting of a public body – a quorum must be present at the physical meeting space.

The Staunton Library Board is in a unique situation. FOIA only applies to “public bodies” (elected or appointed). Although we are appointed, we do not advise a governing body, we only advise the library director.

Options for proceeding include: (1) If a quorum is willing to gather in person, we can go forward as we have in the past. (2) Request an opinion from FOIA Advisory council about whether we are a “public body”. If the answer is “no” we can meet however we want. If “yes” we would need to comply with FOIA. (3) We could ask the city council to amend city code so that they no longer appoint the Board, and determine a new appointment process.

Josh asked whether there is an advantage to being or not being a “public body”? John answered that the label only means that you are subject to public meeting requirements and FOIA requests. If we are not a public body, these requirements would not apply to the Board.

Virginia inquired how most other library boards are constructed: Sarah replied that through a Library Directors' listserv poll, everyone replied that they are appointed by city officials.

Randolph asked whether the Board could continue to operate as in the past (appointed by City Council), even if it is determined we are NOT a "public body". John answered affirmatively.

Sarah indicated that, as Director, she would like to know the FOIA Advisory Council opinion on this matter, and also affirmed that, either way, it would be desirable to maintain transparency and public accountability.

Mark asked what would happen if someone made a FOIA request and we are not considered a "public body". John replied that the Board would be free to not reply, but might want to have rules for providing a response (i.e. have an independent policy regarding requests). You still want to be seen as accountable to the public.

Sarah proposed that we request an Advisory Opinion and go from there. Josh agreed that getting that opinion from the FOIA Advisory Council would be good. Mark asked if it would be a quick turnaround on getting information. John said that with authorization he would start working on the request tomorrow, hopefully receiving a response in a month or two.

Josh moved that the Library Advisory Board authorize the City Attorney to request an opinion from FOIA Advisory Committee about whether the Staunton Library Advisory Board is a "public body". The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Talking Book Center report

Virginia presented an update on the TBC, highlighting the following items:

- TBC is in transition, having elected new leadership in August
- The yearly audit was approved in September
- New committees are being set up: Donors, Outreach, Strategic planning, etc.

Friends of Staunton Public Library report

Joyce provided an update on the Friends, highlighting the following items:

- Reviewed previous minutes.
- Fall book sale generated over \$4500 in sales. The sale was stressful, with "wheels falling off the bus" – we did not have labor to move books (usually handled by inmates, but Covid intervened), with volunteers having to be enlisted in the extra effort.
- Annual board meeting is next week; hoping to generate some ideas for improvement.
- Audits provided ideas for better bookkeeping practices going forward.
- Slate of officers to be elected for new board in January.
- Looking forward to better planning.

Foundation Report

Sarah provided information about the Staunton Library Foundation:

- One annual meeting.
- Received an estate gift of \$60K.
- The foundation requested a wish list from the library – no restrictions (could be capital projects or operations).
- Some American Rescue Plan funds should also be coming.

Virginia asked whether there a target spend amount and Sarah said there is no target.

Director's Report

Sarah recapped the past month's activities at the library:

- The Library's Annual Report (shared with Advisory Board) will be presented at the work session of the 28 October City Council meeting; all are welcome to come out in support.
- New librarian Alison McCue is coming on board 8 November (arriving from Augusta County Library).
- Trying to figure out where to go from here over the next few months (relative to Covid). The library will continue to emphasize Grab and Go services for at least another month or longer. Programming needs to be considered as weather cools; gatherings will remain outdoors until middle of November, perhaps becoming virtual after that.

Additional Q&A Regarding Library Operations:

Josh affirmed that the report to City Council looks great and added that Instagram account of Library is great ("makes me want to be a teen reader!"). Virginia seconded the great work.

New Business

1) No new business.

Adjournment:

Josh moved to adjourn the meeting, which concluded at 5:10 PM.

The next Library Board meeting is scheduled for 18 November at 4:30 PM via the zoom platform.

Respectfully submitted,
Randolph Bertin