

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION
Library Committee

Issue Briefing

Topic: Revisions to Township Code Chapter 20 - Library Services

Prepared By: David Belanger, Director of Libraries

Date: June 9, 2020

- I. **Action To Be Considered By The Board:** Authorize the Township Secretary to advertise notice of intent to adopt an ordinance amending the Code of the Township of Lower Merion Chapter 20 Library Services, to change the name of the Lower Merion Library Association to the Lower Merion Library System throughout, and to add a provision for the consumption of alcoholic beverages at events in a Township Public Library if sponsored or sanctioned by the Lower Merion Library System.
- II. **Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:** Amendments to the Township Code require the approval of the Board of Commissioners
- III. **Current Policy or Practice (If Applicable):** The name of the Library System was changed from the Lower Merion Library Association to the Lower Merion Library System in 1994 and was not updated in the Township Code.

The Township Code restricts serving of alcohol on Township property, which is defined as a public place in the Code. § 111-4.2 states: No person shall drink an alcoholic beverage, nor shall any person, firm, corporation or other organization possess an open container containing an alcoholic beverage, whether inside or outside of a motor vehicle or any part thereof, on or in any public place within the Township of Lower Merion.

The Board of Commissioners has permitted alcohol at library events in the past on a case-by-case basis. Most recently, the Board of Commissioners allowed the Penn Wynne Library to serve alcohol at its Appetite for Books fundraising event in the library. The Township has rules in place under the Special Event Permit involving the Sale and/or Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages.

A similar exemption exists in the Township Code Chapter 109 Parks and Recreation Department. The exemption allows alcohol to be served on the grounds of Appleford and Harriton pursuant to a permit. The Appleford Committee and the Harriton House Association are authorized to issue such permits. The language in the proposed ordinance is based upon the Chapter 109 exemption, with the Lower Merion Library System Board of Directors given the authority to issue such permits.

IV. **Other Relevant Background Information:** Library events are crucial for building audiences and fundraising activities. In 2018 and 2019, the Penn Wynne Library’s Appetite for Books fundraiser was held in the library with a special exemption from the Board of Commissioners. Having the event in the library allowed donors to connect with their local branch in a novel social way. Using the library also eliminated the cost of renting a facility to hold the event, resulting in additional income.

Serving alcohol in moderation also allows libraries to attract an expanded audience. An article in the March 1, 2019 edition of *American Libraries*, described how libraries across the country are using special after-hours events with alcohol to increase “event attendance, particularly among younger adults, and cultivates a public image of the library as a hip, up-to-date social setting.” “People are used to relaxing with a beer or a glass of wine,” says Marcy James, programming coordinator for Jefferson County (Colo.) Public Library (JCPL). The library staff interviewed for the article reported no negative impact from the events.

Since it is not located in a Township owned building, the Gladwyne Library has served alcohol at various events, such as art exhibit openings. The events have been successful with no major incidents.

Assigning the responsibility for issuing permits to the Lower Merion Library System Board of Directors increases flexibility and efficiency. Under the current process, requests for exemptions are reviewed by the LMLS board, and then presented at a Library Committee Meeting of the Board of Commissioners. Next, the request is formally presented to the full Board of Commissioners for consideration. The new process would be streamlined and less cumbersome, with requests simply determined by the LMLS board.

The updated name in the Township Code will provide consistency and clarity for the public to understand the process for providing library service in the Township.

V. **Impact on Township Finances:** The majority of case-by-case requests to serve alcohol in libraries has been for fundraising related events. This has generated private revenue to expand the services offered by libraries at no direct cost to taxpayers.

VI. **Staff Recommendation:** Staff recommends authorizing the Township Secretary to advertise notice of intent to adopt the proposed ordinance.