

2007 Birmingham Library Board Candidate Forum

What do you believe the Board's role is in overseeing the library's day-to-day operations and its long-term planning?

A. Conigliaro: The role of the Board is to oversee the fiscal and operational management of the Library and assist in the development of both short and long-term planning. This should not, but often is, confused with the daily operations of the Library. Baldwin has a competent, talented and experienced staff that manages the day to day operations. The Board acts as the eyes and ears of the public in determining the needs of the community, and uses this input to advise on matters of strategic and fiscal management.

M. Earl: The Library Board is, as defined by its charter, a "governing Board." As such, the Board has four primary responsibilities: To approve a strategic plan that steers the future direction of the library; establish policies that are consistent with the mission of the Library; assure the organization has the necessary resources to carry out its mission; evaluate and hold the library director accountable for the operational performance of the library.

J. Heinicke: The Board's role is to partner with the director to that end. The board does this through policy making and carefully spending public monies. The Director is the detail person, but all parties need to keep open communication to see that intent is met. The process is complicated and as few of the requirements and guidelines are open meeting and parliamentary procedures.

D. Underdown: While day to day management operations are performed by the Director and the staff, it is the Board who has to be ultimately accountable to the community. The Board does this by setting policy and by being involved in long term planning. I believe the Board sets the tone and provides the leadership to ensure that the residents of Birmingham receive the state-of-art library services.

What is your view on the space that the library currently occupies and its future plan for growth?

A. Conigliaro: I believe that Baldwin sorely needs a facelift. It is challenged with an undersized facility and increasing needs of the community. The challenge is to find a way to financially support renovations and upgrading to meet the demographics of the neighborhood it resides in. Most of us, as residents of Birmingham would not live with the “wear and tear” that the Library currently has. I believe that starting with the lower level and using existing assets not gained through a tax increase is both wise and prudent.

M. Earl: The Baldwin Library facility has the same “foot print” today that it had in 1980. Meanwhile, the utilization of the library has increased 100% in the past five years. Current renovations will help to maximize existing space. A thoughtful, fiscally responsible plan should be developed to address the long-term needs of the community for its library facility.

D. Underdown: The building appears warm and the services are restricted by the current building size. Some areas are very busy at times. However, my observation is that most of the time the present building serves the community well. Updating and smart space usage is constantly being thought about and improvements are being made to make the building usage the best it can be.

What is special about what our library offers compared to other local libraries?

A. Conigliaro: Baldwin is warm, inviting and rewarding. There is literally something for everyone in the programs, the collections and systems that endears it to the public. The same neighborhood reasons that people choose to live in Birmingham are reflected on the Library. Other newer facilities are cold and often confusing. In Baldwin, you feel as if you are at home.

M. Earl: The uniqueness of the Baldwin Library is driven by its success in meeting the expectations of Birmingham residents who are typically better educated than those in the surrounding communities. Since its founding in 1874, the Baldwin Library has continued its tradition of tailoring its collection, staff, and services to the distinctive needs of the residents of Birmingham. The World Cinema collection, the ratio of professional librarians on staff, and the range of services (a proposed support group for Au Pairs) are specific examples that differentiate the Baldwin Library from other local libraries.

J. Henicke: Baldwin Public Library is an anchor and service center, a community center that Birmingham has grown up around. The Baldwin Public Library is a landmark destination basic to the core of Birmingham that its citizens are proud of. The Baldwin Public Library is fulfilling the challenge of being a neutral purveyor of information and services for its patrons.

D. Underdown: Our library offers a very personalized and customized service and is very highly used by our well educated community. Efforts are made to satisfy those special needs for our patrons. This is not a one size fits all operation. The needs of the patrons are to be considered.

What distinguishes you from the other candidates?

A. Conigliaro: I feel that my contribution lies in my business and people skills as a professional in Human Resource Management. I listen well and respond professionally, rather than emotionally. Whether the challenges are echoed from the public or Board differences among themselves, I believe in teamwork. There is a professional manner in which a group should act without individual recognition.

J. Henicke: I have been on the Board since 2003. Attended 2 years previously and have been a member of the Louise B. Sak parliamentary unit here in Birmingham.

M. Earl: For the past 27 years I have been employed by Oakland Family Services, a nationally accredited non-profit organization in Oakland County. As President/CEO for the past 10 years, my experience includes: policy and Board development; fiscal management of an \$8.2 million budget; personnel management of more than 200 staff; strategic planning, as well as implementing literacy programs for pre-school children in Birmingham and throughout Oakland County.

D. Underdown: I've been very fortunate to have been involved with many fine organizations and smart talented people. I have over 42 years of experience working and managing our family business. I have a business education from U of D and MSU Advanced Management Program.