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5 Things the OPPL is hiding or stalling regarding FOIA production

November 1, 2014 at 6:04pm

It's now November 2014 and we've been researching and investigating the Orland Park Public Library for a year now. Remember that this Library Board claims it is for free access to information and is against censorship...but that doesn't apply to information the Library has that it does not want to reveal. Here are five things that the OPPL is fighting us on, refusing to produce, or otherwise obstructing that the public deserves to have an answer on:

(1) The full picture of the spending that the Board engages on when buying food, drinks, or paying for travel for itself. According to ethics rules for library board members in Illinois, the Board is not allowed to be compensated...and compensation means food and drinks as well as gifts or salary. Whenever the Board orders food or partakes of drinks at Board Meetings and the public is not allowed to share in the food or the drink, then the Board is violating the law. Every single time. Even if it's just a Coke that a Board Member drinks for free: if the public is not offered a free Coke too, then the Board is breaking the law. You would not believe how aggressively they are stalling and obstructing our investigation into spending on board member food and drink. For Board travel, the Library can pay for Board members to take trips if it is for library business. However, Board Member Denis Ryan in particular ran up a huge hotel bill in Indianapolis for a conference he claims he attended -- only, there's no record of him attending any conference events, he brought back no materials from the conference, he apparently says he didn't learn anything at the conference, he gave no report on the conference to the other Board Members. So, what was the real purpose of that trip if he can't produce a single document he got at the conference and didn't learn anything? Isn't that just Denis Ryan taking a trip to Indianapolis with no benefit to taxpayers? We need them to come clean on this, pronto.

(2) The real story behind library employees running side businesses while using library computers, printers, copiers, and other resources to design and print materials for their side business. Taxpayers should not have to pay for this. The OPPL is stalling and obstructing production of the records needed to do a full forensic audit on the use of these printers and copiers to determine if indeed they are being used to print materials for employee side businesses at taxpayer expense.

(3) The matter of conference attendance for staff, where they pay huge sums to go to events that the American Library Association and the Illinois Library Association puts on. The staff say they don't learn anything at these events and don't bring back any documents from the events. So, what's the point of these things? Some of them have entry fees of \$295.00/person or more. What we think is happening is that the ALA and the ILA use these things as a way of fleecing taxpayers and redistributing tax money from the public to the private ALA and ILA entities (which have goals and agendas diametrically opposed to the wants of the public). We think there is a scam in place where the ALA/ILA holds these events and charges huge admission prices. The libraries pay the admission prices and the Library Boards don't question what is going on. At these meetings, nothing worthwhile to the public happens...it is just a means of collecting money for the ALA/ILA to run on. It's a giant scam, where tax dollars are funneled to the ALA/ILA through conference fees. The OPPL is refusing to produce documents related to all these conferences that would determine whether there is any value at all in spending around \$40,000/year to send staff to these ALA/ILA events around the state.

(4) What exactly happened at the 12/17/13 RAILS Burr Ridge "Crisis Management Workshop" that two OPPL staffers presented at as the featured speakers. Remember that the OPPL sent two high ranking staffers to teach a workshop on how other library employees around the state could attack the public, treat the public as 'the opposition' and use 'crisis management strategy' to silence critics, discredit them, and intimidate people into not challenging the library boards. The OPPL staff spoke for a solid 45 minutes but claim they have no notes, no presentation, no papers, no speaking bulletpoints, no correspondence, and not even an agenda for that speaking engagement that was highly publicized. It doesn't add up. What happened that day?

(5) The OPPL's spending on food is outrageous, including the purchasing of pizza seemingly every few days for events where the public does not seem to show up. How much pizza is being over-ordered and what's happening to it? Is this the staff doing this on purpose so they can get free pizza and have the taxpayers foot the bill? If the Library's mission statement and charter doesn't say anything about providing food to the public, then why has the Library gotten to the point where it is buying so much food every month? And who is really benefitting from all the food purchases? The OPPL is stalling production of these records and of any documents that would explain the need and purpose of buying all this food. A library should not have a catering budget. It should have a book and DVD budget.

All of these matters are currently being slugged out in one way or the other in court and with attorneys. This has brought the investigation to a standstill until these questions are answered. The OPPL is in turtle mode, with their necks deep into the shell hiding and hoping the public goes away. But too often in Illinois the public gets bored and goes away and allows questions like this to remain unanswered.

We here at Story Time Digital Media aren't going to allow that to happen and are going to keep pressing for answers until every last mystery regarding the OPPL's financial mismanagement and other activities is resolved completely. Stay tuned for ongoing updates to this investigation.