



Reconsideration of Library Materials, Displays, Programs or Services Policy

Approved, April 2023

Library Mission: The purpose of the Bellingham Public Library (BPL) is to be an important resource for all members of the community in their search for knowledge, ideas, information, and creative use of their leisure time.

Selection Policy: The library's material Selection Policy is on the library website at <https://www.bellinghamma.org/library/policies/pages/selection-policy>

Individuals or groups occasionally question the inclusion of items in library collections, or the content of library displays, programs, or services. This policy explains the Bellingham Public Library's commitment to providing open access to diverse information and describes the procedure that will be followed when a member of the Bellingham community expresses a concern about the content of items in library collections, displays, programs, or services.

Guiding Principles

The BPL subscribes to the principles of intellectual freedom as stated in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution, the Library Bill of Rights¹ and its relevant interpretations by the American Library Association Council², and the Freedom to Read Statement³.

Collectively, these documents speak to:

- the right of every American citizen to freely hold and express beliefs, and correspondingly, the right of every citizen to access the expressions and beliefs of other people without restriction.
- the fact that it is unconstitutional for a government entity, such as a public library, to censor or restrict the free and open exchange of ideas.
- the library's responsibility to make available without restriction or judgment a wide diversity of ideas and viewpoints, in support of an informed citizenry and a resilient, free, democratic society.
- the library's obligation to safeguard intellectual liberty by supporting individual choice and judgment in seeking information; upholding the freedom to read, view, and listen; and challenging and resisting attempts to restrict access to information or ideas by those seeking to impose their own standards, opinions, or beliefs upon the broader community.
- The library field's commitment to honor the rights of an individual to use a library regardless of age, race, religion, national origin, social or political views, etc., and the obligation of library staff to provide equal service to all library users.

The BPL and Trustees recognize that individuals may object to library materials, displays, programs, or services out of a genuine desire to safeguard the well-being of their fellow community members and for reasons arising from deeply held beliefs and opinions. However, we take the position that the risk of restricting access to information and ideas is greater than the risk of providing it, and that each person can assess information and make decisions for themselves without undue interference from outside sources.

¹ American Library Association, January 23, 1996, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill> . Accessed October 17, 2018.

² A full list of these interpretations is available at <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations> (accessed October 18, 2018).

³ American Library Association and Association of American Publishers, June 30, 2004, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/freedomreadstatement> . Accessed October 17, 2018.

Library Practices in Support of Open Inquiry and Intellectual Freedom

As a community resource, the BPL is obligated to provide diverse resources and information to meet the varied needs of community members who have different backgrounds, experiences, beliefs, and worldviews. This includes providing material that opposes as well as supports particular beliefs, opinions, and viewpoints, including potentially controversial material, for the benefit of community members who wish to explore perspectives different from their own. The library aims to support the growth and fulfillment of individuals in all aspects of their lives, and therefore provides resources that meet needs for entertainment and leisure as well as for learning, growth, and edification.

The library does not promote particular beliefs or views. Rather, it provides resources to explore various opinions that apply to important, complex, and controversial questions, including unpopular and unorthodox positions. The presence of any item in the collection does not imply the library's, Trustees', or Town's approval or endorsement of its contents, with the exception that library staff make an effort to ensure that materials and services which discuss matters of objective fact are reasonably accurate. Per the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association⁴, library staff do not allow personal opinions to interfere with professional decision-making or the equitable provision of services to the whole community, including in the selection of materials or event presenters.

Because the library aims to represent diverse perspectives and ideas, not every event, service, or item in the collections will be for everyone. The library does not make decisions based on protecting patrons from particular content or topics and expects that individuals using the library will determine which resources and services are right for them and/or their children. Library staff can help empower patrons to make these decisions by assessing their interests and guiding them to content that may be desired, but the ultimate responsibility for any person's use of the library's collections, programs, and services lies with that person.

The library does not restrict young people from using any part of the collection. Library events may have a suggested or required age range, predominantly to ensure an event is attended by its intended audience. The children's and young adult collections and programming may include content too mature for some individuals in those age groups, as others of the same age may be ready for the material. **A child's parents or guardians are responsible for determining what is appropriate for that child and for monitoring their access to library materials, displays, programs, or services. Neither library staff nor other individuals may make such decisions for other people's children.**

⁴ American Library Association, January 22, 2008, <http://www.ala.org/tools/ethics> . Accessed October 17, 2018.

The library avoids labeling or otherwise identifying materials to show approval or disapproval of content. (This is not to be confused with labels that indicate a genre, general subject matter, or area of the collection, which do not comment on the "appropriateness" of the content, or with rating labels which come affixed to materials, which the library does not remove.)

Reconsideration Process

The library recognizes the right of community members to question library materials, displays, programs, or services. Any individual or group seeking the reconsideration of an item in the library's collections, or a library display, program, or service, may submit a Request for Reconsideration form to the Library Director. Copies of the forms are at the end of this document.

Upon receipt of the form, the Director will consult with library staff, with the person submitting the request if needed, and with other relevant sources that may provide useful information in considering the request.

In deciding, the Director will consider the nature and purpose of the item, display, program, or service itself; other information obtained from the sources described above; the library's mission, goals, and policies; and American Library Association guidelines on intellectual freedom. The Director will make a timely decision regarding the request and will provide a written explanation of the reasons for the decision.

If an individual is not satisfied with the Library Director's decision, they may appeal the decision, in writing, to the Library Board of Trustees. The Trustees will consider the appeal at their next regular monthly meeting, or they may schedule an earlier meeting should circumstances present the need. If Open Meeting Law or other circumstances prohibit the Board from meeting with sufficient speed when time is of the essence (e.g., the event is scheduled to happen before the next Board meeting) the Trustee Chair will consider the appeal. The decision of the Board of Trustees, or in extenuating circumstances its Chair, will be final.

The Director and Trustees may take any of the following factors into account, as appropriate, in reconsidering an item, display, program, or service:

- Accuracy and currency of content
- Reputation, qualifications, and/or significance of the author, creator, presenter, etc., including their local importance, if applicable
- Popular demand
- Relevance to the community's informational and recreational needs and interests
- Availability of other materials or programs that cover similar information or meet a similar need or interest, in the library's current collections/services
- Representation of diverse points of view
- Artistic, literary, and/or technical merit
- Appropriateness of the material for the level of its intended audience
- Quality of treatment of controversial issues
- Reviews from authoritative sources (professional journals, individuals experienced with the relevant subject area, other librarians, etc.); critical reception
- Relevance to the library's mission and goals; relationship with other library materials, events, or services

Factors that will not, in and of themselves, be considered appropriate reasons to remove an item from the collection or cancel a program or service include:

- An individual's personal disagreement or feelings of offense with the content or its presentation based on their own particular opinions or beliefs (political, religious, or otherwise)
- The origin, personal history, and/or views of the author, creator, presenter, etc.
- The mere fact that content is controversial, graphic, or explicit, or includes profane language or sexual content
- Content considered inappropriate for children or teenagers that is in the adult sections of the collections or presented as part of an event aimed at adults
- A rating or "explicit content" warning

Evaluation of an item, display, program or service will be based on consideration of the item or presentation as a whole, not on selected individual sections. The library will not alter or expurgate any individual section or sections of a work.

No item is to be removed from the shelf or be placed in a restricted-access status, and no program or service is to be preemptively abridged, modified, or cancelled, during the reconsideration process. No item in the collection is to be removed or restricted, and no program or service is to be cancelled because of a complaint except in accordance with this procedure. Items that have become missing or lost but that are deemed to still be appropriate for the library collection will be replaced.

Responsibility

Final responsibility for all library policies lies with the Board of Trustees, which has approved this document. Responsibility for implementation of policies and day-to-day operations, including collection development, display, program planning, and services, rests with the Library Director. The Director delegates these responsibilities and tasks to other library staff members as appropriate. Decisions by library staff are subject to review by the Library Director, as necessary.

The library does not have control over the content of certain electronic collections, including those administered by the C/W MARS consortium or the State of Massachusetts, or over materials that may be available through interlibrary loan from other libraries.

Adopted by the Library Board of Trustees, April 13, 2023

**Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials Form
Bellingham Public Library, Bellingham MA**

The Trustees of the Bellingham Public Library have established a material selection policy and a procedure for gathering input about patron concerns about individual items. Completion of this form is the first step in that procedure. If you wish to request reconsideration of a library resource, please return the completed form to the Library Director, Bernadette Rivard, Bellingham Public Library, 100 Blackstone Street, Bellingham MA 02019, brivard@bellinghamma.org. **Please note: Only Bellingham residents are entitled to request reconsideration of library materials under this policy.**

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Do you represent yourself? _____

Or an organization? _____ Name of Organization: _____

- Resource on which you are commenting:

_____ Book or e-book _____ Movie _____ Magazine _____ Digital Resource

_____ Game _____ Newspaper _____ Audio Recording

Other, please specify _____

Title: _____

Author/Producer: _____

- What brought this resource to your attention? If you need additional space for any of the following questions, please use the reverse of this form or an attachment.

- Have you examined the entire resource? If not, what sections did you review?

- What are your concerns about the resource?

- Are there resource(s) you suggest that provide additional information and/or other viewpoints on this topic?

- What action are you requesting the committee to consider?

**Request for Reconsideration of Library Programs, Displays or Services
Bellingham Public Library, Bellingham MA**

The Trustees of the Bellingham Public Library have established a mechanism for community members to request reconsideration of a library program or service. Completion of this form is the first step in that procedure. If you wish to request reconsideration of a library program or service, please return the completed form to the Library Director, Bernadette Rivard, Bellingham Public Library, 100 Blackstone Street, Bellingham MA 02019, brivard@bellinghamma.org.

Please note: Only Bellingham residents are entitled to request reconsideration of library programs and services under this policy.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Do you represent yourself? _____

Or an organization? _____ Name of Organization: _____

I request that the library reconsider:

_____ A library event _____ A library service _____ A library display

_____ Something else, please specify _____

Note: If you wish to request reconsideration of something in the library's collection, please use the Reconsideration of Library Materials form above.

Please help us identify the program, display, or service in question.

Name/Description: _____

Presenter/Performer (if applicable): _____

Department, please circle one: Circulation Reference Adult Young Adult Children's

Any other descriptive information?

Please tell us your reasons for filing this request. Please be as specific as possible. You may attach page(s) to this form if needed.