

**Library Advisory Board Minutes: April 9, 2024**For Multnomah County Library Advisory Board

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The Multnomah County Library Advisory Board (LAB) met virtually on Tuesday, April 9, 2024. The meeting began at 5:03 pm.

Board members present were: Cassie Duprey, David Jarvis, Domiè Newton, Hazel Burke, Jade Chan, Kate Fleming, Kelsey Fong, Kristi Ketchum, Mabel Reed, Madison Riethman, Megan Parrot, and Nikia Kae Solbjor. Clare Wilkinson, Gabie Mbenza-Ngoma, Lizzie Martinez, and Taryn Sauer were unavailable.

Staff members present were: Annie Lewis, deputy director; Dave Ratliff, integrated services director; Ellie Avis, collections manager; Johnette Easter, HR director; Maddelyn High, management analyst; Shawn Cunningham, director of communications and strategic initiatives; Sonja Ervin, equity and inclusion manager; and Vailey Oehlke, director of libraries.

**WELCOME & CHECK-IN**

Meeting attendees joined the virtual meeting either via video or phone and participated in a warm-up exercise in virtual breakout rooms.

**UPDATES FROM LIBRARY LEADERSHIP**

Library Director Vailey Oehlke shared recent systemwide updates, including:

- Recent news coverage on fentanyl sale/use downtown and police activity near Central Library, reminding that, as public places, libraries see firsthand the crises folks are experiencing in our community. MCL has a responsibility to keep libraries welcoming for all, and address these complex issues with care and consideration. Oehlke noted that the library is working with the county and City of Portland on several mitigation strategies, including stronger connections with services providers offering support services at the county and elsewhere. Oehlke and other library staff reminded that library staff receive both mandatory and optional training to address difficult situations with patrons.
- Oehlke reminded LAB members about their role as ambassadors for the library, and that part of that role is lifting up questions and concerns folks hear in their respective communities or that folks have themselves. Oehlke expressed gratitude to LAB members for continuing to serve this role.

**BOARD BUSINESS**

Meeting minutes for the March 12, 2024 meeting were approved. LAB committee members then shared brief updates on committee work:

- The library's budget presentation is on Thursday May 23. Finance Committee members (David Jarvis, Kelsey Fong, and Taryn Sauer) are representing LAB and presenting highlights from CBAC work. Oehlke and Katie Shifley expressed thanks to presentation volunteers, and for LAB members' important role in budget development.
- Membership recruitment closes April 30 and 11 applications have been received so far. High reminded that LAB will vote to recommend new members at the June meeting.

High also reminded that a special LAB member tour of the renovated Central Library (post bond work) is scheduled for April 16 at 5:30 pm.

### **INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM + COLLECTIONS**

Integrated Services Director Dave Ratliff (he/they) introduced Collections Manager Ellie Avis (she/her). Ratliff expressed gratitude to Avis, who, above and beyond her normal workload, is managing purchasing for opening day collections at new/renovated libraries included in the bond.

Ratliff explained that his team (Integrated Services) manages the full lifecycle of a library material from purchasing to cataloging to database management to retirement, and including interlibrary loans for materials that MCL loans out or borrows to/from other library systems.

Ratliff gave an overview of collections management at MCL, sharing several statistics:

- MCL's proposed annual collection budget for Fiscal Year 2025 is \$8.6 million, or 7.5% of MCL's total operating budget (this percentage varies greatly among library systems). This budget includes print and electronic materials, databases, streaming services, and more.
- The budget for hardcopy materials is about \$3.6 million (and includes magazines, DVDs, and CDs — all of which are still in-demand formats).
- The budget for ebooks is about ~\$4 million, and includes audiobooks.
- Databases and streaming services (like Kanopy and Hoopla) comprise roughly \$1.6 million of the total collections budget. These services often charge per use.
- Costs for opening day collections for major bond project buildings come from a separate fund (~\$6.5 million of bond funds are dedicated for this).

Ratliff shared that MCL has fully-supported collections in Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. In addition, the library's Black Cultural Library Advocates and Indigenous Teams curate cultural collections specific to those communities. This work is predominantly done by six selections staff, representing the amount of time involved in sourcing quality collections. Four other materials selectors staff manage other collections: adult, children's, ebooks, and databases and streaming content (with some overlap between).

Ratliff also shared some of the changes happening in collections related to bond work and technology implementation. In particular, implementation of a new Intelligent Materials Management System (IMMS) will improve efficiency and specificity of collections at different library

locations. IMMS allows for automatic routing of materials to a location that needs them, as items are checked in; and it involves mapping every single library shelf. Once fully implemented, this will result in fuller shelves containing items most frequently demanded at locations, and the collection will be shared across all library locations. Dave affirmed that the library's overall collection is not getting smaller, but where it lives is changing. Materials movement is increasingly being handled through the new Operations Center, where about a quarter of the library's total collection lives until it moves to a public library location (35-45% of MCL's collection is checked out at any given time, and about 40% of materials are processed via the holds system).

Avis shared some additional trends, noting that for Fiscal Year 2023, 3.1 million physical library items and 5.8 million digital items were checked out. Avis shared a graphic of the collection development cycle (select and acquire, catalog and process, circulate and promote, and maintain and evaluate); and explained that decisions about collections development are informed by many different data sets, one of which is patron demand. Other factors include trends in publishing and media (including things like professional reviews, awards lists, best sellers); patron suggestions; holds and circulation trends; and staff suggestions. Collection evaluation is very dynamic work!

In response to a question, Avis explained that the maintenance process entails evaluation and deselection. Location-based library staff are key to these functions and oversee routine maintenance and weeding of worn out content and titles that are outdated or not being used. Items are reviewed before being retired and may be replaced or kept if they have unique value.

Avis explained the concept of intellectual freedom, a key MCL value. Public libraries are bound to uphold the first amendment, which prohibits censorship based on content. As a public library, MCL has a wide audience (all of Multnomah County!), and the library provides access to materials expressing a wide variety of viewpoints. MCL allows patrons to decide for themselves what materials they'd like to use, and staff protect patron privacy about what materials are checked out.

Avis shared context about book challenges nationally (using data collected by the American Library Association), noting that there has been a recent massive spike of unique title challenges, primarily for materials focused on LGBTQ+ and BIPOC characters and issues. Avis then explained MCL's process regarding response to materials complaints. Library staff are trained to listen and answer questions and to help patrons understand the library's policies and approach; and to help folks find materials that meet their needs and interests. Challenges are managed by the Library Director's Office, in partnership with materials selectors, who review any challenged material to make sure it meets collection policy and criteria. MCL protects intellectual freedom not by acting as a gatekeeper, but by finding ways to add a broad and diverse array of materials and to keep items in the collection as long as they are still being used. As challenges arise around shifting norms and controversial topics, the library tries to provide a wide array of materials so people can learn about these issues.

Oehlke expressed thanks and gratitude to Ratliff and Avis, emphasizing that the work of these teams is core to what MCL does and offers to the community.

**ACTION ITEMS + CLOSING**

The meeting adjourned at 6:29 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

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