

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES
PIERCE COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM
STUDY SESSION, APRIL 8, 2009**

Call to Order: Chair Eugene Matsusaka called to order a Study Session of the Pierce County Rural Library District Board of Trustees on April 8, 2009, 2:05 pm. Board members present were J.J. McCament and Budd Wagner. Allen Rose arrived later.

PCLS 2030 – Future thinking: Joan Frye Williams and George Needham, facilitators for the futures discussion, were introduced.

Ms. Williams began the discussion by stating that the relationship public libraries have with the communities they are serve is changing. In the early days of libraries, information was scarce and expensive, and it made sense that the resources be held in a central location. That has changed dramatically and now information is everywhere. What has become scarce is time and it is important to save people time. Libraries were all about the ‘stuff’; managing a large inventory for the community. The focus has changed to the people rather than the stuff. The product has become the experience; a transformative experience that forms the relationship between the library and the community.

The recent Strategic Vision Workshop bore out the idea of the library being a community focal point - a community gathering place. The questions then become, what does the library need to do to invite people to participate in the experience? What does it mean to compete for the time and interest of people in Pierce County? If the library is going to realize the community’s vision to be a vibrant gathering place, there needs to be conversations about what does it really mean to be a gathering place. In a large area like Pierce County, destination really means driving destination.

What will it take to get someone into their car and go to the library?

Co-location with other entities was one idea mentioned at the Strategic Vision Workshop. In examining the idea of co-locations, the Board mentioned places that are routine destinations, such as grocery stores, schools, boys and girls clubs, places of worship, a town center, colleges, vocational schools and museums. A co-location could be defined as a one-stop shopping idea (a routine destination that is close by or adjacent) or a shared facility. It was noted that with the cost of driving, people want to minimize their stops and that funds will continue to be scarce.

In continuing to discuss the question, the point was raised that co-location could be in the same building, but be a facility so that the library retained ownership of its portion. It was also noted that

What is competition for the library?

The Internet is a clear competitor for meeting information requests. There is competition for time, not necessarily for services.

When asked how the library can compete for people’s time with services, the discussion turned to core library services. There was concern expressed that if the library tried to be a community gathering place or be all things to all people, it would lose its uniqueness. The library should be a connecting place,

connecting the community through information or connecting the community through books and ideas. A Board member stated that the core is information and the form of how the information is found and delivered is what changes. The library shouldn't be looked at as a major entertainment business, noting that there is a distinction between the depth and translation of information versus casual services. Ms. Williams noted that the information business has moved outside the library. The dominant players are private vendors such as Google and Facebook. Manipulation of information is no longer part of the American economy, but has moved off-shore.

Mr. Needham stated that people in libraries are involved in doing their life's work – children doing homework, seniors getting ready for retirement, job seekers. Libraries should not worry about information, but instead in assisting transformation – people's transformation. Libraries provide the opportunity for people come together and interact in person. Personal relationships happen in the library that can't happen online.

Ms. Williams noted that there is a desire to have opportunities for connection that are not technologically connected - in-person social interactions. The library is not the source of the information, but it may be the source of that connection. The human factor is important. Libraries connect the community through ideas - learning, reading and thinking. The Strategic Vision Workshop showed that people think all three are really good for the community. A place for free choice learning, free choice thinking as opposed to a set curriculum. The things used to meet those three needs are the materials and available resources. It's not an either/or world. There are times when you may want to work at home and other times when you want the personal connection. Both are going to be strong threads for some time to come.

What will it take for someone to hop into a car and go to a library?

Board members stated that it could be something happening in the community or something happening at the library. It could be driven internally or externally. The library is an environment that is appealing and has resources to enhance the learning/thinking aspect – conveniently located, amenities, free, resources.

Ms. McCament added that speaking should be added to the list of thinking, learning and reading. The library should be a place where people can come together to discuss issues and speak on issues. Ms. Williams stated that there is a trend to 'sharing' and engaging conversations. Librarianship is a facilitator of conversation. There are very few venues for civic engagement face-to-face that are as neutral as a library. Mr. Wagner noted that there is programming that a library is simply hosting and then there events that the library could stage to engage the community.

What would it take for someone to take that step to participate?

Facilities can be inviting and welcoming and allow folks to come in and move out if they wish – a space openness. Most library functions are in contained spaces so a freer manner in space is desirable. People could jump in, sample a bit of the discussion and jump back out if they chose, somewhat like a physical chatroom.

Ms. McCament stated that she had a concern about the definition of customer-focused. It sounds as if the only responsibility is for the library to respond to the customer and she felt it should be a mutual responsibility. The library has a responsibility to communities and customers of what we expect from

them; we clearly need to set some standards that the public should respond. Instead of a neutral public place, the standards should be the highest common denominator rather than the lowest.

Ms. Williams spoke to an ongoing conversation in the library community about what you call people who use the library. It has been patrons (a very civil and respectful term) and now the term is customers. She did an informal survey and asked people which was more apt – patrons or customers. The majority response was ‘members’. The term ‘member’ indicates a dual responsibility, a long-term thing. It is important to begin hiring practices for the skill sets that work comfortably with the public. Libraries need to look at things such as repeat business and card usage over time. It’s valuable to pay attention to how people grow with the library and how the library nurtures that growth. The difference about libraries and the Internet is the learning aspect – collaborative learning.

Chair Matsusaka noted that a person can become a member of the library just by signing up. To become a real member of any group, you need to feel that you are doing something special, such as to pay a fee. Ms. Williams responded even without a fee, the person is committed to a specific code of conduct required as a member. A method might be found to show a person’s passage into library membership. Following that line of thought, Mr. Wagner stated that he is interested in ways of generating revenue and perhaps a person could buy up to have added convenience, such as a gold card that allows one to have books mailed. He would also like to investigate ways to generate new revenue streams, such as a coffee vendor that rents space in the library. Ms. Williams noted that museums have long offered food service and serve wine for lunch. Some libraries are hosting adult programming in the evening where wine is served, such as author events. The decision would need to be where are the limits; what feels comfortable and what doesn’t? Suggestions included a cooking demonstration or vendors who teach about new products. Mr. Wagner noted that such an event should be sponsored by a vendor who pays a fee. Ms. Williams remarked that there libraries that have event space that generate revenue (such as a wedding), but incorporates a connection with the library, such as bibliography available or bookmarks.

If you go into facilities planning with that kind of thinking as a possibility it will help inform the facilities plan. If the learning activity takes place in the building, then we’re talking about a different kind of facility. The space design would be different for designed to hold a collection versus one that intends to be a community space. Other considerations include the need for languages other than English and inter-generational usage, wanting to engage as a unit rather than a separation of spaces.

Ms. Williams returned to the earlier discussion about whether libraries should be a fun place to visit. What defines a fun place? Mr. Wagner remarked that libraries should be enjoyable, engaging places. He doesn’t want to lose the mission to be a learning/thinking place and remain relevant to the library’s constituency. He stated that he does not want to jump on every fad, but the library needs to be innovative. It was expressed that libraries need to be real, to be authentic.

The discussion turned on how to engage people in the library. It was noted that engagement is not necessary the building, but the services, such as Homework help and outreach efforts. It was mentioned that Orange County Library does book programs and book talking on the beaches, in essence going to the people rather than having the people come to the library. Ideas suggested including having library materials available on Sounder or buses, using vending machines as automatic dispenser of books at transportation hubs for the commuting population. The same might be available for those in hospitals and drivers who do interstate trucking. The library can be used as a research arm for local government by providing service exactly where it’s needed, rather than just advocating for libraries. The library

needs to be doing those things that are innovative and out of the box, while staying relevant and providing deeper value.

If the library proposed a new kind of library with a focus on community agreement, active learning spaces, and possible revenue generators, what are the taxpayers going to think of that?

Mr. Needham reported that OCLS conducted a study identifying who in a community would most likely vote for a library issue. There was no correlation between those who use a library and who don't. It is important to approach different communities in unique ways, offering things specific to a community. It is important to help people understand the larger value of the library: quality of life issues that the library contributes to, strong connections between what the library contributes to reading, thinking, learning and how that reading, thinking, learning positively impacts to the community. The library must understand its community and aligning to what that community wants to be and do.

Does the library wish to focus on youth as a key target audience?

If youth is a priority, the library may have to position itself as an after-school destination, a homework place, a safe place, with computer availability. A concern was expressed that the library doesn't want to take on the role as baby-sitters. The library could become an extension of the school experience; a learning experience with activities for kids. There needs to be a substantive mix of things that benefit the community. There can be a niche to serve youth, without the library becoming the baby-sitter. Schools have been mentioned as possible co-location sites. If that were the case, then by de-facto, the library becomes the after-school program even if it were planned to do so.

Chair Matsusaka mentioned that the question might be not what the library was doing in 2030, but would the library even exist. Perhaps the question should be 'why should we exist?' Ms. Williams responded that, libraries are good for the community. The fundamental value proposition is that learning experiences are beneficial to the community and therefore beneficial to the taxpayers who support libraries. But do we need to develop new tools and skills to keep that mission alive in a new culture? It was suggested that rather than asking where the library will be in 2030, perhaps the question should be where will the community be in 2030 and how can the library support and enhance for the community's vision?

The library celebrates the life of the mind and that life enriches the community. In some ways, the sharing of that life enriches that community. Individual study can take you just so far and then the sharing of information and exchanging that information enrich the community. Now more than ever, the life of the mind is not taken for granted. It's good for the culture that intelligence is celebrated. In libraries, people get to practice thinking in new ways without risk. It's a safe place to exercise your mind without risk of failure and that strengthens individuals and communities. In 2030, we'll still want the life of the mind to be thriving, but we may have to use very different tools to support it. Rather than a curated collection of information, the library provides the tool box and the individual or community uses the tools to create their own unique thing. The library's role is to get the tools together and provide a little bit of coaching, but the community creates. There is no place other than a library that is looking at the civic life of a community.

What are the questions that have to be satisfied to take the question to the taxpayer?

- Is the library relevant?

- Demonstrate the deficiencies and the opportunities to be found by an investment. In a number of communities our libraries appear to be adequate.
- Have to demonstrate that the essence of library – learning, reading, thinking, speaking – that is going to be still happening in the library. Have to demonstrate what makes us different from learning on the internet; what makes us different from speaking on the internet.
- Remind/reinforce that we have been good stewards.
- People on the front line must be an asset;

What makes libraries more of a necessity than a frill? What does it mean if the library isn't here?

- Can demonstrate if we quantify information about gap in service level – what we're able to do and what we could do. Demonstrate where there are deficiencies and opportunities. Demonstrate value for the community.
- Equate reading level of those in prisons. It's a strong statistic for importance of reading and learning.
- Show the testimonial side of things -someone like me or my neighbor has benefited. Make it real for people, not theoretical.
- There's a green argument to be made. Libraries are kind to the earth. It's a great recycling argument – we use the books over and over again. Facilities would be kind to the environment; such as we are doing with Town Center.
- Good stewardship of dollars.
- Responding to community needs - demonstrate the need

In conclusion, the Ms. Williams summarized the discussion. It's important to do things the community can see and appreciate by performing library functions that have visible results and put an emphasis on things that are quite apparent to the communities. It's necessary to look at service planning that doesn't create a staffing increase by being cagey about use of technology, understanding what demand is likely to come and finding the right skill sets for the right position. Library services should flow into the lifestyle, work flow and existing patterns in communities. Move the library in a direction that the community is heading into anyway. Library service should set the bar so that people really want to participate. Align the library with people's existing choices so they don't have to abandon what they normally do. Don't introduce things that seriously disrupt staffing; integrate things that the staffing flow can help. It doesn't require a new building to provide some of the changes that people are looking for.

The library will need to people that libraries are a worthwhile investment and continue to fulfill a valuable role in the community. The role might be around the activities – learning, thinking, reading, and speaking. It can't work if the library has to fragment to meet all individual needs, but has to be a collaborative experience between library users and the library.

Ms. Williams asked Board members how they felt about the phrase members rather than customers. It was suggested that the library conduct a survey to find out how people feel about

Chair Matsusaka remarked the library needs to demonstrate to its communities that it will be relevant in 2030. Mr. Need noted that there is a deep pool of positive feelings about libraries in PCLS communities. One of the differential factors between libraries that are successful in levies is the passion and excitement of staff. There is a lot of passion about libraries.

Ms. Parikh stated that the task is to characterize for the public how PCLS came about making the decisions it has and the facilities master plan recommendations. Group4 is translating all the information that they've gathered – qualitative and quantitative. One of the first steps is to determine the location and sizes of branches. The recommended size is determined by what services and activities goes on in a library.

The regular May Board meeting will be the last meeting before draft recommendations are presented to community leader advisory groups. The Board will be given policy statements for review and approval. Guidelines for partnerships, including co-location issues and guiding philosophical principles are also being developed.

The study session was adjourned at 4:10 pm, on motion by Mr. Wagner, seconded by Ms. McCament.

Secretary

Chair