

**MILWAUKEE PUBLIC LIBRARY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
SPECIAL MEETING  
MINUTES  
Tuesday June 3, 2008  
Central Library Meeting Room 1  
814 W. Wisconsin Ave.**

**PRESENT:** Sharon Cook, John Gurda, Ald. Ashanti Hamilton, Art Harrington, Joan Prince, David Riemer, Kathy Williams, Ald. Terry Witkowski and Paula Kiely

**EXCUSED:** Charlene Hardin, Marty Schreiber

**STAFF** Chris Arkenberg, Meg Diaz, Bruce Gay, Kelly Hughbanks, Joan Johnson, Sue  
**PRESENT:** Knorr, Joan Larson, Dawn Lauber, Sandra Melcher, Sandy Rusch Walton, Karen Radtke, Taj Schoening, Virginia Schwartz, Crystal Sura, Linda Szweda, Paul Wilant, Judy Zemke

**OTHERS** Mark Nicolini, Budget and Management  
**PRESENT:** Eric Pearson, Budget and Management  
Paula Dorsey, AFSCME Local 426  
Calvin Lee, AFSCME

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President David Riemer called the meeting of the Milwaukee Public Library Board of Trustees to order at 10:15 a.m. on May 15, 2008 with a quorum present. Trustees Harrington and Prince participated by conference phone. Trustee Harrington left at 11:10 a.m. and President Reimer left at 11:53 a.m.; Vice-President Gurda assumed the chair at 11:53 a.m.

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**PUBLIC COMMENT** Citizen Ms. Rose stated her name and addressed the board. Ms. Rose stated that the city needs more libraries. The City of Milwaukee's contracting out for services and refusal to hire the citizens who live in the city is one of the main reasons perpetuating the high tax cost to the rest of the City of Milwaukee. The library needs to redefine the true needs of the department. The decision to close at least four libraries is without economical basis. Nowhere is there proof or justification showing the need to close. The budget shows no cost factors for the individual libraries because everything is lumped together. Ms. Rose challenges the library to show the economic cost of such, for each and every library, that may be closed. The 2006 report shows increases of use especially at Atkinson and Villard Avenue. Use should not be criteria for closing. The decision should be based on the need in our neighborhoods for a library within walking distance.

Citizen Helen Harris stated that the Board needs to keep libraries open. Libraries have always been an important part of her life and she wants that for today's children. Milwaukee has a crisis in literacy. Ms. Harris commented that the Board is in place to maintain this library system and the citizens of Milwaukee trust that they will do so. She encouraged the Board not to take a defeatist attitude but to do whatever it takes to keep libraries open because the children deserve it. She mentioned the declining number of librarians in the public schools and that when she was a teacher she relied heavily on the public library. She acknowledged that services are changing and the library needs to promote itself to be used fully by the community – to be embraced by the people.

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1. **MPL Budget.** Budget and Management Director Mark Nicolini distributed a handout titled Limits on Milwaukee's Fiscal Capacity. Mr. Nicolini noted that communication between the budget office and the city departments is important during the complex budget process. He summarized the handout stating that in Wisconsin, in comparison to other states, local governments have very little own-source taxing authority. The end result, due to a number of factors, is that the State Shared Revenue to municipalities has declined by 34% in real terms since 1997. Mr. Nicolini continued to review the allocation process. He suggested that in budget planning, the Mayor, Common Council, Board and Library Administration need to define what a successful library system is. The library may not want to define success specifically on the number of materials circulated, especially moving toward the age of digital divide and twenty-first century literacy. As a performance measure of success, program services may become more important than traditional services. In evaluating facilities, access, hours and service delivery, library administration will have to determine if the library is able to provide the city services that are expected at every neighborhood library. Opportunities in technology and partnerships need to be explored. Technology may be examined as a means to achieve operating savings. MPL also has to be mindful of their relationship with the Milwaukee County Federated Library System. Every city department is facing difficulties regarding service levels and change. There is not the opportunity to continue service at the level that is currently being delivered. Departments will need to work together to improve the overall fiscal capacity. President Riemer entertained questions from the Board. Trustee Gurda asked how are some other cities raising money? Trustee Witkowski commented that the state limits property taxes and we can't tax above the limits. Trustee Harrington expressed his gratitude to Mr. Nicolini for his presentation. Library Director Paula Kiely distributed the following: a letter dated March 20, 2008 from Mayor Barrett; Description of Budget Changes – 2009 Budget Request (Form BMD-2a); map of Milwaukee Public Libraries; and a map indicating the Density of Cardholders. Ms. Kiely stated that the library's budget allocation target for 2009 is \$15,567,000. That is a 9.1% decrease over the 2008 adopted budget and an 11.1% reduction to the cost-to-continue budget. Over \$2 million in reductions were needed to meet the allocation. Since 1997, the library's budget has been reduced resulting in a very lean operation. Reducing hours throughout the MPL system was studied. To get to a savings of \$2 million, with all libraries in operation, hours would need to be reduced by 50%. After ten years of cuts, something fundamental needs to change. Based on discussions with the Budget Office it appears the 2009 budget is not a temporary setback and the fiscal status of the city is long-term. Library Administration worked diligently to find options other than closing buildings, but only small incremental savings could be found. Therefore the recommendation is to have fewer libraries with more hours and same services. By closing certain libraries, the savings can be found not only in maintaining the facility, but also in materials and personnel. A 27% reduction in hours would be realized. Closing libraries impacts communities but same services could be available in fewer buildings. Library Foundation Director Meg Diaz gave a brief position of the MPL Foundation Board. Ms. Diaz stated that the Foundation has enthusiastically supported the library for twenty years. The Foundation is passionate about their desire to find private

1. **MPL Budget.** (continued)

sources of support for the library. The Foundation Board holds their role very firm to raise private resources for library programs and materials that take the library to the next level but are not the base source of support for library operations. They will not supplant the City's responsibility for funding library operations. Ms. Diaz added that many people recognize that the library is a treasure in the community and understand the value that it brings to a neighborhood.

President Riemer entertained questions from the Board. Trustee Cook asked about the Board's role with the Common Council and about a strategy in dealing with the legislature for the long-term. President Riemer responded that the Board's duty is to make sure the library system functions well. The Board's role is not necessarily to get involved in intergovernmental conversations. Trustee Cook asked whose decision is it to close a library. Ms. Kiely responded that the authority is at the Board level. Vice-President Gurda expressed concern over the firestorms that will likely result from libraries closing. Trustee Witkowski stated that there are no easy options and there will be firestorms. In the last 10 years, DPW and DCD have also been cut. The Health Department is much smaller than in the past. It's the role of the Budget Office and the Mayor to make recommendations about the budget. He is the alderman for a higher taxed area that does not get the same city service from police, fire or sanitation as other districts, so to make library service less convenient is another political factor. Alderman Witkowski also raised the issue of suburban libraries and how they will be impacted. He stated that he expects the recommendation for any closings or other options to come from the Director based on her research. Trustee Hamilton stated that he cannot support closing libraries. We must look for creative solutions. There must be other places we could cut rather than libraries; they are too important. President Riemer suggested that the decision on what libraries to close include circulation data, age and cost of maintaining buildings. Director Kiely stated that the need of the library neighborhood is also an important consideration. The maps were reviewed. Trustee Williams agreed that the impact on particular neighborhoods needs to be addressed. She added that income, educational levels, single parent households and the ability of the people in those particular communities to have other options should be some of the factors studied. Trustee Witkowski suggested that the locations of suburban libraries should be considered. He also stated that he liked the idea of the "express library" option. Ms. Kiely responded that the concept of the express library is to enhance, not replace libraries – to reach a certain segment of patrons with quick and technical service – but they could mitigate some of the loss of service. The Board agreed that Library Administration should present a recommendation to the Board. Future Board discussions will take place.

Informational item.

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2. **Other New Business.** None.

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On a motion made by Trustee Hamilton and seconded by Trustee Witkowski, the Milwaukee Public Library Board of Trustees meeting of June 3, 2008 was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

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