

## **April 20, 2020, BLT Agenda Comments**

These comments on Newport Beach Board of Library Trustees (BLT) [agenda](#) items are submitted by:  
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### ***Item 1. Minutes of the Feb 24, 2020 Board of Library Trustees Meeting***

I was able to attend only the first few minutes of the Feb. 24 BLT meeting due to the City's Aviation Committee meeting being scheduled on the same day at the OASIS Center, starting at 5:30, but I don't notice any typographical errors in the minutes as presented.

Well done!

### ***Item 2. Patron Comments***

The number of comments for February seems unusually small.

No comments are shown for March after the March 14 complaint about the Media Lab being closed.

Hasn't NBPL received any comments from the public about its closure?

I personally found it inconvenient and unnecessary to see public access barred to all the desktop computers at the Mariners Branch. It would have seemed equally easy to have simply unplugged enough that the remaining ones were the required six feet apart.

### ***Item 3. Library Activities***

The report does not mention NBPL's in absentia receipt, at the City Council's largely virtual meeting on April 10, of a proclamation honoring [National Library Week](#) or Director Hetherton's [written response](#), in which he estimated "*the Library's \$8.1 million dollar budget has a return on investment of \$24,627,060.*"

As to the statistics, it is a bit surprising Reference activity (page 19) dropped almost as precipitously in March as in-person attendance (page 20), that is, to about half the normal level. Was phone-in (or internet?) reference service not available during the March closure? Or was it available, but not used by patrons?

### ***Item 4. Expenditure Status Report***

Especially in view of the closure during much of March, this report would benefit from some commentary highlighting what line items were impacted, and by how much (and, perhaps, comparing it to the same period in the previous year).

### ***Item 5. Board of Library Trustees Monitoring List***

I believe an update on staff's COVID-19 response and an opportunity for direction from the Board on that needs to be added to the list for the duration of that response (see last page of this document for a non-agenda comment on this).

It might also be noted that the Monitoring List lists for the present meeting an update on the Balboa Branch (previously scheduled for the March 16 meeting, which, to the best of my

knowledge, was cancelled). Per page 15 of the present agenda packet, this has evidently been moved to May 18 (mistyped there as “16”).

At some point, the Board also needs to plan to receive an update, and provide direction on, the future of the rotating Acting Library Services Manager position (as well as whether the department needs a Cultural Arts Manager).

### ***Item 6. FY 2020-21 Library Services Proposed Budget***

The City's Finance Committee met on April 16 to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 closures on the City's budget for FY 2020-21. The City as a whole is expecting something like a 10 to 15% reduction in General Fund revenues (some \$24 to 31 million), which it is expected may be addressed through a hiring freeze through the December and deferral of some previously anticipated Capital Improvement Program projects. I would guess this may impact planning for the Library Lecture Hall and the Balboa Branch replacement (the costs for which do not traditionally appear in the department budget), as well as filling staff vacancies should any exist at the moment (which do, and which it would be good for the Board to be updated on).

The proposed increasing (rather than decreasing) budget does not seem consistent with this. For example, will there be unfilled permanent staff positions or unused part time positions which would allow the salary and benefits line items to be reduced?

In that connection, how are the salary and benefits for the Library Services Manager position, currently on “loan” to the City Manager, being shown in the current and proposed budgets?

In general, details of what went into arriving at the proposed line item amounts seems very skimpy to me.

### ***Item 7. Grant Acceptance from California Library Literacy Services***

Doesn't this “final award” supplement a base grant awarded earlier in the year?

### ***Item 8. Library Material Selection and Downloadable Services***

How many patron recommendations for purchase does NBPL receive during the year, through the website and in person, for hardcopy as well as downloadable materials?

How many of these are honored or rejected, and what fraction of the year's purchases does this account for?

For the downloadable items (such as OverDrive), isn't NBPL primarily part of a consortium as well as having a smaller list of its own titles? How does NBPL influence titles acquired by the consortium? And how large is its own list compared to that?

### ***Item 9. Foreign Language Collections***

I agree with staff's recommendation that further research be conducted before the NBPL budget is spent acquiring foreign language print materials. However, I do believe foreign language collections are a sign of a comprehensive, quality library, and of use not only to speakers of those languages but to potential language learners.

I am surprised by (and frankly doubtful of) the assertion that language data is not available from the Census Bureau at any level below the state of California as a whole. If that is true, I would still suspect that more local information on the volume of voter materials mailed in various languages (and, in particular, to Newport Beach addresses) could be obtained from the Orange County Registrar of Voters, and would give a fairly accurate idea of residents' reading preferences.

It has been several decades since I have personally attempted to achieve literacy in any language other than English, but it is my recollection that at that time our larger Orange County Public Library system housed collections in particular languages primarily at particular locations. For example, their primary Japanese language collection was in La Palma and Chinese books were in Irvine. The Costa Mesa branch (and I suspect others) have, if I recall, a Spanish language section. The OCPL would be a good local resource for information on the popularity of those collections and who they circulate to.

It would seem to me the easiest way for NBPL to facilitate access to foreign language materials would be to promote the collections at OCPL and other members of OC's Santiago Library System. It could also help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by eliminating its interlibrary loan fee, allowing patrons to easily borrow them through NBPL rather than driving to those locations. In that connection, I might note that last time I checked (last year) OCPL branches charge nothing to their patrons requesting books from NBPL. It would seem logical for NBPL to reciprocate.

In such a shared resources model, NBPL might (if the staff report is correct about demographics, and if one does not already exist) be a logical physical location for a Farsi collection curated by volunteers and accessible to everyone in Orange County, just as it is a logical physical location for a nautical collection. However, from the [OCPL catalog](#), there seem to already be 591 Persian language books at their University Park branch, so it's not clear a separate need exists

### ***Item 10. Lecture Hall Update***

I believe the Library Lecture Hall Design Committee last met on March 2, with an expectation it would reconvene on April 6. As far as I know, that did not happen. And a [meeting](#) scheduled for April 20 seems to have been cancelled as well.

It would be good for the Board to know how this might impact the previously-announced timeline, as well as how the City's anticipated loss of revenue and reduction in expenditure on discretionary projects in the coming fiscal year might affect this effort in its entirety.

### ***Item VII. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS***

Given the Board's [Charter Section 708](#) duty to "*Have charge of the administration of City libraries and make and enforce such by-laws, rules and regulations as may be necessary therefor,*" as well as the Brown Act's restriction of Board discussion and action to items announced on public meeting agendas, I find it truly remarkable that there is no item listed on the present agenda for the Board to discuss and provide direction to staff on how the library should respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

Since the Board's last meeting on February 24, the NBPL has suffered what is likely the greatest disruption of service in its history, including locking its doors to the public for many weeks. All, apparently, with no involvement by or direction from the Board.

According to the staff report filed as Item 3, the library may reopen again as soon as May 3, before the Board's next meeting. Will there be restrictions on the number of persons allowed in the buildings? On the handling of materials? On use of equipment? On wearing masks or gloves?

All this will apparently occur with no direction from the Board (or from the public through the Board) as to what that reopening should look like.

Even given this limited concept of the Board's function, it might not be too early to note that Sunday, June 7, 2020, will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formal establishment of the NBPL and its separate Board of Trustees by the City Board of Trustees' [Ordinance No.166](#). I don't know if the Board plans anything to commemorate that event, but it would seem to me appropriate to do so.

100<sup>th</sup> birthdays are usually something to toot one's horn about.