

AKRON-SUMMIT COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
DECEMBER 17, 2020

NOTE: Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the State of Ohio mass gathering limits, this meeting was held entirely on Zoom.

President James Casey called the special meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Akron-Summit County Public Library to order at 4:02 pm. The following members of the Board answered the roll call: James Casey, Angela Neeley, William Rich, and Bernard Rochford. Jill Darlington, John Frola, and Ray Weber were absent. Present from Library staff were Pam Hickson-Stevenson, Michelle Scarpitti, Carla Davis, Ryan McCoy, Pam Plumley, Carl Roxbury, and Barb White. Guests were Jason Dodson and Galen Schuerlein of Roetzel & Andress.

Mr. Rich moved, seconded by Mr. Rochford, to adopt the agenda. Ms. Hickson-Stevenson requested a change to the agenda. A new item 3 should be “Report on Results of Phone Survey and Interviews. The remaining items would simply be renumbered. The roll call vote followed: Mr. Casey, Ms. Neeley, Mr. Rich, and Mr. Rochford all voted aye. The motion carried.

20-90
AGENDA

Galen Schuerlein stated that the telephone survey of registered voters in the Library’s service area was completed, along with the interviews of community leaders. She referred all to the PowerPoint presentation that had been sent to them. The Center for Marketing and Opinion Research administered the statistically accurate phone poll, and Ms. Schuerlein and Mr. Dodson completed interviews with leaders. The next step of seeking public input will be on-line surveys. After the Board makes a decision, the consultants will conduct a communications audit and continue community outreach.

TELEPHONE
SURVEY

The telephone survey was conducted from November 18 through December 9 and obtained 417 complete surveys with a 95% confidence interval. Participants were asked about frequency of Library visits, overall opinion of the Library, important issues facing the County, the importance of the Library, Library services used, type of levy, and sources of news.

Many participants’ opinions regarding a levy changed when asked about a renewal versus a renewal plus additional revenue. A renewal generated support from about 76% of the participants while support for a renewal plus additional revenue dropped to 56%. In examining the cross tabs of location of residence, the difference was more pronounced between the suburbs and Akron. Suburban voter support for a renewal plus additional dropped more precipitously than support from those who live in Akron.

Ms. Schuerlein advised that not only are there key services the Library can highlight while educating the community through the campaign, there are key messages that resonate with people:

1. People do not want the Library to be cut any further.
2. People like that the Library is doing more with less.
3. People saw reductions in state funding as a significant issue.
4. People think it is a significant issue that the levy provides about 55% of the Library’s revenue.
5. People like hearing that the Library has more than two million visitors and more than 4.5 million items that are borrowed.

Ms. Schuerlein commented that, all in all, the Library has some very positive messages and is well positioned based on the survey data.

Jason Dodson discussed the phone interviews conducted with a number of elected officials, community leaders, and business leaders. The interviews were conducted to learn where the Library stands with key leaders whose support will be critical to obtain and maintain and who may be willing to donate to the levy campaign. It was also a goal to see if the information gained through the telephone survey, the interviews and the online survey were consistent with one another, or if any red flags were discovered.

PHONE INTERVIEWS OF LEADERS

Mr. Dodson reported that, for the most part, the results of the interviews with leaders dovetailed with the survey data. The leaders expressed positive comments about the leadership of the Library and the Library as an institution within the community. They view the Library as one of the steady stakeholders in the community. Several leaders stated that as much as the Library is appreciated as a reliable institution, they perceive that the Library has not demonstrated much innovation. If innovation is occurring, they stated it is not being promoted effectively or as well as it could be. He stated that he was impressed with the nature and number of services and programs that were mentioned by the leaders. He also stated that the leaders were a mix of those who use the Library regularly and those who do not.

COVID 19 and the impact it has had on the community is the number one concern of those leaders. It is a two-fold issue in how it impacts the Library.

- 1) Opinions ranged from positive to neutral (at worst) regarding Library's handling of the pandemic.
- 2) Concerns about how the pandemic has affected the community results in reluctance to support anything that would be an additional burden on the taxpayers.

Some of the leaders remember during the Library's campaign in 2015, the director stated that if the levy was not approved, the results would be cataclysmic. A number of the leaders were concerned that about the Library's budget tightening and revenues falling short.

One of the things asked in the interviews was who would be best to endorse the levy. The responses were almost unanimous on how the Library should approach the messaging and who the spokespeople should be. Virtually all of the leaders stated that the focus should not be on elected officials or traditional endorsers, but the people who are using the Library. In terms of renewal vs. replacement, it was pretty heavily weighted in people favoring a renewal as opposed to a replacement. A few leaders stated emphatically that they would not support anything that would be an additional burden on the taxpayers. Most had a more nuanced approach to the question. They were balancing in their minds the very important needs of the Library and the very real effects of budget cuts and revenue constraints over the years. Ultimately, people said that a renewal was the better path due to the economic conditions caused by the COVID pandemic. They also expressed the sentiment that before any new money would be approved for the Library, there would need to be a sustained, lengthy, and innovative approach to telling the community how the Library has changed. Mr. Dodson stated that the Board members who were interviewed reported that the Library operates on a lean budget. They stated is not as though the Library has a tremendous amount of

money to put into advertising. Everyone agreed the Library has done a good job with the resources that it has, but those resources are limited.

Mr. Casey asked if Jason got a feeling that it would be a problem if the schools were going to be on the ballot at the same time as the Library. Mr. Dodson replied that leaders told him if both organizations were on the ballot; it would not be their choice for the Library to go with a replacement or increase. Some elected leaders felt that would complicate the situation, and they would have to stick by the schools if they were both on the ballot at the same time, which would present additional complications.

Mr. Rochford asked about the Library requesting certificates from the County Fiscal Office for both a renewal and a replacement and the discrepancies in the dollar amounts the Fiscal Office reported. Mr. Dodson reviewed the issues surrounding the sexennial valuation and the rates that were submitted three times by the County to the State. The State refused to approve anything twice. The third submission of property values was approved but, as of last Friday morning, the state still hadn't approved the tax rates.

Ms. Hickson-Stevenson also reported that the Library does not have enough trustees present to vote on the resolution. The Ohio Revised Code requires at least two-thirds of all trustees to vote yes for a levy request.

LACK OF
TRUSTEES FOR
VOTE

Mr. Dodson stated that a renewal would generate less revenue for the Library than the replacement. He added that if the 1.4 millage approved prior to 2013 is replaced instead of renewed, the 12.5% rollback paid for by the State goes away. Instead, the property owners get a 12.5% increase.

Mr. Weber asked if the renewal vs. the replacement was all that different in terms of marketing it. Mr. Dodson replied that often the media seizes on the double hit of the disappearance of the rollback and the additional taxes paid on increased valuations.

Ms. Hickson-Stevenson reported that she would contact Board members about scheduling another special meeting for a vote on the resolution.

SPECIAL
MEETING TO BE
SCHEDULED

The meeting adjourned at 4:56 pm.

President

Secretary