



Friends of the Regina Public Library

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January 16, 2019

Sean Quinlan
Chair, Regina Public Library Board
Regina Public Library
2311 12th Avenue
Regina SK S4P 0N3

Dear Mr. Quinlan,

The Friends of the Regina Public Library (FRPL) would like to discuss the points noted below at the Regina Public Library (RPL) Board meeting at 4:30 PM on Tuesday January 22, 2019.

Since Board meeting protocol is an item on the agenda, we would like to discuss the following points, regarding the RPL's Submissions and Delegations Policy, approved by the RPL Board in May 2018.

We agree that while people care deeply about library topics and emotions may sometimes run high, and we may agree to disagree, presentations and other interactions should be done in an atmosphere of respect in all directions.

It seems that in recent times the Library Board has had an intent of being more open to public information and discussion at its Board meetings, which has been appreciated, and this policy seems to work against that intent.

If the Board does not wish to engage in dialogue with the public at its Board meetings, in order to keep the meeting time short and keep to a format, perhaps the Board could consider having public meeting circles where ideas could be shared. The RPL could make more efforts to engage with stakeholder groups while putting decisions together. Surveys and administrative data are useful tools, but dialogue and relationship building beyond a 5-minute presentation at a Board meeting are needed. We understand that it is possible to email, write letters or phone the RPL Administration and in time a response will be received. But this is not the same as an honest face-to-face exchange of opinion, discussion, debate and then perhaps common understanding and resolution of issues.

The following are some comments on particular sections.

Section 1.01) This section requires typed, written or printed presentations. This eliminates or discriminates against anyone who does not have the capacity for this. Not everyone has a computer, typewriter or an ability to write legibly. Perhaps the RPL could facilitate a process for patrons providing a verbal presentation in advance.

Would it not be useful under 1.01 and 2.01 to ask for the e-mail address of the person, where available, if they wish to provide it? This would be an additional way for them to be contacted should the need arise.

Section 1.02) The decision about whether a submission will be heard as a presentation to the Board or be referred to the Board Chair or the Administration is placed at the sole discretion of the Chairperson or the Board Secretary/Library Director. There is no definition of what is suitable to go to the board or why something is referred, nor is there a requirement for the RPL to provide the reasons for the referral.

Under this section someone writing a letter intended for the Board may not have it even get to the Board, it may be referred elsewhere. How will people be able to send a message to the Board?

Perhaps the Board should indicate what at its level it considers as topics worthy of its consideration? It seems to be an avoidance to refer to so many discussion items as operational administrative decisions which the Board is not accountable for.

Section 1.03) FRPL has often in its letters to the Board indicated the follow-up on items we have raised in our previous presentations, so that we and the Board and Administration keep track of these items, which may seem unnecessary to the Board, but keeps these topics in the public record.

It is good that under the new policy there will be a public record of what has been received or referred so that nothing is lost.

A suggestion is to use a method used at City Council, whereby there is a quarterly review of referred items including items that had been referred in the past quarter plus items that were outstanding from previous quarters. The Administration would describe the status of the referred item and, if it had been dealt with by some action (such as a report back to committee) the recommendation was to strike that referred item from the quarterly list. This is a method to track what items the public is bringing forward and a way for people to keep an eye on items so they don't just die from administrative inaction. However, the referral report as described in the RPL policy seems to be intended just for the Board members. Such a list of referred public items should be made available to the public.

Section 2.01) Similar to 1.01 above, this limits the presentations to those that can type, write or print.

Section 2.04) This section states "The brief shall be temperate and respectful and may be rejected or edited by the Secretary, with the approval of the Chair, if in their opinion it does not respect the Board, Library Administration, or library staff." The Secretary

should not be editing the documents of an organization or individual. If the document does not meet the criteria, the person submitting the brief should be advised and given the option of editing it or withdrawing. City Council does redact portions of letters it deems inappropriate. "Redact" is not the same as "edit" and perhaps this wording should be changed.

If the topic in the presentation is not under discussion at the upcoming Board meeting, there is no reason not to include a presentation and discussion as such dialogue can identify emerging issues.

Also, there should be a process for notifying delegations who have previously submitted a letter that was not accepted as a presentation that the topic of their letter will be on the agenda of an upcoming Board meeting and inviting them to make their presentation at that time.

In January and March of 2018, the RPL received, posted and heard several presentations about the Film Theatre. In its September 12, 2018 letter to FRPL, the RPL stated that it had now determined that there were problems with the letters and removed them from the RPL website, and strongly suggested that FRPL should do the same, otherwise legal action was possible, not from the RPL Board, but from others affected by the statements in the letters. The RPL first stated that 5 comments were considered defamatory by its own legal counsel, then 5 presentations, then finally stated that the content and tone of the presentations was harmful. FRPL did remove the RPL's packages from the FRPL website. In our November 2, 2018 letter to the RPL Board, FRPL respectfully requested that the RPL repost those presentations that did not contain what any average person would define as disrespectful material, and redact the material in the other letters. However, the RPL has chosen to try to erase the Film Theatre discussion from the public domain by refusing to follow any of these suggestions. The RPL further suggested that FRPL get its own legal counsel if we want further edification. The people who wrote the letters initially have not been contacted; they have not been given the opportunity to identify what in their submissions was considered disrespectful by the RPL. This approach does not help guide the way to more respectful future communications.

Section 2.06) To meet the requirements of this section, the Board agenda is being provided two Fridays prior to the Board meeting, giving members of the public only 5 days to prepare a presentation related to an agenda item.

We note that the policy does not require the RPL to provide on their website a full text of the presentation as is currently done by City Council – this will be at the discretion of the Board Chair or the Board Secretary/Library Director.

As well, there are no requirements for the Library Board agenda to include publicly accessible written reports either at the meeting or on-line. Timely posting of the Board minutes is also important.

Many organizations have a provision for last-minute presentations on urgent matters, and this should be included in the policy to give the Board more flexibility and allow for urgent matters to be considered.

Section 2.09) The decision on what may be offensive is at the full discretion of the Board chairperson or Secretary (who is also the Library Director). There is no measure of appeal to get a second opinion on the decision. There is no definition of what would be considered offensive. Again, it talks about words "likely to be defamatory, criminal or offensive". This means that anything could theoretically be ruled offensive and not allowed.

Section 2.10) The guidelines for the Board asking questions seem overly restrictive. Perhaps the preamble that a Board member might make would be important to the discussion. It also seems restrictive to not allow any debate with the delegation – people want to give a presentation in the hope that there will be some questions and dialogue with the Board, not just “Any questions?” “No” “Thanks for your presentation.”

Since there are a number of questions that have been raised by FRPL and others, perhaps the RPL Board Governance Committee could hold a public meeting to explain the new Submissions and Delegations Policy, as well as more specific information on what is considered temperate and respectful communication going forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation.

Sincerely,

Joanne Havelock
Chair, Friends of the Regina Public Library