

# trustee tale

## Newsletter for Public Library

### The Public Library in the 21st Century

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director  
Winnefox Library System

I recently received a call from a library director whose board is discussing a building expansion. The village president was skeptical of the need of a new building since "ebooks and digital content will quickly take over traditional formats. How will libraries be used if not for books and DVDs?"

I had some ideas of my own but I wanted to get an additional perspective so I contacted the directors of the 27 public libraries in Wisconsin who built new buildings or expanded existing buildings in 2011 and 2012. I asked how their new building had helped them provide better service to their residents. Here's a sampling of their responses:

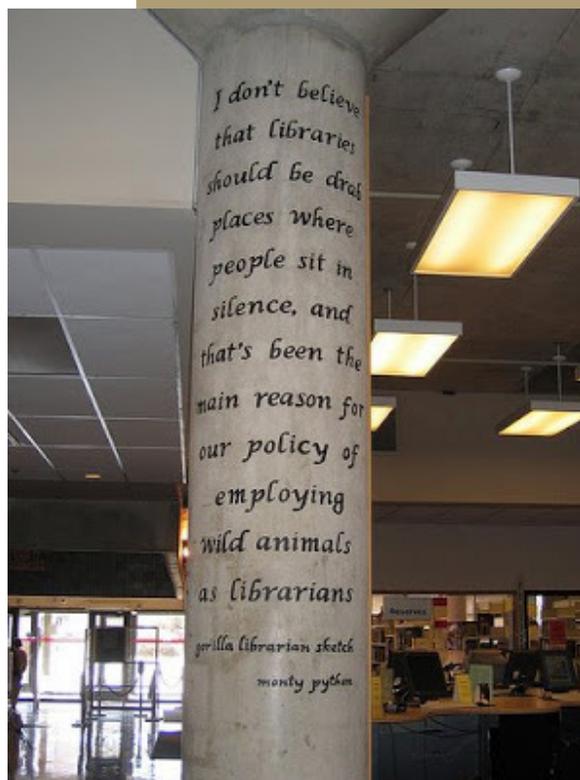
*Overall, I'd say having community space is just as much a priority in this building as having space for materials. Though use of materials is still a big deal, digital age or not. Since moving into our new facility our circulation has increased 10%, this with the same amount of materials. Our new facility that more than doubled our physical space allows the user more comfort in browsing our collection and has made our collection 'seem' fresher and more accessible.*

*Our Teen/Tween room is full most afternoons; we have 6 computers and they bring their own. Still not enough, they overflow into the adult computer room and the children's room on some days. They love to hang out in there*

*Meeting rooms, large and small, available for public use as well as study rooms. We have four, but I think we could have twice that and they would all be busy all the time!*

*The more remarkable thing that I have experienced as a result of our new library is the amount of time that individuals spend here. Formerly our library was the equivalent of a "Kwik Trip", loaded to the gills but discouraging of lingering and visiting. Since moving into our new facility, I have noticed a dramatic increase in its use just for people to hang out, browse the magazine collection, use the wi-fi, and connect with other people. Libraries provide public spaces in communities that churches, restaurants, bars, schools and other social institutions may not provide. You don't have to join a library, buy an item or be under or over a certain age or believe a certain*

*(continued on page 2)*



*way to spend time in a library. The library serves a role unlike any other commercial or religious institution in a community.*

*Study tables throughout the library. Comfortable seats for using a laptop, reading a magazine or a book. Computers! We have a tech center full of PCs. We also teach computer classes in there. Storytime room- we can pack almost 100 people in there, 4 days a week!*

*In my county there continues to be a digital divide that not only leaves the poor at a disadvantage but also those who may be wealthier but live in a geographic area not serviced by high-speed Internet. The library plays an important role for both of these groups by providing wi-fi and high speed connections with patron computers.*

*We have a large table near the fireplace where the knitters, scrabble-players, and book groups like to meet.*

*We have tables for people who bring in their laptops and use the Wi-Fi. This will become even more popular in the summer with our summer residents and tourists.*

*Libraries contribute to the attractiveness of a community much like a well-regarded school does. They are one of the assets people look for when they are considering a move.*

*The Friends have a book sale area in the meeting room. Book sales are up dramatically.*

*We have an expanded children's area. Our area was far too small, with no room for the children's non-fiction and very little room for story time. The new physical space allows us to have everything in one large area, along with study areas adjacent. I see no decrease in the need for children's print literature in the future, even with tablets used in the classroom. Indeed, there seems to be more need for easy readers especially, with the new common core standards and the downward push in reading age expectations. We partner with our local school district to bring all of the kindergarten classes to the library each month during the school year; they each get their own cards and check out books, along with an author talk and stories. Our new space allows for an area that is larger, more functional and easier to navigate - and more appealing too!*

*We moved computers used by adults into a room (they were in the hallway).*

*And finally: "We remodeled in 2011 and already we are having problems accommodating all the activities that people want."*

It's clear that despite what some people have said, the demise of libraries and printed books has been greatly exaggerated. In any case, checking out books never was the only thing public libraries were all about. Since communities began building public libraries in the 19th century libraries have been places for education, self-improvement, and information. They've been the place where children were introduced to books and reading. They've been community gathering places.

And they still are.

Thanks to:

Ann Becker, Barrett Memorial Library, Williams Bay  
Nancy Massnick, Hartland Public Library  
Connie Meyer, Dwight Foster Public Library, Fort Atkinson  
Maura Otis, Gays Mills Public Library  
Wendy Rawson, Fitchburg Public Library

## Recruiting New Trustees

*By Mark Arend, Assistant Director  
Winnefox Library System*

Whenever I'm asked to serve on a committee my first impulse is to ask what the duties and time commitment will be. How many libraries have a short (no more than one page) written summary of the trustee's job that you can give to prospective trustees? I have prepared one for Winnefox Library System that has proven to be very helpful.

This summary should include a sentence or two covering each of these points:

- The library's service plan and goals.
- A general description of trustees' duties.
- The number of trustees on the board, how they are appointed, any residency requirements, and the length of the term.
- Your meeting schedule, including the length of a typical meeting.
- Expectations regarding meeting attendance, serving on board committees, or time commitments outside of regular board meetings.
- The URL for the library's web page and the specific URLs for board minutes, policies, or other background information.

Having this information shows prospective trustees that the library is a well-run, professional organization and gives them the information they need to make an informed decision.

## Procedures for Closed Sessions

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director  
Winnefox Library System

In last November's issue I discussed provisions in the open meetings law that legally allow a library board to hold a closed session—a meeting from which members of the public are excluded and only library trustees and others necessary for the discussion are present. Having a legal reason for a closed session is only the first requirement for following the law. There are certain procedures that must also be followed when the library board holds a closed session.

1. It's a good idea to consult with your municipal attorney or another person familiar with the open meetings law to make sure that your reason for a closed session is permissible.
2. If a closed session is planned at the time the meeting notice is prepared, the notice must indicate the subject matter of the closed session discussion and cite the specific statutory provision allowing a closed session. For example a meeting notice might state:

*"Closed session pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes Section 19.85(1)(c) in order to conduct a performance evaluation of the Director."*

Even if a closed session was not planned, a board may still go into closed session to discuss any subject for which a closed session is allowable, as long as that subject was contained in the meeting notice. This is true whether the notice provides for a closed session or not. This practice is not recommended, but it is allowed.

3. The board must first convene in open session. This could either be a regular meeting of the board or a special meeting for this purpose.
4. The presiding officer must announce the intention of going into closed session and the purpose of the closed session, stating the specific section of the law, by statute number, which allows for the closed meeting. This announcement should be recorded in the minutes. You may use the same wording as was used in the meeting notice.
5. A motion, second, and roll call vote must be taken to convene in closed session. A majority vote is required. If the vote is unanimous you only need to record that there was a unanimous vote. If the vote is not unanimous each trustee's vote must be recorded in the minutes.

6. At this point, anyone who is not on the board or otherwise needed for the discussion must leave the room. Note that a board committee cannot exclude members of its parent body, the library board, from a closed session.
7. Discussion in closed sessions is limited to the subject announced in the meeting notice and the presiding officer's announcement.
8. The law is uncertain on whether you may vote in closed session. The Attorney General's office recommends reconvening into open session before taking a vote. An exception to this, of course, is the vote to conclude the closed session and either adjourn or reconvene the open session.
9. When the closed session business is concluded, there must be a motion, second, and roll call vote to either adjourn or reconvene in open session. The board may reconvene in open session as long as that intent was noted in the public notice of the meeting. If there was no advance public notice given that the board intended to reconvene in open session the board is required to adjourn and wait at least 12 hours after the completion of the closed session before reconvening in open session.

Minutes for the closed session must be taken, just as they are taken for other meetings of the library board, or a board committee.

Minutes of closed session meetings must be open for public viewing. Because the records law contains no general exemption for records created during a closed session, minutes of those meetings must be released upon request unless the minutes contain information specifically exempted from release as a public record (for example certain personal information). Even then, you must separate information that can be made public from that which cannot and must disclose the former, even if the latter can be withheld.

As long as the reasons for convening in closed session continue to exist you may withhold any information that requires confidentiality. Once the underlying purpose for the closed session ceases to exist, however, all records of the session, except information specifically exempted from release as a public record, must be provided to any person requesting them.

More information on the open meetings law can be found in the Wisconsin *Open Meetings Compliance Guide*, found at <http://www.doj.state.wi.us/site/ompr.asp> and in *Trustee Essentials* <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/handbook.html>.

## FAQ

*Our board is supposed to have 6 members but there's a long-standing vacancy that the village has been unable to fill. Do we count a quorum as if we had all seats filled (4 members) or by the number of current trustees (3 members)?*

According to the League of Wisconsin Municipalities this question has not been addressed by the Wisconsin courts or by Attorney General opinion and therefore cannot be answered with certainty. However, the majority view in those jurisdictions that have answered the question is that where vacancies occur, the whole number entitled to membership must be counted and not merely the remaining members.

The counter-argument, which favors interpreting the calculation of the quorum based on the current membership rather than the entire authorized membership, is that although the legislature contemplated full membership, vacancies can occur for a variety of reasons. It can take time to find someone qualified to fill the vacancy and it is not uncommon for local governments to have difficulty finding people willing to be appointed to fill the vacancy or to run for election. Therefore, a municipality may try to fill a vacancy but be unable to and any construction which has the potential of immobilizing government should be avoided.

If this situation arises on your board and becomes an issue you will probably want to consult your municipal attorney.

### *Have questions?*

Contact us and  
we'll try to help.

Rick at OWLS  
rick@mail.owls.lib.wi.us  
920-832-6190

Mark at Winnefox  
arend@winnefox.org  
920-236-5222

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for future articles, send them to:  
OWLS: Rick Krumwiede, 920-832-6190  
or [rick@mail.owls.lib.wi.us](mailto:rick@mail.owls.lib.wi.us)  
WLS: Mark Arend, 920-236-5222  
or email [arend@winnefox.org](mailto:arend@winnefox.org)  
Editors: Rick Krumwiede & Mark Arend  
Graphic Artist: Renee Miller

