

July 18, 2016, BLT Agenda Item Comments

Comments on the Newport Beach Board of Library Trustees (BLT) agenda items submitted by:
Jim Mosher (jimmosher@yahoo.com), 2210 Private Road, Newport Beach 92660 (949-548-6229)

Item 1. Minutes of the June 20, 2016 Board of Library Trustees Meeting

The passages in *italics* are from the draft with suggested changes shown in **strikeout underline** format.

Page 4: Item B.9, paragraph 1: The sentence “*After a Library Services Manager is hired, ...*” seems out of sequence. Logically, it belongs at the end of the paragraph, *after* the description of the recruitment process, rather than *before*.

Page 4: Item B.9, paragraph 2: “... *speaking about her new novel Stars Over Sunset Boulevard about Hollywood and two women who meet while working on the set of the iconic movie Gone With the Wind ~~set.~~*”

Page 4: Item B.11: “*Secretary Johnson-Tucker and NBPLF board member ~~and~~ Toby Larson provided an update ...*”

Page 5: Item VII, paragraph 2: “*On behalf of the staff he thanked John for his service, and his vision of the value of the Library and ~~of~~ his financial acumen, which are greatly appreciated.*”

Page 5: Item VII, paragraph 3: “*John noted that ~~is it~~ was a privilege to be part of this great organization. The Board thanked him and noted that he will be missed.*”

Item 3. Library Activities

Staff training, page 1 (handwritten 12?): “***Staff Training*** *The Library Administration is exploring ways and opportunities to provide more staff training. ... The budget for FY 2016/17 also allocates funds towards staff training and we will identify ways to use these funds effectively.*”

The “Expenditure Status Report” (agenda Item 4) indicates \$15,125 was allocated for “Training and Travel” in the year just ended, amended to \$18,926, of which \$10,157 was spent, leaving \$8,769 unspent. The Council-approved [Budget Detail](#) for FY 2016/17 indicates the amendment was a \$ 3,801 addition for the Literacy Services program (of which \$1,500 came from a check from the Library Foundation accepted by the Council as [Item 10](#) on October 27, 2015, and the remainder I have not been able to trace). Absent a repeat of such a gift, the Council’s FY 2016/17 budget reverts to \$0 for Literacy Services, and \$7,500 for travel and meetings by, and \$7,500 for training of, the 8.45 person Library Services Administration Division staff, with another \$100 to cover travel and meetings for the 11.77 people assigned to work at Mariners Branch and \$25 for the 3.15 employees at the Balboa Branch. It appears the proposal may be to use the funds assigned to the Administrative Division a bit more widely to train the full complement of library staff?

Survey results, page 1 (handwritten 12?): “**Survey Results** Over 500 Library customers have submitted responses to the survey. ... The Survey results are attached at the end of this report.”

It is good to see the summary of the survey results to date. It is disappointing that the survey has not been clearly agendaized for discussion by the Board (as part of a routine monthly consent calendar “Activities” report, a strict interpretation of the Brown Act may limit the Board to asking questions for clarification). Is a more thorough discussion planned for a future meeting? It is also disappointing that the Board, at least as a group, does not appear to have contributed any of the questions being asked in the survey.

My comments:

1. The written comments in response to questions 10, 11, 12 and 20 are provided. Where are the written comments received in response to the other questions (4, 6, 7, 9, 18 and 19)?
2. What is the plan for analyzing, interpreting and acting upon the results?
3. Some of the results are unexpected by me. For example, I was surprised to see the relatively low number of respondents who find it important for a modern library to provide computers, printers and photocopiers for public use. I was even more surprised to see ratings for that service were very similar to the rating for Inter Library Loan, and that a higher number and percentage of respondents rated the existing ILL service as “Excellent.” Intellectually I agree that ILL is a unique and essential service that would not be available anywhere else if it were not offered by public libraries. But one has to wonder how many of the 211 respondents who expressed an opinion about ILL at NBPL have ever actually used it? Surely the library has statistics on what fraction of visitors use ILL, the computers, printers and photocopiers, the WiFi service, the programming and the other amenities listed in the survey. How will that information be integrated into the interpretation of the survey results?

Item 6. Corona del Mar Branch Project Update

“Library staff is preparing to close the branch as soon as the project goes to bid.”

Is this a typo (or am I misunderstanding it)? The City Council has budgeted money for this project, but the bidding process (which the public can in theory monitor of the City’s [PlanetBIDs](#) webpages), and the subsequent award of a construction contract by the City Council, could take many weeks. Wouldn’t one want to leave the branch open until shortly before construction is a certainty, and actually scheduled to start?

Item 7. Statistical Comparison Report of Regional Peer Libraries

“The total amount of staff remains low in comparison to our peer group. This reflects the Library’s use of part-time staffing to maintain appropriate staffing levels on the public service desks.” Is this meant to imply that NBPL has the same levels of staffing, but some of it is somehow “not on the books” (such as using outside contract employees) compared to peer libraries? If so, some further explanation might be helpful.

Further discussion of what eBooks are offered by Enki, Hoopla, and Total Boox might also be useful, and how much they cost. The peer libraries evidently regard them as a worthwhile asset.

It would also be helpful to indicate if the budgets being reported are before or after augmentation by associated Friends and Foundation organizations.

Item 8. Proposed Library Closures for Winter Holidays 2016

I commend staff for the very clear presentation of the proposed schedule, which is a much better schedule than the one in the bad years when all library facilities were closed for a week or more.

I do not fully understand the rationale for being closed on the Mondays *following* the holidays. Working then would seem less burdensome on staff than working on the days *preceding* the holidays (Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve), when they are offering to work half days.

Item 9. Feasibility of an Auditorium Facility at the Central Library Site

“Mr. Coffee ... agreed to examine the site and identify potential locations for the facility.”

I thought the idea was to renovate and enlarge the Friends Room. Does this mean a separate facility *in addition to* the Friends Room is being considered?

Item IX. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

The Newport Beach Board of Library of Trustees was created by [Ordinance 166](#) on June 7, 1920, and reaffirmed by the public in City Charter [Section 708](#) in 1954/5.

When I began paying attention to the BLT some six years ago, I was struck both by the lack of public attendance/engagement in the Board’s activities, and by it *not* doing what I thought an administrative library board should be doing.

Six years later, I believe the Board is taking its Charter responsibilities a bit more seriously, although I think it might want to consider memorializing some of its more important decisions in formally adopted resolutions, as most other governing bodies do, so that there would be a clearer record of exactly what it and past Boards have approved, and when. A searchable database of the minutes and meeting materials would also help in that regard.

Six years later, public attendance and engagement in the Board's activities remains a major problem even though the Board, under the leadership of Chair King, has increasingly begun to allow public participation in its discussions.

With three new faces on the BLT in the past year, two of whom will be new at this meeting, it would seem an appropriate time to reassess the Board's role and its effectiveness in fulfilling that role.

In that regard, I would strongly recommend the new (and old) Board members read the 20 year old [Trustee Tool Kit for Library Leadership](#) prepared by the California Association of Library Trustees and Commissioners, an organization that now seems to have morphed or merged into the California Public Library Advocates (<http://www.cpladvocates.org/>).

I would note that CPLA offers a \$250 group membership that would include not only the Board of Trustees, but also library staff and the boards of the library's Friends and Foundation organizations. As part of the membership, they offer a free 9 to noon Saturday [training session](#) on increasing library board effectiveness.

I have no further knowledge of that program, but just as the library administrative staff is advocating increased training for library employees (in Item 3, above), it would seem to me the CPLA training seminar might be a beneficial exercise for the Board and the public, with a real potential to bring fresh ideas to Newport Beach. Such things as their suggestions for actively [recruiting](#) new Board members through advertising Board activities in the library would certainly seem new to us.

I might note that the City Arts Commission recently approved spending \$3,100 from their Commission budget to hire a facilitator for a Saturday session to reevaluate their mission (July 14, 2016, [Item 6](#)). I don't know what budget the Library Board has to fund its own board-related activities, but \$250 sounds like a bargain.