

Portland Public Library Planning Process
Meeting at Deering High School Cafeteria
Tuesday, September 30, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.

Present from Library Board of Trustees: Taffy Field, Peter Merrill, Nathan Smith, and Laurie Williamson; and from library staff: Steve Podgajny, Heather Tiffany, Jim Charette, Lisa Joyce, and Brian Damien. The meeting was attended by approximately thirty citizens.

Meeting was opened at 7:00 by Nate Smith, who introduced board members present, and Library Director Steve Podgajny, who introduced staff members. Steve Podgajny presented a PowerPoint slide show reviewing the library's board structure, fiscal basis, current statistics, and planning process. The presentation will be made available on the library's website, <http://www.portlandlibrary.com>.

Nate Smith opened the floor for questions and comments at approximately 7:25 p.m.

(Q=question; A=answer or comment from PPL board or staff; C=comment from citizen)

Q. Do the circulation statistics reflect where items are owned, or where they are borrowed?

A. Statistics reflect where the items are owned. We can and occasionally do sampling of raw data to calculate circulation activity by point of borrowing.

C. So the numbers for Burbank are probably higher than shown because of the material brought in from other locations.

C. Comments on the value of the library to the neighborhood as a walking neighborhood. "I can send my seven year old to the library on her own...the librarians know her. She has an independent relationship with the librarians." Edward Albee recently said that we no longer invest in civics or art. But the library represents both. We also need to be aware that as the economy goes down, library use goes up.

C. Burbank Branch is part of a walking neighborhood...you have tremendous community support here.

C. Would be great if the library could find a better way to serve the teens in the neighborhood, and provide services specifically targeted to young adults.

C. Would like to hear more about the library's fundraising efforts and community based endowments.

C. There is a strong sentiment that going to the library is a social activity.

C. This is a terrifically managed branch. For older adults, who are less mobile, we can order books, and they come to the branch. Burbank is centrally located! The board should consider that the cost *to* the borrower is lower when the borrower doesn't have to go downtown.

C. Important for all of Portland to know how important all of the libraries are, especially to refugees and other immigrants. Libraries are a place that provides mental health for a lot of refugees, a place where they can find normalcy. We should also recognize that new immigrants often don't understand about bringing materials back on time, and are afraid of running up fines. Often they don't have enough money to take the bus...so the location of branches is important.

C. The difference between readers and nonreaders is access to books. If we don't raise kids up, they bring us down.

C. Burbank could be enlarged. We need more computers.

A. Comments regarding economics and the upcoming budget season. At the end of the last year we cut the number of FTE (full time equivalents) at the main branch by 10%, and cut the hours at the main branch by 18%. To maintain the current level of service at all locations, with no cuts, we need \$150,000 in new money in the upcoming fiscal year.

A. Regarding fundraising...we are crafting plans to launch a "Friends of the Library" group.

A. The board's commitment is to the library system as a whole.

A. The fiscal situation is scary.

C. Can we be more creative about dividing the pie? We have the ability to generate many hours of skilled volunteer labor. What can be done with fundraising and volunteers to close the gap?

C. The library should look closely at energy usage at its locations, and do energy audits to see what savings can be realized.

C. At one point, the Gray Wildlife Park was on the verge of closing. A creative solution was found to keep the Park open, and it now operates largely with volunteer labor. That is a model to look at. A volunteer association could help with the library's needs.

Q. Do you have any data on the age of your borrowers?

A. We have ways of working with samples of raw data (the borrower records include year of birth) but at present we have no way to routinely generate reports yielding useful data on usage by different demographic groups. Down the road, we need to replace our existing online system with something that does a better job at providing us with this kind of information.

A. The library makes use of volunteers now for many tasks – including outreach, shelving, programs, the garden at Burbank, and the booksale.

C. Compliments regarding the professionalism of the Burbank staff.

C. A dollar saved is a dollar you don't have to raise. Please make energy conservation a real priority. It may pay to get second opinions on the energy engineering for the renovation at Monument Square. The proposed "glass prism" for the front of the Monument Square building should be thorough checked out to make sure that it really is a source of heat and energy savings.

A. Energy conservation is a major concern in this project; it is a prime interest of a number of donors and potential donors. In planning the project, we are picking the points that are going to yield the greatest energy savings.

C. The very first thing you need to do is secure the shell of the building.

C. There are issues with regard to volunteers...some jobs still need to be done by employees.

A. Historically, privately-funded libraries have not been able to provide public service on a consistent basis. There are peaks and valleys in support.

A. Also, as we expand the use of volunteers, we need to do it in a way that the labor needed for supervision isn't greater than the labor that is donated.

A. There are also limits to the kinds of volunteers we can find – we don't expect to find professional reference librarians, for example, who can act as volunteers on a consistent schedule.

- C. We have in the community people of high training and education who are willing to help out.
- C. Organizations that don't have space of their own, but which use the library's spaces, could be approached to ask them for help in fundraising. Literacy Volunteers and AARP are two such organizations.
- C. There are creative ways of fundraising. The Civic Center has recently put a "penny tax" on tickets, which is raising some money.
- A. It is a challenge to find an equitable balance in fundraising. We are obviously trying to raise the remaining funds for the Capital Campaign (\$459,000 to go for Phase I) but have also set a record for individual and corporate donors for last year's Annual Fund. We are focused on raising more for collections, services, and programs, not infrastructure.
- C. We live in a more affluent neighborhood... Burbank and the branches could be a feeder system for the library's fundraising efforts.
- C. We love the professional staff at Burbank – they are top notch.
- C. Where is the Friends group?
- A. There is still planning going on at the board level, and questions being hashed out...among them, should the Friends be a project of the board, or separate 501(c)3? As things go, this is on a fast track. A proposal will hopefully go to the Board in early 2009.
- C. The library should consider a Friends group for each location. I would be much more interested in joining a Burbank friends group than an umbrella group for the whole PPL system.
- A. One of the questions, in this kind of organization, is there a way to capture "pride of place" in a larger organization.
- C. (Mayor Ed Suslovic) The creation of the Friends group is a complex issue. The Friends need to serve the entire system. A fiscal comment...without the staffing cuts that were made last spring, property taxes in Portland would have gone up 20% this year.
- C. We need to recognize that libraries are a great crime-fighting tool in neighborhoods; and that they play a special role with immigrants.
- C. Would be wonderful to see 200 Friends of the Library out at budget time.
- Q. Are there specialties at the branches?
- A. To some extent...some locations do more with popular fiction than others, some do more with children's programming; Reiche has played a special role with immigrants. But specialization is difficult because there are an expectation at all locations that we will provide a full range of services.
- A. The number of volumes is lower than it could be. We are spending only around 11.5% of the budget on collections (including electronic resources). There is a high demand and the budget percentage should be closer to 15%.
- C. The library should use special interest groups to help raise money for special subject areas.