

FAIRFAX COUNTY LIBRARY UPDATE – PART I

Committee Members: Judy Anderson, Baba Freeman, Tammi Jackson, Martha Ray,
Ruth Zeul and Sherry Zachry, Chair.

Under the Government category in the League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area (LWVFA) *Here We Stand*, the following position was reached in 1984:

Public Libraries

Support of measures to maintain a broad library collection.

The League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area strongly believes:

- The selection policies and procedures of the Fairfax County Public Libraries (FCPL) should ensure that its collection contains a wide variety of books and other materials representing a diversity of views to serve the educational, informational and recreational needs of the residents of Fairfax County/City.

The League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area believes:

- The residents of Fairfax County/City should have the opportunity to question FCPL selections through formal processes that ensure fair and equitable resolution.

LWVFA supports:

- Selection and challenge policies and procedures that are clearly defined and communicated to the public which the system serves.
- Procedures that include the active and regular participation of a group of professional librarians working together in making selection decisions in each materials category.

Currently, there are no other positions on libraries at the Virginia (LWVVA) or National (LWVUS) level of League. At the April 24, 2004, Annual Meeting, the following local program item was adopted for the 2004-06 biennium:

A restudy/update of the Fairfax County Public Library System Position: with the focus on the selection of books for purchase and the effects of the Patriot Act on libraries.

In December 2004, the Library Study/Update Committee began their research by interviewing Director Edwin S. “Sam” Clay, III, who was hired by the Library Board in 1982 to run the FCPL system. Mr. Clay offered his overall view of FCPL as “market-driven and customer-driven” (*i.e.*, how can and does the library system best serve its customers’ needs in the community where they reside?). Those needs and interests determine how the individual branches of the library respond to their respective communities. Convenience for the patrons and providing what best serves the customer are the primary goals of FCPL- that the libraries “add value to and are valued by” the community, said the Director.

One of the greatest challenges currently facing FCPL is the changing demographics and increasing numbers of languages used in Fairfax County. Although uncertain at this time as to the best way to encourage new Americans to use the system, the Library intends to be pro-active, not reactive, to the situation and the future. For instance, in order to assess how well the library has responded to patrons’ needs, FCPL will be conducting a telephone survey in 2005 through the Ivy Group (out of Charlotte NC) in which county residents will be asked questions concerning how they use the system and if it is meeting their needs. Included in the survey will be questions that specifically relate to how FCPL has responded to demographic changes such as cultural, lingual and age-related.

As specific needs are identified, the system addresses them in many ways. Examples are: individual libraries may present programs that focus on the cultures in their areas; special language

collections are located in selected libraries; and libraries that are located in diverse areas are staffed with people that reflect the ethnicity of the area.

Of course, there are financial restrictions that limit filling every need. As a result, the Library has enlisted a variety of resources to help them: they have partnered with Exxon Mobil Oil to purchase Korean and Vietnamese language materials, worked with the Vietnamese community to provide additional Vietnamese language books and cataloging assistance, and received financial help in many areas from the Fairfax County Library Foundation. Special collections may be found at Thomas Jefferson Library (Vietnamese), George Mason Regional Library (Korean) and Reston Regional Library (Spanish).

In addition to meeting the demographics' challenge, FCPL wants to be an integral part of "community education" and would like to see FCPL given the opportunity for more involvement and recognition for its part in that process in the future. Part of the future FCPL strategic plan includes more partnering with the public education system to offer adult education programs and early literacy programs to the community. FCPL has hired an "Early Literacy Specialist" to create learning opportunities for children before they enter kindergarten and first grade. Library programs, such as preschool "story" programs may be adjusted to provide added learning value by focusing more on colors, sounds, and the alphabet. FCPL would like to expand library programming by taking some children's programs to day care centers and other places where children are found.

On the other hand, a challenge for library systems across the country is the increasing number of two-income families. They see libraries as a safe haven for their children of all ages in lieu of paid child care or leaving them unattended. Even toddlers are sometimes left to fend for themselves for hours or all day. (On one occasion a two-year-old's father was found playing tennis nearby.) When a facility is short staffed and very busy, the situation becomes worrisome. And it goes beyond that when no

guardian appears to pick up their charges by closing time. Although librarians are sympathetic, to a point, the simple truth is that they cannot do their library jobs and perform as babysitter/protectors at the same time.

In the last ten to fifteen years, FCPL has had to cope with some major budgetary issues which resulted in the library system looking for new sources of revenue outside tax-based funding from local, state, and federal governments. The system had to drastically reduce costs in the early 1990's when the FCPL budget was "cut in half" by Fairfax County. The Library Board was forced to reduce costs quickly in the near term and to identify long-term solutions for budgetary constraints. Hours were reduced in most of the community libraries and all of the mini-libraries, except Great Falls, were closed in 1996. By reducing hours of service, less permanent, full-time positions were required and reliance on more part-time staff and volunteers became a necessity.

For the long term, the Library Board identified three broad, long-term strategies to deal with the situation which have successfully carried the system into the 21st Century. The strategies were:

- to maximize use of technology;
- to develop new forms of non-public money, such as the Library Foundation; and
- to maximize the use of volunteers to augment staff that would not be replaced.

I. MAXIMIZING TECHNOLOGY:

Technology has dramatically enhanced the services of the library system. Through the internet, FCPL patrons can now interface with all of Virginia's public libraries and many academic and public libraries around the world. Therefore, citizens not only have access to a physical presence (a building) in the community, but with an internet connection, they have virtual "24/7" access to most libraries from the convenience of their homes. Through the use of the internet, reserving books, for instance, has increased more than 200% over the past five years.

Another technology-enhanced service that FCPL can offer free to students in Fairfax County is tutoring over the Internet. The library system has contracted with *Tutor.com* to give students online sessions with experts. There were over 800 sessions initiated during October 2004 with 97% of the students glad the service was provided. In 2005, FCPL plans to partner with Northern VA Community College to provide *Tutor.com* for students at the junior college level.

Internet technology has also improved library reference and research by providing access to reference material online. Using a library card, FCPL patrons and persons residing in cities and counties which are part of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) have free access through the FCPL system to reference material in any of the COG library systems. Residents of surrounding COG counties must apply in person for a reciprocal FCPL card at any of the Fairfax County libraries; this card provides access to FCPL's online databases, as well as to all other services. Those who reside outside the COG area (like Fauquier County, VA) have to pay an annual non-resident fee based on the per capita cost for FCPL services.

Internet Use Policy:

Every library system in the Commonwealth has to have an "Acceptable Use Policy" wherein each community describes its own standards prior to setting up online services. The Library Board investigated potential guidelines for patrons' use of the internet and the impact of internet-filtering legislation. The board decided to offer internet use to the public without filtering, and as of now, there are no plans to change that stance.

Currently, there is no filtering software available which does not abridge the First Amendment rights of citizens. Since the primary interest in filtering internet content is for children's use, the FCPL Acceptable Internet Use Policy states, "Parents or guardians are responsible for the internet information accessed by their own children." The FCPL Acceptable Internet Use Policy also states,

"...hardware and software provided in Fairfax County libraries to access the internet shall not be used for any unlawful purpose, e.g., fraud, gambling, child pornography." FCPL places no other restrictions on patrons' use of the internet in terms of content.

A patron's usage of the internet at Fairfax libraries is private, there being no record of web sites contacted. Although a library card is required to get online, the card is not tied to any searches of the internet by the patron. The FCPL does not have the staff to monitor each patron's online usage; however, the computer screens are deliberately set in full view of staff and other patrons. A patron must reserve time for internet usage and is allowed two separate sign-ups per day. Software monitors the scheduled internet sessions, although extra minutes may be used when no one is waiting for internet use. Library records indicate that internet use in the FCPL system averages 50,000 to 60,000 sessions per month. (See also Privacy Policy on page R-7).

Internet Filtering requirements:

For the last several years, federal and state legislation has attempted to tie library funding to the use of internet filters. The federal attempt to require internet content filtering has been connected to discounts for telecommunications costs that the Federal Communications Commission has authorized for public schools and public libraries.

Libraries **must use** internet filters *if* they make use of federal "*e-rate*" discounts to fund electronic connections to internet service providers. The discounts use the percentage of school children receiving federal free lunches each year. For Fairfax County, the telecommunications discount averages 40%, which amounts to approximately \$180,000 per year. However, FCPL does not use e-rate money; the county government provides internet service to the library.

In Virginia (which requires libraries to have an "acceptable use statement" in order to receive any state funding), 60% of public libraries filter internet

content to some extent – mostly for children. The General Assembly continues to try to pass legislation tying filtering to state aid for libraries. In the 2005 Session, for instance, HB2797 would have “required a library board or governing body of a library that receives state funding for **any purpose**” to install internet filtering or block internet access to, among other things, child pornography, obscenity, and materials harmful to juveniles. This bill passed the House of Delegates and was sent to the Senate General Laws Committee from which it was reported out with amendments to the Senate Finance Committee where it was left as the 2005 Session ended. SB882 (similar wording) failed to make it to the Senate floor because of a tie vote in the General Laws Committee.

How would FCPL deal with such law? It is thought that the library system would probably comply with restrictions on children’s use of the internet in libraries. Most likely, the Library Board would challenge attempts to restrict adult usage.

II. NEW NON-PUBLIC REVENUE SOURCES:

The strategic goal of developing new forms of non-public money resulted in the creation of The FCPL Library Foundation, Inc. (the Foundation) and in the enhanced effectiveness of existing Friends of the Libraries (Friends).

The Fairfax County Public Library Foundation, Inc., (www.fcplfoundation.org) was established in 1994 to work with large donors, such as corporate entities, to the entire library system. The Foundation currently has a \$5M Endowment Fund and the “New Century Library Fund” (for gifts of \$500,000 or more) which enrich the system with additional library programs above and beyond what public funding could support. Donations are also sought from the general public.

According to the Foundation’s FY2003 Annual Report, public funding is “only 1¢ of each tax dollar.” Foundation dollars enhance the Library system by offering: literacy outreach and other programs that entertain and educate; technology; homework support (like “tutor.com”); special

collections such as foreign language books and materials; and scholarships.

The Foundation is governed by Officers: Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary & Treasurer, and a Board of Directors composed of representatives from the community and businesses. *Ex-officio* members of the Board are: FCPL Director, FCPL Board of Trustees representative, Immediate Past Chair of the Foundation, and Chair of FCPL Board of Trustees. The paid staff consists of an Executive Director and a Development Assistant. There is also an Advisory Board composed of community banking, health care, educational, and business leaders.

Friends of the Library are specific, branch-based groups. They raise money, usually through book sales, for the needs of a specific branch. In addition, larger, more financially solid groups will often provide funds to system-wide needs. As an example, the Friends of the George Mason Regional Library has recently pledged \$500,000 to the Library Foundation to create an endowment to support the Summer Reading Program for the system.

III. UTILIZING VOLUNTEERS:

As with numerous county agencies, the library system has become highly dependent on volunteers. Library personnel have stated: “the Library could not operate without them.” The need for volunteers to support paid staff was exacerbated by the severe budget cuts of the 1990’s which forced personnel reductions.

FCPL has a paid Volunteer Coordinator who handles the 1,800 volunteers in the library system. The Volunteer Coordinator works with branch managers to supply the needs of the branches with volunteer personnel. She recruits volunteers, organizes the annual FCPL system volunteer appreciation event, attends similar events held at the branches, and publishes a Volunteer newsletter.

Most of the selection, training, and evaluating of volunteers take place at the branch level. In addition to traditional library volunteers, the FCPL

volunteer workforce includes: community-service sentencing of first-time offenders, property offenders, and juvenile offenders (i.e., restorative justice projects). Many students, usually at least 12 years old, from public and private schools and Eagle Scouts, seek out library projects for volunteer service.

ORGANIZATION and BUDGET PROCESS

Organizational structure:

FCPL has a Memorandum of Understanding with Fairfax County that allows FCPL to be its own entity within the county government. The governing body of FCPL is the Library Board of Trustees, composed of 12 members – 10 appointed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (BOS) by district, one member appointed by Fairfax County Public Schools and one member appointed by the City of Fairfax. The Library Board elects its own Chair and Vice-Chair and the Library Director, who is hired by the Library Board, serves as the Secretary of the Board. The Library Board has one representative to the Library Foundation Board.

City of Fairfax Contract

The City of Fairfax contracts for the use of the facility, materials and services of the FCPL system. Thus, the Fairfax City Regional Library is actually part of the FCPL system and belongs to the county.

Budget cycle:

The FCPL fiscal year runs July 1 through June 30, the same as the county. The budget process includes:

1. In late spring, FCPL staff and the Library Board Budget Committee begin discussing budget priorities for the fiscal year 15 months away.
2. The Department of Management and Budget (DMB) of Fairfax County assigns a Budget Analyst with whom the Library Board negotiates and clarifies adjustments to the proposed budget within the constraints of the countywide budget guidelines.

3. Public hearing for input to the proposed Library budget is held at the June Library Board meeting.
4. First draft of next FY budget is presented to the Library Board in July.
5. Library budget for next FY is officially adopted by the Library Board in September and simultaneously submitted to DMB.

DMB recommends its proposed budget (for each agency, including the FCPL Budget) to the County Executive, who presents his Proposed Budget for Fairfax County for the following FY to the Board of Supervisors in February. The BOS holds public hearings on the County Proposed Budget in April; the final Fairfax County budget (which includes the FCPL Budget) is adopted by the BOS by May 1.

In the Fall of 2004, the County Executive had sent out a request to all agencies to plan for a budget reduction for FY 05-06. Since FCPL would not have been able to reduce costs for materials any further than current levels, again, the only alternative would have been to cut staff/hours. By March 2005, it was apparent that county revenues would be more than anticipated; thus, the need for further cost reductions was unnecessary for FY05-06.

Destination of money from fines: The money collected from library book and material fines goes to the County’s general fund—the money is identified as a source of revenue and applied to library expenditures.



Usage Statistics

- Circulation	11,435,007
- Circulation p/Capita	11.0
- Visits	5,283,497
- Visits p/Capita	5.06
- Registered Cardholders	704,879
- Registered Users (%) of Population	68%
- Programs	4,287
- Program Attendees	168,137
- Public Internet Sessions	654,056
- Information Transactions	2,457,936
- Reference Transactions	912,418
- Library Internet Web Site Page Views	10,854,528
- Total Citizen Contacts	38,781,450

Financial Data

- Cost p/Capita	\$25.39
- Cost p/Visit	\$ 5.01
- Cost p/Registered Cardholder	\$37.59
- Cost p/Citizen Contact	\$ 0.68

Collection Data

- Total Items in Collection	2,747,313
- Adult Items	1,686,119
- Juvenile Items	999,968
- Young Adult Items	61,226
- Items Ordered	246,116
- Items Processed	259,959
- Turnover Rate of All Materials	4.4

Customer Satisfaction

Of those visiting a Library within the past year, satisfaction with library services:
- 99% (88% Very Satisfied; 11% Somewhat Satisfied)

Of those using the Library's Web site, satisfaction with the information found:
- 98% (69% Very Satisfied; 29% Somewhat Satisfied)

Effect of the passage of the 2004 Library Bond Referendum:

The recently passed library bond referendum for FCPL capital improvements does not cover staffing and materials. For FY2006, \$3.8M was budgeted

for the collection at the new Oakton Library to be opened in mid-2007. In final actions to reduce the tax rate by 13 cents for FY2006, the BOS eliminated the Oakton advance-buy of materials. Board action at the third quarter carryover may restore the funding if revenues are favorable. FY2007 will include the budget for the staff at Oakton. Every effort will be made to not disrupt the system any more than necessary while completing the capital improvement program covered by the \$52.5M bonds. The capital improvement program covered by the bonds includes:

- Construction of two new library branches: Burke Centre, estimated cost \$12.3M (projected opening date: February 2009) and Oakton Library, estimated cost \$7.6M (projected opening date: June 2007)
- Renovation and expansion at: Thomas Jefferson Library (estimated cost \$6.2M), Richard Byrd Library (estimated cost \$7.3M), Dolley Madison Library (estimated cost \$7.9M) and Martha Washington Library (estimated cost \$8.1M).
- Remaining money will be used for studies of future renewal projects and major repairs on existing buildings (estimated cost \$2.5M).

EFFECTS OF THE PATRIOT ACT ON FCPL Patrons' Privacy Policy:

The policy of FCPL regarding patrons' privacy has not changed over the years, even with the passage of the Patriot Act following September 11th. No permanent history on a patron's use of the library is kept in the system for the use of the internet or materials. Only the items checked out are recorded in the system until they are returned to the library.

FCPL procedure for requests for information about patrons' reading habits is to "refuse any requests for information." The Library Board is the custodian of patrons' records and, when establishing the FCPL Privacy Policy, the Board chose to require that all records be kept private. Names, addresses or telephone numbers of patrons are not given out. Subpoenas are referred to the County Attorney and patrons are notified that their records have been subpoenaed. Also, all public library borrowing

records are exempt from the Virginia Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA).

When questioned by the committee if FCPL had been contacted by the FBI in the wake of September 11, the Director said that he had been contacted by the FBI. He was asked to identify from a list of names, anyone who had a library card or anyone whose name was listed on any "sign-up sheets." None of the names had a library card nor were listed on any sign up sheets, so he was able to respond without violating the library's privacy policy. However, even if the list had contained FCPL patrons' names, the Privacy Policy would have prevented furnishing any information about patrons.

Conforming to the requirements of the Patriot Act, has not caused any additional policies to be enacted by FCPL – basically the Library's policies stay the same. Some additional training was required to outline how to handle the processes set out in the Patriot Act (such as subpoenas for a patron's record, etc., which were already covered by FCPL policies and procedures).

COLLECTIONS

FCPL Collections Policy:

The Library has a written "Collection Development Policy" that outlines 12 criteria to be followed in selecting material to be included in the library collection. The policy pertains to all of the collections, including any donated material. Amazon.com offers a way to make tax-deductible donations to the library (arranged by the Library Foundation) in which the donor chooses from a list of material which has been pre-selected by the library. As to monetary and other book donations, FCPL will accept money donations from patrons but does not accept "designated" donations that do not fit within the material collection guidelines and needs. Individuals often donate materials, especially books. If they pass muster, they may be added to the collection or included in a book sale.

Challenges to the FCPL Collection Policy:

In the mid-1990s, objections were raised about the *Washington Blade*, a weekly newspaper focused on

the homosexual community, being available as a handout in the libraries. Although the objection required FCPL to perform a complete examination of its collections, nothing was changed. The decision withstood highly publicized public participation by 200 to 300 people and was upheld by the County Attorney. FCPL offered the compromise of placing the newspaper out of the reach of young children.

When the Library receives challenges from users, such as a recent one by a Muslim group to a specific work of fiction, the challenger is asked if they have read the book; to define what is objectionable about the book; and to state what they wish to have done about the book. These concerns are then addressed through an established "book reconsideration process." During this process the challenged title is evaluated by FCPL librarians, who read the book and any published reviews. The librarians individually submit their written evaluations and their opinions as to how they think the request for reconsideration should be handled to the Director of Collection Development. This input is evaluated and forms a basis for deciding the fate of the book. The complainant is notified in writing of the decision. After completing this process, the book, which the Muslim group had challenged, remained in the library collection.

The collection is consistently evaluated and books are removed when they are inaccurate or are no longer current or in poor condition. The library receives 40,000 to 50,000 suggestions (in all forms) each year and averages 5 or 6 book challenges a year.

Mr. Clay stated: "If the Library is doing its job of representing all points of view, we have something in our collection to offend everyone."

Sources:

Interview 12/13/04 with FCPL Director Sam Clay and subsequent follow-up phone calls

FCPL office personnel

FCPL website: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library

FCPL publication "2004 Bond Referendum – November 2, 2004"

FCPL Foundation, Inc. website: www.fcplfoundation.org

FCPL Foundation, Inc. Annual Report 2002-2003 "Into the New Century"

Smith, Laef and Rivera, Elaine. "Turning Librarians into Babysitters." The Washington Post, 2/2/04, B3

Coming in 2006: Library Update part II

Library Announces Book Selection for ALL FAIRFAX READS

The Fairfax County Public Library invites adults to participate in All Fairfax Reads, a "One Book, One Community" project encouraging residents to read and discuss the same book through September 20, 2005.

This year's selection is the best selling novel "**The Kite Runner**" by Khaled Hosseini. Set in Afghanistan and America, it is a story about the friendship between a wealthy Afghan youth and his servant's son. The novel is a story of betrayal, redemption, and a father-son relationship that offers insight into the culture of Afghanistan.

A reader's guide to "The Kite Runner" is available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library or call 703-830-2223, TTY 711 for more information. All Fairfax Reads is cosponsored by the Friends of the Fairfax City Regional Library; the Friends of the Kings Park Library, George Mason University, and the Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative.