LIBRARY BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:
Matthew Anderson, Victoria Cox, Bruce Kessel, David Norrgard, Roberta Weltzin, Lori-Anne Williams, Susan Wolsfeld

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:
Susan Nemitz, Library Director; Mary Larson, Library Board Coordinator; Sandy Walsh, Library Manager; Bill Michel, Assistant Library Manager; Chuck Wettergren, Automation & Technical Services Manager

OTHERS PRESENT:
Jan Parker, Ramsey County Commissioner; Arnold and Mary Anne Lindberg, Friends of the Suburban Ramsey County Libraries

CALL TO ORDER:
Norrgard called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Conference Room of the Ramsey County Library Administrative Offices, 4570 North Victoria Street.

PUBLIC COMMENT/INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS:
No public comments were received. Attendees were officially welcomed, with introductions by all present.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES:
Norrgard requested that “Library Director’s Performance Evaluation” be added to the agenda as discussion item V-E. Williams made a motion to approve the agenda as revised and the Library Board minutes of 10-5-05 as presented. Wolsfeld seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

TRUSTEES’ TERMS OF OFFICE:
The terms of Library Board Trustees Matt Anderson, David Norrgard, and Susan Wolsfeld expire at the end of 2005. Anderson and Norrgard have re-applied for appointment, while Wolsfeld indicated that she is not re-applying due to personal obligations.

Nemitz reported that she has spoken with members of the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, who indicated that interviews with candidates for the Library Board vacancy cannot be considered until January due to scheduling conflicts. The Library Board’s by-laws state that a member whose term has expired can continue to serve on the Board until a new appointment is made. Because of several key issues that will require decisions in January 2006, including the Maplewood construction process and the Northwest Area Library Access Task Force report, all three trustees have agreed to continue on the Library Board until the official appointments are made for 2006.

PROPERTY TAX STATEMENTS:
Nemitz noted that the 2006 Ramsey County Property Tax statements have been mailed, and for the first time list the Library’s levy separately from the rest of the Ramsey County levy.

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH RAMSEY COUNTY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT:
In October 2004, the Ramsey County Library Board approved a pilot project for placing the property management of the Ramsey County Library facilities under the direction of the Ramsey County Property Management Department for 2005, with the pilot to be reviewed at the end of the year to determine whether it should be continued.
Nemitz met with Jolly Mangine, Director of Ramsey County Property Management, to evaluate the project. Both agreed that the pilot had been successful, and that the partnership should continue. An agreement outlining ongoing conditions of the partnership was developed, and presented to the Library Board for ratification. Nemitz noted that the pilot project has added value to the Library, including a depth of knowledge and resources previously lacking when the Library managed its properties independently.

Kessel made a motion to ratify the partnership agreement with Ramsey County Property Management effective January 1, 2006, with the agreement to remain in effect thereafter unless canceled by either party at any time. Cox seconded the motion, which was approved by a unanimous vote of the Library Board.

2006 HOLIDAY CALENDAR:
In October, the Library Board discussed the 2006 Holiday Calendar. One holiday, Veteran’s Day, falls on a Saturday in 2006. The official Ramsey County holiday will be observed on Friday, November 10, 2006. Based on the Board’s previous discussion, when several members expressed reluctance to close both November 10th and 11th in observance of the holiday, staff proposed that the Library be closed only on Friday, November 10th. Anderson questioned whether this schedule would be confusing to the public, but it was noted that other government offices would also be closed that Friday for the holiday, and holiday closings are well-reported by the local media.

Cox made a motion to approve the 2006 Holiday Calendar as revised. Williams seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

REVENUE RECAPTURE PROGRAM POLICY:
Since 1995, Ramsey County Library has been pursuing payment of excessive fines by means of a collections process that includes the Minnesota Revenue Department’s Revenue Recapture program. Originally, the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office handled the collections process with a paralegal funded by an innovations grant. This paralegal sent Dunning letters, and filed conciliation court claims against those who did not respond with payment or a payment plan.

In 1997, Ramsey County began funding a full-time collections paralegal position in the Attorney’s Office. Non-responsive patrons were also entered into the Revenue Recapture Program, which captures debts owed by individuals to qualifying governmental agencies in Minnesota. The State charges a service fee (currently $15) to these individuals in addition to the full amount owed to each agency. Debts can be deducted from an individual’s income or property tax refund, renter’s or other tax rebate, or lottery winnings. Currently, the Library’s primary collection method is Dunning letters, followed by certification into the Revenue Recapture program. Conciliation Court, while still an option that can be requested via the County Attorney’s Office, is no longer routinely pursued. In 2004, the amount of revenue received from this collection process was just over $24,000. Year to date payments received in 2005 exceed $39,000.

While responding to patron inquiries about the Library’s participation in the Revenue Recapture Program, it became apparent that the Library lacks a policy outlining our debt collection process. A draft policy was prepared for Library Board approval.

Weltzin made a motion to approve the Revenue Recapture program policy as revised by the Library Board to read:

*Patrons owing $25 or more in fines and fees will be considered for Ramsey County Library’s debt collection process. Before a patron’s account will be certified for the Revenue Recapture Program, the patron shall be sent a Dunning letter to their last known address, requesting that they contact the Library to make payment or arrange a payment plan. If no response is received within 14 calendar days from the date of the Dunning letter, the patron’s account will be certified for the Minnesota Revenue Recapture Program, where it shall remain until the amount owed has been fully satisfied, or until decertified by the Library. Patrons may voluntarily make payments or return lost items less than one year overdue at any time during the debt collection process.*
Cox seconded the motion, which was approved by a unanimous vote of the Library Board.

GRACE PERIOD:
Ramsey County Library currently has a two-day grace period that applies to selected types of materials checked out by library patrons. Books, periodicals, cassettes and compact discs are eligible for the grace period. Videos, DVDs, story tubs, and other specialty items do not have a grace period.

Materials returned after the two-day grace period has elapsed have charges reflecting the item’s original due date. This policy was implemented when the Library upgraded to Horizon software for our online circulation system. Previously, charges were incurred beginning on the third day after the due date. Patrons who self-renew items during the grace period are erroneously charged overdue fees, due to a glitch in the circulation system software. Staff must manually waive those charges whenever they appear in order to be consistent with current policy.

Library managers began discussing the grace period in October, and debated the merits of eliminating the grace period altogether. Among the MELSA libraries, only Anoka County currently has a grace period. Due to the technical difficulties in applying the policy consistently, and because most other MELSA libraries do not have a grace period, the Library’s Management Team approved a recommendation to the Library Board to eliminate the two-day grace period. Signage would be posted for at least three months prior to the effective date, and patrons would be allowed one “courtesy” grace period after the policy takes effect. This courtesy grace period would be noted on the patron’s record.

Kessel made a motion to approve the elimination of the two-day grace period effective March 1, 2006. Patrons shall be allowed one “courtesy” grace period after the policy takes effect, with this courtesy grace to be noted on the patron’s record. Signage shall be posted for at least three months prior to the effective date. Wolsfeld seconded the motion, which was approved by unanimous vote of the Library Board.

INTERNET FILTERING ASSESSMENT:
The Ramsey County Library adopted its current Internet Access Policy in October 2002, and the policy has been reviewed and reaffirmed annually. In September 2003, the Library Board opted to forgo application for e-rate funding, in accordance with its decision against the use of filtering software. While filtering software has not been utilized, a variety of other steps have been taken to discourage patrons from viewing inappropriate images on library computers, including the use of privacy screens, and the parents’ ability to restrict access to the Internet for their minor children.

The Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) requires that libraries block visual depictions of materials that are obscene, child pornography, or harmful to minors. Libraries that do not comply with the CIPA legislation are not eligible for federal funding available via e-rate telecommunications reimbursements, or RLTA grant funding. Nemitz noted that the Library Board’s decision not to utilize filtering software was based on six key assumptions:

1. Philosophical argument based on First Amendment protection for free speech
2. Other safeguards (including privacy screens, etc.) already in place
3. Not having problems with patrons viewing porn in the Ramsey County Libraries
4. Filtering software not perfect; may create a false sense of security
5. Software reduces access to useful information
6. Significant cost to install and maintain

Since starting as Library Director in January, Nemitz reported that she has noticed a lack of support from the local library community. Commissioner Parker concurred, noting that the MELSA organization seems to have embraced a more conservative position on filtering software. State-wide, only Ramsey County Library uses no filtering software whatsoever, with Hennepin County utilizing filters only on computers located in the children’s areas.
Based on this lack of peer support, the potential for negative publicity, and financial liability, including the impending loss of e-rate reimbursements and eligibility for RLTA grant funding, Nemitz asked staff to conduct an assessment of current filtering software, testing the six core assumptions of the current policy.

A two-phase assessment was developed, with Websense software selected for the pilot project. Both phases included two groups: active testers and a control group. Members of the control group simply performed their jobs as usual with the filtering software in place, making note of any instances when the filtering software blocked access to useful information. Active testers purposely tested the software to determine its ability to block questionable websites.

During phase one, the categories suggested by the software vendor for CIPA compliance were used. Control group members reported that no sites were blocked, while active testers recommended that websites on sex education, sexual orientation, and other sites containing useful information on sensitive topics be unblocked. Sites featuring swimwear and lingerie, such as Sports Illustrated, Victoria’s Secret, etc., were also recommended for unblocking. In phase two, these suggestions were implemented, and the active testers and control group members once again tracked the effect of the filtering software. Again, the control group reported that no sites were blocked. Active testers noted that far fewer appropriate sites were overblocked.

Costs for the filtering software have also decreased dramatically, as the number of software packages available in the market has driven down the price. The software can be loaded on a server, rather than loaded individually on each computer. The software could also be pointed toward the wireless routers, so patrons using their own computer equipment in the libraries would also be subjected to the filtering software.

Nemitz indicated that the assessment was conducted to help the Library Board evaluate the Internet Access Policy based on the most current information available. She conveyed her willingness to fully support the decision of the Library Board, whether it is to continue the current practice or to adopt a revised policy that utilizes filtering software. She noted that many staff members remain philosophically opposed to filtering software, but they understand that it may be necessary in the current political climate.

Kessel noted that he would support the use of filtering software, with periodic Library Board review. Nemitz proposed drafting a report outlining how an implementation of filtering software could proceed.

Kessel made a motion to request that the Library Director bring a policy recommendation and implementation plan regarding the use of filtering software to the Library Board within three months. Anderson seconded the motion, which was approved by unanimous vote.

**MAINTENANCE/FACILITY FUND PROJECTS FOR 2006 & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2007-2010:**

Julie Neville, Building Services Manager, submitted a spending plan for 2006 and preliminary recommendations for 2007-2010. The spending plan and recommendations were extracted from information gathered in conjunction with Ramsey County’s Capital Asset Management Program.

In past years, the Library Board has had to make difficult decisions regarding which projects to fund as lack of dollars prevented the Board from proceeding with all the needed projects. The spending plan and recommendations are the first attempt to bring the libraries up to date with deferred maintenance. Some flexibility for change will be necessary, as the needs may shift with the various construction projects and Library operations.

Kessel suggested that projects at Arden Hills, Maplewood, Mounds View, and Roseville be suspended until the Northwest Area Library Access Task Force recommendations are received. Cox recommended that carpet alternatives be explored for the new and remodeled facilities. Sandy Walsh, Library Manager, noted that one member of the Maplewood design team is certified in sustainable architecture, and is exploring options for the new facility. Nemitz will submit quarterly updates on facility fund projects to the Library Board.
NORTHWEST AREA LIBRARY ACCESS TASK FORCE UPDATE:
Nemitz reported that the Task Force continues to meet every other week. Work is progressing, with recommendations to be presented to the Library Board in January 2006.

FACILITIES UPDATE:
Ramsey County closed on the property for the new Library in Maplewood on November 15. Issues regarding the Planned Unit Development need to be resolved with the Maplewood City Council. Schematic design drawings are scheduled to come to the Library Board for approval at its next meeting.

Nemitz asked whether any Library Board member would be interested in attending the Maplewood design team meetings. The team is meeting approximately one day per week. Norrgard and Cox indicated their interest in attending on behalf of the Library Board.

Nemitz also reported that three parties have toured the current Maplewood facility, which is currently for sale on the open market.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR’S PERFORMANCE EVALUATION:
Norrgard has asked Gail Blackstone, Director of Ramsey County Human Resources, to assist the Library Board with the performance evaluation process for Nemitz. A survey will be sent to the Library Board members in mid-December, which must be returned by early January in order to be collated and reviewed by the Personnel Subcommittee prior to the Library Board’s January meeting. Blackstone will also prepare a salary recommendation consistent with Ramsey County policy.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT:
Nemitz reported that the Library’s staff in-service day, held November 11 at the Library in Roseville, was a rousing success. The County Board approved the Library’s 2006-2007 budgets, including a last-minute proposal by Commissioner Parker and Commissioner Reinhardt to fund substitute staff. Transtop Minnesota has asked to appear at a future Library Board meeting to resubmit its proposal for a bus shelter at the Library in Roseville. The issue will be included on a Library Board agenda in spring of 2006.

MELSA REPORT:
No MELSA report was presented.

FRIENDS OF THE SUBURBAN RAMSEY COUNTY LIBRARIES REPORT:
No Friends’ report was presented.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 9:05 p.m.

Next meetings: November 30, 2005 (Tentative), Administrative Office
December 14, 2005, Administrative Office

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary Larson
Library Board Coordinator