

FORT VANCOUVER REGIONAL LIBRARY DISTRICT
Board of Trustees Special Meeting

February 18, 2003

I. CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Jerry King called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. at Discovery Middle School in Vancouver.

II. PRESENT

Vice Chair Jerry King presiding. Board members: Ellis Dunn, Shirley Morgan, Karen Peterson and Elena Smith. Staff attending included: Bruce Ziegman, Executive Director; Patty Duitman, Associate Director; Candy Morgan, Associate Director; Doreen Turpen, Associate Director; Sue Vanlaanen, Associate Director and Becky Pettigrew, recording.

Other staff and citizens attending: Jen Bair, Tom Bennett, Mary Jane Borman, Allan Brettman, David DiCesare, Jon Distin, Greg Flakus, Chalannes Hoover, Marilyn Lewis, Jan Oliva, Annette Price, Rick Smithrud, Tom Vogt and Melissa Williams.

III. INTRODUCTION

King summarized the topic for discussion tonight as the timing of a bond measure for Greater Vancouver libraries. He noted that this is a very important decision and the board wants to give it serious attention. Although board members Merle Koplan and Marilyn Breckel are out of town and unable to attend, they did submit their thoughts on this issue in writing and King said he would read those comments a little later tonight.

King said the other purpose of the meeting is for the board to hear comments from citizens and from staff who have been gathering information on this topic. He added that this is not a formal hearing. However, after citizens have commented, public comment time will be closed and the board will discuss the issue after hearing a report from the director. Their decision tonight will be either to proceed with the election in May 2003 as planned or to delay it to a later date. King reassured those present that there is no question about the need for larger libraries in Vancouver. The question is just about the timing of the bond measure.

Improvements in library facilities in Greater Vancouver would include enlarging the Vancouver Community Library building at its current site from 48,000 square feet to 92,000 square feet. The Operations Center would move out of the building into a separate office/warehouse space. A new 25,000 square foot Cascade Park Community Library would be built adjacent to the Firstenburg Community Center, to replace the existing library that is only 2,500 square feet. King noted that the City of Vancouver has guaranteed land at both library locations at no cost to the library. In order to fund the new library construction / remodel, voters would be asked to approve formation of a Library Capital Facility Area (LCFA), which requires a 50% yes vote to pass, and a \$48 million bond measure that requires a 60% yes vote. The bond would cost citizens in the LCFA 21¢ per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, or about \$31 per year for a \$150,000 home.

King shared several pros and cons related to the timing of the measure:

Pros (reasons to proceed in May 2003):

- New facilities are greatly needed. Our main library is the highest circulating library in the state and the Cascade Park branch circulates three times more than the main library per square foot.
- We have had great citizen participation in this effort so far, including the citizens involved with the Community Resource Team. The Citizens for Better Libraries political action committee has formed and they've been very successful in raising money for the bond issue. Many people support us and have written checks for it.
- We have support from Vancouver City Council and the Clark County Commissioners. King noted that they would support whatever decision we make tonight. The City will provide us with the land for the main library and Cascade Park at no cost. Also, the Friends of the Library and the FVRL Foundation are very supportive.
- The schools recently approved their bonds with high support – well over 60%. Maybe people would be willing to vote for libraries? King noted that at 21¢ per \$1,000, our measure is so much less money than the schools. But people could say they voted for the schools and now they can't afford the new libraries. There is also the possibility that voters were responding to what happened in Oregon with Measure 28.

Cons (reasons to delay the measure):

- Two library issues in the Puget Sound area were defeated.
- State legislature may need to increase taxes.
- We are on the brink of war and it's hard for citizens to focus on local issues when this is going on. The war would be very expensive as well.
- Voters are looking at the local, state and federal problems and may say that this is not a good time for the library.
- Consumer spending is down and the economy is not very good right now, plus unemployment is high.
- Many people say we have such wonderful library service right now and so don't recognize the need for additional space. This could make it harder to explain to people why they need to tax themselves to provide more space.

King said that it is hard to say whether or not things will be better in 6 months or one year from now. He also noted that the decision to go forward was made just last month, with quite a bit of enthusiasm.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mary Jane Borman asked if this bond measure would be the only thing on the ballot in May 2003, if we were to proceed as planned. King said that it would be. Borman introduced Chalones Hoover as the new president of the Friends of Vancouver Community Library.

Jan Oliva said that she has spoken with many in the community and that she speaks on behalf of Citizens for Better Libraries. She commended the trustees for their leadership, as she has heard nothing but good things about the way the library system is run. Another common thread in what people are saying is that there is a strong basis of support because people love their library. She reported that there are no outstanding negatives. People recognize that the library is providing an important service and they also see that the library needs to be expanded at both the main library and in east Vancouver. There is lots of donor support out there. She has found that although people love the library and support it, there seems to be a sense of uncertainty about the timing of the measure. A lot of it is attributed to factors already mentioned and the letters written by Koplán and Breckel. Threat of war, the economy, and issues facing our local and state governments are big issues. She said we want a successful Yes vote campaign, and that means 60% have to vote for it. If we come close but miss, it will be very detrimental because we will have to go back two steps and think it through again. She reassured the board that all the donors who have contributed to the campaign are with us for the long haul, regardless of when we put it to the voters. She added that library supporters commend us for being cautious and planning this carefully. We need to move forward, but we need to be successful when we do. She advocates that we take a good hard look at this and postpone it until later.

King thanked Oliva for her comments and for all the work she has done raising money for this campaign.

Marilyn Lewis said as president of the Friends of Cascade Park Community Library, she emailed the Friends group and area neighborhood associations asking them to come to tonight's meeting. She regrets not asking them to send their opinions to her, but two people did write to her. One is a teacher in the Evergreen School District who cautioned us not to think that those who voted for the schools would automatically vote for the library. This is because lots of volunteer effort went into the school campaign and it was also in response to the bad situation with Portland schools. The other person who wrote to her is a man active in the medical unit at Fort Lewis. This man said libraries are important and there will always be a threat of war, so don't let it stop us from doing what needs to be done. Lewis said she doesn't talk to a lot of people, so she can't say how the board should vote.

Greg Flakus said he resides in Three Creeks library area, but visits the main library on a regular basis. He asked about the financial markets related to bond borrowing. Are the rates more favorable now in comparison to what could happen in the future, and have our financial experts weighed this into the equation? King said that the interest rate you pay on bonds is a big part of the costs; he sees this as a favorable factor in going now, but can't be sure if it will be the same if it passed in several months from now. Ziegman noted that we wouldn't sell \$48 million in bonds right away. The bulk would be sold a year or two hence, and we can't predict the rate that far ahead. We would still be in this situation of selling bonds over time regardless of when the measure is held. Duitman

added that we had looked at it and if the interest rate went up 1%, citizens would pay 22-23 cents per thousand for the bond.

Jen Bair said she moved to Cascade Park from Colorado in January. She is surprised at the small size of the Cascade Park library. She used to pass four libraries on her way to work in Colorado and thinks we need to boost up our libraries here. King agreed that improvement in library space is needed, especially in Cascade Park.

V. RECOMMENDATION OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ziegman said he is about as enthusiastic as he can possibly be about the need for new libraries in Vancouver and Cascade Park. He sees the need very clearly and has been telling everyone who will listen about the need. He will continue to do this regardless of the time frame, as will other staff. He reiterated that there is no doubt about the need for new libraries, which is why he said it doesn't bring him any pleasure to recommend that we delay the bond. He doesn't want to disappoint our many supporters nor our staff who are trying to give the best service they can from very minimal space.

There are times when it's best not to listen to your heart and Ziegman said we must look at this clearly and thoughtfully. This is a board decision, but as executive director he feels he must give his opinion and advice on this matter. He recommended that the board delay the measure for the following reasons:

- The poor national economy. He noted that when we began contemplating this 1½ years ago, the economy was not very good but everyone believed it would swing back up. Instead, things have gotten worse.
- The uncertainty of war. Should war break out and not end quickly, it will cause greater uncertainty.
- Over the past week, Ziegman and several other staff have contacted over 30 community leaders across a wide spectrum including business leaders, government and local organizations. They are almost unanimously recommending that we delay. Ziegman has also asked staff for their opinions and the opinions of their family and friends, and the majority has said we should delay.

Ziegman suggested that the board consider February 2004 as a time better suited for this election. We can speculate that the war issue will be settled by then. This will also provide more time to campaign, which is always helpful.

VI. BOARD DISCUSSION & ACTION

King read the letters from the two board members who were absent (letters are attached). He noted that Koplan is the new board chair and has been on the board for quite a while. She also has retail experience. Breckel was chair of the board for the past two years. After reading the letters, King invited board discussion.

Peterson asked Oliva if the Citizens for Better Libraries had any thoughts about when to hold the measure. Oliva said that the only thought she has heard relates to when other

issues are on the ballot. She did, however, get a sense that there will be ongoing support. No one has opted for a refund on their current donation; they all want it to carry forward.

King noted that we'd likely exclude September and November as possible election times. Borman reminded the group that 2004 is a big election year. Ziegman also mentioned that the schools would not likely do a measure next year.

Dunn said that 1½ years ago, he argued with those who said we should wait due to the economy. He argued that we shouldn't feed into the national fear and create a downward spiral in the economy. He argued then that we should continue. Tonight, following Ziegman's suggestion, he's being prudent and saying that for all the reasons we already mentioned we should wait. He said he feels a great deal of regret in making this decision. Dunn questioned whether we should set an election date at this point, since many local and national issues are so uncertain still.

King asked Ziegman if he had a strong feeling about a date. Ziegman said his sense that we should delay is much stronger than anything related to a new election date. The library needs a lot of attention and could possibly get it in February or May 2004. If we delay past those dates, then we would be into the 2004 full-scale political season, as Borman had pointed out.

King said it should be clear that we definitely plan to proceed. As so much goes into the campaigning process, Peterson encouraged that it's important to have some sort of target, even if it's just a time of year. If we don't have a time frame, then it looks like we're unsure and she is not at all unsure about it. She agrees that we don't want it to go past May 2004 due to the major political climate that starts after then.

S. Morgan agreed with Peterson about the need to set a date. She likes February in that it's a year from now, however she was concerned that it might be too soon after the holidays. Her personal sense was that things would not get done on time without a deadline. Peterson added that the date is part of the campaign itself. S. Morgan said to be sure to include enough time for campaigning. If we place it in February 2004, then we should be committed to going unless things are so dismal that we cannot. We need to have enough time to convince people of the need, regardless of whether things might be the same as they are now.

Smith said that we could wait until the next meeting to decide on a new date, noting that the decision to go for May 2003 had just been made last month. King agreed. He said we could have a formal resolution next month that would set the election for a specific date. He added that he is more inclined to continue with the election than others are, and was never under the impression that it would be easy. He has always known that it would be tough since these kinds of elections don't usually seem to pass on the first try. King said he thinks you need to have the attitude that you're going to go for it regardless. He added that we will never be 100% certain it will pass.

King said that our need for adequate space will continue to increase. People think the service is great, but don't think about how crowded everything is. We make such good use of the funds we have. He feels that we'd get at least 53-54% right now, but not knowing if we could get it as high as 60% means it might be good to wait. He warned that things might get worse, but he is willing to wait if everyone else feels that way. He said he feels badly that we can't go right now, but is encouraged that we will still have all the great support and other things going for us next year.

Smith said that she really appreciates the comments from the public, especially about the political action committee. She said she's not a resident of Clark County and doesn't know the tenor of this community. She really takes public funds seriously and it feels like the right thing to be fiscally responsible and follow the advice to wait for a better time. She said one of our biggest charges as board members is to be fiscally responsible. King noted that it costs \$100,000 in tax money to put the measures on the ballot, plus the money that Citizens for Better Libraries would spend in promoting the campaign.

S. Morgan asked if we could come to consensus about a new election date tonight. Smith agreed that it's important to have a timeline and while she favors waiting to set the date, she does not object to it.

King asked S. Morgan if she had a preference between February and May 2004. S. Morgan said that February would allow enough time but isn't so far out. Also, she thought there might be other issues on the ballot in May. A citizen asked about April 2004. Peterson said that with school breaks, a full three weeks are taken up in April. Mary Jane said to be sure we start campaigning early enough to be successful. Peterson and others agreed that active campaigning should start a full 6 months prior to the election.

Ziegman said that staff would not look at this as a break. We will not let up for even a minute on informing the public about the need. Instead, staff will take advantage of this extra time to reach more people.

The need for a formal resolution to revoke the earlier resolutions was discussed. King said that a formal resolution would be good.

MOTION: Karen Peterson moved and Ellis Dunn seconded that we rescind the previous resolution that set an election date of May 20, 2003 for the library bond measure. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: Shirley Morgan moved and Karen Peterson seconded that we set a bond measure for greater Vancouver libraries that will be submitted to citizens to vote on February 3, 2004. The motion carried unanimously.

Duitman noted that we would need to approve a formal resolution next fall in order to do all the paperwork that is required.

King said that this is an example of the kind of staff we want, who will come to us when they have doubt. We all really want the new libraries, but the board appreciates that we are being responsible about it.

King thanked citizens for attending the meeting and giving their input.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

These minutes were approved at the 3/10/03 meeting.

February 12, 2003

Dear Fellow Library Trustees,

I am very sorry I will not be at the meeting to participate in the discussion on the bond measure. I would appreciate sharing my thoughts with you prior to the vote.

I have been very concerned about the economy and the public's spending habits since Sept. 11 and the fall of the stock market. As I have talked to people and listened to their concerns about spending money, I have been concerned about passing a library bond measure. Knowing how distrustful the public is of waste in government spending in Washington was the other reason I was concerned. I have tried very hard not to be pessimistic for the library effort even though I feel that way about our economy and the dilemma our State and local governments are experiencing. As we have proceeded this past year, I have been hoping the economy and the stock market would turn around so we could go forward with our efforts to build much needed new facilities.

Deficits loom in every facet of government from Federal to City and the public is painfully aware of this fact; reminded daily in all forms of media. With the added fear caused by global unrest, I am further convinced the community will not vote to spend money for anything that is not absolutely necessary.

King County did not pass their library's bond measure; Bellevue failed their park bond issue. These are benchmarks for us in evaluating our ability to successfully pass a library bond measure. Even though our schools passed their bond measure, it was a continuation of a current levy, not new taxes.

My vote, were I there is to wait to proceed with a bond measure. Let's use the information we have garnered in the public sessions. Let's take the time to educate the community on the need for larger facilities. The library staff has done an excellent job of compensating for the deficiencies in library space. We need to have our users know and feel the inadequacies of our library system and resources before they will be willing to spend any money on new facilities.

A failed bond measure is expensive both emotionally and financially. The efforts of the staff and the public, and the money we have spent in planning for expanded facilities will not be wasted when we proceed at a time when the public will be more receptive.

I'm sorry I am not there to speak with you all. I am available, while on vacation, on our cell phone to discuss your concerns and observations. Bruce has my private number where I can be reached after 9:30 AM PST.

Yours truly,
Merle Koplán

February 15, 2003

Dear FVRL Board of Trustees:

I am sorry that I will miss the meeting on Tuesday. I wanted to share some of my thoughts about the bond measure with you.

There is no doubt that the need to build new and expanded library facilities for VCL and Cascade Park. However, I do not think that FVRL should try for a bond measure at the current time. Here are some of my key reasons:

1. The climate for passing library bond measures does not look favorable. I believe this is because citizens have faced a poor economy for the last several years -- and recovery still seems to be too far into the future. There are no strong economic indicators that the economy has turned the corner. Unemployment is high. Many who have jobs still face uncertainty. Fewer citizens would be inclined to add to their tax burden facing this uncertainty.
2. The impending conflict with Iraq, uncertainty of our support from allies, and heightened terrorism alerts decrease citizen confidence. This adds further another layer of uncertainty.
3. While we all know tremendous need for better facilities exists, I am not convinced that there is sufficient time to adequately convince the public of this need. With existing high satisfaction in library service, the public must be better convinced that high quality library service may be compromised as the facilities are overburdened and the volume of service and number of library patrons continue to expand.
4. The results of the February election where a capital bond levy failed for King County Libraries (and the cost per \$1,000 of assessed valuation was smaller) and the failed levy lid lift in Sno-Isle Library System are strong indicators of the tenor of the voting public. I believe as the state of Washington is forced to trim \$2 billion from its budget due to the poor economy and previous citizen-approved tax limitation measures, maintaining a strong educational system will be the highest priority.

My conclusion is a great disappointment. The sooner we can pass a bond, the sooner we can begin building more adequate facilities. I feel that waiting up to one year, however, may give us a better chance to educate the public that our inadequate facilities are beyond their maximum capabilities. We may also see a more clarified direction in our economy and stability in our world.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with you, even though I cannot do it in person.

Sincerely,
Marilyn Breckel