



**2021-2022 MCC Governing Board
Special Called Meeting
August 4, 2021 6:00 p.m.**

Remote participation: 1. quorum is present in-person at MCC;
2. “Public Comment” expressed by individuals in-person is permissible.

MINUTES

Board Members present: *in-person:* Barbara Zamora-Appel; Lisa Mariam; Max Blacksten; Maria Foderaro-Guertin; Melanie Sletten; Carla Post; Shivani Saboo; Rasheq Rahman; Bill Glikbarg
virtual: Suzanne Le Menestrel (1st time virtual, McLean, VA)

Board Members absent: Ivy Chen

MCC Staff present: Daniel Singh, Executive Director; Holly Novak; Sabrina Anwah, PIO

Guests: Christopher Henzel; Adrienne Henzel; Kathleen Gillette Mallard
**One other person was present but did not sign-in.*

CONVENE MEETING

Chair Zamora-Appel convened a Special Called Meeting of the Governing Board of McLean Community Center on August 4, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. This meeting was open to the public attending in-person at the McLean Community Center.

ADOPT AGENDA No changes were requested to the proposed Agenda; it was adopted by acclamation.

PUBLIC COMMENT AT MCC GOVERNING BOARD MEETINGS

**A draft of proposed new protocols for “Public Comment” (based on guidance of Fairfax County attorneys) was distributed in advance.*

Chair Zamora-Appel explained that this meeting is for the purpose of discussing public feedback. Chair Zamora-Appel is glad for that, and it is positive. We are bringing it to the board’s attention now because there has been no public comment in MCC board or committee meetings for the past five years. This is Fairfax County policy; it covers any meeting of any board all around the county. If you want to raise objections to this proposed protocol, it has to go all the way up to the county.

Opinion expressed: If the public person makes a statement and it’s unclear, all I would like is an ability to clarify the issue – not to try and take action as a Board. I just want to clarify what is the meaning of what they are saying. I don’t see any ability to do that in here. I can’t ask that kind of question.

Opinion expressed: This process needs to be such that there can be dialogue among the board. It’s difficult for new people to gain any kind of understanding - knowing there is a space that can be appropriate for the board to interact with the public. After all, we do the work of MCC – to provide resources for the people of McLean.

Question: I’m unclear whether this is inappropriate -once every six months? What if an individual has multiple issues that they want to discuss within a six-month period? It seems like the county is trying to silence the public.

Clarification by Executive Director Singh: Lawyers will be consulted; but at the board level, we cannot change this.

Opinion expressed: I just wanted to propose a couple of things: 1. I like the town hall idea. That is what our annual March Public Hearing is supposed to be. I think this is an opportunity to strengthen how we promote and advertise that as well as to ensure that the public who wants to comment has the ability to. 2. The six month thing is odd but I understand its purpose. Can we ask people to identify ahead of time and require to say what they want to comment on? I understand the role – because you want to try to give everyone an opportunity and not have the same people dominate the conversation. But I was extremely uncomfortable – the people were very threatening. Not courteous or respectful. One stood right in my

face and asked: Why aren't you talking? He said the same thing to several of us – it was intimidating and threatening to me. I don't want that to happen again.

Question: So, we are just rubber-stamping what the county has decreed?

Clarification by Executive Director Singh: We can ask the lawyers if we have questions. If you have an individual continually taking up time giving comments, it doesn't give others an opportunity to comment on something different.

Opinion expressed: It's important to ask someone from the county speak to us and explain.

Opinion expressed: We have had people commenting on the published topics of the agenda. That's where the agenda happens. But none of the recent public comments that we have had so far have dealt with the agenda at hand.

Question: Are these things set in stone, or do we have any flexibility to adjust? If set in stone, and if someone brings up a topic that is not on the agenda, can we put it on the next agenda? As a taxpayer, I would feel frustrated if the board wasn't talking about something that I keep bringing up.

Opinion expressed: If there is some kind of opportunity outside of regular board meetings about a special topic – we could have a “town Hall” where it is more of a discussion-based meeting format.

Opinion expressed: I like the town hall idea. That is what our annual “Public Hearing on Programs” annually in March is supposed to be. In the two years I've been on the board, we've only received three comments in person at that Public Hearing. I think this is an opportunity to strengthen how we promote and advertise that public hearing, as well as to ensure that the public who wants to comment has the ability to do so.

Clarification by Executive Director Singh: Public hearings is one of our options: on a topic that is of interest to the public.

It's important that those who are commenting understand that this is a public meeting. I see no requisite about civility or ‘no *ad hominem* remarks.’ No notion of respect. I can only imagine that other boards have more rules about this. Again, I reiterate the need to hear from someone at the county level.

Clarification by Executive Director Singh: We can come back and speak with the attorneys.

Opinion expressed: I felt uncomfortable when someone tried to place something on the wall that wasn't approved. The fist-pounding kept going. I don't know why that was done and it takes out the idea of civil discourse. I am a volunteer and it's an honor to be serving here. But the board members should not be open to personal attacks. As a teacher, experiencing some of the behavior that occurred in the last meeting, I would have called security. That applies to any setting: if the discourse is that threatening or uncomfortable, it can't be constructive and productive. We are representative of the community and we appreciate the comments. But there is a way of doing it. I would like an exchange of ideas, but in a comfortable environment.

Opinion expressed: I suggest that we should adapt technologically: we have been moving into a technological age. FCPS every Monday has a 6 a.m. forum. We could offer an online forum where people can sign-up randomly. Then, if someone has a 9-5 job and can't get to a meeting, they still have equal chance to speak. I think it's important that everyone has a chance.

Opinion expressed: If there is a system “flipgrid” where they can make a two-minute statement. Maybe people who would be addressing the board could have their comments in an online queue. This would be a way to deal with this and not have people sitting in an uncomfortable environment.

Opinion expressed: I'm in agreement that you need to have courtesy; no words about that in this draft policy. What does “public comment” mean? Three minutes every six months: I might have 3 different subjects important to me that I want to speak to, and they come up over time. What is the subject of the public comment? That needs to be in this statement. How would the lawyer define “public comment?”

Opinion expressed: What troubles me about this draft is that it puts in-person comments at a different level than written comments. I think they should both be treated with the same level of documentation. That should be considered as we look at any changing of the language.

Opinion expressed: Whereas the public's request for in-person remarks has to be scheduled 24 hours in advance, an e-mail public comment can be sent at any time. But the issue is that a meeting requires a prepared agenda. But public comments don't fit that because they come in “at any time”



Clarification by Executive Director Singh: We collated information from the clerk and county lawyer and tried to create one document. We are also trying to manage the board's requests for staff to respond fast. We can take the county timeline and work with the lengthy county process – but it will take a few months. We were trying to respond quickly. But we are totally fine with putting it through the normal process. But understand that it won't be quick.

Opinion expressed: I left the July 28 meeting and didn't detect any lack of civility. There isn't any excuse for incivility. On the other hand, if I have concerns and I came to a meeting and expressed them, and no one said: "Let's consider this." or "Later, can I talk with you?" I would leave completely frustrated. We need to address public comment and have an opportunity for dialogue. But don't allow people who made the effort to come and speak for three minutes to leave frustrated if we are going to keep ignoring them and not respond.

Clarification by Executive Director Singh: This is the county position; but we must vote on it. You can choose not to follow this draft, but then we would have to change the entire MOU. If we choose not to adopt this, then we will look at the whole MOU.

Question: Can we invite a county attorney to our meeting to discuss it? Response by Exec. Dir. Singh: I can ask and see what they say.

Opinion expressed: To your point, the way this is drafted doesn't clarify that it's from the county. It doesn't say... "As per county regulations." I would like it to be more formalized. And I would like to have the county attorney come in to meet with us. I find the limitation of six months arbitrary. I would like to have people speak. We are going to challenge things we don't agree with. Civility is incredibly important. I wasn't here last meeting. But I do agree that we need to make this more complete.

Question: What are Fairfax County's rules about public comment? What are our adjustments to the rules?

Opinion expressed: We need to reference the county rules and show where it comes from. The last policy of rules/procedures was for BoS. Is there a precedent for this language? We need to reference which of those rules we are talking about

Summary by Chair Zamora-Appel: Hearing all these remarks, it is clear we are not voting on it tonight.

The MOTION is tabled. It may be a while before such new Public Comment protocols are finalized.

OLD / NEW BUSINESS Chair Zamora-Appel opened the floor for old or new business. Nothing was mentioned as a further topic for discussion.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Zamora-Appel recognized members of the public in attendance. Three-minutes for each person was allotted. Additional speakers beyond this segment may contribute their comments via e-mail to: Holly.Novak@Fairfaxcounty.gov.

1. Christopher Henzel: Good evening. My name is Christopher Henzel. I am a resident of the tax district that funds the McLean Community Center. I'd like to correct a matter for the public record. After the June 26 drag performance for children, there appeared on the MCC website a document headed "Director's comments on Drag Story hour." During the public comments portion of the board's meeting on July 15, I stated that I had printed out this document, and I cited several points in it, for example, the MCC's admission that it had paid a total of \$900 to the drag performers. At some point in July after that, however, the document disappeared from the MCC website. So, I have brought the printout again today, and I request that it be included in the minutes of this meeting as part of my public comment, so that in future discussions on this issue the public will be able to see the MCC's position in writing. *Mr. Henzel submitted the following document in writing:*

Director's Comments on Drag Story Hour (downloaded July 14 2021 from MCC website)

My understanding is that you are the person that arranged for the Drag Queen Story Hour. Is this correct?

A minor correction. It was a Drag Storybook Hour, not Drag Queen Story Hour. Drag is something that all genders perform. ^[SEP]The event was jointly programmed and arranged by the McLean Community Center (MCC) and The Dolley Madison Library. Drag Storybook Hour is an established program aligned with the American Library Association's key action areas of diversity and equitable access. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity>.

Was this event paid for by MCC and the library provided the space? Did you have to get approval from anyone for the event to move forward? What was the amount paid for this event and was that taxpayer dollars or a special fund? ^[SEP]

The artists were paid for by MCC. MCC makes independent programming decisions based on our commitment to the community and in alignment with One Fairfax, the Equity roadmap for Fairfax County. The three artists were paid \$300 each out of the MCC budget funded by Dranesville Small District 1A taxpayers.

Was the event well-attended? ^[SEP]



You know, this is a complicated question. We know that there was a lot of interest in the program. The tickets were entirely sold out within a few hours of being released to the public. I am really heartened by the clear support of our parents who trust our curation and our approach to an inclusive community.

In retrospect, we found out that there were several negative comments on Next Door about the event. So much so, that Next Door or possibly the original poster took down the whole thread. We also know that 10 adults signed up for what was a kids-focused event. These 10 adults showed up, videotaped, some had their rosaries out, and several of them followed attendees coming to/going out of the event with aggressive, negative, and traumatic language. So, while there was broad and supportive interest in this community-building effort, a few toxic folks derailed what should have been a nurturing and safe environment.

Why did you think this event would be appropriate for this age group?

The Drag Storybook Hour was created to encourage children to be comfortable with themselves, to be compassionate with each other, and to prevent bullying. I am curious why a program with such positive goals would not be appropriate for all age groups. Isn't this nurturing environment the one we wish for ourselves and for the next generation of children? Here are the titles of the books that were presented in the Drag Story Hour.

1. [The Boy & The Bindi](#) by Vivek Shraya
2. [Just Add Glitter](#) by Angela DiTerlizzi & Samantha Cotterill
3. [Kevin the Unicorn: It's Not All Rainbows](#) by Jessika von Innerebner
4. [Mary Had a Little Glam](#) by Tammi Sauer
5. [Neither](#) by Airlie Anderson

Separately, did you know that in classical Greek theater, in the Kathakali form in India, Noh Theatre in Japan, and in the English Elizabethan Theatre, women were not allowed to perform? So, in addition to the clear gender-based discrimination here, drag performance was celebrated. On the one hand, you could argue that these cultures were repressive against women. These repressions created a whole genre of drag artists. Both the repression of women and the creation of new art forms are all part of our history and heritage of theater and storytelling. And these were the most classical forms of theater you can imagine in multiple cultures around the world. So, one could easily argue we were going back to the roots of theater and storytelling—nothing new here really. Storytelling is about stimulating the imagination of all age groups.

The Connection's article on Drag Story Hour gives added perspective on the importance of how these events can change a community for the better: <http://www.mcleanconnection.com/news/2021/jul/09/celebrating-rainbow-families-and-inclusion-mclean/>

I believe you attended the event with your children, correct? What did you like about the event? How do you think it could have been better?

Yes, I attended. Both my children and I would have had a much better event if the artists were not put in such an awkward position, and if we had not been harassed by folks as we were going to my car. The artists were amazing, it was such a lost opportunity for all the families that were present.

Were the Drag Queens artists in attendance local to this area?

Yes, the Drag Artists are all local to the area.

Do you have any future Drag Queen Story hours planned?

We will definitely be looking into all options that encourage kids to feel nurtured in McLean.

I saw many other Pride Month events on the library and MCC Facebook pages, but not this one. Why?

The event was posted on both FCPL's and MCC's websites. The event registrations were filled quickly after being advertised. We did not want to get hopes up that folks could get into a sold-out event—that's why we didn't advertise them. Had this event not been sabotaged, we would have had a great opportunity to teach children how to connect and celebrate each other.

Also, similar programs have been previously offered by FCPL in 2020. FCPL and other county agencies in addition to MCC offered Pride Month events in June 2021. The Fairfax Parks also did a virtual teen Open Mic, and these pride celebrations were meant to lift up and support the LGBTQ+ community. As you know, LGBTQ+ teens are five times more likely to commit suicide because of social rejection by families/communities or because of bullying. We see our efforts as a joint path forward to prevent the trauma of being perceived as different for something that is a natural aspect of 10% of our population, and one that should be celebrated.

Continued remarks by Mr. Henzel: By the way, when will the MCC release the minutes of the July 15 MCC board meeting? There seems to be a similar lack of transparency with the board's handling of this meeting we are having right now. When I learned about the meeting at 4:30 pm today, I phoned the MCC immediately. I was told that the meeting had been "publicly announced" three days ago. I pointed out that I was looking at the MCC website as we spoke, and as of 4:30 there was nothing listed on the board's calendar for today. Similarly under the section of the governing board's page that lists plenary meetings, there was no mention of today's meeting. The person on the phone helpfully checked the website, agreed that was correct, and stated that this was probably a mistake, and went on to point out that tonight's plenary meeting of the board is listed at the bottom of the page, under the "committee meetings" heading. I responded that this is a plenary meeting, not a committee meeting. The MCC staffer agreed, and said the web page needs to be adjusted. In addition, I understand the agenda for this meeting was not posted on the MCC website until a few hours ago. The meeting we are in right now almost took place without effective public notice. Is it a coincidence that the purpose of this snap meeting is to change the rules on public participation in MCC board meetings?



To conclude: during the July 15 meeting I asked when the board would have a public discussion of the June drag performances. The chair stated that the board would have a public discussion, but could not say when. At the board's July 28 meeting, I asked the same question, and got the same answer. So again, I ask the chair, when will the board have a public discussion on this, and make clear to Fairfax taxpayers how much more the MCC will spend on drag performances for children? Thank you.

If they endorse the performance: Judging from the comments from the MCC governing board, it is clear to me that the board is doubling down, and endorsing the use of taxpayer dollars to fund drag performances for small children. Not only has the board decided to ignore the objections of many members of the community, it has declared its intention to use more money for more performances. We taxpayers all need to make sure our neighbors know what the MCC board of governors is doing with our tax dollars. We should work together to defund the MCC.

If they equivocate: The MCC governing board seems to be dodging this issue. The question is very simple – will you spend more money on drag queen performances for children. Why are you trying to avoid answering? If you believe that what you did was a good thing, then why aren't you proud of it and saying so? Instead you are avoiding giving an answer. Is that because you are ashamed of what you did? Be transparent about the use of taxpayer dollars. And if you did something you're not willing to discuss in public, then admit your mistake and undertake never to do it again.

2. Kathleen Gillette Mallard: Thank you for this opportunity to speak again. As Chris just mentioned, I found out about this meeting at 4:45 pm. Holly, thank you for your professional, courteous support, always. It is most appreciated. I spoke at the previous meeting. Yes – there is frustration. Sometimes that frustration comes across in ways that we do not deem as civil. We understand you all can't respond in these meetings. But it is of concern. Many citizens are concerned – Chris and I are here representing 30 people because we are concerned about this ability to provide public comment. Hopefully it will be under civil conditions. It has to be – we have to be polite and courteous. But people will not be polite and courteous if people feel like they are being pushed out. I'm so glad you all will be discussing it further. I'm representing a question from someone not here: We are concerned that you will be changing the protocols without citizen input. MCC exists because of the generosity of McLean taxpayers. Any change should be submitted to taxpayers before being adopted. We ask that you submit such proposal to taxpayers by announcing such proposal on your website on any venue. We respectfully ask that you acknowledge that the public have input before you approve these new protocols.

ADJOURNMENT Chair Zamora-Appel thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Holly Novak – Executive Assistant to the Governing Board