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Thursday, September 13, 2012

**Multnomah County Board of Commissioners**

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**Issues surrounding the proposed  
Multnomah County Library District**

Testimony at a board meeting,  
Thursday, September 13, 2012

**Conflicts of interest** There are two conflicts of interest concerning library funding that seem important to understand.

**Non-profit organizations** Three non-profit organizations support the Multnomah County library system:

Friends of the Library	friends-library.org
Libraries YES!	librariesyes.com
The Library Foundation	libraryfoundation.org

If ever there is permanent funding, if Multnomah County stops bringing library levies for voter approval every 3 to 5 years, a major reason for voters to give money to those organizations disappears.

**Political consultant Liz Kaufman** The Oregonian writer Dana Tims <dtims@oregonian.com>, in an article titled, “*Library supporters ramp up election message*”, said political consultant Liz Kaufman will use \$400,000 to advertise for permanent funding for the library. As the article says, there has been no permanent funding for the last 36 years.

(That July 2012 Oregonian article was not published online, and, surprisingly, none of the pages in the section of the newspaper in which the article appeared are dated. It says only “*Community News*” and “*Volume 812, Issue 2.*”)

According to that article, Liz Kaufman has “*directed 4 of those campaigns*” for library funding. If the present library campaign for permanent funding is successful, she will no longer make money from directing library funding campaigns. There is no intent to imply she has done anything incorrect. The issue is just that she is hired to promote the library district, but will conceivably make more money if the library district fails.

**Could advertising be more efficient?** Suppose there was no conflict of interest, suppose there was an efficient intent to get permanent funding, how could things be different? It seems that there could be inexpensive, low-level methods of convincing voters that it is in their self-interest to have permanent funding.

I've written sample notices; they are below. The notices could be emailed or printed and given to neighbors, for example. It would be easy to produce others. Digital copies are available on our web site at: [futurepower.net/communication/library](http://futurepower.net/communication/library)

Why have none of the agencies involved with the library produced notices for every library patron to circulate? Possibly that method could save most of the \$400,000, for example, which could then be used to support the library system.

Whatever the situation, 36 years without permanent funding is a fact. Why that has been accomplished in a metropolitan area so intensely interested in books needs to be understood.

## **If you don't read books, why support libraries?**

Like digital TV? Digital TV was designed by people who read books.

Drive an automobile? Autos are much more efficient and reliable now because of the efforts of people who read books.

Have healthy children? Vaccines are created by people who read books.

Easy access to books supports those who teach themselves. Those who teach themselves support continued improvements in our lives.

## **Vote for the Multnomah County Library District, November 2012.**

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## **Want prosperity? Support libraries.**

In the early 1900s, Andrew Carnegie gave his money to start 1,795 libraries. Those libraries are one of the reasons the U.S. experienced decades of prosperity.

We have had better leaders partly because those who think they might like to be leaders are able to educate themselves with easy access to books.

We have had social progress partly because those who want improvements can find information about others who feel the same way.

We have had scientific progress partly because those who want to think like scientists can teach themselves scientific methods by reading about famous scientists. (Wikipedia: List of Carnegie libraries in the US)

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**Call for a thorough financial review** For many years, there have been hints that the Multnomah County library system is being guided in a way that is, at minimum, not efficient.

Suppose someone donates a book that everyone agrees is valuable, but the book is not in the library's collection. A rule has been established that the library system cannot add a donated book to the library's collection. A rule has been established that the library will give donated books to the *Friends of the Library* organization mentioned above, which will *sell* the books, usually for much less than their cost. Again, money goes to an outside agency, rather than the library directly.

Instead of accepting donations directly the library pays, for every book added to the collection, the cost of the book *plus* what I have been told is more than \$30, an amount far, far greater than the cost of a computer chip and cover reinforcement.

For some reason, a book preparation agency is making huge amounts of money to prepare books for the library. Why? Whenever I ask library employees, I get the impression they have been strongly discouraged from discussing the subject.

When I talk with library employees, I get the impression that they are strictly controlled, given insufficient explanation, and that leading the library system is not shared. I'm not claiming those impressions are accurate, I'm merely saying they have been my impressions over a period of many years.

A Multnomah Country resident who previously was head librarian of the Sunnyvale, California library told me, entirely independently of anything I've said here, that there should be an investigation, an independent review, of how the Multnomah Country library system is managed. That made me more confident in mentioning these things.

### **Conclusions:**

**1)** Permanent library funding, establishing a library district, avoids conflict of interest. Permanent funding is more than an arrangement that should come to the attention of voters, it is necessary for good management.

**2)** Taxpayers should fund the library system, but they deserve assurance that the money is used carefully. There should be a thorough financial review of the Multnomah County library system.

I don't think I fully understand the library system; I have the impression that there could be improvements in operating efficiency.

Respectfully,

**Michael Jennings**