

RPL Board meeting January 22, 2019 : Agenda #2: Board Meeting Protocols

When we, the public, come to speak to you, the RPL Board, it is **because** we LOVE the Regina Public Library! We truly appreciate all that the RPL provides - books, films, art - all in a beautiful modernist building. Just as Regina citizens in 1908 believed that “a library was necessary to the cultural vitality and future prosperity of their community,” (p2, *Biblio Files: A History of the Regina Public Library*, University of Regina Press, 2016), we still need the Regina Public Library for our cultural and intellectual nourishment.

If we see changes that are detrimental to library engagement, as responsible citizens, we try to speak up, because it is the public who have everything at stake, the most to lose, if programming and services are diminished.

We appear before you when a problem cannot be resolved in any other way. Concerning the Film Theatre, in 2014, we wrote letters and filled out surveys; in 2016, we wrote to the Library Board and met with management (a focus group was promised, but nothing happened). In 2018, with the sudden rumour that we were to lose our local film programmer of 22 years, with no explanation or public discussion, 11 members of the public addressed this issue, while letters of support arrived from across Canada.

For the most part, the presentations and letters of January and March 2018, were in praise of the RPL for its excellent RPL Film Theatre of 43 years, and for Belinda New, RPL Film Theatre Programmer of the last 22 years.

The RPL is a public institution. When we express our concerns, we do not expect, 5 months later, to be intimidated with the threat of a possible lawsuit for defamation, especially when:

- a. all documents had been received 6 days before the Board meeting for approval
- b. no threat of defamation was discussed while we were at the Board meeting
- c. we were thanked fulsomely for our passionate presentations ¹
- d. the presentations were posted on the RPL’s own website for over 5 months

We came to ask questions, which were never answered. Later, the public record was altered. A lack of transparency is created when public input is simply removed and voices erased. This is antithetical to promoting “open and respectful dialogue with the public.” ²

¹ January 2018 minutes: “C. Kobayashi addressed the guests in attendance and thanked everyone for showing their support for RPL’s Film Theatre and for their community...”

“On behalf of the Board, the Chair addressed the delegates and guest to express his appreciation for the interest and the passion they continue to show for the film theatre and library community”

March 2018 Minutes: “Several members of the public made presentations to the Board. C. Kobayashi thanked the delegates for their interest in the future of the RPL.”

² RPL Submissions Guideline: Purpose

While the RPL Board warned FRPL of the potential of a defamation suit if the Friends did not remove, *immediately*, presentations copied from the RPL's own website, at no point has the Board named those threatened, nor identified the "possibly defamatory" comments.

While the FRPL were told that five of our comments were rude, disrespectful and possibly defamatory, we are only left to guess: who and what?

So, I come before you to ask: **What are the rules???** **What is it that we can and cannot say?**³

Are we not allowed to discuss a library program or a library service which concerns us?

Are we not allowed to mention a name of staff or management, either in praise or in criticism?

Are we not allowed to quote what management has said or written?

Are we **never** allowed to question, critique, or comment?

Then, we learn that our tone is disrespectful. While we are left to guess at which 5 comments might be "possibly defamatory", how are we to deal with our tone?

If we cannot ask questions at a public meeting, and if we cannot address the RPL Board with our concerns, if our correspondence to a public board is never seen, or perhaps never even discussed with the RPL Board - then, how, exactly, are we to communicate with our Regina Public Library?

How will the RPL keep a true record its own history?

³ Fair comment protects any opinion openly made on a matter of public interest. The operations of the Regina Public Library and the decision to make cuts to its beloved RPL Film Theatre are clearly matters that fall within the "public interest."