

**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH  
LIBRARY BOARD**

Chairperson -- Ann Yadon – Trapper Creek  
Vice Chair – Diane Holl-Rambo – Talkeetna  
Secretary – Paige Moore – Big Lake

Palmer – Susan Pougher  
Wasilla -- Vacant  
At Large 1 – Vacant

Sutton -- Vacant  
Willow – Carol Goltz  
At Large 2 – Georgia Knazovich

**AGENDA**

**REGULAR MEETING**

**Sutton Library/Sutton Friends hosted Zoom**

**OCTOBER 17, 2020**

**10: 00 am**

- I. CALL TO ORDER
- II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM
- III. ELECTION OF OFFICERS
- IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
- V. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
- VI. MINUTES OF PRECEDING MEETINGS
  - A. January 18, 2020
  - B. February 15, 2020
- VII. BOROUGH STAFF REPORT
  - A. Hugh Leslie
  - B. Librarians
- VIII. PERSONS TO BE HEARD / AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION – 3 minutes per person
- IX. UNFINISHED BUSINESS
  - A. Assembly report – update
- X. NEW BUSINESS
  - A. “Year end” review/ Coming year planning
  - B. Format for coming meetings – zoom plus physical location
  - C. CIP Recommendations
  - D. Membership
- XI. ADVOCACY
  - A. Current needs
- XII. CORRESPONDENCE
- XIII. MEMBER COMMENTS

- XIV. NEXT MEETING
  - A. November 21, 2020 – OWL plus Zoom
- XV. ADJOURNMENT

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**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH  
LIBRARY BOARD**

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**Secretary** – Paige Moore - Big Lake

**VACANT** - Sutton  
Susan Pougher - Palmer  
**VACANT** - Wasilla

Carol Goltz - Willow  
Ruth Strong – At Large 1  
Georgia Knazovich – At Large 2

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**Draft Minutes**

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**REGULAR MEETING**  
**Big Lake**

**January 18, 2020**  
**10:00 am**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

During the January MSBLB meeting, the following actions/discussions occurred:

- Willow Project updates were reviewed
- 2020 Report to the Assembly presentation and discussion dates were put forth
- FY2021 budgets were discussed and will be discussed further at February's meeting
- The open slot on the Governor's Advisory Council was discussed
- AK Reads Act and library usage rates were discussed

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**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Meeting was called to order at 9:59 am

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**II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM**

Members present and establishing a quorum were: Ann Yadon, Carol Goltz, Diane Holl-Rambo, Paige Moore, Susan Pougher and Georgia Knazovich

Excused Absence: Ruth Strong

Staff Present: Hugh Leslie – Recreation and Library Services Division Manager

Beth Skow – Palmer Librarian

Zane Treesh – Wasilla Library Director

Guest Present: Robin Treesh

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**III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**Motion:** Ms. Yadon moved to amend the agenda to include under Advocacy: A. Governor's Advisory Council, B. Alaska Reads Act, C. Thank you from IMLS Director and D. "But Nobody Uses Libraries Anymore". Also to include under Correspondence: C. Creative Writing Contest, D. Miscellaneous Newsletters.

**Motion:** Ms. Holl-Rambo moved to approve the agenda as amended, Ms. Pougher, 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor.

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**IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**V. MINUTES OF PRECEDING MEETING**

A. November 16, 2019

Changes requested were:

- 41 Line 46: thing should be things
- 42 Line 58: have should be has
- 43 Line 64: thing should be things
- 44 Line 73: do something nice for Willow Library Friends
- 45 Line 82: report should be reported
- 46 Line 84: change e words to enrichment, engagement and encouragement
- 47 Line 87: change engage to engagement
- 48 Line 90: service should be services, change e words to engagement, education and
- 49 empowerment
- 50 Line 119: 2019 should be 2020
- 51 **Motion: Ms. Knazovich moved to approve the minutes as amended, Ms. Holl-Rambo,**
- 52 **2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor.**
- 53 **VI. BOROUGH STAFF REPORTS**
- 54 Mr. Leslie reported that the mileage reimbursement forms have been updated for 2020.
- 55 He requested that board members turn them in at every, or every other meeting. Mat Su
- 56 Borough librarians have submitted their budgets. The architectural design firm for the
- 57 Willow Library project should be decided by the next Assembly meeting. Mr. Leslie
- 58 noted the possibility of using a portable building provided by the school district as
- 59 temporary housing for the library.
- 60 Mr. Treesh reported that he has been on the job for seven days and been in training for
- 61 several of them.
- 62 **VII. PERSONS TO BE HEARD / AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION – 3 minutes per person**
- 63 None.
- 64 **VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**
- 65 **A. IT Letter of Support**
- 66 This letter will not be sent.
- 67 **B. FY2020 Report to the Assembly**
- 68 The committee will be using “engagement, education and empowerment” as the three E’s
- 69 of our library system. The committee will provide their final draft at the MSBLB OWL
- 70 meeting in February. The presentation to the Assembly is estimated to be March 17<sup>th</sup>.
- 71 **Action Item: Board members should collect stories and pictures from their libraries that**
- 72 **support the three E’s.**
- 73 **Motion: Ms. Moore moved to table this item until the February meeting, Ms. Holl-**
- 74 **Rambo, 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor.**
- 75 **IX. NEW BUSINESS**
- 76 **A. Handbook Review**
- 77 **Motion: Ms. Holl-Rambo moved to table this until the February meeting, Ms. Pougher,**
- 78 **2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor.**
- 79 **X. ADVOCACY**

- 80           **A. Governor's Advisory Council**  
81           The Library User Representative position is open. It has a three-year term and is  
82           appointed by the Governor. The position is open to former staff, teachers, friends,  
83           trustees, volunteers and any other library users.
- 84           **B. Alaska Read Act**  
85           This was introduced by Governor Dunleavy and Senator Begich. This is a statewide  
86           reading program for grades K through 3 to help improve reading outcomes. As of yet,  
87           public libraries have not been included.
- 88           **C. Thank you from IMLS Director**  
89           New IMLS Director is Crosby Kemper.
- 90           **D. "But Nobody Uses Libraries"**  
91           Ms. Yadon will share the article "Comparative Role of Modern Public Libraries".
- 92   **XI. CORRESPONDENCE**
- 93           **A. Letter of Thanks**  
94           Discussed under Advocacy, C. Thank you from IMLS Director.
- 95           **B. FY21 Budget Worksheets**  
96           Mr. Leslie outlined how the budgets that are created by each librarian, approved first by  
97           himself and then by Eric Phillips, the Community Development Director. Budgets are  
98           then sent to both the finance department and to John Moosey, the Borough Manager. The  
99           budgets are not seen again until they are brought forth at an Assembly meeting.
- 100          Mr. Leslie noted that unused funds are returned to the non-area-wide fund at the end of the  
101          fiscal year.
- 102          Discussion followed, concerning patrons who use city libraries but pay non-area wide  
103          taxes due to their residential location. Determined unresolvable.
- 104          **C. Creative Writing Contest**  
105          The deadline is February 5, 2020.
- 106          **D. Miscellaneous Newsletters**  
107          Issue concerning people entering public offices and filming, claiming First Amendment  
108          rights to do so. There is a concern that patron privacy will be impacted.
- 109          Circulation of hard books is down, but electronic books and audiobooks have increased.  
110          Programming attendance has also increased.
- 111          There is currently a bill in Missouri, due to be voted on that would create a Parental  
112          Review Board for libraries. The bill includes verbiage about criminal prosecution.
- 113   **XII. MEMBER COMMENTS**
- 114          Ms. Pougher reported the Palmer Library's Bagpipes at Christmas program, put on by the  
115          Friends of the Library, had 150 attendees. In February, the Palmer Library Friends are  
116          sponsoring the Mat Su Symphony to come play at the Palmer Train Depot. Next meeting  
117          for them is February 20<sup>th</sup>.
- 118          Ms. Yadon reported that the Trapper Creek change of hours seems to be working well  
119          and that afterschool programming is also going well.

120 Ms. Knazovich reported that the Wasilla Library's book sales have gone up.  
121 Ms. Goltz reported that the Association is looking into liability insurance, although it  
122 may be covered under their 501c3 status.

123 Ms. Holl-Rambo reported that Talkeetna programming is going well, the Senior Matinee  
124 program is ongoing and the cookie decorating at Christmas was well attended. Coming in  
125 March is the birthday of the Talkeetna Library. The K through 3 mentoring program  
126 consistently has 14-16 kids in attendance. The transit authority provides transportation as  
127 the school busses cannot maneuver properly in the library parking lot.

128 Ms. Moore reported that since there is a new contact in IT specifically for the libraries,  
129 things have been going well. Programs are going well. A new custodian has finally been  
130 hired and thanks to on-call staff who have stepped in in the interim. The final picture that  
131 fell during the earthquake has been put back up. One camera had a fly larvae inside it,  
132 which was visible on the camera and was dubbed "Larry the Larvae". The company who  
133 maintains the cameras came to clean it out and seal the hole where the fly had gotten in.

134 XIII. NEXT MEETING  
135 A. February 15, 2020 - OWL  
136 XIV. ADJOURNMENT  
137 Motion: Ms. Knazovich moved to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Holl-Rambo, 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in  
138 favor. Meeting adjourned at 11:53 am.

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**Secretary** — Paige Moore - Big Lake      VACANT - Wasilla      Georgia Knazovich — At Large 2

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**DRAFT MINUTES**

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**REGULAR MEETING  
Big Lake**

February 15, 2020  
10:00 A.M.

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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During the February MSBLB meeting, the following actions/discussions occurred:

- Handbook was approved as it stands.
- Resolution 20-01 in support of the Recreation and Library Services Division annual budget for libraries for FY21 approved.
- Advocacy discussion included proposed cut of funding for IMLS, Alaska Counts Census information, and Ebooks for all update.

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**I. CALL TO ORDER**

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**II. Meeting called to order at 10:04 am.**

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**III. ROLL CALL — DETERMINATION OF QUORUM**

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**A. Members present and establishing a quorum were: Ann Yadon, Carol Goltz, Diane Holl-Rambo, Paige Moore, Susan Pougher**

Excused absence: Georgia Knazovich

Staff present: Hugh Leslie, Recreation and Library Services Manager

Beth Skow: Palmer Librarian

Juli Buzby: Sutton Librarian

Jo Cassidy: Big Lake Librarian

Julie Mitchell: Willow Librarian

Cassidy Owen: Talkeetna Assistant Librarian

Geri Denkwalter: Talkeetna Librarian

Zane Treesh: Wasilla Library Director

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**IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**Motion: to approve agenda as it stands, Ms. Goltz moved, Ms. Holl-Rambo 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

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All in favor

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**V. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

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**VI. MINUTES OF PRECEDING MEETING**

**A. January 18, 2020**

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Ms. Moore reported that the minutes under review had been altered from the ones she submitted. Several areas of discrepancies existed which were determined to be a significant change creating inaccuracies in the minutes. Discussion about how to review and correct these areas ensued. Ms. Moore stated she would fix the errors and resubmit the notes for approval in March.

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**Motion: to table the review of these minutes until the March meeting, Ms. Moore moved, Ms. Holl-Rambo 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor.**

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**VII. BOROUGH STAFF REPORTS**

- A. Hugh Leslie, Recreation and Library Services Manager, reported that for FY2021, no reduction of staff and no reduction of any kind are being discussed. Willow project moving forward.
- B. Beth Skow, Palmer Library Director had nothing to report.
- C. Zane Treesh, Wasilla Library Director, reported the secondary gate is up and running again. It had been down since the earthquake in November 2018. The library budget is consistent with previous year. A 20 hour per week staff position is being added. The 4 story time programs logged over 150 attendees. The Wasilla Library will be working closely with the Wasilla Museum.
- D. Juli Buzby, Sutton Librarian, reported that they have a new Sutton Library Board Member, Nicole Pease. Programming, like adult programs, every other week game night, and armchair travelers are being added and doing well.
- E. Julie Mitchell, Willow Librarian, reported that they are deeply into the design process. There will be a public meeting on March 4 from 5pm to 7pm in the Willow Community Center, with refreshments. ECI is the architecture design firm for the project.
- F. Jo Cassidy, Big Lake Librarian, reported that IT was out to the library to change out switches and IP addresses, OWL had been missed. Several issues since to be worked on.
- G. Geri Denkewalter, Talkeetna Librarian, reported the library was to host a public speaking class, Census training. Fishing licenses can now be obtained online.

**VIII. PERSONS TO BE HEARD / AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION —3 minutes per person**

NONE

**VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

- A. FY2020 Report to Assembly  
Ms. Yadon asked librarians and board members if the direction of the presentation was accurate. Generally, the librarians and board members agreed it was great, and thanked the committee for their hard work. Ms. Moore raised the idea of summarizing some of the larger quotes instead of reading them since they would be on the screen anyway. Ms. Yadon asked for all commentary to be in to her by February 21.

Mr. Leslie informed the board that it items to be added to the agenda of an Assembly meeting should be to the clerk 2 weeks prior.

Motion: to proceed in the current direction, Ms. Holl-Rambo moved, Ms. Goltz 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor.

- B. Handbook Review  
Discussion determined no changes needed.  
Motion: to approve the handbook as it stands, Ms. Moore moved, Ms. Holl-Rambo 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor

**X. NEW BUSINESS**

- A. Resolution 20-01: in support of the Recreation and Library Services Division annual budget for libraries for FY21.

Motion: to approve the resolution as it stands, Ms. Pougher moved, Ms. Goltz 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor.

Vote: to approve the resolution, all in favor, Resolution is accepted.

**XI. ADVOCACY**

Ms. Yadon reported:

- 96 • Kaktovik is working to repair damages caused by the fire and
- 97 requests no book donations as of yet.
- 98 • The Ninth Circuit Civics Contest has a deadline for submission of
- 99 March 25, 2020. Of note, Alaskan students won first prize in 2017
- 100 and 2019.
- 101 • There is a new OWL support technician, Kyle Williams.
- 102 • The federal 2021 budget has once again deleted funding from IMLS
- 103 and other library -eligible education programs. In Alaska alone, the
- 104 IMLS distributes nearly \$1M to the Alaska State Library for grant-
- 105 funded projects such as the 800#ILL Backup, Alaska Mail Services,
- 106 the Ready-to Read Resource Center, purchases of databases on
- 107 SLED, CE grants, and many other activities that benefit libraries
- 108 across Alaska. The advocacy package that was mailed includes a
- 109 petition that you may sign if you wish and also to forward to other
- 110 advocates for libraries. That petition is a function of
- 111 EveryLibrary.org, which is a 501(c)4 organization. Advocates may
- 112 also directly contact their legislators if so desired to ask that funding
- 113 be restored to IMLS.
- 114 • Alaska Counts sent an email from Daniel Cornwall about the first
- 115 official PSA (public service announcement). The email lists several
- 116 benefits of participating in the census which may be worth sharing
- 117 with others.
- 118 • The Rhode Island Library Association contacted their representative
- 119 and met with him to explain how harmful the publishers' restrictions
- 120 on eBooks was for Rhode Islanders. The US House Subcommittee on
- 121 Antitrust, Commercial, and Administrative Law asked ALA to
- 122 contribute to their investigation into competition in the digital
- 123 marketplace.

## 124 XII. CORRESPONDENCE

125 NONE

## 126 XIII. MEMBER COMMENTS

127 Ms. Yadon reported that Talkeetna's change in hours on Saturday has worked well.

128 Programming also doing well.

129 Ms Moore reported that Big Lake's programs are doing well and that a recent Craft

130 Day activity of making playdough without cooking or hot water was a huge success.

131 Ms. Goltz reported that they have had their third design meeting. There will be an

132 open house March 4, with ECI facilitating. Thanks given to Talkeetna Library for the field

133 trip of members of the Association, a great time was had by all attendees. The Association

134 is still looking into insurance information. Question raised about thank you cards for

135 members who have termed out or resigned, Ms. Yadon agreed that thanking past members

136 was a good idea and would be discussed at next meeting.

137 Ms. Pougher reported that Palmer is a busy library. Friends of the Library and Staff

138 have created a Saturday reading time for kids presented by community members, with

139 firefighters, mushers and the like invited to present. The fund raiser of the Symphony at

140 the Train Station made close to \$900 for the Friends of the Library.

141 Ms. Holl-Rambo reported that the Librarian for Talkeetna has a radio program that

142 discusses book clubs, programs and has people lined up to interview

## 143 XIV. NEXT MEETING

144 A. March 21, 2020—Palmer

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145 XV. ADJOURNMENT

146 MOTION to adjourn Ms. Pougher moved, Ms. Moore 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor. Meeting  
147 adjourned at 10:55am .

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-09-26/how-la-public-library-adjusted-covid-19-pandemic>

## **How do you go to the Los Angeles Public Library when COVID-19 has closed its buildings? It's easy, fun and surprisingly comforting**

Bronwen Serna drops off books outside the Los Feliz branch of the Los Angeles Public Library on Thursday. At this "library to go," residents can request books and reserve a time to pick them up outside the branch.

(Gina Ferazzi/Los Angeles Times)

By NITA LELYVELDCITY BEAT COLUMNIST

SEP. 26, 2020

6 AM

I've been library hopping this whole week long, exploring the rich offerings of the Los Angeles Public Library system. I've been to free classes and events hosted by the Central Library and quite a few of the 72 branches spread out across the breadth of our city.

Through the library, I've joined in a book club, a writing class and a career day. I've seen children read aloud to a dog. I've learned from a master gardener how to turn the pages my columns are printed on into pots for seedlings. I've heard people grapple with systemic racism in a learning circle focused on the New York Times' "1619 Project." I've watched volunteers helping people learn English explicate idioms: "dog-tired," "cloud nine," "kick my butt."

I've paid my visits while all the library system's buildings have remained COVID-closed to the public — a physical absence that has hit people hard.

But I've discovered through my tour that as many (real) doors have closed, other (virtual) ones have opened, greatly extending the library's reach. I hope they'll stay open even after the virus is vanquished.

If it weren't for the digital divide — an enormous problem the library system is trying to do its small part to chip away at — and if it weren't for how being in actual library

buildings helps people, I'd have to say that our city's public library system in this new time feels in some very profound ways warmer and more accessible than ever.

So many of us like to visit our libraries to browse the bookshelves, to see what's just arrived, to go hear a well-known author speak. But for some in our city those buildings are an absolute lifeline — places for the isolated to find respectful, otherwise-absent human contact, for those without roofs over their heads to get respite from the outdoors as well as resources to help them and vital computer and internet access.

The virus has exposed much that is unfair in society — including that we don't all have the technological resources the modern world all but requires.

At the same time, it has shone a light on just how extraordinary those resources can be if you do have them — how you can be alone anywhere in front of a screen and join a community as big as the world.

The library lists its ever-growing array of online classes and events on its homepage, and visitors from all over are partaking of them. A few programs are restricted to people in the area, but the vast majority are not. When a 5-year-old named Shreyovi joyfully half read, half sang “One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish” to a dog named Summer on Tuesday afternoon, Andy Howe, the Sun Valley branch children's librarian, was running the weekly gathering from her home in Glendale. The little girl was at her dining room table near Portland, Ore., and Summer was lolling about on the grass in a backyard in Lake View Terrace.

Pre-pandemic, Summer would have come to the library for the weekly “BARK: Read to the Dogs” session. The neighborhood children who read to her loved to pet her and comb her hair, which they were collecting to make something with, Howe told me. But Shreyovi couldn't have been part of it. And neither could 7-year-old Tallay, who Zoomed in from Palm Desert to read about Grover from “Sesame Street.”

It's recently become possible to sit outside almost all the library system's libraries to use the free Wi-Fi six days a week, from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., though at first there were concerns that leaving it on might encourage people to congregate in ways that wouldn't be safe.

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It's also possible now to go to an L.A. library to borrow materials, though you have to request them in advance and make an appointment to fetch them outside either the Central Library or one of the 19 branch libraries that offer the new pandemic-safe Library to Go service.

I spent several hours this week watching a steady stream of masked borrowers arrive in the parking lot of the Los Feliz branch to pick up what they'd reserved, delivered to them in brown paper bags. In the space of 10 minutes, I met two novelists who were missing the indoor writing space.

I also learned from veteran librarian Pearl Yonezawa, who has run the very busy branch for 25 years, how different the library's world is right now. It's not just the inability to stroll the aisles with a regular who wants to take out a book but doesn't know what book.

It's having to quarantine the books and videos that are returned before they're handled, trying to reconfigure the space so it will be safe when the doors open again and managing with a much-reduced staff on site. One-third of her staff is at home because of high risk or child-care issues. Another one-third have been redeployed as city disaster service workers. The children's librarian, Diane Garcia, a new mother, is mostly working these days as a contact tracer.

Garcia told me that, in normal times, she's happily busy all day with kids inside the library. Before she began contact tracing, she told me, she used her emptier days to boost the branch's social media pages, learn how to turn story times virtual and test out new ideas. In July, with funding from the Friends of the Los Feliz Library, she created a story walk for neighborhood kids, who could follow a map on a flier to read page after page of a picture book, displayed in the windows of local businesses.

Adult librarian Matthew Panzera told me about the oddness of transforming his popular monthly film screenings, which were mostly focused on the watching, into virtual ones in which people stream a movie on their own and come together not to watch it but to talk about it.

They and all the librarians I talked to this week told me that the pandemic has both tried them and fueled their creativity. Librarians from different branches have come together to host programs. Some have yet to meet in person.

That cross-pollination of staff, volunteers and visitors is one of the unexpected gifts of this new world born of necessity. People who would never have met before are now meeting, albeit online.

For city residents, it's no longer a traffic nightmare to attend a library event or class miles away. That was part of what I loved about the "Grow Your Own Food: Fall/Winter Garden" program hosted by the John C. Fremont branch library on Wednesday afternoon. On Zoom, I could see master gardener Emi Carvell cut into a gorgeous purple sweet potato in her Venice front yard from my own home in Hollywood. (I could also watch one of the other people watching Carvell as she trimmed artichokes in her kitchen.)

Participating in many different library programs is so easy now, and not just on Zoom, I learned from managing librarians Kelly Tyler, who oversees the literacy classes, and Madeleine Ildefonso, who directs the New Americans Initiative. I talked to them last week when I was writing about Clemencia Isabel Morales, who prepared to become an American citizen through one of the initiative's free citizenship classes.

Tyler's purview includes the library's Career Online High School, through which adults who live in or work for the city can earn a high school diploma and career certificate in a high-demand field. That program was already web-based, but the literacy programs and the initiative's services for immigrants weren't. Before the pandemic, students working on their English or citizenship met in person at libraries with volunteers, some in one-on-one sessions, some in group classes. Now they're getting together in whatever ways work, including on the phone, on WhatsApp, on Facetime.

Some of my favorite moments this week were in the literacy classes. I heard so many different accents. I glimpsed so many different living rooms and bedrooms. I saw people standing outside to take the classes in breaks at work. I heard one woman promise to make her on-screen classmates Persian rice one day when they could actually meet in person. I felt freshly smitten with our many-splendored city.

I also kept seeing the same people in class after class. One was Hande Guzey of Istanbul, all alone in this big metropolis she moved to just two years ago. She's out of work. Her substitute teaching jobs dried up when the virus hit. She's trying to take advantage of her unmasked-for free time. She used to take one weekly conversation class at the Fairfax branch. Now, she takes hour after hour of classes, taught by people from all over the city.

In one class, I asked in the chat room how students were enjoying the virtual library.

“Hi Nita, Zoom classes took away our loneliness,” Guzey wrote. Like me, she said, she hopes they’ll stick around even after we once again have other choices.

http://ala-publishing.informz.net/z/cjUucD9taT05NTY4NDE3JnA9MSZ1PTEwMjY3OTQ5NjkmbGk9ODAYNTc1MTc/index.html

# Hold On, eBooks Cost HOW Much? The Inconvenient Truth About Library eCollections

by Guest Reviewer · Sep 6, 2020 at 2:00 am ·



*Jennie Rothschild is a collection development librarian at a public library outside of DC. She talks about books for fun and for work all over social media and in places like Booklist and Library Journal. She's also been on several award committees, including ALA's Margaret A. Edwards award and the CYBILS. When she's not reading or shouting about ebook pricing, she likes to knit, watch Mike Schur shows, and work on her definitive rankings of the best boxed wines. Jennie misses getting lunch with friends and browsing bookstores. She's just finished reading Women in Black by Madeleine St John. She tweets [@kidsilkhaze](#).*

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As we continue to stay home as much as possible, even the most die-hard “give me paper or give me death” readers have been dipping their toe into the ebook waters. And they're discovering what long-time users have known forever.

**Good news! You can get ebooks from your library!  
But (bad news) only if you're willing to wait for-EVER for the most popular titles.**

Even for some of the less popular titles, wait times are much longer for ebooks than their print versions, and it's just gotten worse as ebook popularity has dramatically increased this spring and summer.

Which leads to the following questions:

1. **Why do you have to wait for an ebook at all?!**
2. **Why doesn't my library just buy more copies?!**

And the conclusion I've come to for both questions is: I think most publishers hate libraries.  
I wish I were kidding.

When libraries and publishers entered the ebook landscape, they went with a model they knew and understood: they licensed library ebooks with a one copy/one user. While some other models have come out since then (such as cost-per-circ, where the library pays every time someone checks a book out, which you see with services like Hoopla) one copy/one user remains the most common way ebooks are sold for lending. However many licenses a library buys is how many people can read a book at a time.

***So why doesn't the library just buy more copies?***

Because ebooks for libraries are really, really, really expensive.

Really expensive.

And then we don't even get to keep them. Librarians pay wholesale for print books that can remain in circulation for literal decades, but ebooks are very different in terms of access and in terms of cost.

I'm a collection development librarian (aka, the person who buys the books for the library) and I realize that people know that libraries pay different prices, but last spring I tweeted out actual numbers, and it's the closest to viral I've ever gotten. People knew it was bad, but not THAT bad.

So I started a project where every week I shared what was on the best seller list and how much those books cost. I shared specifically how much the library would spend to buy those titles in a paper book or an ebook and how much those same books (paper and ebook) would cost for a regular person. **I kept the thread going for a year, and now I have data to play with.\***

You may want to pour yourself a drink...

**Show Spoiler**

**First, let's look at averages for print, digital book, and digital audio.**

On average, the Suggested Retail Price for a print book (aka the price that's printed on the cover) was \$24.78.

On average again, Amazon would sell you (a reading consumer) a paper copy of that print book for \$16.77.

Your library could buy a print copy from their vendors for \$14.14.

Looking for digital?

You could buy that same book on average for \$12.77 on your Kindle.

**The library had to pay an average of \$45.75.**

YES WE HAD TO PAY THAT MUCH. 3.5 TIMES MORE THAN YOU DID.

On average, this means that we (libraries) can buy 3 print copies for every single ebook license, and still have some money left over.

$\$14.14 + \$14.14 + \$14.14 = \$42.42$  for 3 print books in circulation

vs.

**\$45.75 for a single license of an ebook.**

And then there's audio.

If you're curious, the average price to buy the book on Audible was \$27.28, but for libraries to get it in digital audio? **\$69.76.**

It's graph time!

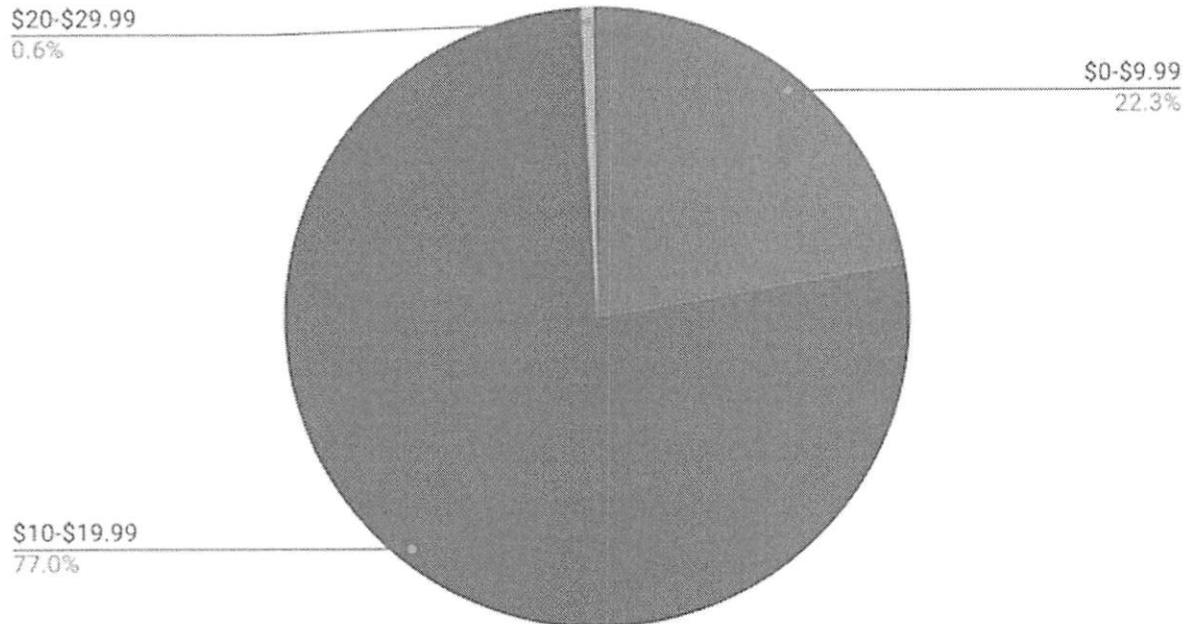
### Average Book Prices



And that's not some wonky prices skewing the averages.

Check out these sweet pie charts:

## Price Distribution for Kindle Books



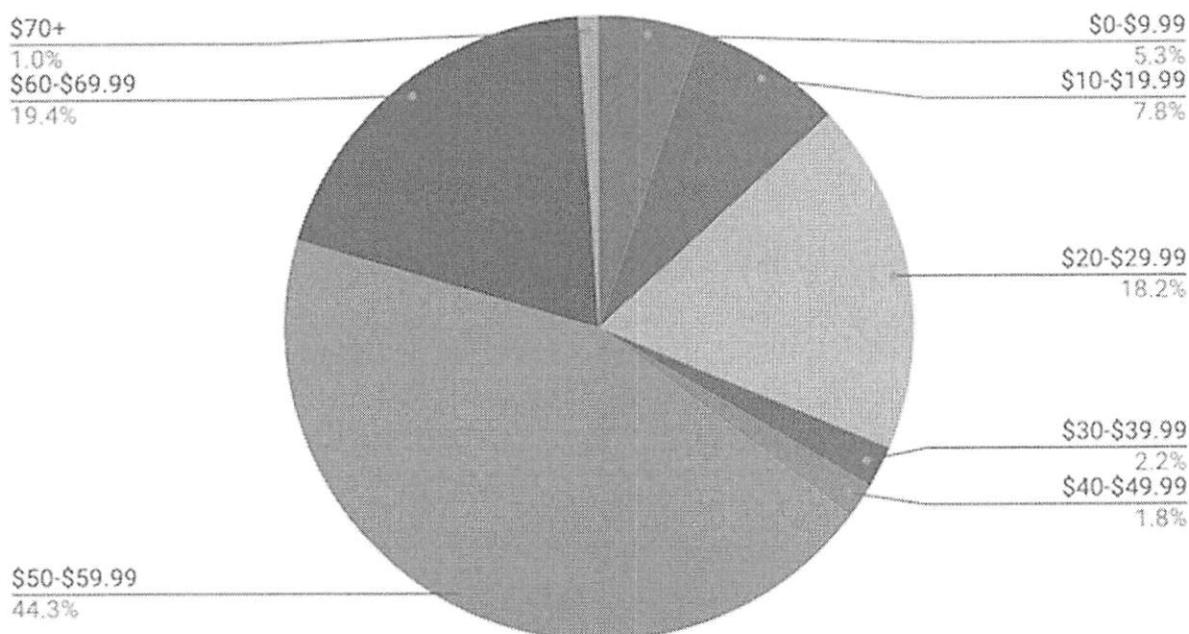
- 77% of the Kindle books tracked for the purpose of this survey are priced for consumers between \$10.00 and \$19.99.
- 22.3% of Kindle books for consumers are between \$0.00 and \$9.99
- .6% of Kindle books for consumers are \$20.00 and \$29.99.

**So more than 3/4ths of popular titles in this data set were between \$10 and \$19.99.**

That's for you, the individual consumers.

Let's look at library prices for ebooks.

## Price Distribution for Library Ebooks



Ebook library licenses are a very, very different story.

Of the popular titles included in this dataset:

- 44.3% of digital library books were between \$50.00 and \$59.99.
- 19.4% of digital library books were between \$60.00 and \$69.99.
- 18.2% of digital library books were between \$20.00 and \$29.99.

In other words:

I. **64% of ebooks cost over \$50 for libraries, but none of the titles included in this data set are that much for anyone else.**

99% of Kindle books cost \$19.99 or less, but only about 13% of library ebooks do.

So while wholesale prices for print acquisitions for libraries are usually lower on average, prices for ebook licenses are substantially more.

**Pour yourself another drink, because it gets worse when the usable lifespan of these purchases is examined against the price per item.**

Show Spoiler

II. 86% of the ebooks from that list have to be repurchased on a regular basis, most commonly after 24 months, even if the book is never checked out.

This is why libraries can be reluctant to take an ebook chance on an unknown author.

When libraries buy the ebook, the terms of purchase are actually a lease. The publisher will take the book back after 24 months. If libraries want to still have that ebook available for checkout, they need to buy it again.

Publishers do this because, once again, they're working off the print model, and print books don't last forever. They get eaten by the dog or dropped in the tub or coffee gets spilled on them or after it's been checked out a million times, it just wears out. And if people still want it, we'll buy another copy.

But...(and this is a big but)

Remember how much libraries pay for print? (\$14.14 on average, see above?)

How they pay even less than the average Amazon price?

**III. The average price of an ebook that has to be repurchased is \$49.48.**

*Wait, isn't that higher than the average price of library ebooks?*

YES IT IS.

The more expensive a book is, the more likely we have to rebuy it on a regular basis.

Only 1% of the books that cost over \$50 don't have to be regularly repurchased.

I know it doesn't make sense.

Prices and terms for digital books are set by the publisher, and most publishers have broad rules that apply to all of their books.

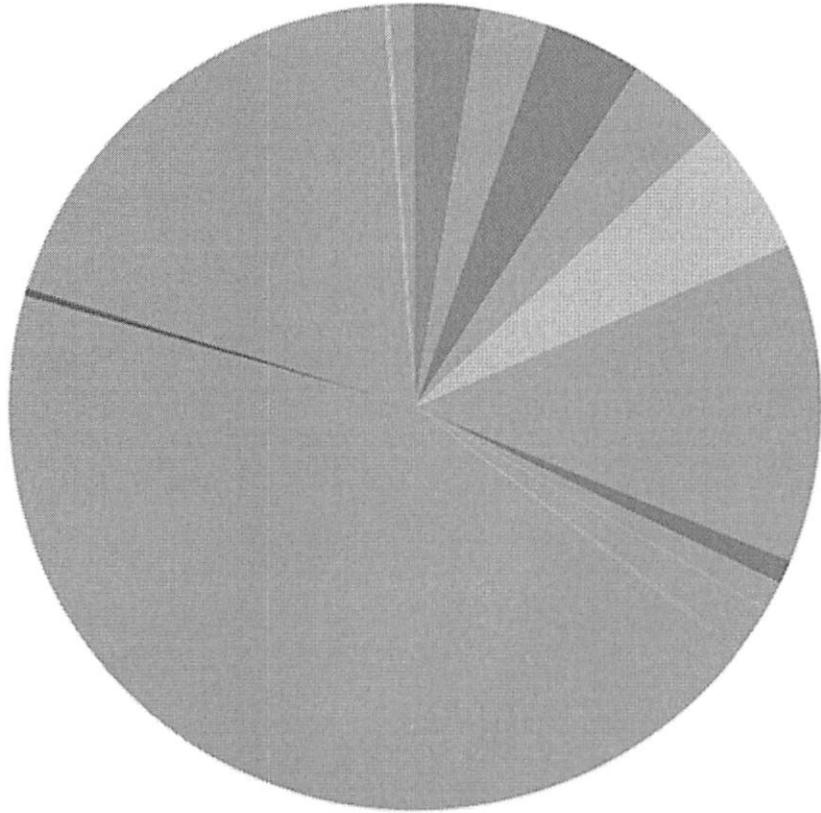
*And some very large publishers \*cough\* Penguin Random House, Macmillan, and Hachette \*cough\* have set high prices for books that expire quickly.*

Why would they do this? Because they can. If libraries want to provide what our users want, we'll pay their prices on their terms, no matter how ludicrous, because what choice do we have?

Remember that sweet pie chart from 3 paragraphs ago examining Price Distribution for Print Ebooks for libraries? Let's grey out all the parts that represent books that will need to be regularly repurchased.

I'll try not to cry.

Wait, I have to rebuy how much?!



All of the greyed areas: **ebooks that need to be repurchased because they are sold to libraries under a limited license.**

And of course, this assumes that libraries can even get the digital version of a book!

(At this point, my liver can't take another drink, so I'm switching to ice cream.)

Show Spoiler

**Some publishers refuse to sell digital formats to libraries.**

Major side-eye to every single Amazon imprint and company, which includes Lake Union, Audible, and more. All of those wonderful Audible exclusive audio books? Are Audible exclusive, which means libraries cannot acquire them.

Some self-published authors don't make their stuff available on OverDrive, and if they're part of Kindle Unlimited, they're not allowed to.

How big of a problem is this?

IV. Libraries were unable to buy 1.5% of this year's bestsellers in ebook.

V. It's worse for audio-libraries were unable to buy 15% of this year's bestsellers in eaudio.

This is literally the reason why your library doesn't have *Rise of Magicks* by Nora Roberts on eaudio. Or the new Sarah J. Mass: the publishers refuse to sell them to libraries. (This does not include books where the publisher opted not to do a digital format--these numbers are just for items individual consumers can buy, but libraries cannot.)

And all of this has huge ramifications for the library, but also publishers (and readers) in general.

If libraries have to pay that much money for an ebook and can only keep it for 24 months, they're going to concentrate purchasing power on titles they know will circulate heavily, to get the most bang for the limited buck. Which means lots of blockbuster sure-bets, and less midlist or new authors.

For romance readers, fans of Avon and Harlequin are in luck, because they're both HarperCollins imprints. HarperCollins charges Suggested Retail Price and libraries can keep the ebook for 26 checkouts. As with most romance publishers in mass market paperback, most of their ebook titles are \$7.99 and libraries can keep them until they use up all 26 checkouts. While it's still not as good as print (which libraries would pay less money for and which usually last far longer than 26 checkouts) it's still the best pricing offered by any of the major traditional publishers.

But St. Martins is Macmillan, and Macmillan charges \$60 for new ebooks (regardless of Suggested Retail Price) and their ebooks expire after 24 months, even if no one checked it out. Berkley is Penguin Random House, and they charge \$55 for new ebooks that libraries can only keep for 24 months.

That can be really hard math to justify! With our vendor discount, libraries usually pay \$4.95 for a mass market paperback with a Suggested Retail Price of \$7.99, so they can buy a full dozen print copies for the same price of a single ebook (and that ebook expires after 24 months)

**\$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 + \$4.95 = \$59.40 for 12 print books**

**vs.**

**\$60 for a single ebook license that expires in 24 months**

In many ways, a lot of the big publishers are pricing themselves out of the library ebook market, with terrible consequences for libraries.

Libraries have long struggled to find the right balance between user demand for ebooks and tight budgets, and COVID-19 just made it a whole lot harder. The economic impact of the pandemic is also going to hit local governments, which fund libraries, very hard.

At the same time, **demand for ebooks has skyrocketed**. Anecdotally, I know many libraries have seen this demand start to trend down a bit, but most of us who buy digital books for libraries are not expecting levels to ever drop back to where they were pre-pandemic.

### **So what does this mean?**

With shrinking budgets and outrageous prices, libraries are unable to provide all the ebooks users want, or to get a good handle on wait times.

As a result, users see the library as being out-of-touch with reader needs, so they don't fight for more funding.

So funding gets cut more, so libraries can provide even less and are seen as even more out-of-touch and the cycle continues.

### **Show Spoiler**

#### **So, what can library users do?**

- VI. Don't stop reading ebooks.**
- VII. And don't feel guilty about reading them.**
- VIII. Don't yell at authors if their publishers have bad terms.**
- IX. Do contact publishing house executives about their bad terms.**
- X. Do be patient with your library if the wait times are forever or if they don't have every book you want.**
- XI. Be nice to your very stressed out librarian.**
- XII. Most of all: do advocate for your local library when budget season rolls around.**

Find out who is your library's funding body (this varies by location, so you may need to ask the library) and tell them how much you value your library. Tell your neighbors and friends how much you value the library and ask them to also champion the library's budget.

**EveryLibrary is a nonprofit that lobbies for libraries across the country**—help them with their efforts and let them know if your library needs their help.

Libraries are used to trying to get the most value possible out of every dollar, but sometimes they just need more dollars.

Also, after all that, I'm out of bourbon and ice cream. Please fetch me my smelling salts.

### **Show Spoiler**

*\*Here's the nerdy fine-print methodology section about my data set:* I looked at the following New York Times Bestseller lists: Hardcover Fiction, Hardcover Nonfiction, Combined e/print Fiction, Combined e/Print Nonfiction. I also looked at adult titles that appeared in the Top 30 of the USA Today Bestseller list. Each title is only counted once, so even though *Becoming* by Michelle Obama was on multiple lists every single week in the past year, it's only represented once. Also, this was an evolving project, so I started with the NYT lists on 7/25/2019, the USA Today list on 8/11/19 and started looking at audio book pricing on 11/6/2019. The data includes information about 645 titles, 381 of those also have audio data.