

Notes from Munjoy Neighborhood Meeting  
October 14, 2008 7 PM

Attending: Trustees: Morris Fisher, Nathan Smith, Taffy Field, David Brenerman, Peter Merrill, Ted Spitzer

Staff: Steve Podgajny, Wendy Nowell, Jerri Blatt

Attending from the public – 10

Meeting began at 7:10

Nathan Smith welcomed all to the meeting and introduced the trustees and Steve Podgajny. He explained that we would be giving an introduction to the Library System followed by comments and questions regarding what the Library is doing right, not right, what it could do in the future as well as where the Library will be going in the near future and the fiscal difficulties involved.

The presentation complements the handouts and all the documents and presentations are on the web-site as well as the MOU with the EECS. There are six branch locations with various dates associated with them. Munjoy was at Adams School for many years and it recently moved to EECS in a joint participation started by the City Council. The first MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) ended June 30, 2008 and the second is currently in effect.

The mission of the Library is to serve the Greater Portland Community by providing books, programs, etc. There are 19 Trustees with 12 living in Portland. Of the seven who do not live in Portland, five have full time jobs in Portland. The System lent more than 807,000 items last year, a record. Hours open and public computers are extremely important for a vast segment of the community. Many adult use the computers for many reasons and they were used over 126,000 times used last year.

There were over 131,000 Reference questions answered and over 25,300 people attended programs, mostly at the main library. Lending has gone up after 4 years of flat or decreasing lending. The Library had 51 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) employees in June 2008. On the FTE count – Many think that places have grown since their taxes have grown but we have less now than we did in years past. The numbers have gone up and down; often due to stresses in the economy.

Efficiency has gone up in the lending per FTE which is a big benefit from technology. Visits are also up – and are not passive – many are involving interactions with the staff who are making sure the patrons have good experience.

On the New England Region Statistics – of all the North Eastern branches, we have the most branches per 10,000 and the lending per capita is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest after Hartford.

The budget – \$3.8 million – is 86 % from government, including the State Library giving \$184,000 which allows all Cumberland and York Counties to get cards. We could not make this up by charging fees for out of district users. On the income side (outside of government funds), the funds come from investments, operations (copies, fees, etc.) and fundraising.

On the expenses side – Personnel is highest at 67 %, Collections is at 11% and should be at 15% (this includes all collections – books, DVD, CD, magazines, etc). Only direct expenses are allocated to the

branches. Operations include audit, management system, contract with ILL, etc.

Looking at the Munjoy summary – we will have been in the neighborhood 50 years this November. There are many programs with Parks and Rec – which is a very successful relationship. “Read your way to Opening Day” is a big one. The first two years we were open in EECS, we had a MOU which did not address joint hours – this severely limited the hours open to the public. The new MOU has addressed that and there are many security issues addressed. The community has been using the Library increasingly and the hours are better suited to peoples needs.

This is the 5<sup>th</sup> neighborhood meeting. The YS library is here temporarily will return to Monument Square in spring 2010.

The Library’s Budget Principles will be left on screen. These are the principles which were used last year when we were told we had a flat funding and then an additional \$50,000 decrease was announced which was eventually restored but which caused much stress. We reduced the staff and hours at the main branch by 10% and 18% respectively..

Nathan Smith addressed the factor that the principles are very “numeric” and there are a lot of things which libraries provide that are not qualified by numbers. The principles are a work in progress. Regarding the stress last year with the budget cuts, we face the challenge this coming year that, unless the City funding increases by \$150,000, we will not be able to meet our contractual obligations. We feel it is hard to imagine that there will not be pressure on the Branches as the main branch hours have been cut by over 18% already. We are looking at the Branches in new ways and going forward will try new ideas. With the current fiscal situation, it is improbable that the City will be able to increase our funding. Against that back drop, we are trying to see what we are doing right, how we can do things more efficiently and what might be possible do going forward.

*C: Comment from Audience; Q: Question from Audience; A: Answer from staff or Board*

Q: Speaker was a regular Munjoy user until this fall. How much does the Library use volunteers, how do they recruit them, and could they use more?

A. We use volunteers at the library, both the main library and at all the branches, during the book sale and many other things. We have a waiting list of volunteers as we do not have enough staff to work with all the volunteers. What we are thinking of building on is to enhance the pool of volunteers and are looking to start a Friends of the PPL Group.

A: Since 1985 we have not had an active Friends group except on Peaks Island. We have been doing research locally and nationally and are in the early stages of launching a Friends group. We are looking at volunteer opportunities as well as advocacy for the Library at City Council meeting, fundraising and programming. We hope to have the group organized by early winter. If you are interested, please let us know.

Q: How many volunteers?

A: We have over 80 volunteers and a ¾ time HR/Volunteer Coordinator. One of the early challenges might be to have a volunteer who can help with the care and feeding of volunteers.

Q: Is Burbank open?

A: Yes, Burbank is open although there were many years when it was not. When Burbank was closed in the early 80's, many advocates for Burbank would come to the City Council meetings and ask for it to be reopened. Burbank is one of the most active lending libraries in the state of Maine. It also shows how hard it would be to reopen a branch if it had to be closed.

C: Speaker finds that as an adult user of Munjoy that it is extremely difficult to use. Instead of 2-3 times a week, now she uses it once every 2-3 weeks. The magazines are jammed in and do not have any labels and there are no lists of what magazines there are. It is very happenstance to find a periodical. The Librarians are usually so busy with the line-up that it is hard to ask questions. Also there is no comfortable place to sit for the adults that is near the adult collections. Adults need to go over in the high traffic areas or way to the back out of the line of fire to find a spot to read. It is unfriendly and difficult to look through to choose what you want read.

C: From what the Speaker has heard from the feedback on the other meetings, there is a feeling of inequitable cuts across the board. She heard a comment from the Burbank meeting that they felt they were a affluent neighborhood and perhaps they could raise some money to cover some of their hours. She feels that so much of the resources were taken from the Main branch and moved to EECS that it would have been good to share resources with the other branches. There is space at Reiche to expand the collection there and move into other spaces at the building. Some of the hours could be expanded there and at the other branches. There is a need to address equity. She hopes any cuts are looked at closely. What does by “what ever appropriate means” mean in the handouts?

A. It means that there are neighborhoods without any branches at all and that if the Library could develop presence at the neighborhoods it would have to be in a way without a facility. The Munjoy move is for 2 years and is only due to the renovation. By moving here, the space was already set and in place and ready for children. In approximately 3-4 months, the YS area of Monument Square will be under construction. The Reiche area does not have space. We are trying to have an interrogated school public library structure.

Q. How is usage tracked? If a book is brought out to Reiche, the number is not counted there; it is counted where the book lives not, where it is checked out. How do you track people who come in and do not check out books? Speaker used to work for a library in New Hampshire and they tabulated the magazines and books which were used by having the left on tables and the librarians would count and refile. She feels the branches are used more often than the numbers show.

A. Samples show that all the locations do warehouse and the numbers showing what has been borrowed are not that far off. There was only a 10% (or 2,000 item) difference at Reiche in one sample. We do need to find a way to better track the information but need to deal with a system with limited “canned” reports. It is good data analysis. With regard to the magazine usage, it is difficult. If people put things back, it is one less thing for a staff member to do. We are developing, based on the comments, a different way of looking at the numbers – culturally as well as in other ways. This disproportionately affects many areas including the main branch.

Q. Having a paid person training a volunteer is a lot; could the volunteer then train the new volunteers? That is what they do at Maine Med. Train them, let them loose, have someone else come in and be trained by the first volunteer. Have a staff person to oversee but not have to train.

A. That is something to look at – could leverage the volunteers.

C: Learning theory tells us that the best retention happens when you have to teach someone else. It could make better volunteers that way.

A. This branch is a unique branch. The integration with the school is not a simple thing. Handling the collections and the security is still a work in progress. The YS will ratchet down in a couple of years resulting in less pressure here.

Q. What is the long term goal for this library in terms of the adults?

A. It will revert much more closely to what it was before. The adult proportion would increase. The collaborative results with the school and the times open will hopefully remain.

Q. Regarding collection development at the branches, how is that done? Is there money allocated for immigrant populations to learn to read through ESL materials?

A. It is done on a number of levels. Branch personnel and Branch manager (BD) work to develop the collections. There has not been a lot of analysis to balance the uniqueness of the neighborhood. If a new popular book comes out, all the branches would have it – in English to start. What needs to happen is to look more discreetly as to what is actually borrowed at a location and why? What are the demographics? Our lending system was not designed to look at the demographics of what is being borrowed. What we are doing is more work on understanding the location, the neighborhood, and what is borrowed there. We can not be a full literacy center at Reiche (in terms of one type of collections) – financially it is impossible. Reiche and Riverton are unique areas and we need to figure out how to connect better.

There is an ESL program run by the schools which we need to know more about accessing. What a Friends group could do is to generate a sense of a bottom up understanding of the books that are needed at a branch. We know what is there but what is not there is also important to know.

Q. When the Library was at Adams, one of the things which was noticeable was the kids learning to use computers and going on line and getting their parents in to see what they were doing. The speaker has totally lost track of what happened with that since the move from Adams. She has not seen as much usage in that way and does not know if it is the change of location or what?

A. Family literacy – traditional or computer – is being looked at. The move from Adams did affect the immigrant population's usage of the library – it is perhaps outside their comfort zone.

A. These are some of the first “negative” comments – perhaps “constructive” is a better word. This is a school/public collaboration experiment forced by the City. It is not an easy thing to meld the two different libraries. School libraries are run totally different from public libraries. Adams was run like Reiche and Riverton as a separate entity.

C: The speaker seems to recall that there were only 3 other similar libraries in the country. So you (the Library) have no one to pick their brains about how to make it work. When the meetings were done to design the school, they wanted more small rooms for tutoring so the seniors could come to help tutor the kids. It is not safe with the snow removal and parking is difficult. There is not a huge pool of folks who have done what you are trying to do. She is trying to be very respectful as to what you are doing here and seeing what you came up with for solutions.

A. We are also very stubborn about this and that we do not want to admit that it may not work.

C: As a former school librarian, it definitely has not worked often nationally as schools and publics have different missions. The elementary school children have taken a hit; the Portland school libraries are being reduced and information skills are being lost. School librarians are trained differently from public librarians.

A. We do not have a voice at the City Council when we go. Please come and make your views known at the finance meetings – It is a political process and they will listen if people come. Don't forget us in March when it is snowy and icy.

Q. The speaker was very concerned about the shortfall. How is the budget decided? When the budget is presented, what is the opportunity for comment?

A. Many first steps that have some give and take and a “heads up” on what the probability would be. This year, there were messages sent and then more and more messages and the money kept reducing. The Manager will come up with budget and the City Council will decide what to approve. They have a lot to deal with from fire and police to snow removal and public works. We are already seeing profound differences in the Library. We will be looking at where the other City departments will show up with their overall cuts. Was the Library cut in line with other areas?

We feel we are open a bare minimum with what we have currently. The public library movement went hand in hand with public schools. The irony of having an increasing usage and a decreasing staffing raises questions. By some date in February, we will submit a budget that keeps all the branches open with the same levels we currently have. The Manager will let us know what he will recommend. We can not do it with less without cutting hours. We then have a chance to go to the Finance committee and tell them what the cut will result in.

Q. When do you want the public to get involved?

A. We are placed in the position of arguing with the Manager. We will be better about informing the public as to what they can do to help. We need to publicize what the plan B would be if the Manager's plan was to be done. We were blindsided last year and did not have the time let people know anything.

There is sensitivity to the “share the pain” view. We need to hold together as a system. We need to put pressure on the City to keep the system intact. What can we do to get by and salvage the aspects of the system?

Between now and November 4<sup>th</sup> – three City seats are open. Talk to the candidates as to what their library views are. This is a spectacular way to get the candidates to get on board.

C: In support of the “share the pain”, each neighborhood is radically different from the others. You can not say that the slack would be picked up by another branch. Each is so diverse in their natures.

Q. Aren't several of the committees with the City open to public comment?

A. In the budget process there are amazingly few points of input for the public.

C: You could raise conciseness by emailing people as to what is going on.

A. There is one main public comment time on the budget where every one can comment on everything and it is pretty late in the game. The horse is almost out of the barn at that point.

Q. Are there times we can get public input to the Manager? Perhaps by email?

A. On balance, they meet for a month and the departments present their needs before the councilors.

C. Good way to network with the neighborhoods is through the city neighborhood site which has email addresses to all the neighborhood groups.

A. One of the dilemmas in lobbying the councilors is that sometime the councilor does not get into office. But also they need to be sensitive to the balancing of the issues of all. We need to have a strong place at the table. Libraries have a strong place in the communities and the point needs to be made again and again. Libraries are less tangible than fire departments.

C. Nothing that replaces a personal phone call or email than appearing at a public hearing (which is needed as well) Around the time of the finance meetings, write, call, email. Tell the City Manager. Stay positive about the strengths as to what the Library does, better chance for success. Need to win this battle for more than one year...

It does not serve to pit one branch against the other. We have a system. That is a challenge for us as well in going to the council.