

McMinn County Library Board  
1289 Ingleside Avenue  
Athens, Tennessee 37303

Board Meeting Minutes  
SEPTEMBER 25, 2023 at 6:00 PM

Present - Chairman Tyler Forrest, Treasurer Tim Womac, Secretary Tyler Boyd, EGFPL Interim Director Beth Jackson, Ocoee Regional Library Director Liz Schreck, and MCLB members Everett Gillespie, Jan Dingess, Tara Carter, John Duggan, and Kay Harper. Vice Chairman Mickey Blevins was absent.

I. Call to Order, Establish Quorum, and Acknowledgments

Treasurer Tim Womac called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and welcomed guests. (Chairman Forrest arrived a few minutes late during public comments and presided over the remainder of the meeting).

II. Public Comments

Ann Marie Shaffer – She handed a packet to the board. She said she hopes the board considers righting an “egregious” error of the “deliberate” misapplication of the term Young Adult by the ALA and requested clarification of the definition of young adults and how it is distinct from Teens or Juveniles. She said it is important “to have a firm command of the English language.” She cited several examples of the use of the term Young Adult and emphasized that almost all of them refer to individuals aged 18 or older.

Will Bolton – He said that protecting our kids has “gotten lost” in all of this. He asked the board to make sure future book displays do not violate state laws. He said it is difficult for parents to keep an eye on their kids all of the time and that certain content should be inaccessible to them. He referred to the incident of people leaving Bibles defaced with profanity in the Blessing Box as a “red flag” and urged the board to install a camera outside the front entrance door to possibly help identify the culprit should it happen again.

Laura Carmody - She complimented the “beautiful library” and asked for an update on the library’s policy on the availability and display of sexually-explicit books. She also asked the board to look into the cost of installing more cameras, especially for the darker places outside of the building. She expressed her concern for the safety of the patrons and employees without cameras outside. She urged the board to see that the trees and bushes on the library grounds are regularly trimmed.

Kelly Kaus – In reference to the display of sexually-explicit material targeted at children, she discussed and quoted from TCA 39-17-911. She said she opposed banning any books, but expressed her desire for a policy to restrict access of sexually-explicit books to children. She also referenced the library's existing policy on Internet use. She cited several Tennessee Supreme Court decisions that upheld restricting children's access to sexually-explicit books. She again stated she had no desire to ban any books or restrict adult access to any library material. She discussed the recent vandalism of Bibles in the Blessing Box and asked for either cameras to monitor the box or to place the box inside the building. She also asked the board to consider employee conduct while on the clock.

Stephanie Tupper – She said that many of the things she believes in and support have already been said. She said the library is beautiful. She is concerned that the wetlands have grown so large to become a security risk. She asked why the library does not have a better security system. She agreed that parents should watch their children, but claimed that other adults have a responsibility to speak up and make sure children are not harmed, giving examples in other public spaces. She wants the Collection Development Policy to reflect the local community. She said she does not come to the library as often anymore because she and her child were not treated well during their last few visits.

Eddie Broadwell – He said everything he wanted to say has already been said. He said he and his wife have been coming to the library since they moved to Athens. "We love it and it is fantastic." He said the staff are "great people." He agrees with the notion "You have to be a friend if you want a friend," and said that mindset is needed here. He claimed we are "hypersensitive" to so many things going on. He asked everyone to remember to "represent humanity" when they come in the library.

Sue Parsons – She was a librarian, once served on the regional library board, and was on the committee that built the library. She asked the board to encourage the city and county governments to support the library. She thanked the staff for their work while earning modest salaries. She asked if the proposals would be voted on tonight, and Chairman Forrest said it was the board's option. She asked for the board to delay voting on the proposals until the next meeting to ensure more public input and transparency.

Sherry Frank – She said she agrees with what has been said about making sexually-explicit materials available to adults but not children. She spoke of her work as a counselor and talked about the damage that inappropriate content can do to youth, including stress, anxiety, pain, and experiments that they are not prepared for. "It desensitizes them." She discussed how pedophiles expose children to such material to groom them and does not want the library to enable that. She spoke

about the negative effects of porn. She talked about her work with sex abuse victims and said that young children should not be able to access such material.

Anna Grabowski – She is a longtime patron who expressed her appreciation for the board. She sarcastically commended the citizens for attending the meeting in this “den of inequity.” She said juveniles and teenagers are Young Adults and that this is all “semantics.” She worked as a teacher. She discussed a scenario of a child having to ask for permission to check out certain books that are stored under lock and key. She claims you do not protect kids by hiding things from them and that the library is not supposed to wrap the kids in bubble wrap. She said that concerns about the alleged dangers of the wetlands were unfounded. Based on the rhetoric of some previous public comments, she expressed her concerned about fear and paranoia in the community. She agrees that no one should feel unwelcome, like someone said earlier, and she says the same goes for LGBTQ kids. “I am sorry the board had to go through this and it should have never happened.” She again sarcastically referred to Athens and the library as a horrible and scary place. “Do not let silly, unreasonable, and paranoid people dictate to you.”

### III. Approval of Minutes

Secretary Tyler Boyd presented the minutes from the July 24, August 15, and August 28 meetings. He asked for any corrections. John Duggan mentioned a grammatical error. John Duggan made a motion to accept the minutes and Everett Gillespie seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

### IV. Treasurer’s Report

Treasurer Womac bragged EGFPL Interim Director Beth Jackson for her work with the library’s finances. He said the July and August numbers were skewed because of the transition to a new director. Jackson deposited the checks from the local governments quickly. Womac appreciates Jackson’s time spent with the library’s accountant. Womac noted that second quarter checks from local governments are coming soon and discussed MOE (maintenance of effort) on the part of the various city halls. He reminded the library to spend all of the money appropriated to it. “Use it or lose it.”

Chairman Forrest mentioned that the executive committee authorized a transfer from the long term investment account to be able to cover payroll. This was due to a delay in checks from the Athens and McMinn County governments. He thanked Beth Jackson and the library’s accountants Warren and Jackson for helping with it.

### V. Library Reports

#### i. Calhoun

Treasurer Womac reported that they are reorganizing the library and received some new books and DVDs. He also reported that they are preparing for Halloween. He mentioned Calhoun's Christmas activities and the library's planned involvement.

ii. E.G. Fisher

Interim Director Beth Jackson compared her experiences as a school librarian to her new role as interim director of a large public library. She said she has "fallen in love" with the staff and patrons and praised the staff for being well trained. She spoke of how the staff helps each other when they are short on help. She discussed the variety of programs at the library for all ages, including children's programs for the upcoming fall break from school. She lamented two staff members who recently left the library (one for a new career and another to help with family problems) but expressed gratitude to have recently hired back a former employee. She shared the library's plans for Halloween, including Trick Or Treating in the wetlands. She said she supports purchasing additional security cameras, especially in the back for employee parking. She said she makes sure to check the Blessing Box daily to make sure no more vandalism has taken place. She expressed her hope that the "anger and angst" will "blow over." She said she supports new policies to protect children while also respecting the First Amendment.

Chairman Forrest asked about former director Peyton Eastman's research on the best security cameras to use. Jackson said she would continue that research. Board member Duggan said that crimes will decrease if security cameras are installed and that it is time to stop talking about it and take action.

iii. E.G. Fisher Friends of the Library

Everett Gillespie had no report since the Friends of the Library board had to delay their meeting.

iv. Englewood

Board member Jan Dingess reported that the library had 162 patrons in July and 164 patrons in August. She also reported that they are updating some policies, including their book return policy, and that they are planning children's activities for Christmas.

v. Etowah

Board member Kay Harper shared some news from the library director. They received a large grant from Piedmont Lithium and will use it for a new drop box and STEM books and equipment for the children's library. The first round of state funds have been spent on adult fiction and nonfiction books. The Community Artist League is getting a new chairman. The library director was accepted into the state library's Public Library Management Institute (PLMI). In August, the library had five children's programs with 44 kids in attendance and two adults programs with seven in attendance.

vi. Regional Library

Regional Director Liz Schreck discussed the Data Collection Survey for all the libraries in the regional system. She spoke about recent trainings in the region, including security and safety training. She noted that the MOE agreements with the nine county governments in the region have been circulated. She reminded everyone of the Trusteeship training on September 28 and noted that three librarians in the region have been accepted into the PLMI program. She discussed the TOP Grant (Training Opportunities for the Public). She also passed out the statistics for the region.

Interim Director Jackson said she wants the staff to have an opportunity to do safety and security training.

VI. Old Business

Chairman Forrest gave an update on the ongoing settlement of the estate of Ovalena Lee of Niota who left a generous amount of stocks and money to the library.

Forrest gave an update on the director search committee's first meeting, which involved writing the job description and posting the job online. He said the committee hopes to have it narrowed down to three candidates and to make a hire at the November meeting. He said that this will be an open process. Liz Schreck noted that she helped advertise the job posting online.

Board member John Duggan asked for an update on the discussion of the library becoming a city department. Forrest said he has only discussed it with Mayor Sherlin once since November 2022 and said the city has to make a move before we can do anything. He said the library board and the county mayor were supportive of it. John Duggan offered speak about the issue at a future city council meeting. Forrest spoke again about the library's status in "purgatory" and how it disadvantages the library, especially with finances. He said the board would welcome a discussion about the issue with the city council if they show

any interest. John Duggan offered to be a liaison between the board and the city council on this issue.

## VII. New Business

Board member John Duggan proposed a Public Meeting Etiquette Policy for the board to adopt. Copies of the proposal were provided for the board. Chairman Forrest read the proposal. Secretary Tyler Boyd said he believed it was a good policy. Treasurer Tim Womac said he would not be opposed to the public bringing small signs for protest, but is opposed to large signs or any apparel that will interfere with the meeting. Liz Schreck encouraged the board to seek legal clarification about the library as a public space to ensure that No. 7 on the policy does not invite a First Amendment audit. Forrest and Womac echoed Schreck's concerns. Forrest said the board has no power to prevent anyone from recording citizens who attend the meeting. Womac recommended a change from "will" to "may" in the line that gives the chairman the power to ask a citizen to leave for policy violations. Duggan made a motion to table No. 7 if the first six were adopted. Womac made a motion to accept Nos. 1 -6 and Jan Dingess seconded it. The motion passed unanimously. The board agreed to allow Forrest to ask attorney Bridgette Wilhite for legal advice. Boyd thanked the board members and Liz Schreck for sharing their thoughts on the proposed policy.

Boyd and board member Duggan proposed changes to the library's Collection Development Policy. Duggan said he supported waiting until the next meeting to vote on the proposals. Duggan discussed the proposed changes, including an update to ensure the policy is in line with TCA 39-17-911. Duggan also mentioned the Public Library Service Agreement, which already prohibits the purchase of books containing sexually explicit material. Womac described his "China cabinet" policy regarding certain books that should have access restricted to adults only. Forrest said he agrees with the proposal but believes some of it is ambiguous. He says that there are tons of books that the library would not be able to be put in the new book display based on potential content. He listed some examples. Schreck recommended the board seek legal advice and said the disciplinary portion of the policy would be better fit for the employee handbook. She says she could not give the board a definition of the term "obscenity" and urged them to seek legal clarification. Duggan also said that "obscene" is a vague term and recommended changing the wording in the policy to be more specific and to look to existing state laws for a model. Boyd said he appreciated the discussion and noted that it was challenging to write the policy. Boyd and Womac mentioned SCOTUS Justice Potter Stewart and his famous quote "I know it when I see it." Boyd discussed the distinction between a book written for adults that contains sexually explicit material that would be difficult to find while thumbing through it compared to a book written for children that features content presented in a format similar to a glossary that would be easy for a child to see while thumbing

through it. Boyd said the proposal needs to be worked on and improved. Director Jackson mentioned that adult books are currently placed the adult section. John Duggan said he would be arrested if he took one of the controversial books from the Rainbow Book Pride Month display and gave it to a child outside of the library.

Forrest said that he had similar concerns about the wording of the Materials Access Policy proposed by Boyd and Duggan. Boyd said he thoroughly reviewed all previous public comments and emails over the past few months and was careful to ensure that no proposed policy would restrict adult access to any library materials. He claimed that minors do not have full rights under the Bill of Rights and cited U.S. Supreme Court decisions affirming that claim. Boyd also gave a few examples from his experiences as a teacher relating to the First Amendment rights of minors. Boyd made it clear that his goal when writing the proposal with Duggan was to restrict children's access to certain material while not stepping on the rights of adults. Boyd discussed different styles of parenting but noted that the library must have policies that allow only the parents to make a decision on what materials their children have access to. Duggan said he wanted to have a clearer definition of age groups (minors, teens, youth, juveniles, young adults, etc.) Boyd agreed and said that such age distinctions are not arbitrary, especially when it comes to the law and making clear policies. He spoke on the importance of placement.

Boyd quoted from the library's existing User Policies (pg. 16, Item D, No. 1B) pertaining to computer and Internet use and said he wants all policies to be consistent. Schreck discussed CIPA (Federal Children's Internet Protection Act) and how the library must adhere to it. Duggan agreed with Boyd's desire for consistency among all policies and praised censoring online content at the library to protect children. Forrest said the board will also seek legal advice to ensure that all library policies are in line with the Public Library Service Agreement.

Discussion shifted back to the proposed changes to the Collection Development Policy. Womac took inspiration from the office of Secretary of State Tre Hargett. Copies of Womac's proposal were provided. Womac discussed his proposals. Forrest and Schreck shared their thoughts on Womac's proposals. At Forrest's request, the board agreed table Womac's proposal and seek legal advice before proceeding.

Secretary Boyd quoted from the library's existing User Related Policies (pg. 22, Item F, Nos. 3.1.A and 3.1.B) relating to security cameras. To be consistent with existing policies, he spoke in support of installing a security camera at the entrance and at the staff parking lot in the back. He said these cameras are especially needed in response to recent vandalism of Bibles in the Blessing Box outside the library entrance. He said such acts were hateful and borderline

stalking and harassment and hopes to be able to use the cameras to identify possible future perpetrators who may be suspended from the library for violating library policies. Duggan said that new cameras are needed to help protect the children, especially since their section is close to the entrance of the library. Duggan spoke of his belief in being proactive rather than waiting to take action after incidents take place. Forrest said the board will move forward in purchasing additional security cameras and that Jackson will take the lead in identifying the best cameras to purchase.

Forrest reminded the board of upcoming Trusteeship training and the date of the next library board meeting planned for November 27. He also reminded the board of updated policies from the Englewood and Calhoun libraries to be voted on. He also noted that the annual investment report will likely be delayed until the January meeting.

Chairman Forrest adjourned the meeting at 8:04 PM.