

Library Board Meeting Agenda

October 22, 2020

Meeting held electronically via Zoom. Phone Number: 1-253-215-8782. Meeting ID: 848 2305 1697. Comments can also be submitted ahead of time by emailing libraryboard@highlandcity.org.

Legal Declaration:

I Roger Dixon, Highland City Library Board Chair, hereby declare that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, holding a Library Board meeting with a physical anchor location presents a substantial risk to the health and safety of those who may be present at the anchor location due to health concerns with Board members and their family members. Members of the public are invited to participate in the electronic means which are detailed in the Board Meeting agenda. This declaration is dated October 22, 2020.

7:00 pm-Call to Order: Roger Dixon, Board Chair

1. Public Comment

2. Consent

Approve Minutes for September 24 2020 Meeting

3. Reports

1. Director's Report
2. Foundation Meeting Report
3. Outreach/Community Assessment

4. Action/Policy Items

1. Approve revisions to Strategic Plan
2. Reconsideration request for the book *The Illness Lesson* by Clare Beams
3. Feasibility Study

5. Discussion Items

1. Next Steps Related to the Feasibility Study
2. Library Service Priorities Brainstorming Session
3. Visit a library next month?

6. Future Agenda Items

Budget Adjustments
Feasibility Study
Donna's Annual Evaluation

7. Adjournment

**Minutes from a Regular Meeting of the
HIGHLAND CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD**

Thursday, September 24, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

IN ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Jessica Anderson, Secretary
Mike Burns
Briawna Hugh
Claude Jones
Becky Lewis
Natalie Reed, Vice-Chair
Kim Rodela, City Council Rep.
Edgar Tooley

Other

Donna Cardon, Library Director and
Board Executive Officer
Erin Wells, Assistant Highland City
Administrator (left at 8:24 p.m.)

Absent

Roger Dixon, Chair

A quorum of the Board being present, Board Vice-Chair Natalie Reed welcomed those in attendance and began the Library Board meeting at 7:05 p.m. as a regular meeting. The meeting agenda was posted on the Utah State Public Meeting Website at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

AGENDA

1. Welcome

Becky Lewis was welcomed and introduced herself. She worked for Provo School District and was the supervisor of their libraries and also worked at the Provo Library. The Board briefly introduced themselves to Becky.

2. Public Comment

None

3. Consent Agenda

- a. *Approval of Minutes from January 23, 2020*
- b. *Approval of Minutes from April 23, 2020*
- c. *Approval of Minutes from August 27, 2020*

Jessica Anderson pulled all three sets of minutes from the consent agenda. Vice-Chair Natalie Reed decided to consider them before reports. Jessica Anderson noted that minor adjustments needed to be made to all three minutes to include certifications recommended by the City.

Mike Burns moved to approve the minutes with the corrections recommended by the City. Briawna Hugh seconded the motion. The vote was recorded as follows:

Yes	Jessica Anderson
Yes	Mike Burns
Yes	Briawna Hugh
Yes	Claude Jones
Yes	Becky Lewis
Yes	Natalie Reed
Yes	Kim Rodella
Yes	Edgar Tooley

The motion passed.

4. Reports

a. Director's Report

Donna Cardon summarized her report.

- Programming is mostly live in the council chambers, with adjustments as necessary. The parent/child book club is occurring live and attendance is steady.
- The new book drop came and was installed yesterday.
- Study room is the book quarantine room; the library used CARES Act funds to buy some shelves and bins to organize the room.
- The library is also using CARES Act funds to buy new furniture to replace any furniture that is upholstered that cannot be wiped down. They are mostly 12 years old and need replacing anyway.
- Super Hero Event coming up will be spaced with only one family going through at a time. Library will be closed that day to accommodate the event.
- Friday and Saturday of Halloween will have the candy machines set up so kids can trick or treat out of them without contact.
- City Councilor Scott Smith won an award from the Utah State Library Association for his tireless support of libraries.

b. Outreach Committee Report

Briawna Hugh, chair of the Outreach Committee, reported. She noted that the committee has not had a chance to meet together, but that the Board has been working generally on the outreach community interviews. Discussion ensued about next steps on the outreach program, whether to continue the interviews or to have the outreach committee start focusing on specific sectors. Donna would like the Board to continue the interviews as they can and the Outreach Committee to collect the reports that have been done into a single document. Claude Jones asked about outreach to Alpine and Cedar Hills.

Becky Lewis is informed of her membership on the Outreach and Library Fund committees. Briawna Hugh agreed to have the outreach committee compile the interviews that have been done so far and to forward the interview list and questions to Becky Lewis. Donna noted that asking about what caused each individual the most headache this month would be a good question to add to the interview list. Briawna Hugh noted that we might consider reaching out to additional groups, such as teens. Becky Lewis recommended that contacting community libraries might be a good step.

Erin Wells noted that the City still has CARES Act funds to spend and has donated some things to local schools and would be interested in doing more as needed. Donna Cardon is looking at getting Kindles to load with Battle of the Books books and a subscription to Tumble Books. If those things happen, we will need to spread the word.

c. Strategic Planning Committee Report

Mike Burns, chair of the Strategic Planning committee, reported that the committee met a couple of weeks ago and worked on extending the current strategic plan out to about 2025. That plan, which is coming up on the agenda, will be presented to the City Council next month.

5. Action/Policy Items

a. Strategic Plan

Donna presented the updated proposed strategic plan, which is included in the packet. Under the state guidelines, the strategic plan needs to include an introduction with a history of the library. That was not modified much, except to note

that some meetings occur electronically and to update the information about the Friends of the Library and the Foundation. Donna removed the grant section, because there are no grant items specifically in the works at the moment. This plan is updated throughout with references to capital improvement. Specific goals for the next five years were included with anticipated initiation/completion dates. Donna Cardon briefly went through the goals, noting her reasoning. Updating nonfiction to support Common Core curriculum has already been done, using COVID-19 funds. Programming is currently a struggle, so the goals are largely to maintain and build upon our current programs.

The library would like to establish better relationships with local schools. Number of current library card holders is down to 1200; Donna Cardon would like to make it a priority to increase this number. Becky Lewis noted that Provo Library would schedule school visits to promote the library. The library had planned to go in to promote summer reading but were unable to do so because the schools were shut down due to COVID-19. Right now, schools are reluctant to allow adults into the schools. But Briawna Hugh noted that there are ways to get in. The outreach committee will meet and discuss the options. Natalie Reed recommended having the outreach committee meet with appropriate library personnel to combine forces on this issue.

The City is developing a method where people could text reference questions to the library and the library could respond (without using their personal phones). Security gates are probably necessary, because we are losing more books than previously thought – about 900 this summer. The gates will cost about \$6,000. For example, sometimes people don't realize that a book didn't get checked out properly on the self-checkout; recently, a brand-new book that had never been checked out disappeared. And many things that were due back during the closure have not come back. Hopefully, those will come back. Staff training is an ongoing goal.

The major change to this version of the strategic plan is the addition of a timeline for adding additional library space. It specifically identifies a facility in the plot east of the library, which would include a large meeting space, medium-sized program rooms, study rooms, and an art gallery. The plan notes that the library will administer the space but that may change as things go forward and community partners join in. The plan is roughly outlined as follows:

- Establish team to investigate creation of space
- Do a community assessment
- Obtain a rendering

- Edgar Tooley suggested using a university class/students to complete renderings
- Create an initial budget
- Check in with the City Council (as frequently as necessary)
- Hire fundraising consultant (Library Foundation to pay)
- Start a fundraising campaign
- First funding milestone
- Second funding milestone

The Board discussed whether the ultimate vision is to have the library stay where it is and then have the meeting space on the lot or to have the library move completely into the new building. The City does not necessarily need the additional space where the library is, unless maybe the other City building goes away. It might not be optimal to stay in the current space as is, because the population is growing. And the library is already small for our population. We may want to expand the current space at some point. But the current plan is for the new building to at least start out simply as community/programming meeting space. We just want to get started and the plans can evolve. The City Council will likely be more receptive of the need for more meeting space versus more space for physical materials, especially if we can show need and how the space will benefit the community. Donna Cardon spoke to additional programs that could be held if there was more space. We will need to work on the best way to present/market the proposed space.

Becky Lewis noted that School Library Journal is having a free online program with many authors. The library could possibly set up a screen, so people could watch. Becky Lewis will send more information to Donna Cardon.

The Library Board will do its annual presentation to the City Council on October 6, 2020. A part of that will be presenting the strategic plan, and the council will vote on the strategic plan in November.

Jessica Anderson moved to approve the revised strategic plan as presented. Mike Burns seconded the motion. The vote was recorded as follows:

Yes	Jessica Anderson
Yes	Mike Burns
Yes	Briawna Hugh
Yes	Claude Jones
Yes	Becky Lewis

Yes	Natalie Reed
Yes	Kim Rodella
Yes	Edgar Tooley

The motion passed.

b. Report to City Council

Edgar Tooley, as chair of the Reports Committee, reported that Donna has compiled the information, and Edgar is working on the script and the slides for the presentation.

Briawna Hugh moved to give authority to the report committee, working in conjunction with the Library Director, to finish preparing the report and then present it to the City Council on October 6, 2020 without further approval from the general Board membership. Jessica Anderson seconded the motion. The vote was recorded as follows:

Yes	Jessica Anderson
Yes	Mike Burns
Yes	Briawna Hugh
Yes	Claude Jones
Yes	Becky Lewis
Yes	Natalie Reed
Yes	Kim Rodella
Yes	Edgar Tooley

The motion passed.

Erin Wells left the meeting.

6. Discussion Items

a. Strategies for Increasing Library Use

Donna Cardon is concerned about the drop in library card holders over the past year. Edgar suggested that we start with the City Council; not all of them have library cards. Donna Cardon would like to try to the double diamond from business marketing. (Becky Lewis again suggested going in to the elementary schools.) First diamond: you start with the original diamond, generating a ton of ideas about the problems

and challenges people have. Once you have a huge list of possibilities, you narrow it down and decide which ones to address. Second diamond: generate tons of ideas about how to address the problems. Once you have a huge list of possibilities, you narrow it down and decide what to implement.

We have some extra funds at our disposal (due to budgeting and COVID-19), and we need to figure out what people would like, what would make them want to get a library card.

Over the next month, the Board will compile lists of issues and stressors that face the community (i.e., how the library can serve the community better). Mike Burns noted that library card holders may not be the best metric to measure use. Edgar Tooley noted that people having library cards is a great tool for us (and them) to use. Briawna noted that people do not have to physically be in the library to be an active library user, given the electronic items available. We need to communicate the library services to people who are not using the library. Donna Cardon will create and circulate a Google Doc to place the generated ideas.

Donna Cardon noted that there is an opportunity for the Library Board to tour the new Orem facility. She will look into it and perhaps schedule it for our November meeting.

Vice-Chair Natalie Reed read the following statement aloud (which should have been done at the beginning of the meeting):

I Natalie Reed, Highland City Library Board Vice Chair, hereby declare that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, holding a Library Board meeting with a physical anchor location presents a substantial risk to the health and safety of those who may be present at the anchor location due to health concerns with Board members and their family members. Members of the public are invited to participate in the electronic means which are detailed in the Board Meeting agenda. This declaration is dated September 22, 2020.

7. Future Agenda Items

- a. *Review ideas and generate additional ideas related to current problems and challenges facing the community (as part of the overall strategy to increase library card holders)*

The Board's next meeting is scheduled for October 22, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

8. Adjournment

Claude Jones moved to adjourn the Library Board meeting. Mike Burns seconded the motion. The vote was recorded as follows:

Yes	Jessica Anderson
Yes	Mike Burns
Yes	Briawna Hugh
Yes	Claude Jones
Yes	Becky Lewis
Yes	Natalie Reed
Yes	Kim Rodella
Yes	Edgar Tooley

The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 8:46 p.m.



HIGHLAND CITY

LIBRARY BOARD AGENDA REPORT ITEM #4.1

DATE: October 22, 2020
TO: Library Board
FROM: Donna Cardon, Library Director
SUBJECT: Revisions to 2020-2025 Strategic Plan

PURPOSE:

Consider and approve changes to the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan suggested by the City Council.

BACKGROUND:

On October 6, the Library Board presented its annual report to the City Council. At that time, we gave them a copy of the 2020-2025 strategic plan that we approved in our September Library Board meeting. On October 20, I led a discussion about the Strategic Plan at a City Council meeting. During the discussion the Council approved conducting a Feasibility Study by CRSA. I have therefore altered the dates and wording of the “Space” section of the Strategic plan to reflect that decision and the new time line that will result.

In this meeting we will review those suggested revisions, and then decide to approve a revised version of the plan that will then be taken to the City Council for final approval.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The current Strategic Plan does not require any additional funding from the Highland City General Fund. It does include expenditures from the Library Foundation of at least \$3000-\$5000 dollars to pay for the Feasibility Study, and more to hire a fund raising consultant.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The Library Board approve the Strategic Plan as revised.

PROPOSED MOTION:

I propose that the Library Board accept the revised 2020-2025 Strategic Plan and submit the revised version to the City Council for final approval.

ALTERNATE MOTION:

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Strategic Plan 2020 (draft)

Highland City Library: Long-range Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Introduction

Public libraries have long been an important aspect of American life. From the early days of the Republic, libraries were valued by Americans. Benjamin Franklin founded the first subscription library in Philadelphia in 1732 with fifty members to make books more available for citizens of the young nation. From that time to the present, public libraries have been valued because they allow equal access to information and educational resources regardless of social or economic status.

Library service has long been important to the residents of Highland. From 1994 to 2001, residents of Highland and Alpine were served by a joint-use facility at Mountain Ridge Junior High School. That arrangement was eventually terminated and in 2001 the entire library collection was relocated to the old Highland City building for storage. In 2008, Highland City built a new city hall and dedicated a portion of the building for a city Library. In 2016 the Library received permission to convert a public meeting room into a Children's Room for the Library. The new Children's Room was opened in spring of 2018.

The Library joined the North Utah County Library Cooperative (NUCLC) April 1, 2012 as an associate member. NUCLC is a reciprocal borrowing system that allows library card holders from participating libraries to check out materials from other participating libraries. It is not a county library system. Each participating library maintains its own policies, budget, administration, non-resident fees, etc. In 2018 the Library reached the required collection size and was accepted as a full NUCLC member.

The Library is supported by three constituent bodies: The Library Board; the Friends of the Library; the Library Foundation.

1. The Library Board oversees the operation of the Library. It consists of nine persons; eight volunteers appointed for three year terms, and a representative from the City Council. All meetings are held in the Highland City Hall or electronically using a video meeting platform. Records of the Library Board meetings are available from on the City website.
2. The Friends of the Library is an independent non-profit organization that supports the library in the following ways: raises funds through used book sales and other endeavors, creates community connections through programs and events, and increases volunteerism to support and supplement Library resources.
3. The Library Foundation is a nonprofit, tax-exempt foundation dedicated to assisting the Highland City Library with fund-raising and additional support. The Foundation administers larger donations, particularly those targeted at capital improvement.

Vision Statement

The Highland City Library seeks to be a valued resource in the community that evolves with changes in society while meeting learning, information, and entertainment needs.

Mission Statement

The Highland City Library provides materials, programs, tools, and space that strengthen the community by informing, educating, and entertaining community members of all ages.

Long-range Strategic Plan, 2020-2025

The elements of the Strategic Plan support the goals and values expressed in the Library Mission Statement. Most of the goals listed below are expected to be accomplished within the current annual budgets for the Library. Capital improvement goals involve fundraising by the Library Foundation.

Materials:

Plan	Value	Metric	Date Initiated/Completed	Responsible Party
Relabel and reorganize picture books/beginning readers	Educate Entertain	All picture books and Beginning readers are organized strictly by author's names and titles.	January 2021-Summer 2021	Collection Development Team
Add series spine labels to all series in the Library	Educate Entertain	Series in Junior Fiction, Intermediate Fiction, Teen Fiction, and Adult Fiction all have series labels	Fall 2020-Fall 2021	Collection Development Team
Create an Intermediate Fiction audiobook collection	Educate Entertain	Audiobooks whose physical copies are in Intermediate Fiction are relabeled,	Fall 2021	Collection Development Team

		and new items acquired.		
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Programs

Plan	Value	Metric	Date initiated/ Completed	Responsible Party
Continue providing educational programs for each age group	Educate	Offer weekly children's programs, and monthly adult/teen programs	Fall 2020-ongoing	Programming Team
Establish working relationship with all local schools	Inform/ Educate/ Community	Quarterly contact with representative from each school	January 2021-ongoing	Public Relations Team/ Library Director
Increase number of current library card holders	Inform	Number of card holders will increase 10% the first year and 5% each subsequent year	January 2021-December 2025	Library Director/ Public Relations Team
Increase Summer Reading participation	Educate/ Entertain	Have 1000 participants by 2022 and then increase by 5% in the next 3 years	Summer 2022-Summer 2025	Library Director/ Public Relations Team/ Programming Team
Re-establish programs for special needs and seniors	Educate/ Inform/ Entertain	After COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, re-establish outreach to HIVES and Highland Glen	Fall 2021- onward	Library Director/ Programming Team
Establish a quarterly bilingual story time	Educate/ Entertain	Hold four bilingual story times in one year	Fall 2022-Fall 2023	Programming Team/ Library Director

Hold a Senior Services Fair annually	Inform	Hold a trial event and then consider continuing	Spring 2022	Public Relations Team/ Library Director
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Tools and Technology

Plan	Value	Measure	Date initiated/ Completed	Responsible Party
Establish a text-based reference service at the Library	Inform	Adopt the service acquired by the city that allows text-based reference.	Fall 2020-Winter 2021	City Public Relations/ Library Director
Increase e-book use by purchasing most held items	Inform/ Entertain	E-book use increases by 10% each year	Fall 2020-Fall 2025	Collection Development Team
Obtain circulating e-readers with Battle of the Books pre-loaded	Educate	Obtain 10 e-readers and load the Battle of the Books titles on them	Fall 2021-ongoing	Collection Development Team/ Library Director
Obtain Security Gates	Materials	Obtain and install security gates at main entrance	Summer 2022	Library Director/ Collection Development Team

Training

Plan	Value	Measure	Date initiated/ Completed	Responsible Party
Send at least one staff member to a national conference each year	Train	Staff member attends a national conference	Spring 2022, and continuing forward	Library Director
Send at least three staff members to state training sessions	Train	Three staff members attend state training each year	Fall-2020, and continuing forward	Library Director

Train staff on first year library school topics during monthly staff meeting	Train	Training session at monthly staff meeting	Fall 2020-Spring 2021	Library Director
Have a staff member complete "Uplift Training"	Train	Staff member receives Uplift Training Certificate	Already initiated/ Fall 2023	Library Director/ Participating Staff Member

The Covid-19 epidemic has underscored the Library's need for expanded program space. We hope to build a facility in the plot east of the library with a large meeting space with a stage, medium size program rooms (could be divided off sections of the large meeting space), study rooms for use of the community, and a space for an art gallery (perhaps as part of the lobby). This facility would be administered by the library, but could also be used by other city and non-governmental organizations. Although the Library would spearhead the fundraising process, we hope to find community partners who will join the effort. Based on City priorities and outside organizations interests, this plan will likely need to be adjusted in the future.

Space

Plan	Value	Measure	Date initiated/ Completed	Responsible Party
Establish a team to investigate the creation of a Library Program Space near the library	Community	Hold an initial meeting and schedule future meetings	November 2020	Library Director/Library Board/Foundation
Do a feasibility study concerning the creation of a Library Program Space	Community	Assessment takes place	Winter 2020/2021	Library Director/Library Board/ Foundation Other Community Leaders
Obtain a rendering for a possible Library Program Space near the library	Community	Have a professional agency create a rendering for a Library Program Space	March 2020	Library Director/Library Board/Foundation

Establish a capital improvement budget for new Library Program Space	Community	Obtain a realistic estimate from a competent agency	Summer 2021	Library Director/Library Foundation
Discuss community assessment, rendering, and capital improvement budget with City Council and make any needed adjustments. Continual check-ins will occur with the City Council at a minimum during the Library Board's annual report to the Council.	Community	Hold a Joint Work Session with the City Council and Library Board	Spring 2020	Library Director/Library Board/ City council
Hire a fund-raising consultant for capital improvement	Inform	Fund-raising consultant engaged	Spring 2022	Library Director/Foundation
Start a fund raising campaign	Inform	Launch of fund raising campaign	Spring 2022	Library Director/ Foundation/ Consultant
First milestone in funding reached	Community	25% of cost of Library Program Space raised	Summer 2023	Library Director/ Foundation/ Consultant
Second milestone of funding reached	Community	50% of cost of Library Program Space raised	Summer 2025	Library Director/ Foundation



HIGHLAND CITY

LIBRARY BOARD AGENDA REPORT ITEM #4.2

DATE: October 22, 2020
TO: Library Board
FROM: Donna Cardon, Library Director
SUBJECT: Book Reconsideration Request

PURPOSE:

Discuss the request to reconsider the book, *The Illness Lesson* by Clare Beams.

BACKGROUND:

Our collection development manager has a limited budget, so she tries to primarily order fiction that is popular and has received positive reviews. In February 2020 she ordered *The Illness Lesson* by Clare Beams. It had received starred review from Booklist and Kirkus and positive review from other sources.

In July we were approached by a patron who was very disturbed about the book. I encouraged her, since she felt strongly about it, to submit a Library Material Reconsideration Form. I did not hear from her again until October, but in the mean time I read the book and felt that her concerns were understandable. After she submitted her formal reconsideration request, I invited Board members to read the book as well. Three of the Board Members agreed to read the book.

The Library's collection development policy states that, "The Library does not buy pornography (as defined by the Utah State Code, Title 76- 10-1203) or materials which trade exclusively in sensationalism or would offend community standards." The purpose of our discussion today is to determine, in the Board's opinion, if this book fits that description.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No fiscal impact

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Although the book contains disturbing story elements, I do not feel that it qualifies as pornography or is patently offensive to community standards.

PROPOSED MOTION:

I propose that the Library retain its copy of The Illness Lesson in its collection.

ALTERNATE MOTION:

I propose that the Library remove its copy of The Illness Lesson from its collection.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Patron Material Reconsideration Form (Redacted)
2. The Illness Lesson Summary and Reviews

Library Material Reconsideration Form

(you may continue explanations on additional pages if desired)

Title The Illness Lesson

Book X DVD _____ Other _____

Author Clare Beams

Publisher ?

Request initiated by [REDACTED]

Address [REDACTED]

City [REDACTED] State [REDACTED] Zip [REDACTED]

Telephone [REDACTED]

Request made on behalf of:

X yourself

_____ An organization or other group (name) _____

Did you read/view the entire work? yes

What is your objection? Please be specific. Cite pages.

The cover copy of the book draws readers in with (fiction) of women's girls being valued and intelligent in the early 1900s, when history says they weren't. The twist ending is that they were sexually molested and sent away scared bc they ~~and~~ fell

What is positive about the work?

One woman, a dismissed as silly, wife & art teacher left protesting the sexual abuse.

under pressure of coercing men, unable to fight for themselves & therefore not actually valued for intelligence.

What do you feel might be the negative result of reading/viewing the material?

It describes in detail teenage girls being lied to & coerced into sexual molestation. Feelings of embarrassment, low self worth, confusion, triggers of their dreams... etc.

Are there any persons for whom you would recommend this work?

Absolutely Not!

What do you believe is the theme of this work?

It was sold as a school for girls with brilliant minds. Then throughout it were twists of character, second guessing, & manipulation.

What resource(s) do you suggest to provide additional information on this topic?

Read about great women in history:

Marie Curie, the like or fictional strong women - Wizards First Rule Series.

In its place, what work would you recommend that would convey a more acceptable perspective for the target audience of the subject treated?

Girl, Wash Your Face.

Action requested:

☒ Return it to the staff selection committee/department for re-evaluation

☐ Other, explain:

Signature

date

7/20/20

The Illness Lesson by Clare Beams: Summary and Reviews

Summary (from Washington Independent Review of Books)

<http://www.washingtonindependentreviewofbooks.com/index.php/bookreview/the-illness-lesson-a-novel>

The Illness Lesson: A Novel

By Clare Beams Doubleday 288 pp.

Reviewed by Robert Allen Papinchak

February 7, 2020

What happens when the patriarchy decides a group of 19th-century schoolgirls is suffering from "hysteria"?

Not since Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds" has a flock of aggressive avians taken front and center in a narrative as they do in Clare Beams' provocative debut novel, *The Illness Lesson*. Belligerent red, trilling hearts dominate the imagery and themes of her engrossing treatment of progressive education in mid-19th-century New England.

The story follows one academic year from its inception to the demise of the Trilling Heart School. Founded on the ash heap of a failed transcendental community, Birch Hill Farm, the new school is no phoenix rising.

It is fated for disaster from the start. Its mission statement is to find the "foreignness of the fifteen year-old girl" in order to reveal the "truest, deepest self" through literature, moral reasoning, scientific inquiry, and mathematics. It promises the discovery of the "genderless soul."

Caroline Hood, 29, grew up as a child of the earlier experimental endeavor under the tutelage of her famous essayist father, Samuel, on the remote farm outside the nearby rural town of Ashwell, Massachusetts. She was 6 when her mother died under mysterious circumstances, and Samuel has been her only supportive companion.

The best-laid plans seem to be moving along fairly smoothly — seven students have enrolled; the barn has been refinished as a one-room schoolhouse — until Caroline has a chance encounter with Eliza Pearson Bell.

Eliza's deceased father, Miles, was one of the original members of the first school. He became infamous by writing *The Darkening Glass*, a scandalous roman a clef based none too subtly on an alleged adulterous triangle involving him and Caroline's parents. Samuel has, in essence, abolished the successful, salacious novel from the premises. But try keeping it from curious adolescent eyes and minds.

After petitioning Caroline for entrance into the school and pleading with her mother and stepfather (who are soon off to Europe for an extended period of time), Eliza becomes student number eight. She also becomes the fly in the ointment, the apple that upsets the cart.

Caroline should have known better. She thinks Eliza's presence will give the school some credence and prestige. She convinces her father that the word of mouth they will get from having her "will make us." She ignores the furious flutter of the ominous red birds scurrying about when she meets Eliza.

Eliza is not the only outsider to enter the fold of the initiates of the new project. David Moore, a self-taught naturalist from Ohio, is hired to teach natural history, mathematics, moral philosophy, and history. He is recognized as Samuel's "last disciple and unexpected hope."

Caroline is immediately drawn to his handsomeness and intellect. A "flurry of trilling hearts" clouds the sky when they meet. But he harbors a secret that will affect their entire relationship.

When classes begin in earnest, the year goes quickly from dismal to worse. A "blur" of birds constantly hovers near the barn and in the fields. Favorite objects — an earring, a bit of lace, some hair ribbons — go missing. Then, one by one, the girls fall ill. Eliza unexplainably faints, develops a rash, and gets a red spot in her eye. Others begin to exhibit seizures until the whole female population — including Caroline — suffers from mysterious fits and discomforts.

A supposedly reputable local doctor is called in to diagnose the situation. He determines the cause is tension from "hysteria." The only cure is "pelvic manipulation leading to paroxysm." Each female — including Caroline — is subjected to the treatment.

Beams excels in the details of this prescription. The sections on symptoms and their causes expose archaic misinformation and enforced misogyny.

Caroline begins to suspect something is awry. She secretly asserts her independence, first by writing to the private school Eliza attended previously. She discovers an unexpected ally in one of the staff, and another in someone with an intimate connection to David.

Then she confronts her father about the circumstances surrounding her mother's death. Pearson's novel hinted at a cover up. When Caroline finally recognizes the truth, she decides the school must close. The "grand educational experiment" must be deemed a grand failure. They were "making girls for a world that does not exist." And she decides she must determine her own future.

Despite its finely wrought prose and incisive dialogue, *The Illness Lesson* is often overburdened by its obvious message and its telegraphed plot. Nevertheless, it is a scathing indictment of early toxic masculinity, a measured diatribe against male-dominated medical and educational institutions.

Ultimately, it is a blistering condemnation of a patriarchal society which would deter the empowerment of independent female thinking. It also suggests that sometimes a bird is just a bird. Except when it's not.

Robert Allen Papinchak is a former university English professor whose reviews and criticism appear in numerous newspapers, magazines, literary journals, and online.

Positive Review

Kirkus Review

(<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/clare-beams/the-illness-lesson/>)

THE ILLNESS LESSON

by Clare Beams • RELEASE DATE: Feb. 11, 2020

progressive all-girls school in 1870s Massachusetts is thrown into chaos when its residents begin to experience inexplicable maladies.

Caroline Hood is the daughter of one of the most prominent thinkers in New England. Her father, Samuel, is a widowed essayist best known for a failed social experiment—a sort of utopian village—he attempted when Caroline was a child. This failure was lightly fictionalized in one of the period's most popular novels, *The Darkening Glass*. So when Samuel gets the idea to found a rigorous school to teach girls about their “deepest selves” on the site of the failed community, Caroline, now in her late 20s, is apprehensive. This apprehension deepens when one of their pupils, Eliza, turns out to be the daughter of the man who wrote *The Darkening Glass*. Eliza's presence is even more disruptive than Caroline and Samuel feared: Though an intelligent and mature student, Eliza seems more interested in prying into the secrets of the Hoods' past than in her studies. When Eliza suddenly begins manifesting strange physical ailments—seizurelike fits, mysterious markings, hysteria—the other girls soon come down with them, too. Caroline assumes some kind of manipulation; that is, until they start happening to her. When her father calls upon a physician, a family friend who seems to share Samuel's forward thinking, to treat the girls, the world that Caroline and her father tried to build is in danger, once again, of crashing down. Beams (*We Show What We Have Learned*, 2016) takes risk after risk in this, her first novel, and they all seem to pay off. Her ventriloquizing of the late 19th century, her delicate-as-lace sentences, and the friction between the unsettling thinking of the period and its 21st century resonances make for an electrifying read.

A satisfyingly strange novel from the one-of-a-kind Beams.

Negative Review

Goodreads contributor: Amanda (overall goodreads score 3.5 out of 5)

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/45754743-the-illness-lesson?from_search=true&from_srp=true&qid=QiSCeHvtoO&rank=1

At first, this was one of the most boring books I'd ever read. I had to find an alternative book to read at times, because this one frequently lulled me to sleep. Since it was a book club pick, I muddled through. (Also, because I went to hear the author, Clare Beams, speak about it and I purchased and had her autograph a copy.)

By the last 50 pages or so, it became very perverse and difficult to read. (Keep in mind, I am not easily offended and have read some disturbing materials, as seen in my "Read" bookshelf.) This was very distasteful and I'm not sure how it was totally relevant to the story. Many other scenarios could have been substituted and still reached the conclusion. Furthermore, I'm having difficulty understanding how Ms. Beams was able to write such a story, having two daughters of her own. I can only hope for their sakes that they are never allowed to read this book.

The only satisfaction I got from this book at all came from finishing it and being able to guilt-free rid my bookshelf of it, autographed copy or not.



HIGHLAND CITY

LIBRARY BOARD AGENDA REPORT ITEM #4.3

DATE: October 22, 2020
TO: Library Board
FROM: Donna Cardon, Library Director
SUBJECT: Feasibility Study

PURPOSE:

Library Board will consider the Library Foundation's request to commission a feasibility study for a new Library Program Space.

BACKGROUND:

In the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, the Library proposed that the first steps be taken to investigate constructing a new Library Program Space. In the Strategic Plan as initially approved by the Board in our last meeting, it is proposed that the Library Foundation would do a community assessment concerning the project in Spring of 2021. Since that time, I have become aware of an opportunity to have a feasibility study done by the architectural firm, CSRA, at a significantly reduced rate if the study can be initiated by the fourth quarter of this year. The company has received stimulus money because of the COVID-19 epidemic to support these kinds of projects, but it must be spent by the end of the year. CSRA has constructed several library and community center projects in the past decade.

The goal of the study would be to obtain community feedback regarding library needs, establish an appropriate building size, confirm whether the land is a suitable location, establish potential project partners, and establish a total project cost. The cost of feasibility study of this nature would usually cost around \$30,000-\$40,000. It is anticipated that the cost would be, after the discount, between \$3,000-\$5,000. The Library Foundation met on October 13th and approved using Foundation funds to pay for the study.

The study would focus on the property east of the current city center building.

The City Council approved the study in their October 20 meeting. They added a stipulation that the study should contain information about possible extra revenue sources to support the center. Councilor Kurt Ostler, as part of the arts council board, has agreed

to be part of the steering committee for the study.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The feasibility study would be funded by the Highland City Library Foundation. It is anticipated that by initiating the study earlier than anticipated, the Foundation would save between \$27,000-\$35,000 dollars.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Library Board approve the commissioning of a feasibility study for a Library Program building east of the city center building.

PROPOSED MOTION:

I move that Library Board approve the commission of a feasibility study by the Highland City Library Foundation, for a new Library Program Space on the property east of the current city center building.

ATTACHMENTS:

None