

STATE OF CONNECTICUT, RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
STATE LIBRARY BOARD
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON STATE LIBRARY BOARD ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES
Held Via Teams
March 14, 2023

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Members joining via Teams:

Maureen Sullivan, Jessica de Perio Wittman, Sheri Szymanski,
Sally Whipple

Others joining via Teams:

Jane Beaudoin

The meeting was called to order at 3:04 p.m. by Maureen Sullivan.

NEW BUSINESS

Review of the work done in November 2022: Maureen stated that she is hoping to have a final version of the document created in November by the working group comprised of Sally Whipple, Jessica de Perio Wittman, and Sheri Szymanski, that can be shared with the Board at their regular March 27 meeting. Suggestions or comments were invited.

It was asked by a Committee member what the process is for annually evaluating the State Librarian. It is a question that needs to be answered at some point and because the Committee members are all new board members they aren't aware of the procedure. Some conversation followed that if there is an absence of a performance evaluation it would be important to know if the job description that the State Librarian was provided would give an adequate rubric which could be used to start developing a performance evaluation if that really is what is expected of the Board to do.

Maureen added that it's important for this work going forward to think about the position and not the individual. She feels we'd be doing a disservice if they didn't have a performance evaluation plan. Deborah would have the opportunity to say what she would like to focus on and have a chance to do the work before there was any review.

In Maureen's effort to understand how they might go forward she kept coming back to needing to have clarity of the work of the Board's Chair and how the Chair works with the State Librarian. Maureen's sense is that the Board kept going in a more transactional role and she would like to see a stronger role for not just the Board but for the State Library. She would like to see the Board have more discussions and do more work. Maureen explained that by "transactional role" she meant more routine work just following the standard agenda and acting on items that came to its attention like ACLPD matters or state funding for construction grants. She explained that any Board is a great group that can understand what the forces for change are and what the experiences of the people in the field are and asked how the State Library and State Library Board can enhance those experiences. This is why Maureen finds value in having a strategic plan.

NEW BUSINESS

Review of the work done in Nov. 2022

Draft a list of activities expected of the Board Chair for review by the full Board:

Maureen asked for suggestions on what would be the work of the Board Chair. Committee members agreed that the Chair should work with the State Librarian to formulate the meeting agendas but all of the board members should work with the State Librarian on the strategic planning and the Board should be careful not to overstep the State Librarian. Sally agrees that it makes sense and with her experience on boards they are often trying to understand what's going on in the world and what are the trends. This Board should focus on what the State Library needs to know about in order to do the right thing for the other libraries in Connecticut and for itself and also how can the Board help inform the staff so they can help enhance other experiences. Maureen agreed and stated that the State Library Board is a governing board and not an action board.

It was shared that it can get very hard when one finds themselves on a Board in their own professional field because it's tempting to want to jump in and say a lot. It's important to remember what the Director's role is. When a Board that is really pushing to do things that a Board should not be doing, it creates tension for the Director, the Board, and the staff who feel they aren't being listened to. There has to be a balancing act.

Maureen asked if there were things that should go on the list that you would not want the Board Chair to do. She thinks that there is an important leadership role for the Chair with the Board and also sees that in order for the Board's work to move forward it was important to have regular communication about what's happening as it's happening. Maureen is trying to help be really clear about the work of the Board Chair. There were no items listed.

Committee members noted advocacy as something the Chair could work on with the State Librarian and then have a role in helping guide the rest of the Board. It was noted that the State Librarian has to help formulate this.

Another suggestion was the importance for the Chair to work with the State Librarian to bring in educational moments like Board training and outside speakers that will help the Board understand what the challenges are around the state and can help the Board stay within their role but still offer assistance.

It was emphasized that the Board should know that the process is correct. The Chair should be sure there is no bias. Maureen added that it comes back to how important the relationship is between the two positions.

It's important for the Board to hear things as any bit of information is helpful. The agenda and strategic plan are important things to keep on track. Maureen feels it's important to create the opportunity for the Board to be the eyes and ears for the agency. The Board members are ambassadors for the State Library and all libraries and should be gathering information to support the staff.

There was discussion about publicizing information. It was said that the Board needs to let the State Librarian and staff lead with what the message should be. It was agreed that this is a critical point. The State Library Board needs to be careful about what it says publicly. It's the staff and State Librarian who know a lot about what's really going on.

Draft list of activities expected of the Board Chair

Maureen told the committee members that they accomplished good work and if possible she would like to share their final version of the document on the State Librarian and State Library Board Chair duties. It was agreed that they will forward the document to Maureen and Jane for inclusion in the Board's next meeting packet.

At 3:38pm, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane Beaudoin, Recorder