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Re: Public Meeting on July 10, 2023

Topic: Labeling LGBTQIA+ materials in Children's section

Attendees: Councilwoman Purinton; representatives from Moms for Liberty; Library Director, Gavin Woltjer; Assistant Library Director, Kelsie Rubich; Information and Systems Coordinator, Megan Thomas; BPL Board members Peggy McSweyn, Staci Samuelson, Roger Young, Susan Plath, David Darby; Assistant City Administrator Kevin Iffland; City Administrator Chris Kukulski

The meeting came to order at 10:02 am. Woltjer announced this meeting was not intended to be a debate but a listening session and a decorum of respect will be maintained. Public comment commenced from 10:07 am to 10:56 am. Public comment was given by 32 individuals. Attendance is reported as between 100-120 people.

Public comments focused on the library as a "public space intended for use by all" and material should be "inclusive" and not "labeled or segregated" in any way that will promote censorship, create an advantage for one segment of the populace over another, diminish curiosity, or diminish community values. Additionally, commenters expressed deep regard for the concept of library materials as being "mirrors, windows, or sliding glass doors" that reflect, allow for other perspective, or allow for another's engagement with ideas different from their own. Further comments stressed that libraries are "a market place for ideas," provide education and entertainment and connect the community, and act as a "bastion for free speech."

Councilwoman Purinton and Moms for Liberty requested that materials with LGBTQIA+ themes be labeled as such and/or moved to a separate location with like-themed materials. Arguments included that libraries should have "boundaries" and to "respect family boundaries" and to allow parents to be "educators of their children about this subject." Another argument was put forth that the library engages in teaching "gender ideology" and pushes an agenda. Councilwoman Purinton asked the relationship of the library with the American Library Association. Woltjer provided this information. Councilwoman Purinton also asked about how many complaints the library has received concerning this issue. Woltjer provided this information.

BPL Board members listened and provided comments. McSweyn explained the process of challenged materials, and stated that the library allows gender ideology but does not promote it. Darby explained the Board operates in an advisory capacity to the Library Director. Young commented that the library's function is to

provide information for all users, and reinforced the importance of the First Amendment. Samuelson broached the question “is it necessary to talk about sexual identity in the young area of the library?” Plath reiterated the importance of a library being for everyone and not individual segments of a population.

Woltjer thanked everyone for attending and for keeping a respectful environment. Woltjer reminded all in attendance that the library serves all social constructs of Yellowstone County. Woltjer commented that this is a complicated subject that deserves attention and the importance of difficult conversations. Further follow-up was not discussed.

Meeting adjourned at 11:47 am.