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MEMORANDUM  
Harvey Ruvin  
Clerk of the Circuit and County Courts  
Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners  
Miami-Dade County, Florida  
(305) 375-5126  
(305) 375-2484 FAX  
www.miami-dadeclerk.com

CRC  
Agenda Item No. 6(B)

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**TO:** Honorable Chairman Javier D. Souto  
and Members, Cultural Affairs and  
Recreation Committee

**DATE:** October 7, 2013

**FROM:** Christopher Agrippa  
Division Chief, Clerk of the Board Division

**SUBJECT:** Approval of Commission  
Committee Minutes

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The Clerk of the Board's office is submitting the following Clerk's Summary of Minutes for approval by the Cultural Affairs and Recreation Committee:

August 7, 2013

CA/kk  
Attachment



**MIAMI-DADE COUNTY  
FINAL OFFICIAL MINUTES  
Cultural Affairs and Recreation Committee (CRC)**

**Board of County Commissioners**  
Stephen P. Clark Government Center  
Commission Chambers  
111 N.W. First Street  
Miami, Florida 33128

August 7, 2013  
As Advertised

Harvey Ruvin, Clerk  
Board of County Commissioners

Christopher Agrippa, Division Chief  
Clerk of the Board Division

Kerry Khunjar, Commission Reporter  
(305) 375-5108





Stephen P. Clark  
Government Center  
111 N.W. 1st Street  
Miami, FL 33128

## CLERK'S SUMMARY OF

### Meeting Minutes

#### Cultural Affairs & Recreation Committee

Javier D. Souto (10) Chair; Barbara J. Jordan (1) Vice Chair; Commissioners Jean Monestime (2) and Xavier L. Suarez (7)

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Wednesday, August 7, 2013

9:30 AM

Commissioner Chambers

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**Members Present:** Sen. Javier D. Souto, Xavier L. Suarez.

**Members Absent:** Barbara J. Jordan.

**Members Late:** Jean Monestime 9:40:00 AM.

**Members Excused:** None.

**Members Absent County Business:** None.

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**1 MINUTES PREPARED BY:**

**Report:** *Kerry Khunjar, Commission Reporter (305) 375-5108*

**1A INVOCATION AS PROVIDED IN RULE 5.05**  
**(G)**

**1B ROLL CALL**

**Report:** *In addition to the members of the Committee, the following staff members were also present:  
~Senior Advisor to the Mayor Lisa Martinez  
~Assistant County Attorneys Miguel Gonzalez and Daniel Frastai  
~Deputy Clerks Jovel Shaw and Kerry Khunjar*

**1C PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**1D DISCUSSION ITEM**

1D1

131558 Discussion Item Sen. Javier D. Souto  
DISCUSSION RE: OPTIONS FOR THE CLOSURE OF  
COUNTY LIBRARIES

**Report:** *Chairman Souto welcomed and thanked the audience and Commissioner Suarez for attending today's (8/7) "special" Cultural Affairs and Recreation Committee (CRC) Meeting. He shared his hopes that other Committee members would soon join the meeting.*

*Chairman Souto stated the purpose of today's (8/7) meeting was to hear from Miami-Dade residents regarding the proposed and impending library closures due to budgetary restrictions.*

*Chairman Souto welcomed Commissioner Monestime.*

*Chairman Souto provided a brief overview of the duties of the CRC and explained while the CRC was entrusted with many responsibilities such as overseeing all matters pertaining to parks, libraries, museums and cultural facilities as well as liaising with entities such as Vizcaya Museum and Gardens and Zoo Miami; overseeing the management of the library system was one of the most important assignments of the Committee.*

*Chairman Souto stated it was his intent to hear from the residents and the County Administration regarding options and alternatives to the proposed library closures so that the best decisions would be made in September at the final budget hearing.*

*Chairman Souto voiced his optimism and high hopes that the Mayor and the County Administration would find an acceptable and satisfactory resolution to the issue. He offered the assistance and support of the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) and noted that he and his colleagues were willing to work with the Mayor and his staff in resolving the matter.*

*Chairman Souto noted while the BCC votes were divided regarding the issue of the millage, his decision to vote to keep the property-tax rate flat came as a result of him following the wishes of his constituents to not have any further tax increases.*

*Chairman Souto reiterated his commitment to listening to the community and invited today's*

*(8/7) meeting attendees and all other concerned residents to attend and share their feelings and opinions regarding the proposed library closures at any of the six public hearing forums to be held throughout the County. He also noted the 1st Budget Committee of the Whole Meeting would be held at the end of the month (8/26).*

*He quoted Winston Churchill's famous dictum that "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others" as he offered an explanation regarding the often times complicated, cumbersome, time consuming and difficult processes and procedures associated with government decisions.*

*Chairman Souto concluded by noting today's (8/7) forum was an attempt to get different views and ideas by "thinking outside the box". He stressed it was the aim of the Committee to offer Miami Dade County the best government and quality of life available.*

*Commissioner Suarez thanked Chairman Souto for affording him this opportunity to be heard. He drew reference to the frequent reminders from Commissioner Monestime that society was judged as it treats the most vulnerable. (an adaptation of a Hubert Humprey quote)*

*Commissioner Suarez commended Ms Lisa Martinez, Senior Advisor to the Mayor, for all her hard work thus far and noted based on a recent report, progress appears to have been made in the right direction.*

*He read the latest updated list of libraries spared closures into the record. Ms. Martinez confirmed the list provided to Commissioner Suarez was the latest revised version but also stressed it was by no means the last and final list.*

*Commissioner Suarez read the following updates for the record:*

*~ The five municipal branch libraries located in Verrick Park, Shenandoah, Culmer, Little River and Lemon City previously marked for closure would stay open.*

*~ The following branch libraries Allapattah, Edison, Sunny Isles, Miami Beach Regional, Miami Spring, West Flagler, Coral Gables, Pinecrest, Coconut Grove, South Miami and Palmetto Bay would also remain open.*

~ The future of storefront libraries continued to be a source of concern. He noted only one storefront library location, Lakes of the Meadows, previously slated for closure was spared.

~ The following county owned libraries would remain open: North Dade Regional, North Central, Arcola Lakes, North East (Sub Regional), Main, Hispanic, Kendall, Key Biscayne, South Dade Regional, Homestead, Coral Reef, Naranja, West Dade Regional, Kendale Lakes, International Mall and Miami Lakes. He noted Golden Glades, Civic Center Kiosk, Model City and South Shore were all still on the proposed closure list.

~ Out of six branch libraries identified for closure, two would now remain open – namely the Opa-locka and North Shore libraries.

Commissioner Suarez commented he believed with continued pressure from the BCC and with the leadership of the Committee Chairman Javier Souto and BCC Chairwoman Rebeca Sosa even more libraries would be removed from the "closure" list. He acknowledged that great headway had been made to date and voiced his optimism that even more libraries would be saved particularly the storefront locations.

Commissioner Suarez pointed out that approximately 10 storefront libraries continued to be slated for closure but he was confident these libraries would be saved by implementing some of the recommendations made by BCC Chairwoman Sosa in her July 25th memorandum titled "Suggestions regarding the current Budget process."

Reading from BCC Chairwoman's memorandum, Commissioner Suarez highlighted the following recommendations and voiced his hopes that the County Administration would implement some of the suggestions:

~ Renegotiation of leases for libraries slated for closure and/or relocate existing leased/storefront libraries to County-owned, municipal or school facilities through inter-local agreements with government entities. (Commissioner Suarez noted that inter-local agreements were the reason all of City of Miami facilities remained open. He pointed out that these inter-local agreements were rent free which translated into immense savings.)

~ Examine staffing needs per location to minimize closures.

~ Examine patrons' use of facilities for Wi-Fi and computers versus printed material checkout. (Commissioner Suarez informed the Committee that 25 percent of Miami-Dade County residents did not have personal access to internet, with the percentage being higher in poorer communities. He stated it was of utmost importance to ensure the safety of library facilities offering computer and internet services to the community.)

~ Expand use of mobile library units that are Wi-Fi-capable. (Commissioner Suarez commented that this was a great recommendation particularly in light of the size of the community.)

~ Explore possible revenue-generating partnerships. (Commissioner Suarez stated it was his belief that if given the opportunity, the developers and property owners of many of the storefront library locations would be amenable to "adopting" or "sponsoring" the storefront library resulting in free or reduced rent and utility costs.)

~ Adjust library operating schedules.

~ Explore additional grant opportunities.

Commissioner Suarez concluded by thanking and commending BCC Chairwoman Sosa and the County Administration for all their efforts thus far regarding the resolution of the issue. He voiced his hopes that as a result of this special Committee meeting and the combined efforts of the Board of County Commissioners and the County Administration, all the libraries would be saved from closure. He noted some concessions, such as the location of some storefront libraries may have to be made but this would ensure their safety and continued service to the community.

Chairman Souto welcomed BCC Chairwoman Sosa to today's (8/7) Special CRC Meeting.

BCC Chairwoman Sosa stated that she was present at today's (8/7) Special meeting as a show of support to Committee Chairman Souto's endeavors to save the libraries from closure. She thanked Commissioner Suarez for reviewing and reading her memorandum to Mayor Gimenez dated 7/25/2013 into the record.

BCC Chairwoman Sosa conveyed her hopes that

*the County Administration and the Mayor would find a solution to this issue that would be fair and beneficial to the community. She noted due to the economic recession and its impact in Miami-Dade County, many residents had made personal sacrifices to ensure the survival of their families and called for a similar approach to this problem.*

*Speaking as a teacher, BCC Chairwoman Sosa noted the impact libraries made on children, senior citizens and society as a whole. She stated libraries were a part of the development of a healthy, intelligent, resourceful and professional community.*

*BCC Chairwoman Sosa reiterated the importance of renegotiating storefront library leases. She pointed out most of the buildings used for the storefront library locations suffered from poor leasing and had many empty storefronts. Chairwoman Sosa stated she believed the owners of shopping centers would be amenable to working with the Library Systems if they were made aware of the fact that the library would have to leave the property due to high rental leases and utility costs, thus creating more empty space and less traffic to the property.*

*BCC Chairwoman Sosa highlighted the need to modify the current library operations practice in order to save the system and keep libraries open. She discussed options like using classrooms in schools to house library locations as well as relocating some libraries from their current location to another property, one or two blocks away that would translate to savings due to lower overhead costs.*

*BCC Chairwoman Sosa reiterated the importance of modifying the current library system in order to ensure its future survival. She repeated her support to the cause and thanked Committee Chairman Souto and Commissioner Suarez for calling today's (8/7) special meeting and placing her memorandum to the Mayor on the record. She recapped the recommendations listed in her July 25th memorandum to the Mayor and voiced her confidence that an acceptable budget would be reached through hard work. BCC Chairwoman Sosa shared her optimism that the Library System would continue to benefit the community for many years to come.*

*Commissioner Monestime congratulated BCC*

*Chairwoman Sosa on a well delivered commencement speech at the Florida International University (FIU) Graduation Ceremony.*

*Commissioner Monestime asked Ms. Martinez when an updated closure list would be available.*

*Ms. Martinez informed Commissioner Monestime that an update would be available sometime next week but it would be difficult for her to give an exact date due to the ongoing efforts to resolve the issue.*

*In response to Commissioner Monestime's inquiry regarding the number of libraries on the proposed closure list excluding storefront locations, Ms. Martinez stated that she did not have that information with her but she would be sure to forward it as soon as it became available. Additionally, she noted while many of the remaining libraries on the closure list were storefronts, this did not mean that they would be closed. Ms. Martinez explained renegotiation of storefront leases as well as other deciding factors would play a vital role as to which storefront libraries would ultimately be recommended for closure. She pointed out it was the County Administration intent to not leave any "gaps" in service.*

*Commissioner Monestime stated while he spoke in support of keeping all library locations open he was particularly concerned about the future of the Golden Glades Library located in Commission District 2. He informed the Committee that the Golden Glades Library was built approximately 10 years ago and should not be confused for a storefront library.*

*Commissioner Monestime also echoed the concerns of a parent, noting libraries were often times a place of "refuge" for children not in school and that this "refuge" should not be taken away from them. He applauded the County Administration for their ongoing efforts and acknowledged the creative approach taken in an attempt to explore all avenues so as to ensure no libraries were closed.*

*Commissioner Monestime noted the recession was not over and it was not the time for lay-offs due to library closures. He concluded by expressing his optimism that a favorable resolution would be reached in the next few weeks resulting in libraries*

remaining open.

Chairman Souto reminded members of the audience wishing to address the Committee regarding this issue to register before approaching the podium to speak.

Ms. Martinez addressed the Committee regarding the work being done and processes being followed by the County Administration in an attempt to resolve this issue. She informed the Committee that for several years the library millage rate was bringing in more money than was needed for library operations thus creating a surplus. She explained in an attempt to provide taxpayers some relief and to work towards establishing a millage rate that would address the operating needs of the Library Department, the millage rate was reduced. Ms. Martinez further explained the Library System managed to stay afloat over the past few years through the identification of operating efficiencies as well as through the use of the surplus millage funds accrued over past years to offset costs.

Ms. Martinez informed the Committee the accumulated surplus funds were no longer available and the 2013/2014 anticipated budget for library system was considerably less than the current year's budget. She pointed out the list of proposed library closures shared by the County Administration in July reflected the worst case scenario but through ongoing efforts over the last 2 weeks the County Administration had identified solutions which allowed them to remove a minimum of 35 libraries from said list.

Ms. Martinez reviewed the following Mayor's directives to the County Administration in the development of solutions:

1. Protection of the library district footprint;
2. Protect program offerings;
3. Do not do it alone. The mayor charged staff to work with the District County Commissioners, Cities, Community Partners and Stakeholders before finalization of any recommendations.

Ms. Martinez noted the County Administration had been following the Mayor's directives and guidelines and provided an update of efforts. She informed the Committee that staff was working across several departments such as the Library Department, Office of Management and Budget and the Internal Services Department in an

*attempt to conduct a thorough analysis of the library department's budget. She stated that progress had been made and the analysis should be completed by the end of the week.*

*Additionally, Ms. Martinez informed the Committee members that the Library Department along with the Internal Services Department were both working together to renegotiate storefront library leases. She acknowledged that storefront libraries were valuable assets to the community and the County Administration did not want to make any final decisions until progress was made regarding lease renegotiations.*

*Ms. Martinez stated personnel costs accounted for the bulk of the operating budget. She shared with the Committee that the Administration was exploring and discussing various staffing level scenarios in an attempt to address this aspect of the issue.*

*Ms. Martinez stressed it was of utmost importance that everyone be aware that the staff was approaching the problem from different angles and that no final decisions had been made. She noted staff was working strategically in accessing recommended library location areas and was also considering a cluster approach which took into account resident's accessibility to neighboring libraries as possible scheduling scenarios were explored.*

*Ms. Martinez stated staff assessed door counts, identified popular programs and considered the services made available to the community at each library location as a part of the final recommendation process. She noted in keeping with the Mayor's directives, the County Administration was not taking solo responsibility for this task. She highlighted the ongoing meetings and conversations with District County Commissioners, Municipalities, Community Organizations and Local Funders.*

*Ms. Martinez ensured the Committee and members of the audience that library schedule recommendations would not be finalized until all discussions were concluded. She informed the Committee that staff was working closely with "Friends of the Library", the advocacy group responsible for fund raising. In addition to working with "Friends of the Library," she pointed out that staff met weekly to discuss and finalize an updated plan that would maximize fund*

development opportunities on behalf of the library system.

Ms. Martinez noted in addition to the current library system's website being revamped, work on an "app" (application software) was almost complete. She explained the new "app" would allow users to access many features of the library system's website. Ms. Martinez noted staff was working on solutions that would benefit all the residents of the community, including those with and without access to technologies such as I-pads and smart phones.

In an attempt to explore all viable options, Ms. Martinez stated staff was "stepping out of their comfort zone" in order to come up with new and creative ways to bring programming to the community and expand current partnerships.

Ms. Martinez drew the Committee's attention to the development and launch of the Technology Learning Centers throughout 11 Miami-Dade County Parks. She explained this initiative was an example of how the County through the provision of services at parks could meet the community's need for computers, technology training and Wi-Fi access which was previously only provided at libraries. Ms. Martinez stated staff would continue to assess needs within the community that were currently being met by the Library System and find additional ways to satisfy these needs.

Ms. Martinez commented that finding a solution to this issue of library closures was a work in progress and would continue well past October, the beginning of the new fiscal year. As a representative of the Mayor, Ms. Martinez voiced her commitment to exploring all viable options brought to the County Administration's attention. She promised to continue conversations and to foster the strengthening of relationships for the future.

Chairman Souto opened the public hearing and called for persons wishing to be heard. The following person appeared in opposition of the proposed library closures.

1. Helen McCray, 10744 SW 144th Street, Miami FL 33176, informed the Committee members that she was retired from the County Library System after 39 years of service. She expressed her dismay regarding the current financial state of the system. Ms. McCray said she

was disheartened by the idea of libraries being turned into and treated as homework and technology centers. She stated she chose a profession in the Library System so that she could make a difference in the community and spoke about her personal struggles as a single mother taking evening classes at the University of South Florida Extension Program and how she used what she learned to teach and guide library users.

She acknowledged her presence at today's (8/7) special meeting was not about telling her story, but about telling the story of a library user seeking assistance from librarians and library staff. She pointed out the majority of library users did not possess the knowledge to properly express what they were looking for, and showed how the librarian and staff employed professionalism, training and customer service to properly guide these users to what they needed. She recounted her personal experiences throughout the years and shared stories of students not knowing and needing her assistance as she explained the difference between bibliographies and biographies or the difference between the APA writing style versus the MLA writing style.

Ms. McCray stressed volunteers and automated services could never replace the vast knowledge and one on one services provided by librarians to library users. She pointed out that while libraries offer the public computer and internet access, often times it was the librarians who taught and explained how to use these computers and access the internet to first time users.

Ms. McCray spoke about the constant threat of closure faced by library staff and noted that library usage increased in times of economic hardships. She talked about the role libraries play in economic recovery and stated library closures and cutbacks impact programs that would otherwise help underprivileged and underserved families and the community.

Ms. McCray noted the variety of roles libraries play in society – a preschooler's first glimpse into the world of learning; a first time computer user's classroom; a bookstore to families unable to afford school books; but most important libraries remain a place where someone who simply enjoyed reading an actual "book" instead of using an e-book or tablet could visit.

2. Patricia Martinez, 6427 Windmill Gate Road, Miami Lakes FL 33014, acknowledged the tendency for numbers and figures to be cold and impersonal particularly when utilized incorrectly. She stated her intent was to provide additional statistical information regarding the Library System that would hopefully add perspective to the situation. Ms. Martinez noted in addition to the already known figures of 22 branch libraries slated for closure and 251 librarians at risk of losing their jobs, the Committee should also be made aware of the fact that the Miami Dade Library System served approximately 2.5 million residents and in 2012, the system not only saw increased visits but also loaned approximately 7 million items to members.

Ms. Martinez pointed out the majority of taxpayers under the current millage tax rate paid no more than \$20.00 to \$25.00 yearly into the Library System, the equivalent cost of one hard covered book. She informed the Committee that her personal contribution to the Library System decreased from approximately \$100.00 in 2009 to approximately \$23.00 in 2012 – a staggering 75 percent decrease. In an attempt to add perspective and context to the numbers Ms. Martinez highlighted the fact that the majority of taxpayers nominal contribution to the system, (the price of one hard covered book) afforded an individual as well as the community access to millions of books, magazines, DVDs, CDs, Electronic books (E-books) and other computer resources – a priceless return on their investment.

Ms. Martinez spoke about the importance of a library to the community; she stated a library was not just a building, but a place that fostered personal connections and resources critical to the development of an educated society. Ms. Martinez told the Committee the library system was an integrated network that would suffer even if one aspect of the system was cut.

She also stressed the fact that libraries were not homework or technology centers and should not be treated as such. Ms. Martinez recognized the Library system needed to introduce new technology in order to keep up and advance in today's world but recommended a slow and careful integration into the current system.

Ms. Martinez continued to address the Committee with regards to the library's steps at introducing technology into the system. She stated

anyone claiming "the age of the library was ending" was unaware of what was actually transpiring in the system. She re-visited the statistical information she provided to the Committee earlier and clarified out of the 7 million items borrowed by library patrons in 2012, almost 3 million were children's books, while only 700,000 were e-books and electronic resources. Ms. Martinez pointed out the library currently spent between \$75.00 to \$130.00 on e-books, which impacts the cost of a regular book. In addition to the staggering costs of e-books, she explained e-book rentals were treated in the same manner as a traditional rental, meaning only one person could "check out" an e-book at any given time.

Ms. Martinez indicated the library's current investment in e-books did not produce a good expense ratio return particularly since it was a resource that could not be accessed by everyone in the community. She continued to say the library's continued investment in e-books presupposed two things. Ms. Martinez explained the first assumption was the library's ability to afford these purchases even with a slashed materials budget. She pointed out half the existing materials budget was used for electronic databases leaving the library's budget for new children and adult materials virtually non-existent.

The second presumption according to Ms. Martinez was the idea that the entire community had access to e-books and electronic resources and had thus conquered the digital divide. She highlighted the fact that public schools did not provide students with tablets so the notion that textbooks would be made available to all students electronically was a misstatement.

Ms. Martinez presented additional figures to the Committee for consideration. She stated today's library system was a result of 40 years of careful and strategic planning and development with a focus on meeting the community's needs. She indicated while she was an advocate for saving as many libraries as possible from the "closures" list, she did not support operating them on a limited schedule. Ms. Martinez indicated 2pm to 6pm operating hours were not a viable option for the majority of the library users particularly working families and those using the internet facilities to find jobs or file paperwork. She emphasized the proposed

modification of hours would not meet the community needs. Ms. Martinez indicated she understood the limitations facing the County Administration but voiced her opposition regarding operating libraries as homework centers.

Ms. Martinez noted 251 librarians were in danger of losing their jobs and the negative financial impact this would have on an individual as well as community level. She pointed out as a federal employee she was also subject to furloughs and pay cuts and could identify with the majority of the community managing under tighter budgets. Ms. Martinez asked the Committee to think about the impact of losing a source of income would mean to the community. She pointed out this loss of income would mean many families would no longer be able to pay their mortgages or rent much less for property taxes. Ms. Martinez contended the voices of the 251 librarians and their families should matter just as much as the 51 percent of residents who responded via the "robo-call" for no additional tax.

Ms. Martinez stated the Mayor's proposal to staff libraries through the use of volunteers and "apps" was insulting to librarians. She pointed out librarians were among the lowest paid professionals requiring a Master's Degree.

Ms. Martinez concluded by making an impassioned plea to the Committee to stop thinking of libraries as a frill or luxury item and to keep them open for the benefit of the community.

3. Ricci Yuhico, 15688 SW 85th Lane #101, Miami FL, addressed the Committee as a taxpayer and librarian. She recalled her personal decision to become a librarian and stated it was her way of giving back to the community and helping children. Ms. Yuhico concurred wholeheartedly with Ms. Martinez' statement that the use of volunteers to staff libraries was an insult to librarians. She stated her beliefs that the librarian staff was the most important aspect of the library system. Ms. Yuhico pointed out librarians were trained to be the "friendliest face of the government", providing non-judgmental help to everyone walking through the doors. She thanked Commissioner Monestime for his recognition and acknowledgement of the fact that 251 librarians stood to lose their jobs based on the proposed

closure list.

*Ms. Yuhico addressed the apparent inconsistencies which exist within the County. She spoke about County departments that were reportedly "over staffed" and questioned why resources could not be diverted from such departments and allocated properly to ensure the safety of the library system and staff.*

*Ms. Yuhico spoke about the various sacrifices library staff has made along the way, which included working extended hours with less manpower and furlough days. She referred to the 2011 cuts to staff and library infrastructure where 150 librarians lost their jobs (herself included) and half the mobile library units were eliminated. Ms. Yuhico questioned why the Library System was again facing more closures and cuts.*

*Ms. Yuhico addressed the library's current hours of operation and the effect it has had on library patrons. She informed the Committee she was currently employed at a Regional Branch location and even though two years had passed since the hours of operation had been modified many visitors to the library were surprised to discover the earlier closing time. Ms. Yuhico acknowledged smaller library branches may not be able to operate with extended hours particularly in light of today's budgetary limitations, however, she maintained the larger Regional locations were expected to remain open from 9am to 9pm. She cited West Kendall Regional, which was slated for closure, as a prime location example where library users were confused and displeased with the limited operating hours.*

*Ms. Yuhico agreed with the need for the County's libraries to evolve with the time and keep up with the electronic and digital age. She referred to an article regarding Library Systems' attempts to keep up with the digital world and the trend towards "purchasing" more e-books. Ms. Yuhico provided the Committee with additional information regarding the cost of e-books to the library and pointed out in most instances libraries paid approximately \$85.00 to "purchase" an e-book. She explained e-books were actually leased, not purchased, from publishing companies so they never fully belonged to the library. She stated on average a "leased" e-book was available for rental to library users for either one year or a total of 26 times, depending on the terms and*

conditions of the lease agreement. Ms. Yuhico questioned the benefits of this type of investment, particularly for a library system already in dire need of funding.

Ms. Yuhico referenced a second article she recently read regarding a survey conducted among young adults and their opinions concerning the use of e-books in libraries. She stated while the survey showed the majority of young adults supported the use of e-books as a means of the library system moving forward into the digital era, they also valued space. However, when surveyed about replacing traditional books with e-books to save space, Ms. Yuhico reported according to the news article only 20 percent of the young adults supported the idea. She used this article to illustrate the importance of creating a legacy for future generations, a legacy that would include access to books and educational materials.

Ms. Yuhico questioned what message the current allocations budget would send to future generations regarding the place of libraries in society. She asked the Committee to take into consideration all that was presented before them before coming to a final decision regarding the proposed library closures.

Chairman Souto issued a friendly reminder to speakers to be brief and concise when presenting their views in an effort to manage time effectively.

4. Ellen Burger, 2706 North Greenway Drive, Coral Gables, FL 33134, noted while she was a Coral Gables resident, she wished to address the Committee as a Librarian and offer some insight as to the repercussions the BCC millage rates vote in July would have on the Library System. Ms. Burger told the Committee she believed the vote regarding millage rates was made too quickly by the BCC without taking into full consideration the effect it would have on the future. She commented the ripple effect of their vote would be felt for decades and asked if there was an opportunity for the BCC to revisit the millage rate issue.

Ms. Burger spoke of the difficulties encountered in trying to define libraries. She pointed out the treatment of libraries as simply homework centers was misleading, inaccurate and an injustice to the community since it did not take into account the other sectors of the population, such as the elderly and disabled; and the different services provided

to the community such as book clubs.

Ms. Burger read portions of Terry Murphy's article entitled "County tax decision sends wrong message" which appeared in the Herald on 7/28 into the record.

Ms. Burger questioned the type of quality control measurements that would be implemented to monitor the volunteers proposed to staff the libraries. She spoke about the dedicated tax line for the Children's Trust and pointed out currently the tax allocation was almost triple that of the Library System. Ms. Burger also noted since the library budget came into question, the Children's Trust was now ready to provide funding for children's services.

Ms. Burger addressed the current staffing and operational situation at library locations. She spoke about a recent newspaper article which misrepresented the staffing situation at libraries. Ms. Burger informed the Committee the average 15,000 square foot library location like Pinecrest Library was staffed by 6 employees and a Branch Manager whose time was divided between two library locations. She also pointed out the staff shortage meant even the Branch Manager was responsible for shelving away books. Ms. Burger stated in spite of the 2011 budgetary and staffing cuts, the library system continued to operate successfully without complaints from the public. She noted however, in the event the proposed library closures did go into effect, every closed library location would serve as a reminder to the public of what was taken away from them.

Ms. Burger asked the Committee to revisit the tax allocation for the library and pointed out on average seventeen cents per one hundred dollars paid towards property taxes was set aside for the Library System. She stated it was her belief the "robo-poll" results did not accurately represent the feelings and opinions of the community and maintained even if the tax allocation amount were to be doubled from 17 cents to 34 cents she could not envision any opposition from the community.

5. Michael Deibert, 1960 Marseille drive, Miami Beach, FL 33141 identified himself as a journalist, author and Miami resident. He questioned whether the County Administration's fiscal argument for closing the libraries should be accepted particularly in light of the hundreds of millions of County dollars spent on the Marlin's

*Stadium.*

*Mr. Deibert spoke about the important role the Miami Beach library played in his life as a new and financially depressed resident in Miami Dade County. He credited the library system for helping him overcome difficult times in his life as well as broadening his intellect and ultimately for playing a part in his decision to pursue a career as an international journalist. Mr. Deibert informed the Committee that it was impossible to place a monetary value on the knowledge and benefits he gained from visiting libraries. He spoke of books that were "out of print" and could not be found online for purchase but were available for rental at libraries.*

*Mr. Deibert revisited the topic of internet access in Miami Dade County. He pointed out the County's connectivity rate was very low; noting 25 percent of residents did not have internet access, with the numbers being considerably greater in poorer communities. He questioned where these residents would find free internet access to conduct online job searches or fill out unemployment forms if libraries were to close. Mr. Deibert stated it would be a short sited and destructive move for the Commission to deprive the citizens of Miami Dade County access to one of the truly free resources for information and education left in the city today.*

*Mr. Deibert described libraries as one of the last remaining precious democratic institutions and concluded by quoting Kurt Vonnegut "the America I loved still exists, if not in the White House or the Supreme Court or the Senate or the House of Representatives or the media. The America I love still exists at the front desks of our public libraries."*

*6. Elyse Levy Kennedy, 18725 SW 84 Avenue, Miami FL thanked Chairman Souto and Commissioners Suarez and Monestime for their continued patronage of Miami Dade Libraries. She recognized County Administration Staff, particularly Lisa Martinez, Senior Advisor to the Mayor and Raymond Santiago, Director at Miami Dade Public Library System, for their ongoing efforts to finding a solution to the issue at hand.*

*Ms. Kennedy informed the Committee that she would happily pay a little more in property taxes to help the Library System even as a retiree living on a fixed income. She stated she believed she*

*was not alone in the understanding that county services must be paid for and was not free.*

*Ms. Kennedy pointed out the tax allocations for the Library System was very reasonable and she believed that the community was willing to pay for its continued survival. She reiterated her belief that there was a mistaken impression that the community was not willing to pay more taxes towards the Library System. She stated people wanted value for their money and was unwilling to pay more for services they did not believe met this criteria, however Ms. Kennedy maintained this was not the case with the Library System.*

*Ms. Kennedy spoke about the creative thinking employed by the Library System over the years. She noted that the expansion project was accomplished on time and under budget thanks to the innovative thinking of the Library Department.*

*Ms. Kennedy concluded by voicing her opinion regarding library funding. She stated it was her personal belief that the Library System should have its own dedicated source of reliable funding and the County should have a yearly budget designated solely to the maintenance of the Library System. She upheld her belief that if the County continued to "slice and dice" the System, the current problem would only resurface year after year.*

*7. Jonathan Rose, 5 Island Avenue, #11E Miami Beach FL 33139, identified himself as an attorney and the Community Relations Director of South Florida Writer's Association. He referred to a previous statement made by Chairman Souto likening libraries to churches and how closing a library would be comparable to closing a church.*

*Mr. Rose described libraries as community centers; a place that encouraged curiosity; a place that one could visit to be quiet; a place one could visit to escape the constant barrage of technology; a place where one could think. He stated libraries were great resources for families.*

*Mr. Rose pointed out that libraries were non-judgmental institutions that everyone could access; free of charge - all that was needed was a library card. He echoed a sentiment he shared with one of his favorite authors, Frank McCourt about the virtues of librarians. Mr. Rose recalled his personal interactions with librarians over the years noting their willingness to always help and guide people. He advocated for keeping all*

libraries open and suggested using the Marlin's Stadium as a new location.

8. Alex Fernandez, 1700 Convention Center Drive, Miami Beach FL 33139, addressed the Committee on behalf of Deede Weithorn, Commissioner-City of Miami Beach and President of Miami Dade League of Cities (MDLOC). He indicated the budget committee of MDLOC looked forward to working with the staff from Miami Dade County Administration and Ms. Lisa Martinez in an effort to explore every viable option available as it pertained to the Municipal Branches. Mr. Fernandez explained the Municipal Branches were "revenue neutral" and did not create additional financial burdens for the cities of Miami Dade County.

Mr. Fernandez stated City Commissioner Weithorn was mindful of the constitution's guarantee of public education to every child despite ethnicity, background, financial status or immigration status. He reiterated every child in Miami Dade County, and the United States of America had a right to education. Mr. Fernandez stressed the importance of public libraries as an integral, auxiliary component to the public education system.

Mr. Fernandez stated the Municipal Libraries were unable to continuously absorb the added burden created from the shortcomings of larger jurisdictions. He acknowledged and expressed appreciation of the work done by the County Administration in their attempts to find creative and innovative solutions to resolve the issue at hand without placing additional stresses and burdens on the taxpayers of the cities of Miami Dade County.

He restated City Commissioner Weithorn and MDLOC's commitment to working together with the County in an attempt to resolve the issue at hand and keep all the libraries open.

He pointed out the Miami Beach Library was situated in a location which provided service to an elderly housing facility as well as a publically funded residential facility for the disabled and people living with HIV and AIDS. He stated this library provided resources to people who relied on the public library system for education and other services.

He thanked the Committee and County

*Administration for all their hard work and voiced his hopes that by working collaboratively, a solution would be identified to save the libraries from closure.*

*9. Yudit Lam, 817 Wallace Street, Coral Gables FL told the Committee when she emigrated from Cuba 15 years ago she was amazed by the Miami-Dade County Library System. She explained she made it her duty to take visiting friends and family to the library so they could experience it themselves.*

*Ms. Lam stated while the library in her area was not slated for closure and would not be affected she wanted the Committee to consider the effect of individual library closures on the system as a whole. She reiterated the point that the Library network operated as a system.*

*Ms. Lam revealed to the Committee that while she was now a stay at home mother, she was a librarian by profession. She explained she valued above all else a high level of quality services and the only way this high level could be maintained in the Library System was by keeping librarians on staff. She pointed out the role of a librarian at a library was comparable to the role of a doctor at a hospital.*

*She thanked the Committee for allowing her the opportunity to speak. Seeing no one else wishing to speak concerning the proposed library closures, Chairman Souto closed the public hearing.*

*Commissioner Monestime voiced his regret that the public was not afforded the opportunity to address the BCC regarding the issue of millage rates in July. (See Legislative File Number 131453.) He identified himself as an avid library patron and explained that he frequently visited libraries to read to visiting school children or to catch up on his personal reading.*

*Commissioner Monestime noted the efforts made by the Administration to find a solution to this issue. He repeated the sentiments of one of the public speakers and noted if the County was concerned about its residents then conversations of library, cultural and art center closures should not be the focus.*

*Commissioner Monestime voiced his optimism that a collaborative solution would be reached.*

Commissioner Suarez thanked the public speakers for their input on this matter and noted there were several suggestions presented for consideration. He questioned the possibility of providing internet access to elderly approved public housing facilities such as Robert King High Towers, Three Round Towers and Smathers Plaza. He pointed out the facilities had ample space to accommodate such a project and it would eliminate the need of elderly residents leaving their homes to access the internet.

Commissioner Suarez fully concurred with Ms. Kennedy's statements regarding "slicing and dicing" of the Library System. He acknowledged the efficient management of the library department and noted staff salaries were considerably less when compared to other departments. Commissioner Suarez referred to his memorandum dated 7/11 entitled "Statement of Proposed Millage Increase" which spoke about his findings regarding the Fire Department's staffing budget. He pointed out the Fire Department currently had 75 employees classified as "chief" with an average yearly salary of \$200,000.00 (includes benefits and salary). Commissioner Suarez informed the Committee and the audience copies of the memorandum could be attained from his office.

Commissioner Suarez referred to the suggestion made by Mr. Rose to use the Marlin's Stadium as a library location and noted he understood the spirit in which the suggestion was made. He expressed his support for utilizing underused County facilities and properties to house storefront library locations and informed the Committee of his intent to contact the City of Miami with regards to possibly using one of the many empty storefronts at the Marlin's Stadium to house a storefront library.

Commissioner Suarez addressed the size and operating budget of the County's Information Technology (IT) department. He noted the department was made up of 528 employees and operated with a budget of \$120 million.

Commissioner Suarez commented the IT Department was perhaps one of the areas that would benefit from "slicing and dicing". He suggested the possible transfer of IT employees to storefront library locations and new facilities to set up internet access for the community.

Commissioner Suarez recounted his experience with bureaucracy within the system and explained how he was able to secure a location for his Commission District Office in South Miami free of charge. He pointed out that he was able to save the county \$50,000 annually (the salary of a mid-level library employee) simply by exploring alternative options.

Commissioner Suarez informed the Committee that the County currently owned 4500 properties, many of which were under-utilized. He recognized the County Administration's attempt to streamline operations but noted much more work was needed. He stated inter-local agreements were already in existence in many instances and used the inter-local agreement between the County and the City of Miami as an example. He pointed out the current inter-local agreement with the City of Miami included 4 or 5 facilities at a charge of \$1.00 annually and voiced his optimism that this agreement would continue to successfully function for years to come.

Commissioner Suarez noted his belief that volunteers could be an effective and a viable option in different situations given the proper supervision. He communicated his interest in seeing the IT Department take a more active role in the expansion of internet access at County facilities including senior centers and new storefront library locations. Commissioner Suarez pointed out many metropolitan cities enjoyed storefront locations for public services and amenities because of private sector donations and involvement in the community.

Commissioner Suarez thanked Chairman Souto for facilitating this special emergency meeting while the Commission was on recess and recognized his efforts in trying to resolve this issue for the benefit of the community.

Commissioner Suarez urged the public to feel free to contact his Commission District Office for additional information.

Chairman Souto reiterated the County's commitment to resolving this issue. He stated it was in everyone's best interest to save the libraries from closure. Chairman Souto stated there was a lot of money in Miami Dade County and called for the "pillars" of the community, businesses such as Carnival Cruise Lines, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, Burger King, American

*Airlines and the likes, to get involved in the community.*

*Chairman Souto expressed interest in meeting with the Mayor to discuss possible legislation that would address the involvement of the pillars of the community in the resolution of the issue of library closures. He emphasized the importance of home based organizations like Florida Power and Light (FPL), the Miami Marlins and the Miami Dolphins getting involved and stated his belief that they should be a part of the solution particularly if they contributed to the problem.*

*Chairman Souto called for a collaborative venture with "Friends of the Library" to help raise more funds. He noted although almost \$90,000.00 was raised to date, more money was needed.*

*Chairman Souto questioned why there was not more involvement by "The Children's Trust." He noted that the Trust was charged with improving the lives of all children and families in Miami Dade County and the issue of library closures would directly affect countless children and families. Chairman Souto stated his belief that there should be more help from the Trust particularly in light of them receiving funding from a dedicated source that was voted on and approved by the residents of Miami Dade County to ensure needs of all children were met.*

*Chairman Souto fully concurred with Commissioner Suarez suggestion that unused County properties be utilized to house library locations in an effort to offset the cost of leasing. He also suggested pursuing the idea that owners of the buildings in which storefront libraries were located be approached about donating the spaces to "Friends of The Library." He pointed out these donations would be a tax write off for the business.*

*Chairman Souto reiterated the need for change for the betterment of the community. He spoke of the virtues and diversity of Miami as a city and stated for Miami to continue developing investments needed to be made into education. He stressed that the Library System was an integral part of the education system.*

*Commissioner Suarez referred to Terry Murphy's article titled "County tax decision sends wrong message" which was cited earlier by Ms. Berger. He acknowledged Mr. Murphy's article made a valid point regarding loss of revenue for the*

County from non-homestead property owners quoting "For every \$1 reduction in a homeowner's tax bill, the county forfeits \$3.68 in revenues." Commissioner Suarez spoke about his intent to meet with the Legislative Delegation Chairperson regarding implementing legislature that would allow the County to levy more property taxes on non-homestead properties thereby lessening the tax burdens on homestead property owners.

Commissioner Suarez voiced optimism that his proposal to increase taxes on non-homestead properties would be supported by the BCC and result in added revenue for the County.

**2 (No items are scheduled for these sections.)**

**8 ADJOURNMENT**

**Report:** *There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 11.15 a.m.*