

Pamunkey Regional Library
Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
March 8, 2023

The Executive Committee of the Pamunkey Regional Library (PRL) Board of Trustees (BoT) met on Wednesday, March 8, 2023, at the West Point Branch Library, at 9:00 am.

Attendees

Attending were Trustees:

Goochland County: Barb Young (Committee Chair; late arrival, Interstate Closure)

King and Queen County: Patricia Simpkins (Board Chair, Committee Member)

Hanover County: Ryan Martin, Mike Smith;

Julie May (Committee Secretary), Joe O'Connor (late arrivals, Interstate closure)

King William County: John Edwards, Mary Shipman (Committee Vice Chair)

Guests Attending:

Ira Staley of Mechanicsville

Sharon Landrum of Aylett

Elaine Daniel of Aylett

Dorothy Wassenberg of King William

Pat Jordan of Mechanicsville

Joanna Russo of Mechanicsville

Christy Schumacher of Mechanicsville

Peggy Lavinder of Mechanicsville

Trudy Montagnoli of King William County

Library Staff Present:

Tom Shepley – PRL Director

Sherida Bradby – PRL Deputy Director

Jeff Huff – Collection Strategy Librarian

Levi Carter – Collection Management Librarian/Mobile Services Manager

Kelly Pridgen – Youth Public Services Coordinator

Call to Order/Welcome

The Committee Chair, Secretary and Mr. O'Connor were delayed by the closure of Eastbound lanes of Interstate 64. After discussion, Committee Member Tricia Simpkins agreed to serve as Chair temporarily. Ms. Simpkins opened the meeting and welcomed the Trustees, citizens, and Library Staff in attendance.

Consideration of Agenda Amendments

There were no amendments to the agenda.

Citizens' Time

Up to thirty minutes was set aside to hear from Citizens with up to three minutes per speaker for presentations.

Mr. Ira Staley of Mechanicsville told the Trustees that there was evil in the meeting room. He explained that people who stand on the sidelines instead of fixing problems in the community contribute to evil. He remembered seeing a young child at his church gathering last Sunday, looking scared. Why was the child scared? The responsibility of the Trustee is to guide the management of an organization. Trustees were requested to take action rather than sit on the sidelines.

Ms. Sharon Landrum of King William County spoke to the Committee as a parent. She expressed concern about the direction of the PRL. She spoke about the problem of sexually explicit material for children, which she believes is not good for them. She quoted from the New Testament about people who do not stand against evil being like a person with a millstone about their neck being cast into the sea.

Ms. Elaine Daniel of Aylett spoke to the Committee about public school, libraries and education. During her career, she taught all elementary school grades, and other specialized classes in public schools. She always taught her students to be the best they could be, to be prepared to become a productive citizen. Libraries have not previously been a place to be feared. Books now divide our communities. Communism and Marxism are part of the problem. We are destroying the minds of our children with the influences of many of the books made available to children.

Dorothy Wassenberg of King William is both a grandmother and a great-grandmother. She said she knows things are different now than when she was raising her own children. The books we place in our children's collections of the library are changing things, making things harder for children. Things are changing from Capitalism to Socialism and Marxism. She asked Library leadership to segregate the explicit books.

Pat Jordan of Hanover County spoke to the Trustees. She expressed confusion about the words "evil" and "Communism" and "Marxism" spoken during today's meeting. The American Library Association tells us that the Pamunkey Library is upholding the standards of public libraries. Lies from people like Tucker Carlson are what are causing current divisions in our nation.

Christy Schumacher of Mechanicsville told the Committee about her experience at her oldest child's kindergarten orientation years ago. After meeting with the teachers and principal, she was offered a chance to sign up her five-year old son for a Pamunkey Regional Library Card. She noted that the forms stated that she would be responsible for the books her son checked out of the Library. In small print, the Library explained that the parents, not the Library, would be responsible for selecting materials. It did not seem like a significant duty, as he could not yet read. The reality now that her son is twelve years old, with many materials in the Children's and Young Adult Collections she finds unsuitable for him to read. The responsibility for monitoring her children's choices at the Pamunkey Library feels much less comfortable, less

appropriate. She recently discovered that with his library card, he was able to select and check out both a horror movie and an R-Rated movie. She felt that was/is not appropriate.

Joanna Russo of Hanover County addressed the Committee. She noted that she has attended several Board of Trustee meetings. She believes books ought to be thoughtfully placed in public libraries for free people to read freely and safely. Libraries should be a safe place for all children. Why are we not warning parents that there are materials that are not appropriate in the Childrens' and Young Adults' Spaces? She noted that the Novelist System is not easy to use at time of checkout.

Peggy Lavinder of Mechanicsville addressed the Committee. She noted that she is a longtime advocate for libraries, for the Pamunkey Regional Library and the Mechanicsville Branch Library. She has been filming parts of the public meeting, not to be obnoxious, but to document the event for people who are not able to attend this weekday morning meeting. She supports the freedom to read in our public Library. She supports the Library Staff and their good work, following established library policies. She warned us that attacking libraries and the American Library Association is a dangerous, slippery slope.

Trudy Montagnoli of King William County noted that people fear censorship. She noted that it can be harmful for children to read books that are shocking. Parents should be warned: not everything in the library is suitable for a general audience. Materials should be age appropriate. In her work, she has seen many instances of child abuse. She believes it is important that sexual activity not be normalized for minors. She asked us to help prevent sexual abuse by making it harder for minors to read sexually explicit materials.

Old Business

Review of Draft Library Collection Policy

Ms. Simpkins opened the discussion of the Pamunkey Regional Library's proposed update of the Collection Development Policy.

Mr. Martin asked Mr. Shepley to discuss the major differences between the old Library Materials Policy and the proposed policy. Mr. Shepley noted that the proposed policy has restated and explained more fully the collection process. He noted that a public library must follow different policies than private libraries. The policy both references and is guided by *the Freedom to Read Statement* by the American Library Association, the rights granted by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution including Freedom of the Press; and *the Library Bill of Rights* by the American Library Association. He explained that our Library purchases books for a wide variety of interests to educate people on a variety of subjects. The policy follows industry standards. Pamunkey Regional Library is aligned with neighboring library systems. The policy gives guidelines for all the age groups, noting that the age ranges are just guidelines. Every child learns to read at his/her own time.

Mr. Martin asked, “Is there a way that our library can better remind parents about their responsibilities when their children are in the Library?” Mr. Shepley offered the possibility of posting signage in Library Branches containing information about parents’ responsibilities for selecting appropriate materials for their own children.

Mr. Smith thanked Tom for supplying the Board with policies from other Libraries. He quoted from the Henrico County Public Library Collection Policy explanations about Juvenile and Young Adult Collections. The Henrico policy is emphatic in noting that not all materials in the Young Adult Collection will be suitable for all citizens. Mr. Smith suggested that some similar language might be included in the proposed PRL Collection Policy.

Ms. May spoke about her review of the Virginia Public Library Trustee Handbook, *the Freedom to Read Statement* by the American Library Association and the Association of American Publishers, and the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. She has concluded that as a Trustee, she does not have the authority to infringe upon the right of citizens to have free access to all the materials in our public Library. The government has expressly reserved that right and privilege to the people.

Mr. Martin asked if staff could separate the Young Adult Collection into middle school and high school appropriate sections. Mr. Shepley explained that the movie industry can put ratings on movies before they are distributed to theaters. The movie industry is private, not a government organization. Libraries are different. The PRL has special limitations presenting difficulties for divided collections. There would be difficulties for staff to make a determination about how to place each book. The maturity of teens varies widely by age and school grade.

A discussion began about the online book database NoveList K-8 Plus. Could a NoveList Kiosk be placed in the Young Adult or Childrens Area to help with selections? Mr. Shepley explained that it has been available for about fifteen years. It is available to library patrons, parents and children in each branch library, on every public computer in the branches.

Mr. Shepley said the staff has been working on providing better communication for the communities served by the Library. He introduced the new NoveList K-8 Plus brochure that will be made available to PRL patrons, to educate people about the database. Some additional communication projects are in development.

Mr. Edwards agreed with the suggested communication changes and policy revisions suggested by Mr. Smith.

Mr. Martin asked Mr. Shepley if it would be possible to make the NoveList link more prominent on the PRL website, and easier to find on the Teen Page. Mr. Shepley believes staff could make the link bigger and more prominent on the webpage.

Ms. May recommended to the public in attendance that they consider creating reading groups with their friends, neighbors and teenagers to read books of their own choosing together and

discuss the books together. It will provide opportunities to help guide your young adults/teenagers as they read the literature available today.

Mr. Shepley spoke about the availability of *Talk Totes*, book totes with fifteen copies of popular books available for checkout by Library card holders. This makes it easy for groups to read a book at the same time before gathering to discuss the book.

Ms. Young arrived in the meeting room. She apologized to everyone for her delayed arrival.

Mr. Shepley summarized the Executive Committee suggestions regarding the Collections Policy and related Library organization.

- Add signage about parents/guardians responsibilities for material selections
- Add language to the proposed Collections Policy about Childrens and Young Adult Collections
- Add ...
- Make Teen Webpage NoveList link more prominent

Mr. Edwards suggested the proposed Collection Policy might be improved by deleting the references to the American Library Association. The ALA has become a lightning rod for many citizens, provoking distrust. Mr. Shepley agreed that this could be done.

The Trustees agreed that no motion would be needed to bring the results of this discussion from the Executive Committee to the full PRL Board of Trustees. The Library Staff plan to revise the policy to bring to the Board at the end of March.

Mr. Shepley remarked that the proposed Collection Development Policy, Display Policy and Library Programs Policy were like three legs of a stool, all supporting Library functions. The proposed update to the Reconsideration Form would serve patrons for challenges to the Library collection, displays, or programs.

Regarding the proposed Display Policy, Mr. Martin asked the question, who dictates opinions and viewpoints in our displays. Are all ideas included? How balanced are PRL displays?

Mr. Shepley explained that displays tend to be about materials, or about someone who has an opinion about a subject. The Library will make every effort to stick with factual information that is well researched. He noted that every book in the Library is on display. The books and other materials have earned their spot in the Library. Staff have done their research on each book, video, etc. Staff work to display books that will be used, circulated, read.

Mr. Martin asked whether the Library promotes particular ideas.

Mr. Smith noted that the Library is neutral.

Mr. Shepley and Mr. Smith stated that that the Library does not serve *in loco parentis* (in the place of parents).

Mr. Martin advocated for balance in collection selection.

Ms. Young spoke to the need for Library displays to be respectful of patrons, never rude or offensive.

Board Governance

Ms. Young raised the topic of Board Governance and Board Training. She asks us to review how our board is governed. Using a list from our Virginia Public Library Trustee Handbook (2019), she has prepared a list of topics and meeting dates. Trustees are to rank three topics they are willing to review for fellow Trustees, by April 20th. Ms. Young will lead the review of the Difference between Advisory Boards and Governing Boards at the March 22nd Board of Trustees Meeting. Mr. Smith reminded the Committee that we need to have a very thorough new Board Member Orientation.

New Business

Board Self-Evaluations, using the document provided by the Virginia Public Library Trustee Handbook. Today, Ms. Young will send each of the Trustees a Self-Evaluation Form to be completed in April. The evaluations may be returned anonymously. Mr. O'Connor suggested strongly that the self-evaluations should be overseen by the Full Board of Trustees, not the Executive Committee. He insists that he will sign his name to his self-evaluation, after years working in public service. Ms. May suggested that any compilation of results from the Trustee self-evaluations be made available to the Fiscal Year 2024 Board of Trustees, as well as the current Board of Trustees, so both Boards may be informed by the results. The Full Board may appoint someone to compile the results, or a Trustee may volunteer to do so.

Ms. Young adjourned the meeting at 11:05 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie May
Executive Committee Secretary