

Friends of the Knox County Public Library Regarding the Library Advisory Board

On October 24, County Commission, at the request of Mayor Ragsdale, will vote on a bill that would permanently eliminate the Board of Trustees that once governed the Knox County Public Library. The present law, which created a temporary Library Advisory Board to offset the hiring debacle of a new library administrator in 2003, is due to sunset in April 2006. A new law would instead extend the advisory board status *in perpetuity*. This proposed law has passed the state legislature, been signed by the governor, and awaits ratification by Knox County Commissioners.

Citizens of Knox County will remember that the former Board of Trustees refused to hire the candidate proposed by its own search committee, seeking instead to advance the candidacy of one of its own members. For its part, the present Advisory Board is also characterized by negativity: apathy about attendance at monthly meetings; refusal to meet and work with the mayor and library staffs; and inappropriate, behind-the-scene attempts to manage the library staff.

In an attempt to bring clarity and integrity to the debate, the Friends of the Library offer the following perspective. We staunchly support the vision and work of Larry Frank and the staff and mission of the Knox County Public Library. Because of the great strides achieved by the library system under Mr. Frank's leadership, we feel that changing the structure now would be disruptive to continuing progress. As well, the Friends support an advisory board because its foundation is elected officials. Both a county mayor and commissioners are answerable to citizens at the ballot box and therefore a vital part of democracy.

We also believe that the citizens of Knox County deserve qualified and cooperative board members. Members should be advocates, not detractors, for the public library; should be committed in time and energy to attend meetings and become informed about library matters; and should have a record of working openly and well with others.

Based on recommendations from the FOL-sponsored public meeting concerning the library board's role held in March of this year, the Friends also strongly endorse the following changes to the structure of the board:

Increase the number of members to 11 or 13, these at-large seats to be appointed by the mayor.

Establish clear terms for members, with a typical term being three years and not more than one consecutive term.

Despite on-going and formidable budgetary challenges, our library system continues to deliver the most popular of all county services. Citizens can review a summary of its impressive progress in the 2005 Annual Report posted at www.knoxlib.org. With our top elected official directly responsible for the Knox County Library System, we feel confident that the future will hold continued success. An informed, hard-working and dedicated Advisory Board can be of great help in this work. We strongly recommend that the County Commission vote to perpetuate the Library Advisory Board.

Submitted by the Friends of the Knox County Library
Maggie Carini, President
October 12, 2005