

**CITY OF BOULDER
BOULDER, COLORADO
BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS MEETING MINUTES**

Name of Board/ Commission: Library Commission
Date of Meeting: March 13, 2021
Contact information preparing summary: Jennifer Phares
Commission members present: Juana Gómez, Joel Koenig, Jane Sykes Wilson, Steven Frost, Scott Steinbrecher Commission members not present:
Library staff present: David Farnan, Director of Library & Arts Jennifer Phares, Deputy Library Director City staff present: Members of the public present: Joni Teter and Miho Shida (Library Champions), Dave Taylor, Stephanie Trees
Type of Meeting: Retreat Remote
<p>Agenda Item 1: 2018 BPL Master Plan goals and funding gaps [0:03:02 Audio min.] <i>Overview of 2018 Boulder Public Library Master Plan goals and funding gaps - where the library is now and what do we need to go forward – David Farnan, Library and Arts Director</i></p> <p>Master plan goals focus on maintaining library core services, not visionary services. The plan is about taking the library in its current state and use it to better serve the underserved such as older adults and Latinx. Farnan gave examples of current library programs that serve those groups such as the internet hotspot program, started during the pandemic and not sustainably funded. The early 2000s recession resulted in budget cuts for all city departments. Some of the cuts from the library were restored during the past five years but the pandemic resulted in more cuts, eroding those gains. Opening a north Boulder branch library and a Gunbarrel corner library have been requested by the community for about 30 years.</p> <p>The visionary part of the Master Plan is obtaining sustainable funding to meet the goals. For the past three to four years, the library and the Library Commission has discussed with City Council forming a library district. Farnan described that districts receive property tax revenues which are a more stable and predictable form of funding.</p> <p>The commission asked staff to clarify the library’s current Full Time Equivalent (FTE) and the FTE that were cut, how the substitute positions factor in to the library staffing and how the FTE translated into the actual number staff members. Farnan responded that the total FTE is a combination of full-time and part-time staff and the hours worked in substitute positions is approximately equal to 5 FTE over the course of a year. He was asked how much support the library receives from volunteers. They give approximately 28,000 hours (during a non-pandemic year) which is equivalent to 14% of the library’s personnel, and if they were paid staff members their wages would be more than \$500,000 annually.</p> <p>The commission asked staff to create talking points that they can share with their family, friends, council and other community members about the library’s past and current staffing levels, how critical substitutes and volunteers are to providing library services, how many staff hours it takes to manage the work contributed by volunteers, and how much more than the total FTE number is needed to keep the library open 70 hours per week.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 2: Library Commission’s position on obtaining stable funding [0:25:31 Audio min.] <i>Summary of the Library Commission’s position on obtaining stable funding for the library - Juana Gómez, Library Commission Chair</i></p> <p>For the past three to four years, the commission has focused on finding sustainable funding for the library. In the 2018 Master Plan, the commission recommended in the foreword to form a library district to establish sustainable funding. Master plan goals are based on real needs of the community, are similar to what other libraries provide to their communities, and are what a highly educated city such as Boulder should have. Gómez: we have not only the support, but a request from the community for the library to be adequate to its demands. She reported how when the commission asked other libraries that had formed districts if they would go back to being municipal libraries, unanimously the answer was “no.” District funding is more stable. It can plan for the ups and downs of the economy, budget for the community needs and facilities maintenance, and plan for new branch library facilities and operations. Gómez described the options to form a library district outlined in Colorado Revised Statute and shared information about the community engagement and petition process the Library Champions completed in 2019.</p>

Commissioner's current recommendation to City Council is to work with the Boulder County Commissioners to form a library district by resolution, negotiate an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) and then go to the voters because the IGA spells out how the tax revenues will be spent.

Koenig said the COVID issues have magnified the difference between municipal and district libraries. Districts have been able to maintain their previous services.

Agenda Item 3: Key information from the Feb. 23, 2021 City Council study session [0:37:56 Audio min.]

Discussion of key information from the Feb. 23, 2021 City Council study session on governance and stable funding options for the library

Gómez summarized the Feb. 23, 2021 for the retreat attendees. She noted that a staff recommendation was not provided and that council asked for one at the upcoming April 20, 2021 public hearing. Farnan clarified that the City Manager will decide if there will be a staff recommendation. Gómez asked Farnan to share why district funding is more stable funding. He described property values have remained consistent in Boulder and for many other districts in Colorado they have increased. In the case where there was a decline in property taxes, the district has a two-year lag time to plan to address the decline in revenue.

Gómez commented how this instability translates through to the community members with such issues as: I don't get to order my books from another library, I don't get to take my kids to story hour, I can't access the internet or a computer, etc. Steinbrecher said a way to understand stability is that property taxes are pretty stable, but a municipal library is subject to the business cycle of sales taxes, competing with other priorities for the city budget and to political whims. Sykes Wilson asked if the IGA has a standard legal framework with a few decisions to be negotiated such as assets, HR, and technology and if there is a period of time in which it can be renegotiated if things aren't working. Farnan responded the expiration/renewal of the IGA would be written into its terms. Teter commented that 85 to 90% of the IGA is standard language that would not change with rest being negotiable and able to be revisited, e.g. administrative services. Items such as the transfer of facilities would need to be longer term for stability.

There was interest from some council members during the Feb. 23, 2021 study session to follow the commission's request to form a committee of council members, commission members, Library Champions, Boulder County Commissioners and City staff to draft an IGA. The results of the council straw poll during the study session was a majority (5 members) of council does not support a TABOR election in 2021 for a library district due in part to it conflicting with the vote to extend the Community Culture and Safety (CCS) Tax.

Teter asked to share this link with the group as an example of how property taxes in Boulder have been stable: Colorado homeowners accumulated an average of \$32,000 in home equity last year per [Denver Post article](#). Farnan shared that the tax impact to the average homeowner is about \$17 per month, i.e. having a robust public library system costs about 1/3 of the cost of what households pay for internet. Shida said a point that is confusing is the assessed value vs. the sale value.

Sykes Wilson asked if we know what might be coming after the CCS tax renewal. She thinks that the commission and champions are poised and ready to with district formation and tax ballot decision. If the decision is postponed it could face competition from other ballot items. She thinks there is a mood in Boulder that the library has community value and people are willing to give non-profits; if we put it off, people may become fatigued post pandemic and not be as willing to raise taxes.

Agenda Item 4: Library Champions district strategy

[1:15:29 Audio min.]

Library Champions strategy for forming a library district to date – Joni Teter, Library Champions

In response to Teter's inquiry, staff indicated that the council parameters for public participation at a public hearing are outlined on the city's site [here](#).

The argument opposed to a 2021 district tax measure concerns how the city's economy has been hit so hard due to the pandemic. Small local businesses (especially services) have been hit hard. Businesses pay about four times as much property tax as a residence. The champions asked council to consider give a tax break in the form of a rebate or grant (that could be built into the IGA if it is a way the library could help small businesses) to small businesses. Once council gets an economic update and can find a way to ameliorate the impact to small businesses, then we can decide if a 2021 district tax measure makes sense. Sykes Wilson asked what percentage of businesses are small and locally owned. Teter suggested that Boulder Chamber of Commerce may have that information. Shea said the commercial property taxes typically get passed through to commercial leases.

Another factor is the County is considering a 2021 housing tax. Council has until August 2021 to put a district tax on the ballot. If the district/tax measure is done by petition, the deadline is May 2021 which is challenging. Teter thinks the most important 2021 accomplishment is to form the district with the current council. She thinks the committee is a good idea so an IGA can be defined.

One of the other tasks in 2021 is to educate the new candidates for City Council.

Agenda Item 5: Discussion of current Library District Strategy

[1:35:07 Audio min.]

- *Will the Library Champions reinitiate a petition? Is there funding? Are there volunteers to do the work?*

Sykes Wilson asked if the petition signatures collected in 2019 are still valid and if not, can everything be accomplished to form a district and get the tax measure on the 2021 ballot. Teter: in theory the signatures are still valid, but it may be difficult to get a definitive confirmation in a timely manner. She thinks if the champions were to reinitiate a petition on April 21, 2021, they could get 100 signatures and turn them in to the county by the May 2021 deadline. Farnan said the county prefers that new signatures be collected.

- *Should the Library Commission/Champions bring in Patrick Sweeney of EveryLibrary?*

Sykes Wilson asked if EveryLibrary has determined how the landscape has changed for library district since the pandemic. Teter said approximately two to three dozen library district initiatives were on the ballot nationally with all passing but two. Teter said she will wait to reconnect with EveryLibrary after April 20, 2021, and that Congress passing a funding bill for libraries speaks to the climate and that people recognize the value of libraries.

Gómez asked for a straw poll of commissioners in favor of holding the district tax vote in 2021. Gómez, Sykes Wilson, Koenig, and Frost are in favor of 2021 district tax measure. Steinbrecher prefers to wait until 2022 because the August-September timeframe for soliciting input from the community is unknown in terms of the pandemic. Steinbrecher: although the economy seems to be doing well, we don't know what it will look like in four to five months; given the upcoming changes on council, the current council may not want to be put in the position of making a decision, and the issues around Gallagher need to shake out. He asked how the commission neatly packages the information about district formation for the community and if the district tax can be positioned as revenue neutral. He commented that although some people are doing well due to the increase in housing values, there are older people that are "house rich" and "cash poor." Further, the impact of remote work on Boulder's demographics and how those potential new community members will vote is unknown.

Farnan advised the commission to think through the political implications and shared that the county does not support going forward with a district if council is not on board. Teter said the question of who pays for the cost of the election was not resolved last year.

Frost thinks the argument to wait is flawed because we never know what will happen in the future. If support of the current council is obtained, he thinks the commission should move forward. He sees it as a brand-new beginning for everyone in Boulder. The library is doing so much with so little, and this is the second time in a decade that it has been put under budget constraints. People respect the library and its staff and telling the community's stories could be part of the campaign. If the commission can make sense of the statistics for the voters, he thinks it will pass. Sykes Wilson thinks that if the commission can get past the hurdles of getting the issue on the ballot there is a strong argument to be made for getting the library sustainable funding now, given the disruption and reduced access young learners, underserved community members, and older adults have withstood during the past year. Delaying action further will negatively impact the library access to the next generation of young readers. Koenig expressed frustration at the length of time this issue has been discussed. He thinks the commission should move forward.

Farnan and Teter urged the commission to determine the outcome they are hoping for from the April 20, 2021 meeting. Teter thinks it is important for council to know what it means to the community not to have full access to the library. The commissioners collectively and/or individually can urge council to create the district so that funding decision can be put to voters.

Gómez said that the ideal outcome of the April 20, 2021 meeting is that council forms a district by resolution and then drafts the IGA. Given the weight of the decision for council, Gómez recommends the upcoming commission draft a letter requesting that council at least forms a committee to draft an IGA. Steinbrecher suggested that the commissioners and other interested parties should plan to frame their April 20th public comment and state what they hope council will do. Farnan asked the commission to consider the timeline for their ideal outcome: form a district now (April 20, 2021), seat a library board, and begin negotiating the IGA with the City and County. It will be difficult to accomplish seating the board and negotiating the IGA before the deadline of completing the tax measure for the 2021 ballot. Teter agreed it would be difficult to hit the 2021 deadline with the waiting period for public comment for the resolution. Gómez concurred that the timing may be too tight to have the tax measure in 2021. Sykes Wilson asked the commission and champions if they could,

ahead of the meeting on April 20, 2021, voice that the situation the library is facing is a combination of COVID and financial impacts. Teter agreed and said the message should come from both commission and champions. The champions are organizing comments from community members in Gunbarrel, Niwot, members of the historical society, etc. that other libraries are open now and serving patrons and our library cannot because it doesn't have the resources.

Farnan again urged commission to request what they would like council to do: form a committee, negotiate the IGA by July 2021, and form the district by resolution in October 2021, and vote on funding the district in 2022. Steinbrecher agreed with this approach and said there are two steps: informing the public about the issue and framing it for council and non-library city staff.

Additional questions from Commissioner Gómez

[2:33:39 Audio min.]

1. What is the cost of the North Boulder Branch Library?
The current estimate is approximately \$10.5 million. The bids close soon.
2. How is the library responding the issue of some of the Dr. Seuss titles that have racist language?
The library adheres to the American Library Association's Right to Read. The library does not censor anything. Staff recognizes that many children's classics have stereotyped images which are in some cases racist. We hope to provide parents and caregivers the tools to read and discuss those with their children themselves.
3. Will the library receive any of the funds appropriated by Congress in the Restore Act?
We are uncertain if the library will receive any of those funds. We may for reimbursement of the hotspot program costs.

Agenda Item 6: Departure of Commissioner Gómez

[2:36:14 Audio min.]

The group appreciated Commissioner Gómez for her leadership, support and service to the library and the community!

Agenda Item 7: Adjournment

[2:42:07 Audio min.]

There being no further business to come before the commission at this time, the retreat meeting was adjourned.

Date, time, and location of next meeting:

The next Library Commission meeting will be at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, April 7, 2021, through a virtual setting.

Commissioner Sykes Wilson approved these minutes on April 7, 2021; and Celia Seaton attested to it.