

Douglas County Libraries
Wednesday, April 27, 2022
7:00 P.M.
Highlands Ranch Library, Highlands Ranch, CO

CALL TO ORDER Presiding: Dawn Vaughn, President

NOTICE *This meeting was noticed in compliance with both Colorado Open Meeting Law and the Douglas County Libraries Bylaws.*

ATTENDANCE

GUESTS Eide Bailly Auditors, Janeen Hathcock and Kimberly Higgins

PUBLIC COMMENTS

CONSENT AGENDA

[Page 5](#)

Board members may request to have any item(s) removed from the consent agenda for further conversation by making that request when asked by the chair and stating the item.

MOTION to approve Consent Minutes

1. Minutes March 30, 2022

[Pages 6-9](#)

EXECUTIVE LIBRARY DIRECTOR UPDATE

[Pages 10-18](#)

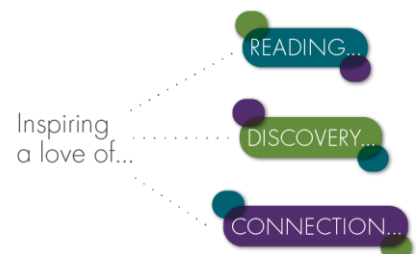
PRESENTATION Materials Handling and Circulation

DISTRICT BUSINESS

Do any board members have a conflict of interest to disclose regarding any of the below matters? If so, please recuse yourself, and return to the meeting after discussion has ended.

PRESENTATION Annual Audit Report

BYLAWS PROJECT TEAM UPDATE



EXECUTIVE SESSION

Executive Library Director's Goals and Annual Performance Feedback Process

Pursuant to C.R.S., Section 24-6-402(4)(f), C.R.S., for the purposes of discussing personnel matters related to the Executive Library Director's goals and annual performance feedback process.

MOTION to enter Executive Session

RETURN TO OPEN MEETING

Executive Library Director's Goals and Annual Performance Feedback Process

MOTION to accept Executive Library Director Goals

Other action as needed from discussion on:

- Staff feedback
- Updated evaluation tool
- Review Team
- Timeline

REPORTS

Partnership of Douglas County Governments

Douglas County Youth Initiative

Urban Libraries Council

Foundation

TRUSTEE COMMENTS

UPCOMING BOARD MEETINGS

1. **Board Executive Committee Meeting**: May 16, 2022, Castle Pines Library, 8:00 a.m.
2. **Board Study Session**: May 25, 2022, Roxborough Library, 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
3. **Board Regular Meeting**: May 25, 2022, Roxborough Library, 7:00 p.m.
4. **Board Annual Retreat**: May 14, 2022, Highlands Ranch Library, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

OTHER BOARD CALENDAR ITEMS

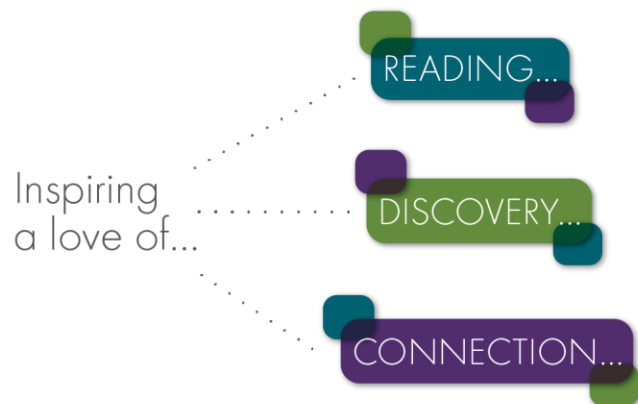
1. **New Castle Rock Library Groundbreaking**: May 2, 2022, Philip S. Miller Library, Castle Rock, 10:00 a.m.
2. **Partnership of Douglas County Governments Meeting**: May 18, 2022, Douglas County Government, Douglas County Human Services, 7:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.

ADJOURN



Board of Trustees

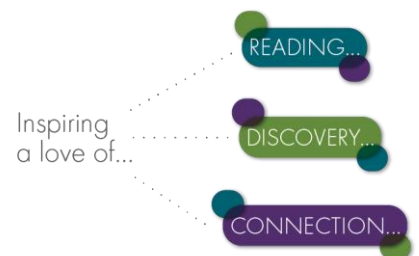
April 27, 2022



Board Action: Review the minutes for approval.

Item	
Minutes	Regular Meeting March 30, 2022

MOTION: I move to approve the March 30, 2022 regular board meeting minutes as presented.



DOUGLAS COUNTY LIBRARIES
 Board of Trustees Regular Meeting
 March 30, 2022
 Castle Rock, CO

President Vaughn called the annual meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

This meeting was held and was noticed in compliance with both Colorado Open Meeting Law and the Douglas County Libraries Bylaws.

The following were present:

TRUSTEES: Suzanne Burkholder, Jessica Burt, Daniel Danser, Terry Nolan, Meghann Silverthorn, and Dawn Vaughn

Rick LaPointe was absent. The absence was excused. A quorum was present.

STAFF: Bob Pasicznyuk, Lisanna Parkhurst, and Patti Owen-DeLay

GUESTS: Ron Cole and Louise Wood

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Louise Wood shared appreciation for being able to serve on the library board.

Ron Cole concurred with Wood's statements.

CONSENT AGENDA

1.	Minutes Annual Meeting – February 23, 2022
2.	Record Study Session – February 23, 2022
3.	Email Poll – Disposition of Gazebo at Castle Rock – Philip S. Miller Library
4.	2022 Trustee Manual Updates

MOTION 22-03-01: Danser moved and the motion carried unanimously to approve the consent agenda, consisting of the February 23, 2022, annual meeting minutes and study session record, the email poll for disposition of the gazebo at the Castle Rock – Philip S. Miller library, and the 2022 Trustee Manual updates. Silverthorn seconded the motion.

EXECUTIVE LIBRARY DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Pasicznyuk reported that the move of the gazebo top at the Castle Rock – Philip S. Miller library to the Lowell Ranch as part of the Castle Rock rebuild project was successful. He updated the board on the timeline and upcoming easements for the project. The project is still on time for a May excavation start and groundbreaking even though permitting is still in process.

Pasicznyuk spoke about upcoming legislation, as highlighted in his packet. Colorado SB22-004—libraries have been removed from the bill. Unionization Efforts seem stalled, but are still wait-and-see.

Pasicznyuk reviewed the 2021 fourth quarter Key Performance Indicator report, citing visits are still below 2019 numbers while other numbers are actually heading back toward previous numbers. The eNPS listed is just a baseline number to start tracking employees as promoters and staff are determining a target range for the employee net promoter score.

DISTRICT BUSINESS

No trustees declared a conflict of interest with any items in front of the board for discussion or action.

- Recognition of Retiring Trustees Ron Cole and Louise Wood
Vaughn read the resolutions honoring the service of Cole and Wood.

MOTION 22-03-02: Burkholder moved and the motion carried unanimously to adopt Resolution 2022-03-01 honoring the service of Rondle L. Cole and Resolution 2022-03-02 honoring the service of Louise M. Wood. Nolan seconded the motion.

- 2021 Fourth Quarter Key Performance Indicator Report
Pasicznyuk reported on this above. There was no other discussion or comment.
- Closure Policy
Pasicznyuk shared the reasoning for this request of policy change. Silverthorn asked for clarification on weather closures.

MOTION 22-03-03: Nolan moved and the motion carried unanimously to adopt the amended Closure Policy that reads: The Board annually approves the District holiday closures and all Districtwide closures unless due to extreme weather or emergency. The Library Director has discretion for delayed openings, early closure, or closure of a single location. Burkholder seconded the motion. Due to a lack of full board, the motion, though carried, did not pass and will go to the April regular meeting for a second reading, where it can pass by a majority vote.

- Board Self-Evaluation and Goals Discussion
Vaughn proposed that the board take time at the May annual retreat to set goals and to evaluate the self-evaluation document. There was general consensus to continue this annual practice, as stated in the bylaws, and to do so at the annual retreat.
- Board Bylaws Project Discussion
Vaughn prefaced the bylaws project citing an almost 10-year period since the bylaws have been reviewed en masse, and a need to review them for any updates or changes.

MOTION 22-03-04: Nolan moved and the motion carried unanimously to appoint Burt and Silverthorn as the Bylaws Review Task Force to work with staff to bring

recommended updates to the board at the June regular board meeting. Burt seconded the motion.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Vaughn stated the reasons and statute citations for moving into Executive Session.

MOTION 22-03-05: Vaughn moved and the motion carried unanimously that the board retire into Executive Session, Pursuant to C.R.S., Section 24-6-402(4)(e) and Section 24-6-402(4)(f), C.R.S., for the purposes of determining positions relative to matters that may be subject to negotiations, and discussing personnel matters related to the Executive Library Director's contract. The motion was seconded by Nolan.

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

The board returned to open meeting at 7:46 p.m.

Vaughn stated: For the record, if any person who participated in the Executive Session believes that any substantial discussion of any matters not included in the motion to go into the Executive Session occurred during the Executive Session, or that any improper action occurred during the Executive Session in violation of Colorado Open Meeting Law, I ask that you state your concerns for the record.

Hearing none, the board proceeded with discussion to amend the Executive Library Director's contract, making the following motion:

Executive Library Director's Contract

MOTION 22-03-06: Danser moved and the motion carried unanimously to enter into the employment contract with Executive Library Director Robert Pasicznyuk as presented. Nolan seconded the motion.

There was discussion led by Silverthorn about timing of amending the evaluation process to better reflect current library process and the need for the board to approve the Executive Library Director's 2022 goals. Staff will work on the process for consideration along with Pasicznyuk's goals at the April board meeting.

MOTION 22-03-07: Silverthorn moved and the motion carried unanimously to clarify that the pay raise approved with Motion 21-12-03SP for Pasicznyuk for 2022 was intended to be retroactive to January 1, 2022, and the pay overage previously shared be handled through the bonus also given with the 21-12-03SP motion. Burt seconded.

Partnership of Douglas County Governments (PDCG)

Nolan noted an informative presentation by the City of Louisville on their recent fire, citing lessons learned and the difficulty of this particular fire.

Douglas County Youth Initiative (DCYI)

Burkholder reported Outstanding Youth Awards will be in April recognizing 10 Douglas County youth who have overcome great adversity. Teen Court is restarting after a hiatus.

Urban Libraries Council (ULC)

Silverthorn reported that the ULC board will meet next week, after which she will have more to report at the April library board meeting. The Executive Director is stepping down and she hopes to have some influence in ensuring that the new Executive Director understands the important role of Intellectual Freedom in libraries.

FOUNDATION REPORT

Vaughn reported that the next meeting is later this month, so nothing to report until after that meeting.

TRUSTEE COMMENTS

Burkholder added on to the board packet piece, sharing a thank you from teen Alaina who appreciated Lisa Casper for her support in helping her succeed with DECA, acknowledging the impact staff make on our customers.

UPCOMING BOARD MEETINGS

1. **Board Executive Committee Meeting**: April 18, 2022, Castle Pines Library, 8:00 a.m.
2. **Board Study Session**: April 27, 2022, Highlands Ranch Library, 5:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.
3. **Board Regular Meeting**: April 27, 2022, Highlands Ranch Library, 7:00 p.m.
4. **Board Annual Retreat**: May 14, 2022, Highlands Ranch Library, 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

OTHER BOARD CALENDAR ITEMS

1. **Annual Volunteer Appreciation**: April 23, 2022, Highlands Ranch Library, Detective Dinner event (invitations are out, RSVP required)
2. **Partnership of Douglas County Governments Meeting**: May 18, 2022, Douglas County Government, Douglas County Human Services, 7:00 a.m.-9:30 a.m.

ADJOURN

Vaughn adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Nolan, Board Secretary
Minutes prepared by Patti Owen-DeLay



Executive Library Director's Report

Bob Pasicznyuk

April 2022

Community Context

Employment and Recruitment. Douglas County governments are reporting marketplace challenges to recruit and retain talent for key positions and seasonal hires. Each is working varied responses – high school job fairs, mid-year compensation changes, and reorganizations.

Homelessness. The County continues to foster collaboration among governments, law enforcement, and non-profit providers on a wide range of homelessness solutions – shelters, camping regulations, RTD enforcement, and alternative philanthropic opportunities. Partnering agencies and organizations are rallying around 4 Cs to mitigate Douglas County homelessness: Compassion, Code Enforcement, Continuum of Services, and Communication.

Housing Starts. Interest rate increases have yet to quell permit requests for new homes.

Business Plan, Operations, and Strategy

- Our Community Engagement and Customer Experience divisions completed their first quarter event offerings - Fairytale Balls (6 events, serving, 1122 children and parents).
- HR completed a competitive process selecting and awarding Brown & Brown for Library benefits and Health brokerage services.
- Facilities completed temporary repairs on the Castle Rock sewer system.
- Information Technology completed a software upgrade to our integrated library system.
- Collection Services is deploying their 2022 Newspaper on iPad Service for customers.
- The Sheriff has begun their safety audit of Library procedures and facilities.

Castle Rock Building Program. In advance of the coming May groundbreaking:

- Completed restriping of alternative parking and strip mall cleanup.
- Community Engagement is moving into the strip.
- Met with area neighbors to inform them of the project.
- Completed the Town's permitting process to begin construction.

Mandates, Impacts, and Business Risks

- Library content challenges continue – Washington Post Article.
- Colorado's legislative session continues with no impacts yet to DCL.
- The draft state budget portends no change in state funding for libraries.

Professional Trends and Analysis

- Fine Free Libraries continue to be an emphasis of the ULC and area colleague libraries.

- 5 libraries in leadership transition – Durango, Colo Springs, Garfield, Loveland and Anythink.
- Jefferson County Libraries just opened an “Express”, staff-less location.
<https://jeffcolibrary.org/express-library/>

Board Talking Points

Elevating the Brand – Douglas County Libraries elevates our community by inspiring a love of reading, discovery, and connection. With nearly 2 million visitors to seven branches each year, visitors are met with beautiful spaces, curated collections, personalized services, and a variety of events that offer a premium experience for all.

General Library Talking Points:

- Libraries build skills for school and life success. DCL hosts over 140,000 children and parents each year in our early literacy events.
- Libraries are some of the highest used venues in communities. DCL is second in Douglas County to the Park Meadows Mall for annual visits.
- Library events and camps are in high demand. DCL’s camps, programs, and events, more than not, run at capacity, often with waiting lists.
- Reading isn’t a fad. DCL’s digital and traditional collections are ranked at the top 2 or 3 in the nation for use among peers.
- Library customer loyalty is epic. Our Net Promoter rating exceeds industry best practices for service sector and retail organizations.

New Castle Rock Library Talking Points:

1) Why build a new library in Castle Rock?

We are excited to respond to the community’s growth and demand for library spaces and services through continued dedication to our strategic plan. A new library in Castle Rock is also in line with commitments we have made in our facilities plan, to provide customers with premium libraries that meet community needs.

Castle Rock is growing; it is now larger than Parker and will surpass Highlands Ranch as the largest town in Douglas County in the next 10-20 years. Our current Castle Rock facility is about the size of our Lone Tree library, even though Castle Rock’s population is three times that of Lone Tree. We are working together to achieve a library facility with the space and features to serve our Castle Rock customers now and into the next generation. We also seek to equip our districtwide services teams with spaces for their important work.

2) For memory’s sake, please also note this bulleted summary of the longer narrative.

- A new Library is part of a decade-long commitment to upgrade all DCL facilities.
- The new library will be on par with libraries in Parker and Highlands Ranch.
- Castle Rock growth and the library’s age made it a priority for improvement.
- The Library is funding the facility through annual cash, capital savings.
- The existing library will be open until the new facility is complete.

Customer Experience Division Report

Storytime attendance is growing at a fast pace! Across all formats, locations, and ages, 11,912 people attended or viewed a DCL storytime in March. This is a 26 percent increase over February!



We were contacted by a CU Boulder senior, Carlie Charp, who grew up in Highlands Ranch and is a DCL storytime alum completing her degree in engineering design. As part of her senior project at CU she has created a book about Ralphie the buffalo and she asked if she could read her book at storytime. Cliff and Melissa helped her prepare and she

joined Melissa's Saturday storytime to read parts of her book. Melissa helped Carlie adapt her story to the younger age group in attendance and Melissa was impressed with her interactions with the children. (Pictured below)

A parent of one of our regular storytime families (6-8 per week) informed us that storytimes at the library are just the beginning! "Addison loves storytime so much, one of his favorite games to play at home is "storytime" when he reads and sings to his younger brother, almost every afternoon." The YFS storytime team has truly made a connection with Addison and his brother!

From Literacy & Community Outreach Specialist, Tiffany Curtin

We are planning our next Naturalization Ceremony to be held at the Parker Library at 1 pm on Friday, May 20!

By hosting these events we are able to welcome and celebrate the Citizenship of up to 25 residents of Douglas County. It is an honor to share with them the moment they become US Citizens! While we are not able to host ceremonies for all of our customers and neighbors who become citizens, these opportunities reflect the DCL Value of Welcoming to All. The speakers from our staff help make it personal, premium and definitely make a positive impact. These ceremonies are open to all to witness and observe.

Censorship battles' new frontier: Your public library

Conservatives are teaming with politicians to remove books and gut library boards

By [Annie Gowen](#)

Today at 7:00 a.m. EDT



LLANO, Tex. — In early November, an email dropped into the inbox of Judge Ron Cunningham, the silver-haired head chair of the governing body of Llano County in Texas's picturesque Hill Country. The subject line read “Pornographic Filth at the Llano Public Libraries.”

“It came to my attention a few weeks ago that pornographic filth has been discovered at the Llano library,” wrote Bonnie Wallace, a 54-year-old local church volunteer. “I’m not advocating for any book to be censored but to be RELOCATED to the ADULT section. ... It is the only way I can think of to prohibit censorship of books I do agree with, mainly the Bible, if more radicals come to town and want to use the fact that we censored these books against us.”

Wallace had attached an Excel spreadsheet of about 60 books she found objectionable, including those about transgender teens, sex education and race, including such notable works as “[Between the World and Me](#),” by author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates, an exploration of the country’s history written as a letter to his adolescent son. Not long after, the county’s chief librarian sent the list to Suzette Baker, head of one of the library’s three branches.

“She told me to look at pulling the books off the shelf and possibly putting them behind the counter. I told them that was censorship,” Baker said.

Wallace’s list was the opening salvo in a censorship battle that is unlikely to end well for proponents of free speech in this county of 21,000 nestled in rolling hills of mesquite trees and cactus northwest of Austin.

Leaders have taken works as seemingly innocuous as the popular children’s picture book “In the Night Kitchen” by Maurice Sendak off the shelves, closed library board meetings to the public and named Wallace the vice chair of a

new library board stacked with conservative appointees — some of whom did not even have library cards.

15 of 18

With these actions, Llano joins a growing number of communities across America where conservatives have mounted challenges to books and other content related to race, sex, gender and other subjects they deem inappropriate. A movement that started in schools has rapidly expanded to public libraries, accounting for 37 percent of book challenges last year, according to the American Library Association. Conservative activists in several states, including Texas, Montana and Louisiana have joined forces with like-minded officials to dissolve libraries' governing bodies, rewrite or delete censorship protections, and remove books outside of official challenge procedures.

“The danger is that we start to have information and books that only address one viewpoint that are okayed by just one certain group,” said Mary Woodward, president-elect of the Texas Library Association.

“We lose that diversity of thought and diversity of ideas libraries are known for — and only represent one viewpoint that is the loudest,” said Woodward, noting that there have been an estimated 17 challenges leveled at public libraries in Texas recently and that she expects many more.

Leila Green Little, a parent and board member of the Llano County Library System Foundation, said her anti-censorship group obtained dozens of emails from county officials that reveal the outsize influence a small but vocal group of conservative Christian and tea party activists wielded over the county commissioners to reshape the library system to their own ideals.

In one of the emails, which were obtained through a public records request and shared with The Washington Post, Cunningham seemed to question whether public libraries were even necessary.

“The board also needs to recognize that the county is not mandated by law to provide a public library,” Cunningham wrote to Wallace in January.

He declined to comment for this story but said in a statement that the county was aware of citizen concerns and “is committed to providing excellent public library services to our patrons consistent with community expectations and standards, as well as operating within compliance of Texas and Federal statutes.”

Dissent over removing books

Cunningham, a two-term judge who was once part of the security detail for then-Gov. George W. Bush, acted quickly on the complaints. He strode into the main library a few weeks later and took two books off the shelves — Sendak's “In the Night Kitchen” — because some parents had objected to the main character in the story, a little boy, appearing nude — and “It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health,” a sex education book for parents and children ages 10 and up, that includes color illustrations of the human body and sex acts.

He also ordered librarians to pause buying new material and to pull “any books with photos of naked or sexual conduct regardless if they are animated or actual photos,” emails reviewed by The Washington Post showed.

Texas school districts were already ablaze with book challenges in October, when state Rep. Matt Krause (R), chair of the General Investigating Committee, asked school districts for information on his own list of 850 books, most of them gender- and race-themed, that “might make children feel discomfort, guilt or anguish.” Gov. Greg Abbott (R) jumped into the fray, calling for an investigation of “pornography” in school libraries. One school district removed more than 100 books, although most were reviewed and returned.

EveryLibrary, a national political action committee for libraries that tracks such challenges, said it has seen ^{16 of 18} “dozens of new attacks” on libraries, their governing bodies and policies since the first of the year — in Texas as well as ongoing cases in Montana and Louisiana. In some cases, the challengers are being assisted by growing national networks such as the parental rights group Moms for Liberty or spurred on by conservative public policy organizations like Heritage Action for America, the ALA has said.

At the county’s main library in Llano, director Amber Milum said in an interview that she had already taken it upon herself to put some books away in a file cabinet in her office as early as August, including two popular read-aloud picture books aimed at amusing kids: “I Need a New Butt!” and “Freddie the Farting Snowman.”

The moves circumvented the library’s established practices on objectionable content — including a challenge form to be reviewed by librarians. Isolating or removing books because of subjective or “personal opinions” — finding the content offensive or distasteful, for example — could open up a library to a First Amendment challenge, experts said.

“We didn’t fill out a form, everyone just came in and talked to me personally,” Milum said. “I took notes on everything that everybody was saying, and that’s how it happened.”

Meanwhile, Baker, head librarian at the library branch in the unincorporated community of Kingsland, about 23 miles from Llano, continued to push back. An Army veteran whose grandfather fought in World War II and who has a son in Afghanistan, said she is a firm believer in the Bill of Rights.

“I don’t think we should give in. If we give them even an inch, they will think they can do whatever they want,” she wrote in an email to Milum.

Then in December, the commissioners voted to suspend the county’s e-book system, OverDrive, because, they said, it lacked sufficient parental controls, which also cut off access for the elderly, people with disabilities or those otherwise unable to visit a physical library. Officials say they plan on replacing the system. They also shuttered the libraries for three days just before Christmas to review and reorganize the teen and children’s collections.

“God has been so good to us ... please continue to pray for the librarians and that their eyes would be open to the truth,” Rochelle Wells, a new member of the library board, wrote in an email. “They are closing the library for 3 days which are to be entirely devoted to removing books that contain pornographic content.”

Green Little said not much is known about what administrators did during the time the libraries were closed. The book “Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents,” a work about systemic racism by Pulitzer Prize-winning author and journalist Isabel Wilkerson, has mysteriously vanished, and the fate of several other works remains unknown, she said.

“When I heard books were being taken out of the library, that was a big-time problem for me,” she said. “For others it was the fact that the county was not operating transparently. A small group of private citizens had an inordinate amount of control over county workings.”

Green Little, a mother of two who lives with her family on an 1800s-era cattle ranch outside of town, said it was not easy to take a stand in conservative Llano County, where nearly 80 percent of the majority-White population voted for President Donald Trump in 2020. A Confederate flag still flies at the Civil War memorial.

Some friends stopped returning her calls. Social invitations dried up. Green Little recently threw a Beatrix Potter-themed fundraiser at a park to raise money for the library foundation — complete with a petting zoo with baby lambs. For counterprogramming, Wallace, the wife of the town’s hospital board president, hosted an “adults only” showing of a video of pedophile chasers. It was held at a hall next door to the park at the same time as the garden

A new library board

In January, commissioners voted to dissolve the existing library board — whose members came from Friends of the Library groups and the Women’s Culture Club — and created a reconstituted board of mostly political appointees, including many of the citizens who had complained about books. A retired physician, Richard Day, a Democrat, was denied a seat despite having a master’s degree in library science and experience managing the rare books collection at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, he said.

Cunningham said in a statement that the restructuring of the library board was in keeping with Texas law and past practices to allow for “citizen participation from different perspectives.” The all-female board is overwhelmingly White and Republican, records show.

And the new board was ready to start focusing on its top priorities, including adding content of “academia, educational value and character building” and consulting with a local Christian school about their needs, Wells wrote in one email. Wells, a member of the local tea party who home-schools her six children, did not return calls for comment.

But she had one more complaint: “There were 3 or 4 patrons present taking notes,” at the group’s meeting, she wrote to one of the commissioners. “That surprised a few of us. Would you be able to persuade Judge Cunningham to keep the meetings closed?”

Last month the board voted to close meetings to the public, which could violate the Texas open meeting laws, experts have said. Panel members often stop to pray over questions brought up in meetings, and until the Lord answers, they can’t resolve them, according to county officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they feared repercussions.

The county has argued that although the board will now approve all book purchases going forward, it is operating in an “advisory capacity” only, which means it is not subject to open meeting laws. But if the commissioners simply rubber-stamp the recommendations, they could be, legal experts say.

John Chrastka, executive director of EveryLibrary, said library boards are designed to be independent to protect records, serve the entire community and protect patrons’ First Amendment rights.

“When boards become politicized, there are problems because they either favor one group over another or start to spend taxpayer money in less-than-transparent ways,” Chrastka said. “If a board is motivated by political ideology or a religious agenda, it stops being a public institution because it does not serve the whole public.”

Fired

Baker, who had been head librarian at the Kingsland branch for a year, continued to wage her own resistance. Inspired by a recent book-burning in Tennessee, she created a display in the library with banned titles like “To Kill a Mockingbird” and changed the letters on the variable message board out to front to say “We put the ‘lit’ in literature.” Milum told her to take down the display, then began ignoring her emails, she said.

On March 9, when Milum and the director of human resources appeared at the door of her library, Baker was ready. She knew she had caused waves. With a quaking voice, a visibly nervous Milum read Baker’s alleged

offenses: “insubordination,” “creating a disturbance” and “allowing personal opinions to interfere with job duties and procedures.” 18 of 18

Baker was being fired.

After Milum finished reading her termination notice, Baker handed over her timecard and began packing up her belongings — books, supplies for the art class she taught and a small plaque that said, “Your beliefs don’t make you a good person, your behavior does.” A co-worker burst into tears. Baker said goodbye and walked out into the warm spring day, leaving the place that had been a refuge since she left a troubled marriage in Colorado and moved back home to Texas in 2016.

She was sad, but has no regrets about defying the board’s orders, she said.

“You’re taking away people’s freedom to read books and that’s not right,” Baker said. “Your intellectual freedom, your mind, is one of the only things you ever truly own. You can’t go against that.”

‘Things I feared already came true’

One recent spring day, an overflow crowd packed the Llano County commissioners meeting as the panel debated the new library advisory board’s bylaws.

Many who spoke praised the commissioners for their recent work “saving the children of Llano County” from “pornography” and “pedophiles,” often breaking into enthusiastic applause and shouts of “Amen!” Tension erupted when latecomers stuck in the hallway attempted to speak. “I’d like to speak in the name of Jesus!” one man yelled.

When Cunningham spoke, he evoked past trials that the county had weathered — a historic flood, a historic freeze, a historic pandemic — and he sounded tired.

“This has gone way too big and way too heated,” he said. “Both sides need to take a breath. We’re going to get to a solution together.”

Throughout the debate, the commissioners deferred to Wallace, who showed up with an giant binder full of papers, including what appeared to be a color copy of an illustration from one of the offending books. Ultimately, each side scored a small victory — the head librarian would now be a member of the board, as the anti-censorship camp wanted, but the meetings would still be closed to the public.

Baker and Green Little were in the audience, but neither wanted to speak. Baker said she is exploring her legal options with an attorney. Cunningham declined to comment on personnel matters or potential litigation.

Green Little’s group is also consulting attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union and elsewhere to see if there is any “legal accountability” for the commissioners’ actions.

She said they will keep fighting, but “the things I feared already came true. I expect more of the same — more censorship, more opacity, a library for all curated by the few.”

Magda Jean-Louis contributed to this report.