

NH ALA Councilor Report from ALA 2020 Midwinter in Philadelphia, PA

This was my third ALA Council series, and I am finally getting the hang of the process and procedures associated with it. For those who are unfamiliar with ALA Council, it is the membership governing body for the American Library Association (a 501(c)3, consisting of 184 councilors). Representation comes from state chapters, ALA divisions, and ALA Roundtables. NH Library Association is a chapter of ALA.

My report below includes an Executive Summary with highlights, and then a listing of the major agenda items for each Council meeting, with links to reports and resolutions. Unless noted otherwise, I voted yes when the vote occurred. I was there for all discussions, but what is clear to me (having been present) may not be clear to the reader of this report. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions about anything related to this report, ALA Council, or ALA in general: 603-271-2393; lori.fisher@dncr.nh.gov.

Executive Summary

For NH librarians and NHLA, there are three major issues to highlight from 2020 Midwinter ALA Council meetings: updates passed at Council III related to interpretations for the Library Bill of Rights; the Steering Committee on Organizational Effectiveness recommendations about radical changes to ALA governance; and the ALA FY20 Budget. Details about all Council actions are referenced in my [full report](#) (pdf).

1. **Updates regarding ALA's Library Bill of Rights:** an updated interpretation about access to library resources and services regardless of sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights was approved by Council. Visit the [ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee Report to Council](#) to see the updated language. Also of note is that the new print book version of the Library Bill of Rights and all interpretations is due to be published in 2020.
2. **Steering Committee on Organizational Effectiveness recommendations:** These recommendations, if implemented, will radically change the governance structure of ALA and eliminate ALA Council. It is worth noting that Council would have to vote twice to move forward with eliminating themselves. The purpose behind this restructuring is to increase member communication and engagement, changing ALA into a more responsive, 21st century organization. The NHLA executive board will be discussing this issue and deciding if they want to issue a statement about it (NJ chapter opposes; Idaho chapter endorses, for example). For more information, visit <https://forwardtogether.ala.org> or take part in the upcoming virtual webinar on Thursday 2/13 from 2 pm to 3 pm EST.
3. **ALA is facing a serious cash flow problem,** along with a lack of effective communication about financial matters to divisions, roundtables, Council, and members. Bottom line is that ALA is operating on a deficit budget, and that simply cannot continue since there is not enough in the general fund to pay the bills. This came as a big surprise to many at the conference, since that information was released in a very limited way to few people just prior to Midwinter.

Last, ALA has hired a new executive director, Tracie Hall. She starts work on 2/24/2020, and I did get to speak with her briefly during the conference. For more information about her background, [read ALA's press release](#).

Below is my detailed account of Council activities. Please reach out with questions.

Submitted by Lori Fisher, NH ALA Councilor (2019-2021)

ALA Council I – Sun 1/26/2020

ALA CD #35 - [Report from the Steering Committee on Organizational Effectiveness](#)

This report outlines the process and next steps towards a radical reorganization of ALA. This is an important document to read, since the NHLA Executive Board may decide to submit a letter to ALA either in support of or in opposition to this plan prior to the first of two ALA Council votes on the issue at 2020 ALA Annual meeting in June. For more information, visit <https://forwardtoether.ala.org> or take part in the upcoming virtual webinar on Thursday 2/13 from 2 pm to 3 pm EST.

ALA CD #40 – [Resolution Ensuring Intellectual Freedom and the Right to Peacefully Assemble at ALA Conferences and Meetings](#)

Language in this resolution was amended to be “all ALA events.” No discussion about amendment or about resolution. I abstained from the vote because I thought we were voting on the amendment (which I was not convinced was a good one) not the actual resolution. The problem with this resolution is that it puts ALA Council in the position of dealing more with management issues instead of policy issues. Some Councilors tried to get this resolution suspended in Council II, but that action did not pass (see below under ALA Council II).

ALA Council II – Mon 1/27/2020

ALA CD#27 – [Committee on Organization \(COO\) Report](#)

This vote made the Council Forum an official subcommittee of the ALA Orientation Committee, which would then provide education about the parameters of Forum, give sustainable facilitation, and provide oversight. This is the recommendation of the COO since the unfortunate event at Midwinter 2019 where some Councilors felt Forum had become an unsafe space.

ALA CD #37 – [Final Report of the ALA Task Force to Explore Online Deliberation and Voting](#) The changes outlined in the document to the ALA Constitution and ALA bylaws were passed by majority vote.

ALA CD #39 – [Create the ALA Affiliation, the Polish-American Librarians Association](#)

I voted no for this action. I believe that creating ethnic affiliates is an unsustainable cost burden that ALA cannot afford to take on any longer. Exec. Director Mary Ghikas did not provide more than “it will cost a lunch” as an answer about the fiscal impact of adding an affiliate, and that explanation was not enough to compel me to vote yes. Passed by majority vote.

ALA CD #41 – [Resolution in Opposition to Charging Prisoners to Read](#)

This was an easy yes and passed with no opposition.

ALA CD #40 – Suspend implementation of CD#40 until after fiscal year is complete (See above ALA CD #40 for full description). I voted no to the amendment for the suspension, and yes to the suspension motion as written. Suspension of the motion implementation was defeated.

ALA Budget Discussion

On Friday 1/25, Councilor and BARC (Budget Analysis and Review Committee) member Peter Hepburn sent [Exec Board document #12.39](#) to the Council listserv, and the contents caused an uproar for the rest of the conference. Bottom line is that ALA is cash poor, and needs to take drastic action and change course or else there is a chance we could lose our association. This “discussion” during Council II was mainly a period for Councilors to ask questions that would be taken back to the Executive Board for their afternoon meeting. The only reason this “discussion” took place was because a Councilor stood up and asked that it be added to the agenda.

ALA Council III – Tues 1/28/2020

ALA CD #18.1 – [Resolution celebrating the centennial anniversary of the American Library in Paris](#); passed.

ALA CD #19.4 – Access to library resources and services regardless of sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights; passed.

ALA CD #19.5 – resolution on forming a working group to align vendor privacy policies with ALA policies and ethics; passed.

Both are in the link for the [ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee Report to Council](#).

ALA CD #49: [Resolution in Defense of the Free Speech of Supporters of the Movement for Palestinian Rights](#); defeated and I voted no.

This vote was due to a referral of the Resolution to three committees at 2019 ALA Annual Council: Committee on Legislation (COL), Committee on Intellectual Freedom (IFC), and the International Relations Committee (IRC). Prior to vote, the recommendations from each of the three committees were shared. For IRC, they voted 6-3 that this is a domestic policy so has no relevance to their committee. That also means they did not vote in favor or in opposition to it. For COL and IFC, both did not support the resolution as written. See the IFC report link above, and here is the [COL report link](#).

I voted in opposition to this motion because ALA needs to stick to its core priorities and values. We are the only organization that focuses on federal library funding, and that priority requires that we work hard to build legislative relationships in Washington DC. Voting for a partisan resolution would only hurt those relationships on the Hill. I spoke

against this resolution in Council Forum as a representative of ALA policy corps, and other policy corps members who are also Councilors spoke at Council III in opposition.

The Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT), who put this resolution forward, is very adamant that it be brought back to 2020 ALA Annual with different wording.

ALA CD #13.1 – [FY2021 Programmatic priorities \(slide 6\)](#); (scroll down and click on the link to document 13.1); passed; voted yes

ALA Budget Discussion

This portion of Council III opened with ALA President Wanda Brown reading a letter from the Executive Board to the ALA Council. This document has not yet been made available on the ALA web site, but you can see the text in the link below to the transcript for Council III.

ALA Executive Director Mary Ghikas (MG) then provided some answers to questions that were brought up at Council II, as well as provided an overview and timeline for the financial situation ALA faces now. The highlights are:

- Revenue has declined approximately \$2 million from the three main sources of funding for ALA: publishing, conferences, and membership.
- Publishing: FY19/20 gross revenues missed the target by \$600K
- Conferences: 2019 MW conference revenue down due to Council AV costs in Seattle
- Membership revenues have been declining
- Budgeted interest income was not realized (“bad budgeting” per MG)
- In addition to the shortfall of \$2 million, there is another \$2 million in overspending on the IT capital budget, so now there is a depreciation schedule with a big balloon. The IT capital expenses mainly dealt with ecommerce (online financial software for membership dues, elearning, and the ALA store).
- Because of the timing of the Chicago building sale as well as some personnel issues, there were things that MG assumed were in the budget and were not.

Overall, not all of the Councilor questions were addressed. According to MG, ALA is holding/not filling positions, and is looking at the budget to hold/delay various things (\$100K here, \$100K there). She feels we need to focus on membership growth since it doesn't have the same dynamics as publishing and conferences.

The biggest discussion point was around the cash reserves that were held by the various divisions, which were used by ALA leadership to pay ALA operating expenses and basically means that those cash reserves are gone. For example, PLA had the biggest cash reserve of \$3.6 million, and that money was spent without notifying PLA staff and the PLA board. According to MG, ALA has “one checkbook” and monies in reserves by divisions can be spent by ALA leadership. However, this really affects successful divisions such as PLA, who now does not have the reserves money (that they earned through conferences, sales of materials, etc.) to start new initiatives. According to MG, for FY 20 and beyond, divisions and roundtables need to plan their uses of cash with ALA administration for anything over \$200K. ALA is cash poor even though the assets statement makes it look like ALA is fine.

To see the text of the letter read by President Wanda Brown, the statements by Executive Director Mary Gihkas, as well as questions from Councilors, you can read the transcript of Council III: [Transcript of 2020 ALA MW Council III](#)