

100323.6
Jane Weber

Testimony to City Commission

Tuesday, October 3, 2023

TO: Mayor Kelly and Commissioners McKenney, Hinebauch, Wolfe, and Tryon

RE: Appointment of Anne Bulger/Hoppy Hopkins to the Library Board
Board Appointment Process

Honorable Mayor Kelly, members of the city commission, and members of the public, my name is Jane Weber and I live in Great Falls just a few blocks from the library. As you may recall, I served as a Cascade County Commissioner for a decade; and many of those years, I served as the county's representative on this library board. I have an intimate knowledge of the mission of the library and the responsibilities of library board members. I provide this testimony in favor of Anne Bulger's re-appointment and Hoppy Hopkins' new appointment to the library board. I also wish to speak to the appointment process.

First, I have known Anne Bulger for 45 years. She is well-qualified and committed to serving on our library board. An avid reader, when Anne moved to Great Falls, she immediately obtained her library card – that was 43 years ago. Ms. Bulger is not one of those cardholders, like me, who tuck our library card away in our wallets and rarely uses it. She is - and her late husband was – a weekly user of the library. I know, because Anne routinely shares those checked out books with me so that I can also read them and she can return them to the library.

Anne knows books. She has belonged to a book club for several decades, and reads a variety of genres of books. She also knows what topics interest younger readers. Ms. Bulger has her master's degree in education and taught middle school and high school students in our community for 25 years. She knows what children are interested in and how they think about the world around them. Past students still stop Anne in the grocery store and remark about her positive impact on their lives. She knows how to engage young readers and attract them to the library.

Ms. Bulger and my tenure on this board overlapped for several years, so I witnessed first-hand, her dedication and growing knowledge about this institution's mission and its operations. Up until her husband's illness, I do not recall Anne ever missing a library board meeting. Anne is now back in the saddle, so to speak, attending every meeting and actively contributing to the discussions. She comes to meetings well-prepared, asking intelligent questions and making suggestions regarding operations and policy.

As elected officials, you need to consider leadership succession on your all-volunteer boards. The function of the library is complicated – budgets that reflect funding from a variety of sources, critical expenses to a variety of providers to ensure the library functions efficiently, and policies to ensure patrons are safe and library materials reflect the demographic and social make-up of this community. It takes several years to learn how the library is funded, its operations, and policies. Anne Bulger has gained that institutional knowledge over her first term on the library board, taking that knowledge forward would be a wise decision and beneficial for the library board. Anne Bulger

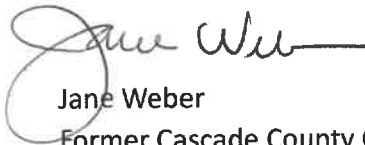
has served admirably in her first term on the library board, has demonstrated her commitment to the mission, and has dedicated herself to serving all readers in our community.

Regarding the recommendation of Jerry “Hoppy” Hopkins to the library board, I have ~~one~~ two quick things to say. HE IS CURRENTLY A LIBRARIAN in our public schools. He of all people understands how libraries are organized and what children like to read. Isn’t that what we should be doing in our city-county public library – getting children to read so it becomes a life-long learning habit? Hoppy will learn the budgeting and staffing operations as he works with the current library administration and his fellow library board members.

Finally, changing the process of appointments to this all-volunteer board in the middle of the process was disturbing to me. The current appointment process for library board members has served you well for many, many years. As a voter, I question why two members of this commission felt the need to change the appointment process of THIS and ONLY THIS board when the library board had already followed current policies and were prepared to make their recommendation for Anne Bulger’s re-appointment. To be fair, if you are changing the process for library board appointments you had better make that same appointment policy change for ALL city boards – planning board, park & recreation board, parking advisory commission, Board of Adjustment and Appeals, Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts board, and the many all-volunteer boards functioning for the city. Requiring volunteers to be publicly interviewed with an audience sitting behind them is intimidating for anyone wishing to volunteer their services to our community. Remember, they are volunteering to help the city. You already have difficulties filling board appointments on several of these boards, think of the excellent volunteers who will not apply once they realize the onerous interview process you will subject them to.

In closing, I highly recommend that Anne Bulger be re-appointed to the library board for a seamless transition and the potential for future leadership succession. And that Hoppy Hopkins be appointed to begin to learn the library operations and contribute his librarian experience to the board. I also ask that you do NOT change the library board recommendation/appointment process and continue to allow the library board to accept applications and make their recommendation to the city commission for appointment.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.



Jane Weber
Former Cascade County Commissioner
Former member of the Library Board