

Sitka Public Library Commission Meeting Minutes 11/4/2020

Held via Zoom (Meeting ID #951 1948 5327)
at 6:00 p.m. on November 4, 2020

The Sitka Public Library Commission met on Wednesday, November 4, 2020 via Zoom. The meeting was called to order at 6:04 pm. by Chair, Nicole Filipek.

Roll Call

Present: Jessica Ieremia (Library Director), Valorie Nelson (Assembly Liaison), Nicole Filipek (Chair), Jeff Budd (Commissioner), Steve Morse (Commissioner), Darryl Rehkopf (V. Chair/ Acting secretary); *Absent.:* Daniel Gunn (Commissioner/excused).

Public Comment

No public comment.

Changes to and Approval of the Agenda

No changes to the agenda; considered approved by Chair.

Approval of Previous Meeting (9/2/2020) Minutes

Minutes for the September meeting require an updated Zoom ID. Motion to approve (Steve), second (Jeff), passed unanimously.

Reports

Jessica Ieremia (Library Director):

- Visitor numbers have increased since August (2,343) to October (4,869). A new door counter has been installed which will improve accuracy for state reporting. Items checked out, holds placed and requests from other libraries have all gone up. Computer visits have gone down slightly (20) from last month.
- Library will be open the day after Thanksgiving, window service only.
- Cleaning contract has gone out to bid.
- Small meeting room had it's largest ever hard-to-find leak during a recent storm again, after staying dry for a while. City maintenance continues to investigate, but it may require a roof job in that area to solve the problem.
- Transom windows (which are opened every day for ventilation) are often stuck open—screws have been frequently replaced and the windows may need to be replaced eventually.
- Margo (Adult Librarian) reports somewhat modest turn-out but good discussions for the recent Sitka Reads and Sitka Science Center Landslide Warning System events at the library. Good feedback on the Banned Book display. Still working on the Online Baking Class and recorded book reviews which will be posted on the SPL webpage. Monthly Travel Log may be ready to go by mid-December.

- David K-T (library assistant) has started work on the local history project and will be doing an online story-time every three weeks.
- Maite (Youth Services) is still sending out the popular Craft and Goes every Saturday, along with monthly Zoom meetings of the Teen Advisory Board and the ‘Tween Club. Plans are also to have a (covid-safe) Reading Wonderland program again this December.
- Nicole notes that current month transactions are not printing out on the budget performance report. Jessica will work on that. Also the insurance expenditure line is higher than expected again this year and Nicole would like Jessica to inquire about that. Valorie notes that insurance historically goes up and suggests checking with the finance director. Jessica will check with Melissa Haley regarding this. Jessica will also check with IT to try and get a detailed summary of IT charges coming out of the library’s budget. Valorie suggests speaking with Grant and Melissa to learn how IT ‘overhead’ is calculated for the library. Jessica mentions that SPL will be receiving some new computers purchased with CARES Act funds and wants to be sure the IT budget calculations reflect current inventory.

(Welcome to Valorie as the new Assembly Liaison.)

Commissioner Report (Jeff):

The Armchair Traveling Series (or similar title) to be hosted by various local world-travelers should start by mid-December. A team Spelling Bee is also planned for February on Zoom.

Chair Report (Nicole):

A commission member is needed to sit on the Art Selection Committee with Nicole. *(Nicole describes the art project as proposed by the committee.)* A hold-up of over a year in the city’s legal office has delayed the release of the RFP for this project. Jeff says he will be glad to help with the committee’s open seat.

New business

Discussion and action on a proposal to recommend to the City Administrator that Sitka Public Library Go Fine-Free

- (Jessica) In a broad movement across the country, libraries are choosing to go fine-free to attain diversity, equity and inclusion in the communities they serve, and to avoid the stigma of overdue fines which in turn cause embarrassment and create a barrier to library use, leading to a lack of information access and loss of social connection.
- The prevalent belief that fines are the best motivator for recovering library materials may not necessarily be true: a large segment of ‘late-return’ library patrons do eventually return their materials, and libraries see little reason to penalize such patrons. Instead, libraries wish to empathize that they are providing a service, not a revenue stream comprised of overdue fines.
- Libraries which have gone fine-free have seen increased circulation numbers, improved patron satisfaction, and reductions in awkward interactions between library staff and patrons regarding money and whether materials have or have not been returned.

- SPL is one of the last libraries in Alaska that has not gone fine-free. It currently has 272 adult and 94 youth accounts blocked—the majority of which are blocked simply because of overdue fines. Patrons who cannot pay their fines lose access to library services and stop coming to the library. Every time this happens, an important connection is lost, along with the best opportunity for the return of the overdue materials. SPL wants people to keep reading, to stay connected, even those without the ability to pay.
- Total staff time over the past year devoted to manage the recovery of overdue fines is not easily calculated, but of the \$7,290 that was billed out in the past year, only \$3,800 was recovered. Based on the amount of time one staff member spent annually preparing and sending notifications by mail and or email alone cost the library approximately \$2,785. That does not include the cost of effort by other staff members who lay the groundwork for the notifications by running reports, etc. or who deal with this issue by phone or on a face-to-face basis at the front desk every day.

Motion: That Sitka Public Library go fine-free, but continue to hold people responsible for damaged [or lost items] books and equipment. (Made by Jeff, second by Darryl.)

- Steve asks about what effect fine-free would have on the length of time you would have to wait after placing a hold on a book. Jessica replies that fine-free libraries have not seen increases.
- Steve says he sees the benefits of children’s accounts going fine-free. Jessica replies that her experience with fine-free only for children resulted in a tendency for ‘blocked’ parents to check things out using their kids’ accounts.
- Jessica points out that SPL could take a look at selected data that would track the efficacy of a change to a fine-free policy and enable fine-tuning if needed.
- Steve and Jessica agree that this policy change could also be a lesson in self-management. (‘Can I manage the 50 items I am allowed to check out?’)
- Libraries that have gone fine-free find that items formerly labelled as ‘lost’ are returned to the library in large numbers.
- Laptop computers will remain subject to late fines.
- Nicole wonders about looking at the results of the policy at its first anniversary, although once fine-free, it may be awkward to rescind.
- Some libraries make a big celebration out of going fine-free, some say nothing about it. (Which tends to create grateful patrons and an increase in donations.)
- Jessica suggests we forgive all fines.

Motion as stated passes unanimously.

Old Business

No old business.

(Nicole states her intention to get bylaws drafted for the Commission. Also encourages the recruiting of new commission members.)

Items for the next agenda

No items brought forward for the next agenda.

Comments

No public comment.

Motion to adjourn (*Darryl moves, Steve seconds.*)

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 pm.

Next meeting date: December 2nd at 6 pm via Zoom.

Minutes submitted by Darryl Rehkopf, V. Chair/Acting Secretary