

City of Marine on St. Croix
City Council Committee Workshop
Wednesday, February 1, 2023 7:00pm

Ward, Nyenhuis, Miller, Pardun and Anderson present.

Citizens present: Gayle Knutson, Mary Burke, Lynn Bjorkman, Annie Minnich, Juanita Ikuta, Karen Poel, Matt Quast, Beth Honetschlager, Megan Kavanagh, Scott Spisak, Tammy Newcomb, Kay Hempel.

Mayor Nyenhuis opened the workshop for the purpose of reviewing the Memorandum of Understanding between the City and Marine library association.

Jim Maher, in attendance on behalf of the library, gave an opening statement. Mr. Maher gave the history of how MarLa was formed after Washington County closed the County branch approximately 12 years ago. Currently the City provides the library space, utilities, usage of the upstairs and downtown parks and most recently the elementary school, all at no charge. MarLa does its own fundraising and receives a \$6,000 annual payment from Washington County from the Elizabeth Jordan bequest fund. In return, MarLa provides many children's programs, the River Radio show, adult programming, summer reading programs, local books and access to the Washington County books as well. MarLa has also upgraded the AV equipment, purchased padded folding chairs and resurfaced the counter tops on the buffet tables upstairs, along with renovating the actual library space as well. Mr. Maher believes MarLa has more than filled their end of the MOU all with a group of people who are 100% volunteers.

Council member Pardun and previous Council member Roden had met with Mr. Maher back in November to discuss the review of the MOU. At that time, MarLa had agreed to consider some cost sharing ideas, discuss those with the library board, and bring that back to Council. The idea that MarLa would continue sharing the cleaning costs but also add utilities and a stipend for the usage of upstairs was also brought up. After further discussion, the decision was made to extend the agreement until April and continue the discussion at a later date.

Miller was part of the original MOU and believes it has been a great relationship between the library and City. He would like to hear what other members of Council think before coming to any decisions.

Anderson does not believe this is the time or place to negotiate. In the future, he believes it should be an ongoing pen and paper negotiation until an agreement is reached. He also does not believe it should be a landlord/tenant relationship. He thinks it is in the City's best interest to look at utility costs and possibly a stipend for the upstairs usage as the library programs contribute the most foot traffic for that space. He would like an inventory of the AV equipment and a list of what the City contributed to the purchase of and what additional equipment was purchased by MarLa. He would also like to see City staff trained on all equipment for future use. Anderson also noted the use of the school is not included in the MOU and moving forward believes MarLa should enter into some sort of lease agreement if they intend to utilize that space in the future. In terms of park usage, if any event is held that would require a permit, that should also be obtained from the City. The purchase of chairs and table tops is appreciated, however any future purchase should be discussed with Council and the City should have the opportunity to cost share for those items.

Ward stated she has spent a significant amount of time looking at the information provided in order to make an educated decision. She believes this has been a very successful partnership between a public and private entity, and agrees with much of what Council member Anderson stated. Ward believes MarLa has the capacity to begin to assume more financial responsibilities, both from accessing grant opportunities and fundraising. She believes that paying for utilities is a given and would like to see them maintain and steward the upstairs as well.

Mayor Nyenhuis would like Pardun and Miller to take the Council comments and bring those back to the table with MarLa to negotiate the terms. Nyenhuis also believes that the library serves a much greater community than just the citizens of Marine and would like to see the financial burden not land only on the Marine citizens. He does not believe the Council wants to create undo burden on the library, however would like to find the balance to ease the burden on the Marine taxpayers. The timeline was extended until April and so there is time to continue the negotiation process.

Miller questioned the amount of their annual fundraising. Lynn Bjorkman, previous treasurer, stated the average amount is between \$12,000 - \$15,000 annually plus the Jordan bequest. Miller questioned if there is a plan for the money that the library has. Mr. Maher stated there is no definitive plan for the pool money at this time, but they are hoping the current endowment will eventually pay for all of the annual expenses. Mary Burke stated the library is also looking at their vision plan for the future.

Mayor Nyenhuis questioned the time frame for this next MOU given these points discussed. Miller noted the three year time line seemed fair and the agreement also allows for flexibility within that timeframe should anything change.

Ward would like MarLa to create more of a plan for the upstairs space and share that plan with the City. Pardun noted that Restoration Society would also be involved in those conversations as well.

Mr. Maher would like to see those costs that the City currently incurs be paid for by MarLa, specifically utilities and potentially insurance. MarLa has applied for grants over the years, however that also takes additional time from the volunteers. He also agreed that there a significant number of residents from other communities that use the library, however he believes that is the price you pay for providing these services.

Pardun believes they have heard enough from Council to go back to negotiations, but questioned if he and Miller have the authority to finalize an agreement in order to keep from going back and forth. The consensus of the Council was for them to move forward and bring a final draft to Council prior to the April meeting.

Nyenhuis moved and Anderson seconded to adjourn at 7:48pm. All in favor, motion passed.