

**DRAFT**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Joint Meeting of the VC/LBOT**

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**Herrick Middle School**

**January 02, 2025**

**07:30 PM**

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## 1. Call to Order

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

## 2. Roll Call

Mayor Barnett opened the meeting by welcoming the public to the joint Village Council / Library Board of Trustees meeting and thanking School District 58 for hosting the meeting.

Council Attendance (Present): Mayor Barnett, Commissioner Sadowski-Fugitt, Commissioner Gilmartin, Commissioner Glover, Commissioner Tully, Commissioner Davenport

Council Attendance (Not Present): Commissioner José

Library Board of Trustees Attendance (Present): President Topic, Trustee Humphreys, Trustee Khuntia, Trustee Sladek, Trustee Williams

Library Board of Trustees Attendance (Not Present): Trustee Gigani

Non-Voting: Village Manager David Fieldman, Village Attorney Enza Petrarca, Deputy Village Manager Mike Baker, Jen Ryjewski, DGPL Assistant Director, DGPL Business Office Manager Katelyn Vabalaitis and DGPL Children's Services Manager Allyson Renell.

## 3. Active Agenda

### **A. Discussion concerning a framework for consideration of alternative Library Board of Trustees member selection processes**

Mayor Barnett noted that the agenda has been published. The meeting tonight should result in the coming together of the two bodies to move forward on this issue. He noted that he has spoken with President Topic a few times over the past weeks. He wants to explore how the Library Board of Trustees (LBOT) members are selected. He is trying to obtain broad consensus and intends to focus on the framework of the next steps in the process.

President Topic said that he supported Mayor Barnett's comments and thinks that this is a productive way to go forward and an appropriate way to proceed. He noted that he and the Mayor prepared a joint statement on this topic that was previously published.

Mayor Barnett outlined his expectations about the meeting. He would like to establish a list of desired outcomes and then build on them, getting input from staff. He said that no final decisions will be made tonight. He said that each participant may have different thoughts and hopes to come to an agreement on dates and next steps.

Trustee Sladek said that she would like to set the tone for the meeting and appreciates the work done so far. She noted that governance is the key topic and it is an appropriate question and issue to address. She said that all participants want what's best for the community and that she is prepared to do the work and then implement the recommendations.

Trustee Humphreys thanked Mayor Barnett and President Topic for speaking and setting up the meeting. He is thrilled about the opportunity to discuss the selection process. He also thanked the staff for setting up the meeting. He said the proposal outlined in the joint statement is a good step in the right direction and provides an opportunity for all to learn what's best for Downers Grove.

Commissioner Tully thanked everyone for coming. He thanked the leadership and staff in both organizations for the work completed so far. He also thanked District 58 for the meeting space. He said that the question is interesting and noted that people want more research and time prior to asking the question on a ballot. He noted that the two groups getting together is a good first step. The issue is similar to the video gaming discussion in that the pros and cons of the options can be identified, considered and addressed. Then when this is completed, the organizations can decide next steps. He said that he supports the approach noted in the joint statement as it will allow the community to be involved. He thanked the leadership for preparing the joint statement.

Trustee Williams said that the framework outlined in the joint statement is great and is a helpful starting point. He thanked President Topic for his leadership. He agrees with Commissioner Tully regarding the pros and cons approach, and said that we must look holistically at the current appointment process. The pros and cons of both elected approach and appointed approach should be included in any analysis. He said that everyone cares about the community and library and all should assume that everyone is acting in good faith and building trust among each other. He stated that public officials should deescalate conflict in the community and model the expected behavior during the process. He noted that the process may be more narrowly tailored to ways of achieving the objectives. He tries to be pragmatist and minimalist and these values should apply to this process. The starting point for any subcommittee is looking for core principles and values.

Commissioner Gilmartin stated that he has one concern about going through the process if the viability of an elected board is challenging. He noted that a change in state library law would be

required and it happened only once for Aurora and it was not implemented. He said that considering an elected board is almost a non-starter and that there is a need to focus on what is likely or possible rather than exploring alternatives that have almost no possibility of implementation. He said he supports the formation of a group and welcomes the next steps and there is a need to establish the objectives prior to starting the work. He stated that we need to keep the communication going and the committee should use their time wisely and pursue a path of viability.

Commissioner Sadowski-Fugitt echoed Commissioner Gilmartin. She said that she is uncomfortable with the introduction of this topic during a hectic time working on Long Range Plan identified items. This proposed action is similar to a Priority Action Item. The proposed framework addresses her concerns about the type and amount of work to be undertaken. She said the subcommittee should address the issues of concern and the process will improve the working relationship of the Village and Library.

Trustee Khuntia thanked the leadership and the staff for the work completed so far. She wants to focus on viable options and noted that working in isolation leads to confusion and mistrust. She supports working together as it will build trust. She said she is cautiously optimistic about figuring out a process to do what is best for this community.

Commissioner Tully said that we should start with small steps and then be more ambitious. He suggested ongoing regular joint meetings among the Village and Library and establishing liaisons among both boards to improve communication among the groups. He thinks this is an opportunity to explore all things including the items noted by Trustee Williams. He agreed that the committee should focus on actions that are possible and explain why some actions may not be possible.

Trustee Sladek said that nothing is off the table and there should be a thorough process. Non viable options can be taken off the table during the process. She said that the work should bring more clarity to the existing appointment process and should address what great governance should look like. She encouraged making some immediate improvements in the appointment process as well as enhanced communication with the public.

Mayor Barnett said that the process going forward would involve meetings outside of the regular Council and Library Board meetings. He noted that it is important that these meetings be transparent and available to the public. He said that there should be a date certain for completion of the work and is hoping to not ask for a referendum this spring, but the schedule should allow for it in the future.

President Topic said that a fall completion date is appropriate; perhaps September. This is a complex issue with multiple options that will take a few months to analyze. The schedule leaves time to put the question on the ballot in April 2026, if necessary.

Trustee Humphreys agreed with the schedule and timeframe. He said that one benefit of the open process is the transparency and it will help community members understand the issues and questions. The process will allow the two boards to understand the options and ask for professional expertise. Board and Council members and the community will have the opportunity to learn about the ramifications of these decisions.

Commissioner Gilmartin noted that details are important and any alternative way to select LBOT members should be based on stated reasons or concerns. He said that the public has noted concerns about the transparency of the current process. He is aware that another issue mentioned is accountability. He asked what issues we are trying to address with the process. The committee should understand the issues that are to be fixed. Other than these two issues, he is not aware of the issues that should be addressed and asked for Council input on this topic.

Trustee Khuntia agreed with Commissioner Gilmartin about identifying the issues and concerns to be addressed stating that it will be difficult to move forward if these issues are not identified and addressed.

Trustee Williams observed that there is a breakdown of trust and this process may help improve the trust. He said there is merit to the process regardless of the ultimate outcome and thinks this may address issues of accountability. He suggested that the Village may want to consider its removal process, as well. The committee will likely identify the issues and concerns and the conversation should be forward looking.

Trustee Sladek said that the committee should also be cognizant of the job description of a Library Trustee as described in the state law which is not changed by the selection process.

Commissioner Davenport said he wants to look forward and does not have further comments about the issues that brought this topic forward. He stated that results that include improved public understanding and input are positive. The committee should look at improving the existing process and preparing recommendations. He asked about the budget and use of outside consultants.

Mayor Barnett said that there will likely be some expense in the work and there are systems in place in the budgets of Village and Library to address these unplanned expenses. He noted that budgets and expenses should not preclude the work from being completed.

President Topic agreed with Mayor Barnett saying that it is a good idea to get input from professionals and a modest expense seems appropriate.

Mayor Barnett said a list of questions will be developed with input from both staffs and expenses will likely be included.

Commissioner Tully said that expenses and budget should be addressed by the committee.

This should be a collaborative effort and decisions should be made and supported by both organizations.

Mayor Barnett noted that equal representation of the Village and Library should be provided in the process.

Trustee Humphreys clarified that the intention tonight is to discuss, not vote, on a way forward saying that decisions on details of the committee will not be made tonight.

Mayor Barnett stated that staff will start working on these key tasks and they will be discussed at a joint meeting in February. He noted that consensus on the next steps has been reached.

Commissioner Tully asked about the agenda item on the January 7 Village Council meeting.

Mayor Barnett said he hopes that the item will not be placed on the January 7, 2025 agenda. He noted that all Council members indicated support for removal of the agenda item. Manager Fieldman said that staff took this as direction to not include this item on the January 7 Council meeting agenda.

## 4. Public Comment

Mayor Barnett asked for public comment and requested that comments be made within three minutes, on this topic and complete the comment period by 9:00pm. There will be additional meetings for further public comments. He noted that all Council members are available by email.

Tom Sleeter said that the library should be run in a non-political manner and that the public should not be aware of any political association of any member of the library. He is concerned that the Library budget is always approved by the Village Council and that there may be inappropriate line expenses included. He would like to see the Library Board function as a board of directors. He supports the referendum question being placed on the ballot.

Kylie Spahn provided a history of the Downers Grove Public Library outlining five library related referendum questions asked between 1911 and 1996 noting that only one failed. She said that there has never been a referendum for an elected library board. She said that there are four libraries in the Downers Grove area that have a five-star rating and all four of them have appointed boards. The library board has managed the library effectively and two members were removed for code of conduct issues. She requested improvements in the application and selection process.

Laura Hois said that the five star rating is given by a Library journal not the public. She is concerned that political activities have been noticeable in the recent past. It is frustrating that the Village Council responded to pressure from activists and removed the board member that

spoke for conservatives. She wants the Library to be a neutral institution. She noted several of her concerns about the library operations and programs and does not want tax dollars spent on these programs and operations.

Mayor Barnett asked audience members to let people speak and try to find places to agree.

Jessica Nastal said her first job was at the Downers Grove library. She respectfully disagrees with the Village Council direction to not look backward and consider the existing process. She said there is a need to understand the positive and negative consequences of the current process.

Carissa Daugherty, asked to commit to limiting the spread of misinformation during the process and recommended simple, easy to read updates shared in accessible places. She said it is important to consider qualitative criteria in evaluating library board structure. There should be a more transparent appointment process.

Ilene Briner said that the group should work toward an elected library board, noting that there is no public input to the appointment process. She is concerned that the current Library Board has shown no resistance to spending and there are overlapping service costs such as a social worker at the library and at the Village. She is concerned about continuing remodeling costs of the building. She noted that the five star award is a trade journal award that is no longer awarded.

Laura Kamadelski appreciates the Village and Library upcoming discussions and cooperation. She is concerned about the public comments regarding the exclusion of people and extreme groups attempting to fill Library Board positions.

Bill Nienburg said he is a former library trustee. He said that the idea of a referendum to explore a new selection process is legitimate and has nothing to do with feelings about the Library. He thinks we have an excellent library and the Village can change the selection process and support the current and past library performance. The issue of concern is governance and providing services for the greater good. The goal is to improve transparency of the process. He said he has concerns about the removal process and about the lack of accountability related to budgeting and tax levying authority. He said the board actions have led to unplanned, unbudgeted expenses. He appreciates the Council consideration of the referendum question and stated that the Village should be able to determine the process. He noted that the boards should work for the public and voters. He is concerned that the Council may not be fully pursuing the referendum question.

Laura Alexander expressed support for the Library Journal as a reputable source and thanked both boards for supporting a subcommittee.

Ed Pawlak thanked the boards for taking this first step tonight. He stated there are core values that should not be subject to debate and that all members of the Council and Library Board are

representatives of the residents of Downers Grove. All members of the public should have access to the Library and should have representation on the Board.

Eric Blau spoke about what Illinois law allows in terms of structure change. He appreciates the joint meeting and discussion and said the boards should remain pragmatic and set goals accordingly.

David Eblen applauded the process saying it is a good process for making important public decisions. It is open and transparent and timely. The process is well outlined and should drive good results.

Leslie Henderson said she appreciates that the library is a safe place for her children.

Marshal Schmitt celebrated the joint meeting and the two boards for listening to the public and developing a good process to move forward on this topic. He said that the boards need to carefully define the scope and mission of the subcommittee and that primary consideration should be what the process and structure should be.

Bill Alrich asked a procedural question about remote participation in the meeting.

## 5. Adjournment

Mayor Barnett asked if there are any final comments. There were none. He thanked everyone for coming. President Topic thanked the Village Council and public for participating

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Sadowski-Fugitt seconded by Trustee Khuntia. Voice vote carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.