



PALOS HEIGHTS
PUBLIC LIBRARY

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Palos Heights Public Library Board of Trustees Meeting
January 18, 2024

Library News

We had a wonderful week of programs post-Thanksgiving to help usher in a festive holiday season. We had well over 200 attendees between the Chicago Christmas program, the madrigal sing-along, Baking with Beth, craft programs, and the kids dance party. Then we set up our table at the City's Kris Kringle Market and gave away around 27 gallons of hot cocoa to shoppers. We put out the tip jar and received over \$250 in donations, which is enough to cover our costs for the weekend. We also donated four staff-created items from the Zanardo FabLab, for which the City held drawings. It was an amazing week of celebrating the season and bringing holiday cheer to our neighbors!

Those of you who use the SWAN Libraries app probably noticed that the app stopped working suddenly on November 27th. This was as much a surprise to SWAN as it was to our patrons. The app was a collaboration between two companies, SirsiDynix who manages all of the backend data for the consortium, and Solus, who managed the front end of the app for the consortium. There was a catastrophic disagreement between these companies, which resulted in Solus suddenly taking down the app and permanently severing its relationship with SirsiDynix. SWAN doesn't know what caused this fallout. I speculate that it is rooted in Solus offering its own competing backend product and no longer wanting to support a competitor. Regardless, SWAN went into crisis mode as the app was used by well over 10,000 users per day. Thankfully, due to existing partnerships with other technology providers, SWAN had a few quick options at its disposal. Bywater Solutions, which currently runs the Aspen web-based catalog frontend for the consortium, already has its own app that is fully deployed with a few thousand libraries worldwide. They were able to quickly build a production-ready app for SWAN, which has since gone live in app stores as SWAN Libraries +. It is a completely different app that loses a few features from the old one and has a few extras as well. I don't like it quite as much, personally, but it is functional and has some browsing features that are a significant upgrade.

SirsiDynix was the entity which was contractually obligated to provide the old SWAN Libraries app. They will be refunding approximately \$45,000 in fees to the consortium and reduce its fee for the final full year of the current contract by over \$90,000. Because of its existing partnership with SirsiDynix to run the Aspen product, Bywater is able to provide its app to the consortium at a very low cost of less than \$10,000 per year. We will see this savings as a reduction in our annual SWAN membership fee of around \$1,000 beginning in the new fiscal year.

Our new online newspaper and magazine service, PressReader, went live in January. We're really excited about this service as it allows all cardholders free daily access to the Chicago Tribune and Southtown in

addition to a huge catalog of national and international daily newspapers and magazines. I've wanted to find a way to offer patrons virtual access to our local papers for a long time now. For decades, the library has been a daily destination for a lot of people simply to come in and read the daily paper. In this digital age, it only makes sense that we should be able to offer a similar virtual service. PressReader allows us to do that. Access is flexible and intuitive. There is an app that can be downloaded on phones or tablets, and the service is fully accessible via traditional web browsers as well. Access validates with the same library card number and PIN that patrons use for other online library services. While not inexpensive (\$3,996 per year), I believe that this will be a very well-used resource that will drive engagement with regular patrons and help us bridge the gap to those who don't currently use the library with regularity. We are able to afford this new service due to discontinuing the Freegal music service (\$7,365 annually), which has seen a precipitous decline in usage in recent years.

Building & Grounds News

On November 20th, there was a water main break in the neighborhood. The City had to cut water to the building for a number of hours. We closed the building until 1pm that day as we can't maintain sanitary conditions for staff or patrons without running water. When the City turned the water back on, our plumbing system was slammed with a wave of muck that overwhelmed our backflow prevention system. Chicago Backflow was called and responded immediately. They were able to patch the system up and get it working again, but most of our backflow preventer system was ruined. It was able to hold together until repairs could be completed. After consulting with Trustee Burek, I approved the repair proposal in the amount of \$8,841.00 as an emergency measure. This was something that couldn't wait until our next meeting for approval. I felt that we couldn't even wait to try to get some competing quotes. The system was barely holding together, requiring a few minutes between toilet flushes for the pressure to rebuild enough to flush for the next person. Repairs to the backflow system were completed on December 12th. Water pressure immediately returned to normal. Once the backflow system was repaired, we then had the plumbers come and clean the dirt out of some toilet valves. The same had to be done for the building humidifier as well. At this point, pressure is back to normal and all aspects of the building's plumbing seem to be working as they should. I filed a property claim with Gallagher to reimburse us for this repair. That reimbursement was approved and received, less the \$1,000 deductible.

Budget News

Between November 30th and December 22nd, we received ~\$905,000 in tax disbursements from the County. Despite being four months late, this represents approximately 99% of what we were expecting for the second half of FY22. This gives us enough funds to repay the loan from the City and pay the bills through the spring. The next round of tax bills should go out as usual in early January with those disbursements beginning in March. After that, we will be in good shape to make it to the end of the year, regardless of any delay from the County.

Because we received those tax payments before the end of the year, the City requested that we repay the loan before the end of December. The reasoning behind this was twofold. First, instead of sitting in our money market and gathering interest for the library over the next couple of months, that money could be doing so for the City. As they made this loan to us with no interest, it seems right that we would try to maximize their ability to receive interest income on this money if it is in our ability to do so. The easiest way to do this is simply to return the funds to them sooner rather than later. The second reason for doing this is that it will make for a cleaner audit, both for the City and the Library. Because our accounting is on a cash basis, that additional income being matched by equal outflow in the same fiscal year will make for a tidy little set of transactions for the auditor, as opposed to doing so across different fiscal years. So, on the assumption that the Board would have no objection to formally approving repayment at its next opportunity, I acquiesced to their request and hand-delivered a check for \$250,000 on December 26th.

As a result, you will see that the expenditures for the month of December in the financial reports is quite high. When taking the loan repayment into account, December's expenditures are right where they should be. Similarly, the November expenditures are high because this was one of the two three-payroll months that we have each year. Other than the three payrolls, November's expenditures are also on target.

Annual Tasks

It's the time of year when I have various administrative tasks to do that will keep us officially recognized as a functioning as a public library for another year. Our annual Per Capita Grant application has been filed and accepted by the State. I have submitted our list of Statement of Economic Interest filers to the County. We are compiling statistics to submit our annual Illinet resource sharing and IPLAR statistical reports. Once those are complete, I will file our annual certification with the State.

I have submitted our list of required filers for the annual Statements of Economic Interest to the County. You should see an email from the County asking for that filing sometime in March. I will make sure and let you know when I have received mine so that nobody misses it.

On November 29th, I attended the annual LIRA membership meeting for our corporate insurance bundle. The LIRA pool is up to 63 libraries at this point with well over \$1 billion of insured property statewide. Pooling our resources like this allows for much more leverage in the market than any of us would be able to command on our own. This is reflected year after year with our rates outperforming the industry without sacrificing any coverage. In 2024, we will see a total increase of 13%, which is a big number. However, compared to the industry average of 22%, we are fortunate that it is where it is. These increases are even more significant in the Midwest, as they are now on par with rates on the coasts for the first time possibly ever due to huge increases in catastrophic losses from major weather events. Hopefully, this year was a big adjustment for the market, and we will see softening in future years. But I take comfort in the fact that our costs are reasonable, and our coverage is excellent.

Upcoming Events

- January 18: Policy Committee Meeting at 6:30pm
- January 18: Regular Board Meeting at 7pm
- February 2-5: Friends of the Library Book Sale
- February 9: Staff In-Service Day
- February 15: Building & Grounds Committee Meeting at 6:00pm
- February 15: Regular Board Meeting at 7pm

Agenda Items

Item 1: Policy Updates

The Policy Committee will be meeting right before our regular meeting to discuss changes to the Personnel Benefits Policy and the Financial Policy. The Benefits Policy issue is in response to the new Paid Leave for All Workers Act, which went into effect on January 1. We are now required to provide paid time off to all employees. Currently, most of our part-time employees are granted no paid time off. So we have to adjust our policy to comply with the new law.

With regard to the Financial Policy, the emergency plumbing issue in December brought to light that it might make sense to have a statement that authorizes the Library Director to authorize expenditures in excess of \$5,000 in an emergency situation. The proposed amendment would insert this language.

Recommendation: I recommend that you approve these policies per the recommendations of the Policy Committee.

Item 2: City Loan Repayment

Though we have already issued the check to repay this loan at the City's request, I am asking for ex post facto permission. Because repayment was a formality and the City was firm in their request that it be repaid before the new year, that action was already taken. But we should still get the formal action on the record.

Recommendation: I recommend that you approve repayment of the loan to the City of Palos Heights in the amount of \$250,000.

Item 3: Plumbing Repair

Similar to the above item, this is work that has already been completed as it was an emergency situation. I spoke with enough of you individually beforehand to convince me that taking immediate action was more important than waiting for the next possible meeting for approval. Hopefully, the above changes to our Financial Policy will eliminate this kind of procedural issue in the future.

Recommendation: I recommend that you approve the plumbing backflow repair in the amount of \$8,841.00.

Respectfully submitted,
Jesse Blazek
Library Director