

WEBER COUNTY LIBRARY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES

January 7, 2025

Board Members
in Attendance: Wendy Ogata, Chair
Caitlin Gochnour
Jim Harvey
Shannon Sebahar
John Watson

Board Members
Excused: Sandra Crosland
Reed Spencer

Others
in Attendance: Laurana Ivory Ashby, Community Member
Mark Ashby, Community Member
Bryan Baron, Legal Counsel
Karen Burton, Special Projects Manager
Phoebe Carter, Assistant Director
Andrea Chavez, Associate Business Manager, Southwest Branch
Shari Creer, Friends of the Library
Alex Greenwell, Associate Business Manager, Pleasant Valley Branch
Susan Meagher, North Branch Manager
Randy Mueller, Collection Development Manager
Holly Okuhara, Assistant Director
Leonora Schaelling, Ogden Valley Branch Manager
Deborah Smith, Pleasant Valley Branch Manager
Julia Valle, Business Office Manager
Lynnda Wangsgard, Director

Public Comments:

Ogata called the meeting to order and welcomed those present, noting Crosland and Spencer had asked to be excused. She called for public comments; there were none.

Approval of November 5, 2024, Meeting Minutes:

Watson moved approval of the November 5, 2024 minutes. Gochnour seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative.

Board Policy Concerns, Laurana Ivory Ashby:

L. Ashby said she was addressing a concern from the general public about the manner in which fees for damaged materials are assessed. She explained that she had addressed the concern with

everyone from the circulation staff to the library director without satisfaction, so she was invited to ask for a review by the library board.

L. Ashby shared a response to her concerns that was received from library staff about stewarding and taking pride in the library's book collection. She said she does not disagree with the goal of keeping materials in the best possible condition, but feels the staff has taken it too far. The policy is fine, but the implementation is keeping people from using the library. People in the Valley love the library, she said, but they can't afford to use it anymore. To illustrate her point, L. Ashby referred to a number of comments in response to a post she made on social media; many stated they had to pay for damages they did not cause, or the charge was too much.

L. Ashby shared a recent transaction to illustrate her point. She was the second person to borrow a book, which was returned with bite marks on the cover. She was asked to pay the full cost to replace the book. When she presented her case to the librarian, she said she was told the policy directed them to hold people accountable for damages.

L. Ashby recommended the board consider revising their policy to levy smaller fines and not replace damaged items every time. She said some people had been charged over \$100 throughout the year. It's not the purpose of the library, books are to be enjoyed, she said. "People can't afford books, they have to rely on the library."

Ogata asked from whom she received responses to her social media post. Ashby said the responses came from an Ogden Valley moms' group.

Ogata asked if she ever used the Davis County Library.

L. Ashby said, yes, and they saw the same thing, but there was more leniency; people were not asked to replace the book if they could get the damage out. There were smaller fines and borrowers were not asked to replace the entire book.

M. Ashby said the fines were overbearing and did not support making great use of books; the fines were discouraging people from using the library. He urged the board to find a balance. A dollar or two in damage was reasonable, but he had been asked to pay \$40 to replace a title.

The purpose of both the Davis and Weber County libraries is to encourage reading, but what is seen at the Ogden Valley Branch is not this, L. Ashby said. Some people are traveling to Davis County Library to avoid fees, or they take their return to the North Branch where they are not charged the same fines. She wondered if the problem was "branch specific," or is it pretty much a wide spread issue?

L. Ashby concluded by saying her family moved to Huntsville three and one-half years ago. They are heavy library users. They came from Salt Lake County where they were consistently assessed smaller fines and were not asked to replace damaged materials.

Ogata noted the board cannot give a satisfactory answer today; they will need to do some research before making a decision on how to proceed. She will visit the library to see for herself what is being done. The Ashbys were invited to return to hear the board's discussion and response to their concern during the February 4, 2025, board meeting.

Ogata concluded by asking a follow up question, wondering if all the damage charges were on children's materials.

L. Ashby said they were not.

Watson said the board tracks the number of items borrowed on a regular basis and use certainly illustrates people love their libraries. The board is "people friendly" and wants to encourage use.

Ogata asked if there was anything the staff wanted to add to the conversation.

Wangsgard said the staff will do some research and forward their findings to the board to aid in making an informed decision.

Ogata, invited the Ashbys to stay for the remainder of the meeting.

Procedure for Assessing Fees for Damaged Materials:

Wangsgard addressed the administrative procedure used to provide guidelines for assessing damage fees under the direction of the board's circulation policy. There are no "rules," just guidelines. Librarians are charged with using their professional judgment. The board policy assigns responsibilities to both the public and staff for addressing damaged items:

Damaged Items:

- Borrowers are responsible to inspect materials for damage prior to check out. If damage is present, the patron must notify circulation staff prior to check out.
- Charges for materials returned damaged will be based upon periodically established rates as determined by Library Director.
- Damaged items will be held for 45 days after the patron's account has been charged and the patron has been notified by phone and/or mail. After that, the items will be repaired and put back into circulation or discarded. The fees will remain on the patron's account until paid.

The first step in assuring accurate accountability is for borrowers to check their materials for damage as they are being checked out. If there is previous damage the staff has missed, it should be pointed out at that time. Once the item leaves the facility, its condition is the responsibility of the borrower.

The library director is given full responsibility for implementing the policy. The procedure in use was developed several years ago, in conjunction with the Davis County Library director, when a cooperative borrowing agreement was negotiated. A copy of the current procedure was

distributed to board members and had been previously shared with the Ashbys. The administrative procedure established a category/criteria of damage (light, moderate, severe, and unsalvageable), detailed examples of types of damage, suggested disposition of the item (clean/mend, repair, replace, discard), and a range of fees was detailed.

Sebahar said the concern seemed to be that the range of fees was not being followed, that people were being charged the full cost of the item.

Wangsgard said the best way to look into the issue is for the board to actually visit the libraries and see for themselves what is being done. Every book on a damaged materials shelf has a completed form, noting several factors including, the type of damage, how many times it has circulated, the recommended action, etc. They can see for themselves if the full cost is consistently being levied.

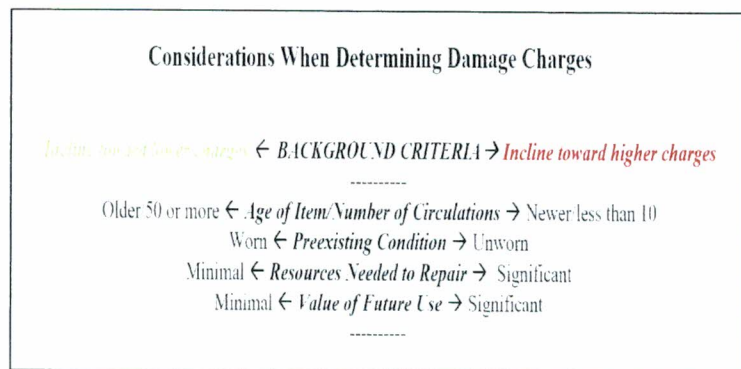
Focusing back to review of the procedure, Wangsgard noted the difference of opinion often arises when there is a disagreement concerning whether the book should be put back into circulation.

Watson asked who makes that decision.

The decision is made by a professional manager, with input from professional librarians, including but not limited to

Main, Holly Okuhara and Randy Mueller
North Branch, Susan Meagher
Ogden Valley Branch, Leonora Schaelling
Pleasant Valley Branch, Deborah Smith
Southwest Branch, Phoebe Carter

The second page of the procedure for assessing damage fees provided a list of considerations to help in assigning fees. These considerations are not all inclusive, but provide a general guideline for professional librarians and division managers. The final page of the procedure detailed minimum repair costs for such things as replacing a barcode label (\$2.00), or re-jacketing the book (\$1.00).



Finding and assessing damage fees is a double-blind process, Wangsgard said. No one knows until after the fee is assessed to whom the charge will be made. As materials are returned, circulation employees collate the item page-by-page and, if damages are found, the item is set aside.

Greenwell went on to explain the circulation staff then takes time to fill out a “white slip,” detailing where and what the damage is, the general wear-and-tear on the item, how many times it has been borrowed, how many copies are owned, etc.

Books, along with the white slips, are then sent to a professional librarian who reviews the item and determines if the item can, or should, be replaced. Once all the information is in hand, the damage charge is assessed. After the librarian establishes the charge, the item is sent back to the circulation manager. It is not until this point in the process that the circulation manager determines who last checked it out. The circulation manager then notifies the borrower of the damages, either by email, telephone, or a personal letter. The item is placed on a “damaged materials shelf” where it remains for a minimum of 45 days, giving the person time to come in, review the damage, and discuss the charge. If a borrower does not respond, their account is billed and the item is either repaired and put back in service or discarded.

Greenwell noted the staff addresses damages that can be easily mitigated, such as erasing pencil marks or repairing a page, and the item is immediately put back into circulation. These materials are not sent to a librarian because there will not be a damage charge.

Sebahar asked if there was a breakdown of charges levied. Are 50% a full replacement charge or are 25% of the items charged for just a little damage?

Greenwell said that degree of specificity is not available. Water damage, is a category of damage that can be reviewed, and in most cases it results in the item being discarded. Food stains are another consistent damage and they carry a risk of pests invading the bindings. These titles are most often not reshelved.

Sebahar asked if there is a way to determine the average number of items that go right back on the shelf.

Wangsgard suggested a general number can be extrapolated by looking at the damage shelves to see how many items are being held for review, compared to number of items that were returned during a given time, but the method is imprecise.

Watson asked, of all damages, how many people come back with a face-to-face objection; is there much interface with members of the public?

Chavez said that out of all the damages, one or two each month come in and are angry at the Southwest Branch.

Wangsgard noted that assessing damage fees is a matter of using good judgment. In many cases fees are waived. The divisive issue, she reiterated, seems to be whether the book should be reshelved. Borrowers may believe that if the book can still be read, it is OK to reshelve. That’s not the overriding criteria used to maintain the public library collection.

Greenwell noted that if the circulation staff can fix the item, there is not a charge. They only send the item to a librarian to assess a fee when it cannot be repaired, when the damage is permanent.

In some cases, Greenwell said the staff sends community members a courtesy notice to remind them of the board's policy and encourage them to be more careful about damages. Damage can be unintentional; a water bottle placed in the book bag, for example. However, there is no possibility the damage occurred in a library book drop. There are hard situations to negotiate through, he continued. We don't want to say we don't believe their account of the situation, but it's hard to communicate without giving that impression. Sometimes, they get angry; we have to be patient because they deserve to be heard.

Chavez noted that employees explain to community members when they get a card that they can help maintain the collection, and avoid unwarranted charges, by checking for damage as materials are borrowed. It can be hard when they check out many items at a time, she acknowledged. Courtesy notices and waiving of fees are a tool for good service, but people have to be cautious about the items in their care.

Harvey said, the point is, after a courtesy waiver a time or two, people need to be held accountable. When we loan something, we expect the common courtesy of returning it in good shape.

Sebahar asked if there was a national standard for charging.

Schaelling said searches on sites such as Reddit give a variety of responses and opinions, illustrating that there is no standard.

Wangsgard noted that Davis County's procedure for assessing damages mirrors that used in Weber County. However, there is a significant difference in the scope of the collections of the two library systems. Weber County focuses on maintaining core collections of classic materials. These items are stewarded differently than are popular materials, which are often published in paperback. It is often cheaper to discard and replace paperbound items rather than spend the time to charge for damages. Ephemeral materials circulate several times and are discarded and replaced. Classic hardbound materials are different and core items may not even be available for replacement. The missions of the two libraries are very different, one is not better than the other, but they are different. Weber County's library collections have depth and breadth of materials for people of all ages. They are much more than popular materials collections.

Wangsgard said, in her opinion, the staff at Ogden Valley Branch negotiates to a greater degree than do those at other library locations. The Valley is a smaller community of users. The staff gets to know residents and tries to cater to their needs.

Burton said, when someone comes in we listen, we try to make them happy.

Gochmour wondered, what could be done that is positive. “Could a family program on how to take care of library materials be developed and could it be sent out on social media”?

Sebahar again asked if the board could get some statistics to provide a picture of what is actually taking place.

Creer agreed statistics would be useful, but there is no substitute for working at a checkout desk. She shared an example of an incident that took place when she worked at the Main Library.

One busy Sunday afternoon, a community member took considerable time debating the fairness of charging for minor damage to an item. The customer line behind her kept getting longer and longer, so Creer asked if she could help the people waiting and then continue their discussion. The woman agreed. The second person in line was a young boy. He told Creer that he was there to pay for a book he had damaged. He took out his coin purse and gave her \$1.25, along with an apology. He then checked out another book and stepped out of line. The story illustrates, she said, how different people respond to charges for damages. It can be a challenge for the staff to be fair. Some people can accept the fact that their kids do things, eating while they read or taking the book outside to play, and they pay for the damage. Other people can't accept that their children make mistakes, or that they can intentionally cause damages themselves.

Gochmour again expressed a desire to inform borrowers by holding a family workshop on how to care for a book. Perhaps the public could be reminded that it's not a good idea to put water bottles in with books, for example.

Wangsgard was asked to arrange a workshop or other educational experiences to help people understand how to care for materials.

Watson, suggested also preparing a list of things that should not be done to a library book; things like bending down the corners of the page to mark where to begin the next reading session and eating while reading. The most common damages would be a good thing for people to know.

Ogata said she will review hold shelves and Wangsgard was asked to forward damage statistics, as available. She asked, rhetorically, “Should the public pay less for book damage?”

Wangsgard said, the board represents the public, the board should decide and the staff will follow their guidance.

Director's Report:

Wangsgard summarized the financial report, printed on December 31, 2024, but not representing the final closing of accounts. Revenue collections for line items other than property taxes were almost 100% accounted for. There will be at least one more deposit and a final settlement to the property tax line item.

Invoices for services rendered during December were still being received and will be charged

against the FY2024 budget through January, 31, 2025. Budget authority for some projects that span more than one year will be carried over to 2025.

The America Rescue Plan Act grant received earlier during the year cushioned spending in several line items, providing funding for budgeted operations and making it possible to facilitate additional projects. The good news, Wangsgard said, is that the year will be completed under budget with a yet undetermined amount of funding transferred to the library fund balance, or rainy-day fund.

Usage statistics were current only through November. Yearend output measures will be reported during the February meeting, Wangsgard said.

Employees will receive 1.5% cost-of-living increase on their first check in January and a pay for performance increase, if one was earned, February 7, 2025. All performance reviews had been completed and turned over to the county, along with a spreadsheet authorizing the pay for performance allocations.

Position descriptions had been updated to better reflect employees' responsibilities. The updated descriptions will be used by the county to conduct a salary and benefits study. The updated descriptions also necessitated revision of performance plan templates which was underway. Performance plans should be finalized by January 28, 2025, and will include focusing on achieving predetermined organizational results for the year. Supervisors will meet with every employee to negotiate their performance plan and ensure they have an updated copy of their position description.

Sebahar asked if there were any discrepancies between the board budget request and what was actually approved. Wangsgard said the board's budget was approved as presented to county commissioners.

Sebahar asked if there was a plan to put the cafés out to bid.

Wangsgard noted there was not enough traffic in today's market to justify a bid. Selling coffee and donuts to library users will not sustain a business and a full-service café has too much overhead to be a success in this labor market. She noted that some libraries are running the café space themselves, but that can be seen as unfair competition with private sector businesses. Several people who did not have access to a commercial kitchen had inquired about using library equipment to run a catering business.

Sebahar said that is not our mission.

Friends of the Library Report:

Creer shared a "connection kit" that was being made available to people who are seeking ways to help them through a dark time of the year. The kit included, among other items, a list of social service agencies and a library events calendar.

A new event being sponsored by the Friends and held at the Pleasant Valley Branch was "Friday Afternoon at the Movies." Films from the library collection were being screened in the black box theater, giving people something to look forward to without having to go out when it is dark. Sebahar asked how the kits are distributed.

Smith said the kits are available at the reference desk. Signage makes people aware of them and staff can make an offer if it seems appropriate.

Burton noted the kits have been a big hit during January for several years at various locations.

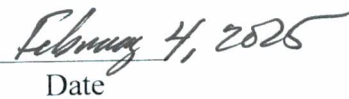
Other:

Crosland had attended the Winter Fest celebration and took some photographs that were screened for the board. Okuhara narrated the presentation, noting it included offering family portraits with Mishka, the Main Library's polar bear mascot; crafts; distribution of warm clothing; and a box lunch with eggnog, coffee, and soft drinks. Friends of the Library provided funding for live music and everyone was welcome.

There being no further business, Gochnour offered a motion to adjourn; Watson seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative.

Respectfully submitted:


Julia Valle


Date