

## June 15, 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 April 20, 2020 Board of Library Trustees Meeting***

Suggested corrections:

**Page 1** (handwritten 6), header: “*Virtual Meeting by Conference Call*”

**Page 1** (handwritten 6), Item IV, paragraph 1: “*In response to Andi Andy Lingle's inquiry, Library Services Director Tim Hetherton advised that the majority of Library staff have been deemed essential workers and are reporting to work.*”

**Page 6** (handwritten 11), Item VII, paragraph 1: “*Jim Mosher noted June 7 will be the official 100th anniversary of the creation of the Newport Beach Public Library and its governing board.*” [The Board may wish to be aware Mayor O'Neill kindly corrected this statement when I made a similar comment at the June 9 City Council meeting. The Mayor said he had checked with Director Hetherton, and “*apparently, they view the opening of the Balboa branch in 1929 as the start of the public library system.*” So by official pronouncement, NBPL is *not* 100 years old, even though the board may be.]

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

I continue to be surprised that no one has written to NBPL asking either why it is closed or when it will reopen.

In connection with that, I am also unable to tell from the BLT materials (staff reports or minutes) when the library closed, but I believe it was shortly after the Governor's statewide stay-at-home order was issued on March 19.

Which makes the remark about the lack of hot water in the men's bathroom (which branch is not clear) in Comment 1 from April (handwritten page 12) a bit strange: it is dated April 20, a month after the facilities closed.

Comment 1 from May (handwritten page 14) is also strange in that the response mentions Christopher Goffard, but that gentleman is not mentioned in the question. Evidently, some context is missing.

It might also be noted that the Library Activity reports of agenda Item 3 mention patron feedback that don't seem to be reported under customer comments, such as in: “*many customers have expressed their gratitude to staff for offering this.*” and “*the response has been overwhelmingly positive*”

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

1. It may seem a trivial point to the Board, but the curbside pick-up program seems predicated on the assumption that all patrons have mobile phones to contact staff from outside the

building (as well as phone or internet-enabled computer to place the hold). While that may be close to true, I know it is not universally true. A more equitable system might use an intercom for communicating with staff without physical contact.

2. With regard to the May statistics:

- a. Page 28: The checkouts of non-ebook materials via curbside service are a small fraction of the normal volume of checkouts.
- b. Page 29: The sharp drop in “reference” activity is surprising, especially in view of it being inflated with curbside phone calls and curbside emails. I would have thought that with the library closed, the volume of phone-in reference questions would have increased. What is the normal level of that?
- c. Page 30: The volume of curbside pickups (5 or 6 per day) at the Balboa and CdM Branches does not seem very cost effective. How many staff persons does it take to implement this? And has it required full utility expenses for those locations?

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

It is not at all apparent how the \$108,822 OPERATIONAL SAVINGS/COVID-19 BUDGET ADJUSTMENT, shown at the bottom, has been realized. What line items were adjusted?

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

COVID-19/Reopening should be added as an ongoing item.

#### ***Item 6. Reopening Plan***

Since the staff report says partial reopenings will be allowed starting June 12, it is not entirely clear why NBPL will be missing that mark by a month. It mentions activities needed in preparation, but couldn't those have been completed earlier?

As to the plan, I believe the proposal that “*Patrons will receive one hour per day on the public computers*” is a poor one. That is a model that has been used in other public libraries and results in frustrated patrons being unable to use the amenities even though they are sitting idle. In addition, if a task is not completed in the initially-allotted time, it provides no opportunity to complete it that day, even for those willing to wait. This is contrary to the concept of public libraries being welcoming to people who may have no other resources.

NBPL's existing CASSIE system, allowing unlimited usage when no one is waiting, is much better. It should continue to be used, with the parameters adjusted based on the observed demand in the new environment. For example, if necessary to ensure turnover, the initial sessions could be limited to 30 minutes with 10-minute renewals (compared to the current 60 min/20 min system).

As to the limited hours necessitated by the shortage of available staff, what is the long-range plan to deal with those uncomfortable working?

### ***Item 7. Circulation Policy Review (NBPL 12)***

The new language suggested under “3.0 Loan Periods” is inaccurate, as it appears to promise materials *will* automatically renew four times, when they may, in fact, not renew at all. It also does not make clear when, during the loan period, the automatic renewal will occur.

I would suggest something like:

“Loan periods and renewals for materials vary as stated below. If an item eligible for renewal has not been reserved by another patron, it may be renewed for up to four additional loan periods. In the absence of a hold or other action by the patron, renewal will occur automatically at the end of the current loan period.”

With such explanation, the following subsections can end with “and may be renewed.” There is no need to repeat the above information.

As to the automatic renewals, although I have long advocated for them, I see some potential shortcomings that should be addressed in the policy.

I would suggest:

1. Consider allowing more renewals but of shorter length so that materials that have been long checked out will be available to others who may request them in a more timely fashion, similar to what CASSIE does with public computer use, as described above: a 1-hour initial loan, followed by 20-min automatic renewals. Under that model, a 3-week initial loan would be followed by (possibly unlimited) 1-week renewals.
2. Notify patrons when an item is *not* expected to renew automatically, as well as notifying them of the new due date when it *does*.
3. Add a brief fine-fee grace period (say three days) after the official due date for all returns. This is necessary to accommodate situations in which an item fails to automatically renew because a hold was placed on it on or very close to the due date. Without that, frustrated patrons will find themselves facing a fine if they do not return it on the very day they receive notice it did not renew.

An alternative system, which was at one time used by the UCI libraries (and for all I know may still be), is to check out materials for very long loan periods, but subject to “recall” by any other patron. When a recall notice was received, the first patron had something like five days to return the item or face a fine.

### ***Item 8. Friends of the Library Wish List***

Given this is a “wish,” it may not matter. But the Friends income is likely to be impacted, as well. So is \$200,000 realistic?

### ***Item 9. Library Foundation Wish List***

Why is the request to the Foundation (\$88,000) so much less than that to the Friends?

Since the Foundation represents the donors big and small, and the Friends only the used book store, shouldn't it be the reverse of that?

### ***Item 10. Media Lab Update***

This report obviously describes the Media Lab as it was prior to the closing.

What will it look like when reopened?

### ***Item 11. Marketing, Public Relations and Social Networking Updates***

One thing the marketing program is not very effective at is exciting public interest in attending and participating in meetings of the Board of Library Trustees.

Possibly notices that the Board is meeting, and what it will be discussing would help.

### ***Item 12. Financial Report Comparison of Beginning Budget to End of the Year Amended Budget***

This shows what line items the increased revenues were added to, but like the earlier Item 4, it does not explain what the \$108,822 of COVID-19 adjustment was cut from. At least not in a way I can understand.

The next to last line shows \$180,000 being subtracted from an original General Fund appropriation of \$2,826,954, but does not explain what that \$2,826,954 was designated for. Comparing to the early item, that appears to be the "Maintenance and Operations total." But a change in the total does not explain what items going into that total it was taken from.

Was it Library Materials? Utilities? or ??

### ***Item 13. Adult and Reference Services Update***

The report does not explain how a "library assistant" differs from a "librarian." An "assistant" sounds like a lesser position than a "library clerk," but from the report I have the impression it is a more skilled position.

Under programming, weren't the two "Nutcracker for Kids" events children's programming rather an adult service?

### ***Item 14. Lecture Hall Update***

As the Board may or may not know, the five-year [Capital Improvement Plan](#) approved by the City Council on June 9, shows \$639,948 spent to date on design and permitting of the Lecture

Hall, nothing at all to be spent in the upcoming fiscal year, and \$7,360,052 of construction costs in FY21-22, \$4,000,000 of which is expected to come from contributions.

It also shows \$834,980 of design work in FY21-22 for the Balboa Fire Station/Library, with \$4,731,848 of construction in FY24-25.

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

The present [agenda](#) says that emailed public comments on it on due by 4:00 p.m. on the Friday before the meeting. Considering NBPL does not appear to send out notices of agenda postings, and they are sometimes not posted until that Friday, this gives very little time for thoughtful review.

I also take exception to the notion that NBPL is not 100 years old, but dates only from the opening of the Balboa Branch.