

TO: BDL Board of Trustees & Linda Lyshol, BDL Director

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SUBJECT: **Report on FOML-Trustee Alliance Workshop of 9 March 2018**

On March 9th, I attended the FOML-Trustee Alliance Workshop at the Southfield Public Library along with about 65 other trustees, Friends, directors, et al. The topic for the day was "Best Practices: Key Steps to Improving Your Service as a Library Trustee." It wasn't a very good workshop, but I did meet some good people and learned a few things worth sharing with you. Here are the highlights:

1. **Governing boards have only 3 main responsibilities: (a) hire/fire the director; (b) set policy; and (c) approve the budget.** Pretty much everything else is the director's responsibility & trustees need to keep their noses out of the director's way except to learn whatever they need to know to evaluate the director's performance. Several people talked about the critical importance of not allowing themselves to be lobbied or whined at by library employees. When an employee directly approaches a trustee about something going on in the library, the trustee should immediately refer the employee to the director.
2. **Boards should have a set of agreed-upon "best practices"** that govern the work-related behaviors of both individual trustees, as well as the board as a whole. Trustees should pay attention to, and consult these, at every board and committee meeting. They can be used to ensure that we are all doing what we need to be doing. For example, staying out of the library's daily operations might be one of the behaviors on the "best practices" list. Someone mentioned having a poster of their best practices list hanging on the wall of their meeting room.
3. **There was disagreement over if and how a trustee may be removed from office.** Unfortunately, the library law specialist who was supposed to be presenting had a family emergency & wasn't there. One woman said she knew for a fact, based on her library's experience, that a trustee cannot be removed except by the Governor. Their trustees are all appointed, not elected, and they ended up in court over their removal of a trustee. She said the outcome was that a trustee, appointed or elected, could not be removed except by the Governor. More research is being done on this issue as several people disputed her contention.
4. **Many trustees are administered an "oath of office" by a local judge before taking office.** The oath is a traditional "swear to uphold the constitution of the State of Michigan" sort of thing. Many libraries, however, do not have their trustees take an oath.
5. **We should be doing a self-evaluation periodically.** There's a sample from Georgia on the Library of Michigan website and, from a quick perusal, I'd say that we aren't doing very good – at least not based on the things they were considering important enough to upon which to judge themselves.
6. **Many libraries have dispensed with committees except for periodic, time-limited ad-hoc committees for special projects.** Some have 1 or 2 standing committees (Executive & Budget, for example) in combination with ad-hoc committees. Many of those same libraries have

bylaws that prohibit them from voting on anything at the same meeting at which it first appears on the agenda. Typically, something appears on the agenda under “New Business” for purposes of presentation and discussion. At the next meeting, it appears as “Old Business” and a vote may be taken on the item at that time.

7. **It sounded like other libraries have better bylaws than ours, i.e., they contain more detailed procedures about how the board operates.**
8. **Some trustee meetings (e.g., Ann Arbor) are televised live and then posted on YouTube.** They think it helps them stay on topic and avoid making inappropriate comments.
9. **We reviewed & discussed some aspects of the Open Meetings Act & FOIA.** It was recommended that trustees NOT use their personal email for library business; rather, they get and use a library email address. If there is legal action, your personal email account could be discoverable, thus releasing everything, not just library business. However, it was pointed out that while info on a personal phone or in personal email may be discoverable, it is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act. If the director or another library employees sends an email to all trustees or to the board as a whole, a trustee should NEVER do a “reply all” because that would be a violation of the Open Meetings Act. It was also recommended that 2-3 trustees should never get together outside of a board meeting to discuss library business. While not technically a violation of the Open Meetings Act, it is a violation of the intent of the law, is disrespectful of other board members, and could appear as collusion. I didn’t think to ask about how this meshes with the work of committees.
10. **Finally, the Lapeer District Library is going for a \$12.5 million bond issue in August in order to build a new library.** They are working with an architecture & engineering firm called “C2AE” with offices in Lansing, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Escanaba, Canton, and Gaylord. They have a lot of public sector experience, including several library projects in Michigan. I’ll bet they have staff who could do an in-depth eval of the current building & probably also provide an estimate of what it might cost to bring the building into sufficient repair to even consider trying to remodel it. Lapeer currently has a total of 8,700 square feet of space to serve a population of 60,000. C2AE recommended that they need 35,000 square feet based on some formula they use.

The best thing about the day was talking to other trustees and library experts about our mutual issues and how we have handled them.

By the way, the Southfield Public Library is magnificent! It took 2-1/2 years to build and opened in 2003. It has 124,000 square feet in a ratio of 50% books/stacks to 50% open space with administrative offices being excluded from those ratios. Southfield has 254,000 books and an annual budget of \$5.5 million. See photos.







