

Governance Assignment

David Glauber

8 June 2015

Dr. McCook

University of South Florida

Governance Assignment

Upon passing a security checkpoint, I entered into a room with auditorium-style seating as a musical rendition of the Jungle Book's "bare necessities" played for the audience. The auditorium was divided into three sections with two television screens located in each corner of the auditorium. Listening to chatter around me, I heard that there were lawyers and lobbyists in the audience. The majority of people in the surprisingly crowded audience (nearly 200) were dressed in business attire, as was I, dressed in a button-down shirt and dress pants. Broward County Major Tim Ryan opened the session with the pledge of allegiance and jokingly made reference to the Jungle Book's song, which served as an introduction for the meeting. The meeting opened with a feel-good recognition of lifeguards at Hollywood, Florida's TY Park, who recently saved a young child from drowning. Upon being recognized, the lifeguards left the meeting. From there, the meeting, which was held on Tuesday, June 2, 2015, proceeded to discuss numerous issues including prescription drug coverage for Broward County employees, human rights issues, and the election of an individual to an at-large position on the charter review board, among many other issues.

Following the passage of agenda item seven, which authorized a small increase in funding for highway construction, the room emptied out by one-third. Over the course of the three hours meeting, the room continued to empty out. Within the first half hour, only half of the original two hundred remained. By the end of the regular session of the commission meeting, only about twenty-five people remained, including myself.

Most of the agenda items passed quickly as Broward County Mayor Tim Ryan, also a commissioner, requested a motion for each agenda item that was then seconded by someone else. Subsequently, Ryan asked for yeas and objections. Without any objections, and after only a few

commissioners actively said “yea,” he asserted that items were unanimously approved for the record. While commissioners were not enthusiastic in the actual voting process, for the most part, the commission members appeared interested to be there and had great rapport with one another. There were some light-hearted comments made among them throughout, but they remained focused on the agenda at hand.

With rising prescription drug costs, the commission wanted to possibly lower prescription drug costs that the county faced. Commissioner Barbara Sharief believed that patients should be able to get the medications prescribed by doctors. She believed that doctors generally prescribe generics before eventually prescribing brand name drugs. Another commissioner, Lois Wexler, was not so sure about that and wanted hard facts to prove that 497 individuals focused on in a study of individuals who utilized brand name drugs attempted to use generics first.

Commissioner Sharief responded that it would be difficult to come up with such facts because someone may have tried a generic drug before they began work with the county. Despite this response, Wexler insisted on facts, and so, the issue of cost-savings was postponed for a later time.

Another big issue introduced by public speakers was about domestic partnerships. Commissioner Wexler noted that Broward’s laws regarding domestic partnership were fraught with problems. She wanted to make sure that partnerships were not defined based on sexual orientation, as is the case in some Florida counties. One of the speakers noted, in fact, that the majority of domestic partnerships were among heterosexual couples. Wexler also stressed that Broward’s requirements for establishing a domestic partnership were too lenient. Currently, all that is required to establish a domestic partnership in Broward is to complete a basic document

and have it notarized. She wanted to see more evidence of a partnership, such as a joint bank account, house records, or other documents that attest to the partnership.

In addition to these issues, the last agenda item was for an appointment to an at-large position to the Charter Review Commission. Candidates took turns presenting their qualifications to the commission. In discussions among the commissioners, one commissioner noted that Broward was a majority minority county (26% black, 26% Hispanic), so somebody black should be appointed. Another commission member agreed. Faced with support for an African American, another commissioner asked for clarification if this meant that they would be selecting an African American candidate. The majority of the commissioners responded, “No, no, no; that hasn’t been established.” As I listened to two of nine commissioners specifically insisting on an African American appointment for the position, I wondered whether this truly amounted to affirmative action or whether it was publicly asserted discrimination against other racial groups. In the end, they selected a Hispanic individual for the position as the regular session of the meeting came to an end.

Unfortunately, there were no issues discussed regarding the public library, but the county commission is the body that oversees Broward County’s library system. Broward County operates one of the largest public libraries in the United States, operating 32 branches and serving a population of 1,771,099 people (American Library Association, 2014). For 2015, Broward County allocated \$59,703,760 for library operations, which amounts to \$33.71 per capita (Broward County, 2014, p.120). Within the county government, libraries are organized into a department that also includes parks and cultural. The libraries, parks, and cultural department is universally incorporated within three larger departments, including environmental protection and growth management, human services, and public works. These departments

report to the deputy county administrator, who reports to the county administrator, who reports to the nine-member county commission, which represents the public (p.4).

The library receives its operating budget from the county's general fund of \$1 billion. Seventy-eight percent of this general fund stems from property taxes. Property taxes in Broward County are assessed at a millage rate of \$5.723 for every \$1000 dollars in property value. That means that someone with a property value of \$200,000 would pay \$1,144.60 per year. That amount is derived by multiplying the millage rate of \$5.723 by the property value (\$200,000), and then dividing by 1000. Fees, fines, and miscellaneous revenues account for an additional 13%, with the remaining 9% of the general fund amassed from sales tax and state revenue sharing. Every year, Broward County Commissioners begin discussing operating budgets each fiscal year in February. These budgets are finalized each September, just in time for the beginning of a new fiscal year, which begins in October (Budget Basics, n.d.).

In addition to county funding for libraries, additional funding is raised by Broward County Friends of the Library, inc. This "umbrella" organization raises money for, advocates on behalf of, and lobbies in support of Broward County's 32 library branches (Friends of the Library, n.d.). Broward's Friend's group is a member of the national Friends of the Library USA (FOLUSA) organization, which is a collective that represents the interests of over 2,000 county Friends of the Library groups throughout the United States (McCook, 2004, p.129). In order to effectively lobby on behalf of its member branches, Broward's Friends of the Library attends annual conferences held by the American Library Association, the Public Library Association, and the Florida Library Association. Individual branches of the umbrella organization cater to the needs of the local community. For instance, the Friends of the Library branch at the Southwest Regional Library in Pembroke Pines, FL purchased audio/visual resources and

furniture in support of a film club and it hosts a family movie night. It also supports a storybook festival every fall (Southwest Regional Library, n.d.). Other friends groups, such as the Weston Friends of the Library help to promote information literacy by implementing classes to teach iPad, iPhone, Photoshop, and language classes (Weston Library, n.d.).

Without libraries, what other entity would be able to provide an information and social resource for the community that provides for continuing education at little to no cost to patrons? What other public group can bring families together and teach them to utilize emerging technologies that are increasingly utilized in today's digital environment? Libraries play an integral role in American society, but they need adequate funding in order to operate. This requires librarians to find allies, such as the Friends of the Library, apply for available grants, and lobby to government officials for funding on behalf of their profession. Without advocacy, politicians may easily reallocate library funding for other matters to the detriment of the thousands of people who rely on library resources. In order to advocate effectively, it is necessary to have a complex understanding of how the government that funds public libraries operates.

Broward County Friends of the Library Home Page:

<http://www.broward.org/Library/Organizations/BCLFriends/Pages/default.aspx>

Here is a YouTube Video for a Friends of the Library chapter in Minnesota:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vXVz9PYMVQ>

References

American Library Association. (2014, August). The nation's largest public libraries: top 25 rankings. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/tools/libfactsheets/alalibraryfactsheet13>

Broward County, Florida - Fiscal Year 2015 Adopted Operating Budget. (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.broward.org/Budget/2015/Documents/AdoptedOperating/EntireDocument.pdf>.

Budget Basics. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.broward.org/Budget/Pages/Basics.aspx>.

Friends of the Library. (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.broward.org/Library/Organizations/BCLFriends/Pages/default.aspx>.

McCook, K. (2004). Introduction to public librarianship. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Southwest Regional Library. (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.broward.org/library/organizations/bclfriends/pages/friendssw.aspx>.

Weston Library. (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.broward.org/Library/Organizations/BCLFriends/Pages/FriendsWE.aspx>.