McMinn County Library Board

1289 Ingleside Avenue

Athens, Tennessee 37303

Board Meeting Minutes

DECEMBER 12, 2023 at 6:00 PM

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

1. Call to Order, Establish Quorum, and Acknowledgments

Chairman Tyler Forrest called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and welcomed guests. He asked the board to add an item to the agenda under New Business to allow TeAnna McKinney from the Election Commission to speak to the board. The board granted his request.

1. Public Comments

Babs Patterson – She asked if the library has an Adult Education Program. Director Jackson answered that adult education is a state program and that the library does not have such a program. Discussing the interview of Rebekah Coleman for the position of library director, Patterson said she appreciated Coleman’s answer to a question about censorship and moving a movie to a different location in the Cleveland Library after discussing it with a parent who believed the movie was inappropriate. Patterson expressed her hope that such issues in the future can be solved through the director and patron sitting down to discuss the issue. Patterson asked the incoming library director to take all Materials Reconsideration forms seriously and listen to all sides of an issue.

1. Approval of Minutes

Secretary Tyler Boyd presented the minutes from the September 25 meeting. He asked for any corrections. Chairman Forrest pointed out a time stamp from Boyd’s audio recording that needed to be removed, as well as several instances of misspelling Regional Library Director Liz Schreck’s last name. Boyd said he would make the corrections. Jan Dingess made a motion to accept the minutes, Vice Chairman Blevins seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

1. Treasurer’s Report

Treasurer Womac reminded everyone that the August checks from the City of Athens and McMinn County were deposited in September, an unusual occurrence, because of the change in library directors. September expenses included maintenance, health insurance, and other materials. Womac commended Director Jackson for ensuring all outstanding invoices were paid. October’s income and expenses were similar to September. The third quarter checks will be coming in sometime in January 2024.

Chairman Forrest noted that the Maintenance of Effort agreements are in the back of the financial report handout and that they have all been signed by each of the municipalities, the county mayor, and Chairman Forrest. He also noted that he and Justin Hicks contacted our auditors to learn that our audits are delayed. Hicks is working to bring the audits up to date, after which time they will be brought to the board for approval.

1. Library Reports
2. Calhoun

Treasurer Womac – The library participated in a Trunk or Treat at Calhoun Elementary School, handing out over 300 bags of candy. The library handed out candy at the Country Christmas Festival and allowed the kids to choose a book from the library as a Christmas gift. The library also hosted a Christmas movie at the park the same evening as the festival. The library has been working with Womac, Regional Director Liz Schreck, and Assistant Regional Director Nikki Branam-Snyder to update their Collection Development Policy and Internet Safety Policy.

1. E.G. Fisher

Interim Director Beth Jackson – She said she feels a lot more settled in and now knows how to do payroll, time sheets, and other reports. She noted that being a school librarian is much different than being a public library director and that she had to learn how to perform several managerial functions. She said she was “warmly welcomed” by the staff when she started. She praised the library for the numerous programs that serve so many people in the community. She noted that the library recently hosted Leadership McMinn. She discussed what the library staff does for a variety of patrons, and commended the kindness showed to all patrons. She said “In a world of so much turmoil and strife, we are blessed to have our library as a safe space for all.” She discussed an author, Neil Gaiman, and a story he once shared about his experience with libraries as a child.

Chairman Forrest, on behalf of the entire board, thanked Jackson for her service as Interim Director over the past three months.

1. E.G. Fisher Friends of the Library

Board member Everett Gillespie was absent. Friends of the Library board member Lynne Perkinson, from the audience, reported that the Friends were able to get truckloads of free mulch for the library’s landscaping and that much of it has already been spread. Director Jackson also reported that Gillespie told her that the Friends is still working to raise money to improve the lighting outside the library.

1. Englewood

Board member Jan Dingess – the library had 152 patrons in September, 129 patrons in October, and 127 patrons in November. The library had to close for a few days due to an Covid outbreak among the staff. The library director plans to host some Christmas readings. Dingess thanked Regional Director Liz Schreck for helping the library revise their Collection Development Policy.

1. Etowah

Board member Kay Harper – Piedmont Lithium presented a grant to the library, helping them purchase new STEM books and a new overnight drop box. The retaining wall in the parking lot was fixed. Becky Pico was the featured artist for October. The library is teaming up with Cash Express and the Etowah Fire Department to accept donations for their toy drive.

1. Regional Library

Regional Director Liz Schreck was absent and emailed her report.

VI. Old Business

1. MCLB Public Etiquette Policy Meeting Proposal

Chairman Forrest reminded everyone that the board discussed this proposal at the September meeting. He read aloud No. 7 on the proposal concerning restrictions on recording and photographing library board meetings. He said that attorney Bridgette Wilhite advised the board to omit No. 7 from the proposal.

Board member John Duggan discussed his proposed revision of No. 7 and quoted the policy adopted by the McMinn County School Board that give them the ability to restrict recordings if it is threating or disruptive.

Secretary Boyd remarked that he hoped a policy could be written to prevent provocative individuals from placing their phones (while recording) right in front of people’s faces or behind the board members.

Vice Chairman Blevins asked if Wilhite had any suggestions about Duggan’s revised No. 7. Chairman Forrest said he would like to table No. 7 to give Wilhite time to review it.

Board member Duggan made a motion to adopt Nos. 1-6 in the policy, and Chairman Forrest thought the entire policy had been tabled. Treasurer Womac reminded all of us that the board already passed Nos. 1-6 at the September meeting. Duggan withdrew his motion.

Treasurer Womac expressed agreement with Secretary Boyd’s desire to require members of the public to stay seated or in one place while they record the meetings.

Chairman Forrest said he would send Duggan’s revised No. 7 to Wilhite for her review.

1. EGFPL Collection Dev. & User Related Policies

Chairman Forrest said these proposals have not been finalized yet because the board had made several edits that Wilhite needs to review. He asked to postpone action on this proposal.

Board member Duggan noted that the Collections Development Policy for the Englewood and Calhoun Libraries are only four pages each and expressed his wish to have the E.G. Fisher Library’s CD Policy revised to be shorter and consistent with other policies. Chairman Forrest expressed his agreement with Duggan and said that the library directors and the regional director will work to make the CD Policies for all three libraries very similar.

VII. New Business

1. McMinn County Election Commission request

On behalf of the McMinn County Election Commission, Administrator of Elections TeAnna McKinney requested that the board permit the commission to use E.G. Fisher Public Library as a precinct to replace Ingleside School. She believes that the community room would be an ideal location to hold the election and explained the election day routine and procedures. She noted that the Ingleside precinct has 775 active voters, but noted that only 150-200 people vote on average every election. She expressed slight concern with space for parking during elections with expected high turnout, including the March presidential primary and District Attorney’s special election. She had previously discussed the parking with Director Jackson and said that perhaps the upper parking lot could be reserved for patrons and the lower library be reserved for voters. McKinney believes that the library would be a good place for a precinct and “feels comfortable here.”

Secretary Boyd asked if there was a way to look up the number of patrons that visited the library during the previous few March presidential primaries to get an idea on how the parking situation might be. Director Jackson said they could make that information available.

Board member Duggan asked if a flyer could be posted to notify patrons of the library serving as a voting precinct.

Director Jackson said she believed becoming a precinct would be great for the library and would help increase the number of patrons.

McKinney noted that the election commission helped the library administer an election for the children during a summer program in 2023.

Treasurer Womac noted that the Sweetwater Public Library divided their parking lot during the 2017 eclipse for patrons and observers of the eclipse.

McKinney gave a breakdown of the age groups in the Ingleside voting area and said that some older voters might have trouble coming up the hill from the lower parking lot to vote. She said she would like to look over the parking lot and work out some sort of parking plan. Chairman Forrest said he is not concerned about parking and expressed confidence that something can be worked out if a problem presents itself.

Board member Duggan discussed other ideas for parking, including the Wetlands parking on Forrest Avenue.

Board member Dingess inquired about the rules for political signs placed on library property. McKinney answered her question.

Board member Duggan made a motion to accept McKinney’s request to make E.G. Fisher Public Library a voting precinct to replace Ingleside School. Secretary Boyd seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

1. EGFPL Director Selection

Vice Chairman Blevins, who also the chaired the E.G. Fisher Public Library Director Search Committee, discussed the committee’s recent work, including interviews with two applicants, one of whom had to withdraw. He listed several skills, including Work Ethic, Ability to Work With Others, Ability to Lead Others, Ability to Make Tough Decisions, Creativity, Ability to Complete Work Projects, and Finances. He noted that applicant Rebekah Coleman’s ratings for all of these areas ranged from 4.33/5 to 5/5. He also discussed references, including a friend at the Cleveland-Bradley County Public Library, who praised Coleman. One reference said she has been an assistant for years and “is ready for the next step.” He reported on the search committee’s 5:00 PM meeting earlier that day (December 12) and that they voted unanimously to recommend hiring Coleman as the new library director.

Vice Chairman Blevins made a motion to hire Coleman. Secretary Boyd seconded.

Board member Duggan asked Coleman a few questions. He opened by discussing recent security and safety issues facing other libraries in the state and asked Coleman about her plans for security and safety. Coleman explained her plans and expressed agreement with Duggan that there can be a danger with the public and said she will work to deescalate any potential violent episodes. She listed a few patron behaviors she will not tolerate at all, and discussed her past experiences working in a larger city at a larger library. She discussed her thoughts on security cameras and her past experiences dealing with patrons with body odor issues. Coleman and Duggan also discussed the homeless issue in the community. Duggan expressed his concern that permitting one homeless person to park a vehicle in the parking lot will invite others to do the same. Coleman said she believes everyone is welcome inside the library and that she understands some people need to rest sometimes. She pointed out different policies at the Cleveland Library and the E.G. Fisher Library with respect to sleeping on library property. Duggan said he opposes permitting the homeless sleep on library property. Duggan asked Coleman if the library was doing a “disservice” to the homeless by permitting them to sit in the parking lot and use the Internet to watch movies and not trying to engage with them to use the other resources inside the library. Coleman said she looks at everyone, even the homeless, as her patrons and that she wants to work with them, including having the police help if necessary. Coleman said she would like to record the library board meetings. Duggan asked Coleman about her thoughts on the library as a “neutral place of thought” and to help foster an environment “free of political and social justice agendas.” Coleman said that the library should be “apolitical” and that a professional librarian should only help a patron find a resource rather than share their own opinion on a political or social issue. She said she welcomes conversations with patrons and that she takes everyone’s concerns “very seriously,” including Materials Reconsideration.

Chairman Forrest called for a vote on the motion to hire Coleman. The motion passed unanimously.

1. EGFPL Compensation

Chairman Forrest discussed the offer letter he sent to Coleman and reminded everyone that Coleman’s official hire date will be January 15 and that she will be hired on a six-month probationary period. He also noted that Coleman will be working on her 2024 goals for the library to be presented to the board at their March meeting. He recommended setting Coleman’s annual compensation at $50,000. He arrived at that amount by researching the salaries of many other Level 4 library directors across the state, as well as a few local non-profit directors. He also noted that Coleman would be compensated at a rate of $24.04 per hour while she works with Director Jackson in the transition period.

Board member Duggan made a motion to approve Coleman’s compensation. Board member Jan Dingess seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

1. EGFPL Bank Authorization

Chairman Forrest asked for a motion to remove Director Jackson and place Coleman on the library’s checking account as a signer beginning on January 15. Board member Duggan made a motion. Board member Dingess seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

1. CPL Collection Development Policy

Chairman Forrest reminded everyone that the McMinn County Library Board also governs the Calhoun and Englewood Public Libraries. In an attempt to make all of the Materials Reconsideration Policies similar or the same for all three libraries, he asked for a motion to table. Treasurer Womac agreed with “streamlining” the three library’s policies. Board member Duggan also expressed his desire for uniformity and asked for a “point of reference” when revising the Collection Development Policy. Chairman Forrest said he does not have an answer yet and that he and Coleman will work on it.

Chairman Forrest asked for a motion to table the last four items on the agenda - action on the Collection Development Policy and Internet Safety Policy for Calhoun and Englewood Public Libraries - to allow more time for revisions. Board member Duggan made a motion. Vice Chairman Blevins seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Forrest reminded board members of upcoming Trusteeship Training opportunities. He said that he and Vice Chairman Blevins would be unavailable for the next regularly scheduled meeting on January 22, 2024. He asked if the board would agree to postpone the meeting to February 5, 2024. The board agreed.

On behalf of the entire board, Treasurer Womac gave Director Jackson a Christmas present. Chairman Forrest again thanked Jackson for her service to the library and wished everyone in attendance a Happy Holidays.

Chairman Forrest adjourned the meeting at 7:18 PM.