

Public Policy – Downers Grove Public Library

I recommend that each of you visit dglibrary.org and look at “board members.” There you will find agendas, minutes, and recordings of past DG Library Board meetings as well as the dates for the 2023 meetings beginning with January 25 at 7:30pm. It takes less time to review available minutes than to view a recording, but as of this writing, the minutes for the October and November meetings are not yet available. The public comments for the September meeting included a representative of Awake Illinois from Naperville who opposed the canceled drag queen bingo event. Other speakers agreed with him, and some speakers disagreed and supported the event. There were speakers against books like Gender Queer also.

CBS News Chicago ran a story on the November 16 library board meeting in their 10:00 broadcast that night. I viewed the 2 ½ hour recording of the November 16 meeting where Marti Sladek was sworn in as a new member of the library board. You can view the meeting yourself, but I want to mention a few items that came up. The financial report included expense overruns in the “special legal” category for complying with FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests. The remainder of this article deals with the public comments during that meeting. The first speaker was a representative of USPIE (US Parents Involved in Education) who attacked library director Julie Milavek personally on two issues – the drag queen bingo event and the issue of maintaining a safe space at the library. This person or his group were responsible for over 100 FOIA requests to the library. There have been incidents where library visitors have harassed and threatened the staff. There have also been incidents involving indecent exposure and drug and alcohol use. The library requested a resource officer from the Downers Grove Police Department, but the DGPD doesn’t have the staffing to accommodate this request. The DG police have stated that they will continue to enforce laws against trespassing even after the Safety Act goes into effect 1-1-23. The library staff has had active shooter response training, training in de-escalation, and training in mental health first aid.

Several people spoke in support of the library which, as director Milavec said, “is a public library, not just for taxpaying residents.” There are homeless people who spend time at the library, and some of them have mental health issues.

Clearly the library needs help dealing with some of the resulting bad behavior which has increased since the pandemic. The library needs our help in supporting their efforts toward diversity and inclusion also.