



Halifax Regional Library Board
March 20, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes
Zoom

Present

Ayo Aladejebi
Laura Godsoe
Killian McParland
Mary-Ann Rowlston
Christian Browne
Tony Mancini
Laura White
Jan Jensen

Regrets – Sue Murtagh

Staff

Asa Kachan, CEO & Chief Librarian
Alison Lucio, Manager Governance & Risk
Janice Fiander, Senior Service Manager, Basin District
Kathleen Morris, Director, Central District
Mairead Barry, Director of Strategy
Darla Muzzerall, Manager of Research and Analysis
Dave MacNeil, Manager, Collections and Access

Education Session – Dr. James Turk, Centre for Free Expression

Asa Kachan introduced James Turk from the Centre for Free Expression. He writes and speaks extensively on freedom of expression, academic freedom, intellectual freedom, civil liberties, university governance, and related public policy issues. As censorship of library materials is unquestionably connected with democracy, it is essential that this conversation is revisited continuously through this important period in history.

Jim Turk provided an excellent session to the Board regarding how Board can cope in these challenging times. Highlights of the talk included:

- How the Library is a very unique a public space in Halifax – no equivalent for indoor public space that is open to the community like a public library and serves the community the way libraries do.
- Public library welcomes everyone – morning to night, no need to pay
- The number of book challenges are increasing, posing serious problems
- Action4Canada Chapters
- Intellectual Freedom is the foundational principle of public libraries
 - The right to express one's views, as well as see and receive information without interference
 - It is the right to speak as well as the right to hear
 - Expression can be oral, in writing, in the form of art, or through any other medium of one's choice
 - CFLA Statement and the IFLA statement outline these principles
 - Section 32 of the Charter of Rights & Freedoms specifies it applies to the legislature and government of each province in respect of all matters within the authority of the legislature of each province. Public Libraries in NS are governed by the Libraries Act (therefore under the Charter).
 - Intellectual and Expressive Freedom Are Essential for you, the advancement of knowledge, democracy, and social justice.
 - There are limits to Intellectual Freedom - Criminal Code – violence, threats of violence, hate speech, obscenity, indecency, etc. Also Common Law, Human Rights Acts and more supersede.
 - Hateful speech is not Hate speech

Through the case law, *R v. Sharpe*, 2001 Chief Justice McLachlin stated that 'Although the Supreme Court of Canada has often insisted that there is no priority amongst the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*' rights and freedoms, the guarantee of freedom of expression is quite literally a "fundamental freedom". The ability to speak about matters that concern us —subjects that inspire and move us into action through expression —is central to contemporary ideas about liberty and democracy. For these reasons, McLachlin C.J.C. in *Sharpe* endorsed the idea of free expression as "the matrix, the indispensable condition of nearly every other freedom".

To help address these issues and concerns, public library boards are recommended to:

- Build a shared understanding among the Board of Intellectual Freedom, its fundamental

- Ensure your library's policies relating to Intellectual Freedom are comprehensive, and unambiguous
- Support your Chief Librarian and Senior staff in relation to Intellectual Freedom challenges
- Be clear about the respective roles of the Board and the Chief Librarian
- Be proud champions of your library – which is a model in fulfilling the role and responsibility of public libraries
- Be an ambassador. Take advantage of opportunities to talk with others about Intellectual Freedom
- Remember this polarized time in which a public library is “welcoming, inclusive, and supportive of all” that does not mean the absence of possible exposure to challenging or offensive ideas whether written visual or spoken. In fact, it means the opposite- library is an environment where diversity of views is welcomed, and people are not excluded because they hold differing views.

Public libraries can help educate through programming, education sessions and overall public and staff engagement around this issue. It is also important to discuss and examine Digital censorship, and the impact of digital censorship. Algorithms can be problematic and has contributed to this issue.

Jim encouraged staff and board members to contact him if they would like to discuss this further or have any questions.

1.0 Call to order

Board Chair Ayo Aladejebi called the meeting to order.

2.0 Agenda & Minutes

Christian Browne put forward a motion to approve the agenda with a friendly amendment to move the in-camera portion to the beginning of the meeting due to scheduling. This motion was seconded by Mary-Ann Rowston.
Motion approved.

Laura Godsoe put forward a motion to approve the agenda as circulated. This motion was seconded by Christian Browne.

3.0 Chair's Message

Board Chair Ayo Aladejebi provided his Chair's message to the Library Board. The Chair thanked Jim Turk for his important session. Ayo reminded everyone that tomorrow, March 21 is the Internal Day of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Ayo encouraged

everyone to seek out further information and to incorporate the announcement of the day where possible.

At this time, Jan Jensen put forward a motion to move incamera. This motion was seconded by Mary-Ann Rowlston.

Motion approved.

After the in-camera portion of the meeting concluded, Mary-Ann Rowlston put forward a motion to move back into the business portion of the board meeting. This motion was seconded by Laura Godsoe.

Motion approved.

4.0 Chief Librarian & CEO Report

Chief Librarian & CEO Åsa Kachan provided an update to the Library Board. Highlights included:

- The Collective Agreement has been signed. Ayo Aladejebi and Åsa Kachan met with Christina Covert and Chad Murphy. This has been a challenging time as this was the first time the Union decided to initiate labour action. We are all very pleased to have reached agreement and have the Collective Agreement signed and continue to move forward.
- Facilities updates - the Request for Proposals for Halifax North is currently posted. Ampersand (through MetroWorks) that provided café services at Central Library and Keshen Goodman Public Library has declared bankruptcy. Management has updated the Requests for Expressions of Interest for each location; these will be posted as soon as possible on the HRM bid site.
- Dartmouth North – sewer issue with Halifax Water that happened in 2013, and has flooded twice again this past couple of weeks. The flood has impacted the entire building, including Recreation. The electrical is in the floor, which may complicate repairs. Once we have a sense of timeline and dates, we will keep the board apprised. There is currently no return date provided by HRM Building Maintenance Services. Management is considering options for service.
- Alderney Gate – a small scale renovation is currently underway. These adjustments will improve sightlines and will provide additional light in the space. The shelving will be lower, and on wheels – allowing relatively quick shifting of floor space for programs and events.

The Board thanked Åsa for the update and provided heartfelt concern for the staff and community of Dartmouth North who are impacted by the building closure.

5.0 Board Committees

5.1 Board Executive Committee

Ayo Aladejebi reported that the Board Executive Committee did not meet.

5.2 Finance, Audit & Risk Committee

Committee Chair Mary-Ann Rowson provided an update the full Board. Updated financials were included in the meeting package. Mary-Ann reported that as the organization approaches end-of-year, it is anticipated that the organization will be close to budget for the year. The Finance, Audit & Risk Committee had no concerns regarding the financials as presented.

5.3 Planning & Performance Committee

Request for Review Policy

Manager of Collections and Access, Dave MacNeil spoke to the Request to Review Policy that was included with the Board package. Highlights included:

- Halifax Public Libraries has not had a policy along this line before; previously this work had been done ad hoc and informally.
- A reminder that it is not for us to review the content of the book or composition, the purpose of this Request to Review is to explore if staff followed existing Library policy.

Laura Godsoe put forward the following motion:

THAT the Halifax Regional Library Board approve the Request for Review Policy.

This motion was seconded by Mary-Ann Rowson.

Motion approved.

Mary-Ann Rowson thanked Management for this work. This approach and policy mitigates some risk for the Library. Management informed the Board that this was draft policy was used for the latest challenge.

6.0 In Camera Session

Laura Godsoe put forward a motion to move in-camera. This motion was seconded by Mary-Ann Rowson.

Motion approved.

7.0 Adjournment

With no further business, Ayo Aladejebi thanked staff, and put forward a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion approved.