

**Library Board of Trustees
August 16, 2023, 12:00 p.m.**

Board Members Present: Dr. Marlene Preston, Chair
Mr. Chris Becke (virtual)
Ms. Mary Lynn Leffel
Ms. Julie Patterson
Dr. Brandi Porter

Dr. Preston called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

Dr. Preston announced Chris Becke had notified her in writing that he would be traveling back to town from a work-related meeting in Lynchburg and unavailable to attend the meeting in person; therefore, he requested to attend virtually.

MOTION: That the Board permit Chris Becke to attend virtually from Lynchburg due to a work-related meeting.

MOTION: Ms. Leffel

SECOND: Dr. Porter

VOTE: Unanimous

Dr. Preston announced there would be a limit of five speakers for Public Comment Period, with a 3-minute time limit per speaker, and citizens who do not have an opportunity to address the Board may submit their comments through the online comment form.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Glenda Buchanan, Buchanan District

"I've heard several of you say that the Rainbow collection of children's library books are meant mainly for that certain little child who might be questioning his or her gender. The child who may have no other resource but the library to get answers from. But, upon reading some of them, it quickly became clear to me that these books are intended for every child to read. I can tell that both by the language that is used and the story lines. One of the things I take exception with is the targeted separation of biological truth and parental observation of that truth, from a child's perception. These books tell a child they might be a boy or a girl or neither or both. They begin instructing children at age four, and even younger, to question what they see with their own eyes, and to question what certain adults, like their parents, happen to call them. Then they insert a whole new vocabulary: binary and non-binary, cisgender, transgender, and on and on to the point that one little book explains there are too many genders to name in a book. (It Feels Good to be Yourself – A Book About Gender Identity) It also explains to the reader that he or she might feel like one gender in the morning, and a completely different one by afternoon. These books give permission to playing gender dress up every day, together with a secret and on-going game of "guess which gender I am, if you can!". To hop into the future for a brief bit, and I know we're not talking about schools here, but to show an example of where these little books can lead, the New York State Education Department has recommended that teachers lie to parents if a child wants to socially transition at school without the parent's consent. They also recommend that all schools adopt the National Sex Education Standards, which introduce "gender identity" in kindergarten and teach children about puberty blockers by 5th grade. Now, as I look around this room, I see a group of men and women. I have no way of knowing if one or more of you identify as "ze" or "hir" or "they". I don't know how a child could be able to tell, either, and that makes me feel a little angry. Neither I, nor any child I know, had any gender confusion at all until some nefarious adult set about making up so many gender combinations

that, there are “too many to name in a book”. The head of the American Library Association (ALA) is, as you know, a self-proclaimed Marxist Lesbian. She recently said its very important to her to be a Marxist Lesbian. Can there be any question about what kind of books she’d like to line every library shelf with, never mind what books she’s already taken off? Perhaps its time to get out of the ALA altogether like several other counties and states have already done. Just a thought, something to consider.”

Ken Conklin, Amsterdam District

“Good afternoon. I’m Ken Conklin. I’m an author, poet, and book publisher and an 18-year resident of the Amsterdam District. I’ve read it’s been suggested you consider that when 13–17-year-olds visit the library that they be accompanied by an adult, except for 16- and 17-years olds if they have parental permission to do so. I’m here to briefly talk about why I’m against putting up barriers that will result in limiting our teenagers’ access to Botetourt County libraries. I love being around books. Those who visit my home will see a large bookshelf in our living room, and books placed in other rooms of our home. And I’m absolutely sure that this compulsion to be surrounded by books came about because of the countless hours I spent in public libraries while growing up. Those times are what fueled my lifelong love of books and served to inspire me to become a writer myself. The Panorama City Library in the suburbs of Los Angeles was a ten-minute bike ride from my home. I was there often. But once I had my own car, I was able to explore other libraries, especially the main one in downtown Los Angeles. This may sound passe now, but for a 16-year-old, it was literally eye opening to discover sitting on shelves the works of Hemingway, Steinbeck, Orwell, Dumas, Dostoevsky, and J.D. Salinger. I also learned about compelling periodicals such as the Atlantic Monthly and Sports Illustrated. In those days I also played the trumpet. A friend of mine who played the French horn, and I were members of the Los Angeles Junior Philharmonic Orchestra. At that downtown library we would check out the sheet music of symphonies, especially ones that had a lot of brass like Tchaikovsky’s 5th Symphony. We did that so we could play along as we listened to a recording of the music. Those experiences help drive my appreciation for all forms of music. Sometimes I let my parents know what I was up to, but mostly I didn’t. I certainly would not have asked their permission to go to the library. My business was my business. I wanted to create my own place in the world, one that they never would have understood. But, of course, it wasn’t until I was twenty-five that I realized that they were actually smart and knew exactly what I was up to. This proposal that has been suggested you consider prompted me to research what 16-year-olds can do in Virginia without parental permission. There are several, but here are two examples. If one reviews Chapter 7, Section 308.7 of Virginia Code 18.2 you can conclude that a 16-year-old can possess a hunting rifle without their parent’s approval. A second example is that it is lawful for 16-year-olds to have consensual sexual intercourse without their parent’s approval. The legal age is 15. So, if 16-year-olds can legally do either of these on their own, let’s not prohibit them from using their own free will to go to a library. Perhaps they will have the same mind-expanding experiences many of us had by being in a roomful of books. After all, they are our future generation. Thank you.”

Ann Palmer, Fincastle District

Ms. Palmer expressed concerned over some of the books in Botetourt County libraries. She stated she had to interrupt her workday to attend the meeting to address her concerns, which was heartbreaking for her. She questioned if everyone’s grandparents would be okay with these books being in the library. She stated she did not have one particular book with her, but she wished she could show a picture from the book because it is pornography. She stated we are on a slippery slope and every slope hits the bottom at some point. She stated if someone wants to purchase these books to learn about these things, they can purchase them on their own through Amazon and they don’t need to get them at the public library. She stated when her

children were young and visited the libraries, she never had to worry about what they would see there.

Charles Ruhl, Fincastle District

Mr. Ruhl stated everyone knew his opinion that the books are inappropriate. He stated there is a new eBook available called Sex is a Funny Word, with very childlike images but the text is about being naked, and this book is designed for 8–11-year-olds. He stated Dr. Scothorn's suggestion for a policy change does not prevent a child from coming across an inappropriate book online. He reported he was recently at a meeting with Governor Youngkin, and a library staff person told him that books like that have been moved to the adult section under "Parenting". He stated some other libraries have moved books behind the counter if they seemed controversial. He stated he knows someone who is connected to the Roanoke County Library and she indicated to him that some of the books are being removed, so it can be done here too.

Alex Stewart, Buchanan District

Mr. Stewart stated he was there to express his appreciation for the total and consistent satisfaction for the staff at the libraries. He stated his daughter loves going to the library. He commended the Library Board and Board of Supervisors for their resolute defense of freedom of speech throughout this eight-month campaign in which staff had to endure slander and rudeness at many moments. He stated his appreciation for what the Board had done for our rights to stand up for access and free speech. He called on the Library Board to reject the proposal to increase the age to 18 because high school kids need access to libraries.

FINCASTLE LIBRARY UPDATE

Sarah Rodgers, Fincastle Library Branch Manager, offered an update highlighting the following activities and events:

- Summer Learning Challenge. Over the summer, there were 7,800 visitors in the library with multiple programs such as Little Critters, Larsons Lizards, and three Space Art programs with 131 attendees. She noted one program was in partnership with the Library of Virginia, which was a mobile unit offering genealogy research. This mobile unit had 25 visitors, which was the largest to date in the state.
- Friends of the Library offered two prizes for the Summer Learning Challenge. The grand prize was a trip to the National Air and Space Museum in DC. Another prize was a telescope. The prizes were sponsored by the Friends of the Library.
- Hours of operation were extended, and one family expressed appreciation because the only time she could visit the library was after work.
- There will be an evening Story Time starting in the fall.
- One patron has family that lives in New England and she inquired about doing a Story Time virtually. Staff worked with her, and they are now meeting weekly, and have been for months. The patron mails tactile accessories to her family members and they work on things together virtually.
- A teenager was interested in a Mother/Daughter book club and library staff recommended books for them, including some authors they had not heard of before.
- There is a book drop off service at The Glebe.
- There is a genealogy room at the Fincastle Library and staff have received many requests for assistance with genealogy. There have also been patrons from out of state.
- Staff will be continuing Little Explorers and Story Time this fall and also adding afterschool activities.

- Mill Mountain Theater is presenting a music program this fall. The program is based on a children's book series, Wings of Fire, which includes 15 books in the series. The library has 17 of the books and they have been checked out over 1,200 times.
- There are morning and evening book clubs for adults.
- Financial planning programs are available.
- In partnership with the Parks and Recreation Office, a fitness series called Forever Fit is available.
- Mike Pulice will host an event for anyone interested in learning how to add their property to the Historic Register.
- Jon Lanford will be offering an update on the Courthouse project.
- Computer classes will begin in the fall.

UNATTENDED MINORS POLICY

Dr. Preston explained the current policy states children under age 13 must be accompanied by a responsible adult aged 18 or older. She noted there has been a proposal made to the Board to change the age of 13 to 18, or 16/17 with written parental permission. She further explained that under the current policy teenagers do have library cards that are under parent control and the parent can view every item checked out by their child.

MOTION: To uphold parental rights by maintaining the current policy.

MOTION: Ms. Patterson

SECOND: Ms. Leffel

Dr. Preston asked if there was any discussion before the vote.

Dr. Porter stated she had heard almost 100% community support to keep the current policy.

Ms. Patterson stated she upholds parents' right to guide their child and that's why she made the motion.

Dr. Porter stated she saw no rationale for why the Board would change this policy. She noted every comment that had come forward to her had been to keep the current policy. She noted as a parent of a teenager herself, the idea of adding more restrictions didn't seem rational.

Dr. Preston stated she had heard from parents that they appreciate the flexibility of dropping their kids off at the library. She stated we want our teenagers in the libraries, and she would rather they be there than at the mall.

Mr. Becke stated he had been in communication with instructors at BTEC, and other educators, and because about 30% of citizens don't have internet, they rely on the libraries to do their research. He concluded he was in favor of maintaining the current policy.

D. Porter stated she worried that changing the policy would send a message that teens are not welcome at the library.

Dr. Preston agreed and noted parents are dropping off their teens, or they are driving themselves there.

Mr. Clinton stated although he was not a voting member, he did agree with the discussion and decision to maintain the current policy.

Dr. Preston called for a vote on the motion made by Ms. Patterson.

VOTE: Unanimously approved.

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Julie Phillips, Library Director, offered the following report:

- The exterior mural at the Buchanan Library has been approved by the Buchanan Town Planning Commission and Town Council. The mural artist should finish work this week, and work will begin on the memorial garden and wall sign soon.
- The Eagle Rock Library will share a new well with the Eagle Rock Elementary School. The well is located on school property, and work should be completed within 1-2 months.
- The Summer Learning Challenge was a success. The team will meet this week to evaluate the challenge and start planning for next year. Some highlights include:
 - The community read a collective 1,255,598 pages, which exceeded the community goal of 500,000 pages.
 - Almost 1,000 people registered in the Beanstack app, earning over 9,000 activity badges.
 - Over 1,700 people attended library programs throughout the summer, with some events bringing over 100 people.
- The library will test-drive a new mobile app in September, and if everything works well, will launch to the public in October.
- The Eagle Rock Library has some staff changes. The current Library Supervisor will move into a part-time Community Programming Coordinator position, and the current Team Leader will move into a Branch Manager position on Monday, August 21. A part-time staff member has been promoted to a full-time role in the same Library Assistant position.
- Average visitors 2,000 per week
- September – National Library Card sign-up month. We let people know what we provide and how to get a library card.
- We have free notary services at all libraries.
- We do test proctoring.
- Asking current patrons to give us input. How does the library help you? What would work better?
- Amazing team has been doing great work. So proud of what we have accomplished.

BOARD COMMENTS

Ms. Leffel thanked Ms. Phillips for her report and all the positive news. She stated Ms. Phillips, and her staff, have the full support of the Library Board, the community, and the Board of Supervisors.

Ms. Patterson stated her daughter needed a place to work on some things and the Fincastle Library made her feel welcome and she agreed the Board appreciates Ms. Phillips and her staff.

Dr. Preston stated they were all very grateful to the Board of Supervisors for their support and especially the library staff. She stated the Board acts in concert with the sentiment from the Board of Supervisors that the library staff has their full support, and they are proud of the work they do. She thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 12:46 p.m.