

**MINUTES  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
THE SMITHTOWN LIBRARY  
SPECIAL MEETING  
June 23, 2022**

An emergency SPECIAL meeting of the Board of Trustees of The Smithtown Library was held virtually VIA ZOOM on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of June, 2022. The meeting was called to order at 6:50 p.m. with a trustee roll call. The following Library Trustees were present: Brianna Baker-Stines, Anita Dowd-Neufeld, Marie Gergenti, Joseph Gregurich, Theresa Grisafi, Marilyn LoPresti and Thomas Maher.

Also present were Library Director Robert Lusak, Treasurer Kevin Miller, Clerk Lauren Gunderson, Secretary Linda Taurassi, Library Counsel Kevin Seaman and SCLS Director Kevin Verbese.

Brianna Baker-Stines, President of the Board of Trustees, acted as Chairperson of the meeting.

Library Board President Brianna Baker-Stines noted that public comments would be available at the next regular board meeting to be held on July 19, 2022, but due to the nature of this meeting there would be no public comments at tonight's meeting.

Library Board President Brianna Baker-Stines moved the following motion:

*RESOLVED, that the resolution adopted by the Board of Trustees at its June 21, 2022 meeting directing the removal of the Pride displays from the Children's sections of all Smithtown Library buildings be rescinded and that the subject displays as constituted on June 21, 2022 be reestablished through the date of July 15, 2022 to be removed afterwards at the supervisory Librarian's discretion.*

The motion was seconded by Trustee Thomas Maher. Before a roll call vote was taken, each trustee made a personal statement, as follows:

Thomas Maher, Vice President: *"I always have and always will support LGBTQ rights, even though it may not seem that way at the moment. Love, respect and acceptance are values that I teach in my home and my immediate family is part of the LGBTQ community. I believe that we are all here to love, to learn and to create and that there are no exceptions. During the board meeting on June 21<sup>st</sup> there was a passionate discussion over the displays celebrating Pride Month. The Board was not in agreement on the topic and was split down the middle. We discussed the issue for quite a while and it came to light that the Board does not have a policy regarding these displays. The task of the Board is to create and vote on policy. My intention was to bridge the time between now, when we have no policy, and next month, when we should have an appropriate policy to vote on. My vote to remove the displays was intended to enable the Library to continue to offer all of its existing resources to all of its patrons in a peaceful and cooperative manner during this time of transition. Obviously that has not happened.*

*As a result of my intentions not coming to pass, I will reverse my decision tonight and wholeheartedly vote to reinstate the Pride Month displays. In my role as a trustee I will continue to support the Library being an open, safe and accepting place for everyone, and I do mean everyone. The trustees are volunteers; we are not perfect; but we all do the best we can and represent the community we serve. Thank you very much."*

Anita Dowd-Neufeld: *"I just want to say that I was disappointed that this came up. This was certainly not on the agenda for Tuesday's meeting. This is the second meeting I've missed in six years on the Board and I am 4,000 miles away so you know my commitment to this issue. It's 1:04 in the morning where I am. Today what I did was ask myself 'Why are people feeling this way? Why are members of the Board feeling this way?' Because I can't understand the hate; I can't understand the feelings towards children, the LGBT community, so I myself went to the Holocaust Museum and Memorial today and it reminded me what happens to a society that does not practice tolerance and diversity. So that's how I feel. I'm glad this resolution is on the table and I'm glad that it got a second."*

Marie Gergenti: *"What started as I presented the other day and commenting on what some of the patrons were messaging me was they felt that little children were exposed to images in some of these books and they weren't happy about it. I did tell them to file a complaint. When I mentioned this to you and Rob you know the Library was already aware of some of the complaints. I just want to read something and what was published in news and other media papers is false information. The original recommendation was to remove sensitive material from the children's section only, based on complaints by parents and the community. Not once did we advise any books be removed as seems to be what is going around. And yet a simple solution was turned into a mockery of The Smithtown Library, unjustified and totally inappropriate. The doxing, the depravity that I experienced, I can't even tell you. And of course there's all these aftermaths. My concern is not politics whatsoever. It's for children and I think that we need to put a policy in place about the children. As far as LGBT community goes of course I have family members. They are loved members in the family and in the community; however, I do feel all children have issues and have problems. It's not just being a gay child and all children need to be accepted, not just a particular group. It is still my concern to shield some of these books from the little kids, from the children's area. Not from the adult sections, or the teen/adolescent section. Thank you."*

Joseph Gregurich: *"I just want to state that I was shocked on the resolution that was put up to the Board on Tuesday. I did vote against it on Tuesday and I hope to vote to rescind it today. As a member of the trustees I love the Library and I only want to make the Library better for everyone in the community. Thank you."*

Theresa Grisafi: *"I am a newly elected Board member and today I come to you on behalf of a lot of the community who have expressed to me, as was shared in our Tuesday meeting, that they felt the display in the Children's Room was not age appropriate for those small children. In light of this we discussed it at our meeting. We took a vote and now we are here to address the issues that have nothing to do with the initial vote. The concern was for the small children. Developmentally many parents felt that this was not suitable for the small ages that were visiting the Children's Room and I believe I tried to convey that at the meeting. This has nothing to do with anybody's personal feeling toward Pride. I think we all have family*

members and friends in that community and in no way was this an attack on them. It was basically about presenting age-appropriate material to the young patrons of the Library. So it's very sad that it's come to this; that people have been doxed and threatened; called hateful and ignorant and bigots. I know the Smithtown community and they are not what is being represented. So I thought tonight we would come to some sort of discussion about how this could be prevented in the future, and apparently we're going to vote again to rescind this. I still stand on behalf of my community members that this is not appropriate for young children. I believe we made it clear that we were going to continue to display the Pride celebration throughout the rest of the Library including the young adult section. I don't know if that was continued. Hopefully it was. I'm very saddened to see how this has spiraled out of control but hopefully we can come to some sort of resolution this evening so people understand both sides. I'm very sad that this has been taken as an attack on Pride. I really am. Thank you."

Marilyn LoPresti: "Please know that as a volunteer trustee I take this matter and my role very seriously. I took an oath to serve this entire community. That said, Tuesday evening a motion was proposed by another trustee regarding issues with a display located in a section of the Nesconset Library whereby books are housed for ages that include zero to six year olds. I was unaware of the specific content of the books in this section and the motion proposed. I decided that it was my duty to understand the issues and reviewed the books displayed on the windowsill located in this section. I spent time viewing several of the books geared towards very young children that was displayed on the windowsill next to a plus 11 Rainbow Pride sign. One book titled "Melissa" contained a fourth grade character who was a transgender named George. Although the book contained lessons about bowling and personal expression, the book also deals with a character searching the internet regarding gender identity and sexual discussions -- the character's brother looking through phone and dirty magazines as something boys do. I voiced my concern, not against the LGBTQ+ community, but rather as to whether the contents of the hand selecting books were all age appropriate for children as young as zero to seven years old. These books are located in the area where nursery school and small chairs are located. The fact that these books are displayed at eye level or reachable to very young children by the librarians can logically conclude the librarians intended these books to grab the attention of children who are seven years old and younger. These books are being directly advertised to children who are this young or may not be emotionally developed to understand the content. Parents voice their concerns as to the nature of the contents of these books displayed in this section and that some books may provoke conversations as parents may deem too immature for a child to comprehend the contents and substance of the same. At no time did I ever express that the Library should remove any books from the Library or remove any Pride decorations which has been going on in June. In fact I support these books being acceptable to parents in the community should they wish to do so. It is very upsetting how questioning whether materials in this section may contain sensitive content that may not be age appropriate now makes me anti LGBTQ? Plus, as I have several close family members who identify as LGBTQ to whom I fully support and love for years, I am deeply saddened that I am being wrongly portrayed as a face of hate and discrimination. It is also equally disturbing that people, who did not see the selected books, know my feelings or attend a meeting rushing judgement or then tap others without conducting a complete and thorough investigation. I believe a library is a neutral location where everyone in the community has a safe place to explore and learn about topics they choose. I believe in freedom of speech and expression and to live your life as you please.

Brianna Baker-Stines: *I am going to make the same argument I made on our meeting Tuesday night about the role of the Board. I think by making the motion we made on Tuesday we assumed a role that was not ours to make; choosing materials to add to the Library's collection and choosing which materials to put on display is a librarian's job. Librarians are highly educated in their specialty. Most of them, if not all, have Masters Degrees in Library Science and many children's librarians are also required to take classes on children's education and children's psychology. We need to trust the staff that we hired and allow them to handle the day-to-day operations of the Library. The motion that we made went against our mission statement and it was a mistake. And I recognize why it was condemned by the New York Library Association, the New York State Governor, and even former staff member Jodi Piccoult. If nothing else she is a testament to the great judgement we have in choosing excellent staff members, which we have many of. The fact that this motion was even proposed illustrates the conflicts we have in this town between board members, staff, patrons, and all community members. We have an excellent Diversity Committee at the Library. It was put together by our Director Rob Lusak. Just this week I had the privilege to read their first ever staff newsletter. We have wonderfully professional and passionate librarians such as Erin Kanelos who chairs this committee. We are doing a disservice by ignoring their input and experience. I'm going to vote that we reinstate the Pride display and extend its life to when our librarians feel it is appropriate. The staff has never caused an investigation by the Division of Human Rights, but now the Board has. The Board should stick to matters of budget and policy.*

After all trustees had made their statements, the motion was put to a vote and adopted 4-2 by the following roll call vote:

YES: Baker-Stines, Dowd-Neufeld, Gregurich, Maher  
NO: Gergenti, Grisafi  
ABSTAINED: LoPresti

Library Board President Brianna Baker-Stines proposed that the following statement be approved by the Library Board to be used as their official statement (note: the statement will also be displayed on the Library's website).

*Earlier this evening the Board of Trustees of The Smithtown Library rescinded our earlier decision to remove Pride displays from our Library's children's rooms. The majority of the Board recognizes that our earlier decision was made without the time, care, and due diligence that a decision of this type deserves and that it was the wrong decision. Moving forward we will commit our collective energies toward ensuring that we get the advice and guidance needed from our library administrators, staff, outside experts, legal counsel, and most importantly from Smithtown residents before we make important decisions regarding our Library.*

*The Board's goal for The Smithtown Library is to be a place that welcomes openly all Smithtown residents. We recognize that we have our differences but we believe that what we have in common outweighs those differences. We know that a good library will contain things that may trouble each of us but understand that our primary role involves representing many different viewpoints and opposing ideas. We do this by giving voice - and space - to each.*

*The Board looks forward to reviewing our decision-making processes and our policies related to our Library's collections, displays, programs, and services to ensure that they are helping us fulfill our mission of "providing access to diverse information, lifelong learning and entertainment resources through outstanding service for all residents of the Library District."*

*We will report back to the community regularly on our progress.*

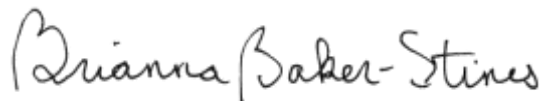
The motion to use the foregoing statement was seconded by Trustee Joseph Gregurich and adopted 7-0 by the following roll call vote:

FOR: Baker-Stines, Maher, Dowd-Neufeld, Gergenti, Gregurich, Grisafi, LoPresti  
AGAINST: None

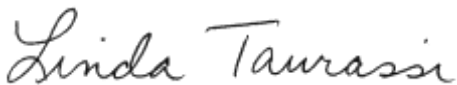
Library Board President Brianna Baker-Stines noted that the next "regular" meeting of the Board of Trustees was scheduled to be held Tuesday, July 19, 2022 at 6:30 p.m. at the \*Commack building, and will include an opportunity for public comments (\*NOTE: meeting venue was subsequently moved to the Smithtown building).

There being no further business, Library Board President Brianna Baker-Stines moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:31 p.m. The motion was seconded by Trustee Anita Dowd-Neufeld and adopted by a unanimous 7-0 vote.

Minutes approved this 19<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2022.



Brianna Baker-Stines, President  
Smithtown Library Board of Trustees



Linda Taurassi  
Secretary to the Board of Trustees