

# TOWN OF NEWBURY



NEWBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Tel. (603) 763-5803

NEW HAMPSHIRE  
INCORPORATED 1778

P.O. Box 245  
NEWBURY 03255

## MINUTES OF TRUSTEE MEETING: 11/7/23

### PRESENT:

#### TRUSTEES

Lynne Touhy

Eric Boyer

Todd Maily

Paul Sullivan

Elizabeth Courant

#### ALTERNATES

Pat Sherman

Jeanne Palleiko

#### STAFF

Lea McBain

Emma Brown

Meeting started at 5:17 pm

1. Lynne introduced trustees, alternates, library staff. Lynne then outlined the agenda for the meeting and the time limitation for public comment before the Board will move to a vote on the challenged books. The four books being discussed are:

- "I am Jazz" by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings
- "Born Ready: The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope" by Jodie Patterson
- "Being You" by Jessica Ralli & Anne/Andy Passchier
- "Jack, Not Jackie" by Erica Silverman

2. Lea discussed the methods for organizing the collection in the Children's room. The request for reconsideration requested that the four books be moved to the "parenting" section. Other sections in the Children's collection include board books, easy readers, picture book biographies, graphic novels, picture book nonfiction, and beginning chapter books.

### 3. Requests for Reconsideration – public comment

- Kristen Schultz discussed the expertise of those in charge of curating the library collection. She also discussed the First Amendment implications of moving books, noting that it was a kind of “soft censorship”. Kristen spoke to the content of these books, noting that moving the books would create a pedagogical disadvantage, and that access to literature does not create affinity for the content.
- Stephanie Spaulding inquired about the decision to re-open the discussion of the books, asking when a vote would take place.
- Dick Wright asked why, if the FCC could not air passages from some books when they were read in a Senate hearing, why should they be accessible by children?
- Bob Wilkonski noted that the NCC is interested in challenging additional books in the teenage section.
- Steven Schultz noted that the idea of additional challenges worries him, he trusts the library staff to make these decisions in their professional capacity regarding where to place books; no group should determine what is in the library.
- Bob Wilkonski noted that he does not want to ban books, he wants to limit the ability of children to see the books without adult supervision.
- Marjorie Schultz asked what age range these books are written for. Lea noted that *Being You* would be K-1<sup>st</sup> Grade, *I am Jazz* would be K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade, *Born Ready* would be K-1<sup>st</sup> Grade, and *Jack Not Jackie* would be K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade.
- Robin Parkhurst stated that she wants these books in an area where children would not be able to access them. Robin fears that children are being groomed by teachers and libraries, leading to a high suicide rate among transgender youth.

- Lea noted that we currently do not have any juvenile accounts – no book can be checked out without parent permission. The library has an unaccompanied minor policy – children ages 10 or younger must be supervised by an adult or person 16 or older.
- Polly Lowe doubted the ability of 16-year-olds to monitor children at the library.
- Beth Gering expressed support for the library staff, she then noted that if a parent cares about their children, the parent needs to take care about how they monitor the content the children see. Beth worries that moving these books will create a trend toward making the library responsible for babysitting children – once this trend begins, she worries it will not stop.
- Polly Lowe asked who it hurts if these books are moved.
- Lea discussed two court cases dealing with the moving of books to different sections, one from 2000 and one ongoing. In these two cases, libraries were sued for First Amendment violations after moving children’s books to different sections.
- Steven Schultz noted that children find acceptance in books, and how his son was able to find acceptance and self-love through books that he read. He noted that suicide rates among gay and trans young people results from a lack of access to books that speak to them, not through reading books, and how his son was able to find acceptance and self-love through books that he read.
- Kristen Schultz stated that teachers are not using literature or any other methods to groom children.
- Dick Wright expressed his concerns that teachers are grooming children. Dick noted his concern that children seek attention, and if they get attention from inquiring about gender issues they will be susceptible to grooming.

- Beth Gering re-iterated that it is the parent’s responsibility to monitor their children and the material they have access to.
- Paul Sullivan asked that public comments be directed at the Board, not each other.
- Jack Gillis asked about the persons that make decisions about age-appropriateness. He then asked about the harm in a child be inquisitive, noting that the library is a good source to foster inquisitiveness. Jack noted that this request for reconsideration smacks of censorship – the whole point of a library is to be a source of information. The library must be a resource for information – if experts have determined the age-appropriateness, we should not fear a child encountering this information. Jack fears the slippery slope of additional challenges.
- Greg Sargent thanked the attendees for caring about these issues, and thanked the library staff. Greg noted that he disagreed with moving the books – as an LGBT person he noted the importance of books that spoke to his identity as a young person. Greg expressed support for the library checkout policy, noting that it gives parents control.
- Jim Schultz expressed support for the way the collection is currently being managed. Jim noted that anyone that seeks information will find it online, so attempts to manage this information will be counter-productive.
- Jeanne Paleiko went to Amazon reader reviews to get a feel for what readers think about the books. The books reviews were overall very positive, and the comments expressed how valuable the books were to helping families understand complicated issues. These books are meaningful because parents desire a vehicle for explaining difficult issues. Jeanne noted how rapidly times change, and these books help to create a message of acceptance and tolerance.
- Polly Lowe noted that parents should be in charge of these issues.

- Patricia Sherman noted the dilemma that the library is in. Members of the community are the constituents of the library, but must also work within confines of the First Amendment. The job of the library is to unlock access for all points of view. Patricia noted that these issues surrounding gender and sexuality are not new, but the information is becoming more general. The library must keep up with the times, and if an issue is in the public arena it needs to be in the library. Trans people realize that they are trans at a very early age – curious children need to have access to information, they should be getting this from the library and not from the internet.
- Bob Wilkonski discussed a book written by a parent of an LGBT child. He noted it was an excellent read, and an entire chapter was devoted to the suicide rate. Bob noted that the book claimed professional help from doctors or religious staff is superior to any book.
- Liz Tentarelli noted that the rules outlined at the beginning of the meeting called on people to speak only once, for three minutes max.
- Jack Gillis re-iterated that he fears this attempt to limit knowledge and access based on the subject-matter smacks of censorship.

4. Lynne closed public comment, moved to Board consideration of the books.

- Lea discussed the reconsideration requests as request to reconsider the classification of the books – regardless of content, do we need to move the book from the section it is currently placed to the parenting section? Is the book in the right section?
- Lea discussed Being You, and noted that it was far too wordy for a board book. Lea noted that an additional copy we received was a nonfiction picture book and not a board book. This made sense from a collection perspective, so Lea has decided to propose to the Board that the book be moved to the nonfiction picture book section, where it would fit in a Dewey call number arrangement.
- Paul Sullivan noted that he would like to address all four books together. Paul expressed confidence in the expertise of the library staff, and hesitation about taking even a small amount of control of the collection

away from these experts. Library staff carefully construct a collection to meet the educational, informational, cultural, and recreational needs of the community. While some of this content is controversial, Paul believes it would be a disservice to restrict access to books in any way. Paul indicated he would be voting no on moving the books.

- Betsy Courant also noted she would like to address all four books. Betsy spoke to the importance of libraries to the communities they serve, and the role of trustees to ensure that a wide array of information is available to meet the needs of everyone. Betsy spoke to the importance of books about LGBTQ issues, and noted that any attempt to restrict access would send a message of stigmatization.
- Eric Boyer agreed with Paul regarding the importance of trusting the expertise of library staff, and with Betsy on the danger of sending a message of stigmatization by restricting access to books. In moving these books we would be overruling the experts and intentionally mis-classifying them, sending a clear (if unintentional) message of disapproval to those interested in this material. Eric noted that current library policy maximizes parental control without limiting access. Eric then spoke of his own experience with libraries as a child, and how formative it was to have access to books even when others had objections to them. Eric indicated that we would be voting no on moving the books.
- Todd Maily thanked the group for coming, and for not asking for books to be banned. Todd noted that this is most likely a form of soft-censorship. Todd noted that his only concern was with *Being You*, noting that in terms of style he did not believe it to be an appropriate board book, these concerns were addressed by Lea, and he trusts the decision that the library staff makes regarding the collection in their professional opinion. Todd noted the community has a right and perhaps an obligation to bring its concerns forward, though he will be very hesitant to remove any book.
- Lynne noted the respect she has for the library staff, and the decisions they make regarding the collection; she is in favor of keeping them where they are, deferring to the judgement of the professional staff.
- Lynne moved into formal voting on the four books
  - *Being You* – Lynne moves that we keep the book in its current location, subject to the opinion of the library staff, Betsy seconds – unanimous

- I am Jazz – Paul moves that we keep the book in its current location, subject to the opinion of the library staff, Eric seconds – unanimous
- Born Ready – Lynne moves that we keep the book in its current location, subject to the opinion of the library staff, Betsy seconds – unanimous
- Jack (not Jackie) - Betsy moves that we keep the book in its current location, subject to the opinion of the library staff, Lynne seconds – unanimous
- After a motion to adjourn was made and seconded but prior to the vote to adjourn, Stephanie Spaulding asked about the book Born Ready, asking if the Board believes that the character Penelope is a boy or a girl. Todd noted that the character in the story identifies as a boy and the parents agreed.

Motion to adjourn by Lynn, Betsy seconds

Meeting adjourned at: 6:33 pm

Minutes submitted by Eric Boyer