

**MINUTES  
BOARD OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS  
OF THE CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS  
April 13, 2023 – 12:00 pm  
111 Library St NE – Conference Room B**

**Anderson called the meeting to order at 12:04 pm.**

**1. ROLL CALL**

Board Members Present: Rachel Anderson, Kathryn Dilley,  
Kristin Kopec (remote via telephone from Grand Rapids,  
Kent County), Lauren Woolsey

Board Members Absent: Deborah Bose (without notice), Kelly Boston (with notice),  
Sheila Garcia Mazari (with notice)

Administration Present: Jessica Anne Bratt, John McNaughton, Meryl Wilsner,  
Katie Zychowski

Staff Present:

Public Present: Andrew Johnson

**2. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

No comments.

**3. BOARD DISCUSSION OF BOARD COMMISSIONER REMOVAL**

Anderson explains Bose's recent absences are due to a medical situation and discusses the process for a board member to leave the board. In consultation with Bose's family, the board has decided to vote her off. Anderson has drafted a memo to give Bose notice of removal and asks for edits. Dilley points out that the citation of policy needs amending. Woolsey supports the memo and the centering of Bose. Wilsner will ensure the memo is served to Bose within the time constraints.

**4. BOARD DISCUSSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY**

McNaughton discusses the intention of this meeting and explains the background of this topic. Dilley wonders if intellectual freedom is also under the umbrella of human rights. McNaughton says that's part of what the board needs to decide.

Woolsey asks if there's a precedent for public statements from the library. Bratt introduces Sally Susman's metrics for whether an institution should comment on social issues. McNaughton indicates front-facing staff receive questions from the public and the library wants to give them guidance. Zychowski discusses this in terms of the rebrand.

McNaughton confirms that while there have been internal statements to staff, there have been no public statements. McNaughton and board discuss the changing culture of libraries as a whole in terms of political alignment and social issues. Woolsey indicates silence is a political choice itself. Bratt says the idea of neutrality has shifted given the spread of disinformation and misinformation.

Kopec says it seems like two different subjects are being discussed: human rights being separate from free access to materials. Woolsey believes there's already a policy regarding books on the

shelves and intellectual freedom but wonders how the library demonstrates their values to the public. She believes it would be helpful to have a metric to determine whether the library should speak out about a topic.

There is discussion of reaching out to other libraries and not reinventing the wheel, but the conversation comes back to what the specific intention and goal of the board is. Woolsey reiterates the need for a collective understanding of how the library approaches public statements, commenting on issues directly related to the library's mission. Anderson asks how staff are being affected by a lack of current guidance. Bratt delineates differences between high level board policy and day-to-day staff experience. Zychowski indicates this affects everything from displays to programs provided to room rentals. She adds that a decision making tree and standards would be incredibly helpful.

Dilley asks where to begin in creating that decision making tree. Woolsey asks how it would relate to the rebrand. Zychowski indicates this level of self-reflection and clarity will be a part of the rebrand. Kopec feels the discussion has been positive but wonders what the next steps are. Woolsey indicates it may not be a linear process. Anderson shares both the UN Declaration of Human Rights and an ALA statement. She suggests beginning with the series of questions referenced by Bratt. Dilley agrees. McNaughton says someone from the executive staff would draft the procedure, which could then be brought to the board. The board agrees this will be taken up in the May meeting.

## **5. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Johnson is a volunteer with the Easttown Community Association. He discusses Patmos Library's defunding and was surprised not to find a statement on GRPL's website. Now having listened to today's discussion he understands more of the complexities and ramifications of making a public statement. He discusses other library systems in the country who are taking very progressive stances and wonders if GRPL could do something similar.

## **6. ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 12:59.