

January 19, 2016, BLT Agenda Item Comments

Comments on the Newport Beach Board of Library Trustees (BLT) agenda items submitted by:
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Item IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Newport Beach City staff maintains for the Council a "*Facilities Financial Planning Tool*" listing major City facilities, including libraries and fire stations, and demonstrating how a certain scenario of replacement over time could be financed. Although supposedly a City Council document, the numbers in the FFPT seem to be constantly changing without Council review or approval. Yet the Board may recall that early in the discussion of the Corona del Mar Library replacement, Public Works pointed to the square footage numbers in the FFPT as indicating the direction given to them by the Council to downsize the library facility and expand the fire station.

The Library Board should be aware that the next item in the FFPT affecting the library system is replacement of the Balboa Branch and adjoining Fire Station No. 1, for which it is currently anticipated that design will begin in Fiscal Year 2018 and construction in Fiscal Year 2020. Early versions of the FFPT (see for example [Item SS3](#) from the Council's July 23, 2013, Study Session, or [the version](#) presented as recently as at the Council's last Planning Session on January 31, 2015) assumed essentially like-for-like replacement of the branch libraries and a slight future expansion of the Central Library.

The Board should further be aware that in [the version](#) of the FFPT presented to the City's Finance Committee last Thursday (January 14th), much as happened in CdM, plans for the Balboa Library replacement have been radically downsized. **The plan now says the Balboa library facility should decrease in size by nearly half, from its current 5,566 square feet to 3,000 sf**, while the fire station is apparently expected to expand from 3,423 sf to 5,000 sf, for a total combined facility size of 8,000 sf. When asked when and by whom the numbers had been changed, City Manager Kiff said this was part of an internal push and pull in which all departments are continually asked to rethink the smallest and most cost-efficient facilities they could live with. Mindful that during the early stages of planning for Marina Park, a former Library Director, apparently without consulting the Library Board, joined the current City Manager -- who is on record as suggesting that brick and mortar libraries are a relic of the past -- in recommending that the Balboa Branch be completely closed and replaced by an electronic kiosk at the new park, **the Board may wish to be proactive this time about attempting to gauge public sentiment about the need for a Balboa Branch and instructing library staff to "push and pull" back on this.**

Item V.A. Minutes of the November 16, 2015 Board of Library Trustees Meeting

Page 1: "CONVENED AT 5:00 p.m." : It would seem helpful to indicate *where* the meeting was held, either on this line or in the header.

Page 5: Item 13: "Board Member Prichard provided an update of the most recent Witte Lectures Committee's meeting noting that the upcoming lecture by Jessica **Fellowes** **Fellowes** has sold out."

Item 1. Customer Comments

Comment 4: The customer was disappointed to find the Bistro 24 food service closed at 4:35 p.m. on a Friday. Staff's reply correctly says that Bistro 24 has changed its hours. However, the customer's disappointment seems justified, for it appears to have been a requirement to bid for this project that the proposer promise to provide food service during certain minimum hours. Specifically, [Article 5.7](#) of the publicly approved contract ([C-5454](#)) sets the minimum (and in some cases maximum) operating hours: M-Th: 7 a.m – 8 p.m., F: 7 a.m – 6 p.m., Sa: 8 a.m – 6 p.m. and Su: noon – 5 p.m. The only exceptions allowed (and then only with written approval from the City) are for construction, inventory and other temporary and unusual circumstances. By permanently curtailing its hours, Bistro 24 appears to be in violation both of its contract and the public's expectation of the service to be provided. To be sure, the staff report submitted to the City Council on April 23, 2013, said the hours were "*subject to change with City consent based on business conditions*" but I cannot find such flexibility in the contract, and whatever the terms, **since operation during library hours seems to have been the expectation, it seems disappointing City staff would have allowed the change in Bistro 24 hours without consulting the Library Board.**

Item 2. Library Activities

Page 1 (Director): "*Beware of the person of one book.*" –*Thomas Aquinas*" The [Wikipedia](#) has an interesting piece on this quote, and its variants, whose attribution to Aquinas seems questionable (since it apparently cannot be found in his written works) and which can be taken either as an expression of disparagement or awe.

Page 5 (Support Services): "*The City has retained the services of a consultant to help each department sort out records and ensure that we are up to date on our records retention schedules. Elaine McMillion and I met with the consultant in early November and we are in the process of completing an inventory of files in both paper and electronic formats.*" This could mean either the department is being encouraged to retain documents that are currently being discarded, or to discard documents that are currently being retained, or some combination of the two. Since the Trustees are charged by the [City Charter](#) with overseeing the administration of the library, **it would seem wise for the Board to review whether the City's one-size-fits all [Records Retention Schedule](#) is appropriate to the library** (the schedule itself is,

strangely, protected by copyright law and not available for public viewing except in the City Clerk's office).

Pages 12 & 16 (Customers Served in Library): It was my personal observation that public use at the Mariners Branch was at close to normal levels during the period between Christmas and New Years when City offices were closed. **I hope the Board never goes back to allowing the bad old system of closing the libraries whenever City offices are closed.**

In the "*Customers Served in Library*" charts it would seem good to squeeze in a column comparing the current month to the same month in the previous year. The data currently provided, comparing the Year To Date totals to the YTD totals at the same point in the previous year indicate a possibly disturbing trend in which although **system-wide use is up, use at all the branches appears to be uniformly down** (by about 10%), only to be offset by an increase at Central. The Board might wonder if this means that the improvement and promotion of services at the branches is not being given the same attention as those at Central. I also have a continuing concern that use at Central is being artificially inflated by the gates on the second floor which may be counting patrons going in and out of the lobby/Bistro/Credit Union area as repeat visitors (and on the first floor possibly counting visits to the bathroom [also a problem at Mariners?], as well as the lesser problem of counting building pass-through traffic – such as City staffers going to CdM Plaza for lunch – as Central Library visitors). **The Board may wish to seek clarification regarding where and how the visitor count data is obtained.**

Item 3. Expenditure Status Report

Regarding the **Financial Report**, my understanding is that December 31st is the midpoint of the fiscal year (starting July 1 and ending June 30). As such, one would expect about half the continuing budgets to be spent. While this seems to be true of "*Maintenance and Operations*" (which tends to be more variable or seasonal), the financial breakdown on page 1 indicates the "**Salary and Benefits**" expenditures (which one would have expected to be more steady and predictable) **are well under half**: \$2 million spent in the first six months with \$3 million left for the remaining six months. The Board may wish to ask for an explanation.

Regarding the **Foundation Wish List**, since it's the largest line item, the Board may want a refresher on what the "*Electronic Village Renovation*" monies have been spent on. **Which "village" is being renovated? And are any of the results visible yet?**

Item 4. Board of Library Trustees Monitoring List

It should be possible to fill in the anticipated dates for most of the items at the bottom of the list. For example, election of Board officers normally occurs at the first meeting in July.

Item 5. Corona del Mar Branch Library Project Update

Hopefully the Board will be given a chance to review the construction plans as they advance, to ensure that what is being built conforms to expectations.

Item 7. Newport Beach Public Library eBranch & Database Review

Providing access to local news, events and history seems one of a public library's core functions. In that regard, the *Orange County Register* seems recently to have instituted a very useful "[virtual newspaper](#)" feature in which searchable facsimile copies of the paper as it appeared in print from November 2002 to one day before the present one can be freely viewed online. If it is not already being done, keeping library patrons informed of such things supplementing the more traditional text-based news archive databases offered by the NBPL would seem helpful.

I also think at least some patrons might appreciate being better informed about the much larger range of electronic resources (including subscriptions to a vast number of [mostly scholarly] electronic publications) freely available to the California public (but only in person) at the [UCI Libraries](#).

And I would ask my perennial question of whether the public libraries could not be better integrated into the "[California Digital Library](#)" (in which UCI seems to be a more full participant)?

Item 8. Placement of donated art in the Central Library

Although I expressed support for this at the recent City Arts Commission meeting (primarily because I thought the two Joan Irving paintings flanking the larger Rex Brandt look better than one), I don't regard Joan Irving as a major or particularly noteworthy painter and I think the symmetry would have been even better if two equal size paintings could have been found.

I further hope the Board will take no action that could be construed as a commitment to permanently display the art in a particular location, or to permanently display or retain it at all.

Finally regarding the signage that will accompany the paintings, I hope that its primary function will be to educate the public about the artists and their connection to Newport Beach and not to glorify the donors or those they designate.