

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

Meeting of the Trustees as a Corporation and Administrative Agency

Tuesday, January 12, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

via Zoom

MINUTES

A Meeting of the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston as a Corporation and Administrative Agency was held on Tuesday, January 12, 2021 via Zoom at 8:30 a.m..

Present at the meeting were: Chair, Robert Gallery and Vice-Chair Evelyn Arana-Ortiz and Trustees: Zamawa Arenas, Jabari Asim, Ben Bradlee, Priscilla Douglas, Linda Dorcena Forry, John Hailer, Jeff Hawkins, and Representative Chynah Tyler. Cheryl Cronin was not present due to being ill. Also present were: David Leonard, President, Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board, along with BPL staff and members of the public.

Chair Robert Gallery called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. and addressed the order of business. Mr. Gallery thanked everyone for their presence and wished everyone a happy new year. A roll call was taken and determined there was a quorum. Mr. Gallery called for the approval of the minutes of the last meeting. With no edits or comments, a motion was duly made and seconded. The Trustees unanimously voted to approve the meeting minutes of November 17, 2020 through a roll call vote. Members of the public were reminded the meeting was being recorded and to sign up to give public comment via the chat feature of the Zoom call.

David Leonard was asked to give the President's report. Mr. Leonard began by reading into record his email sent to all staff in response to the insurrection at the Capital the week prior.

"Likely, like many of you over the last few hours I have been following incredibly disturbing, frightening and ultimately sad news about what has been transpiring at the Capitol in Washington DC. While I understand what I saw earlier, words are failing me to explain what I saw and I have many questions. What I watched earlier was not protest it was something else entirely, a riot or something worse. And yes there has been loss of life as a result. And once again questions revolve around the role of law enforcement and proportionate response.

I hope that greater clarity will emerge. I hope that questions will be answered. I hope there will be no more loss of life; and I hope that those who committed crimes will be held accountable. Today was [meaning January 6th] and is to be an important legal and ceremonial milestone along the path from voting in a Presidential Election to Inauguration. Today, however was a deviation from ensuring the type of peaceful transfer of power that our democracy is known for.

As I draft this note the Senate has reconvened and reengaged with their duties. I find some comfort in this fact and indeed in opening statements I have just listened to by the Vice President and both Senators McConnell and Schumer.

This has been a blow to democracy, and exposes again not just our divisions in our society, but a reminder that we cannot make progress where society cannot distinguish truth from fiction where everyone is not treated equitably where unacceptable behavior is not called out and when groups believe that they are not just entitled to express opinions freely but are entitled to their own reality. While we too at BPL will from time to time have our own internal difference of policy, method, focus or opinion, and our own challenges; we need each other's support and society needs our work for the sake of democracy.

Although not how we might put things today, I am again reminded of the words on the McKim Building 'The Commonwealth Requires the Education of the People as the Safeguard of Order and Liberty'."

Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board-DRAFT

Mr. Leonard continued with his report. He explained that a new initiative that several BPL staff had been working on was just announced whose theme was called “Repairing America” . The initiative aimed to organize several programs and services in a way that can deliberately and intentionally help bridge gaps that divide America. The main themes include economic recovery, civic engagement and discourse, COVID-19 recovery, racial equity, workforce development, and youth engagement.

The BPL continued to offer robust online services and programming throughout the system with BPL to Go services, and limited in-person computer sessions. They continued to monitor staff closely and address anyone who tested positive for the virus or came in close contact, to reinforce the messaging of wearing masks, sanitizing hands, and abiding by social distancing guidelines.

Mr. Leonard announced Mayor Walsh was nominated by President Biden to serve as the Secretary of Labor. Pending his appointment is finalized, the BPL would engage with the transition of Councilor Janey accordingly.

Zamawa Arenas and other Trustees supported Mr. Leonard’s statement and thanked him for his strong and truthful statement, as well as his leadership during this difficult time. Priscilla Douglas echoed Ms. Arenas’ comments and thanked Mayor Walsh for being a staunch advocate and supporter of the BPL.

Mr. Leonard moved onto updating on Collection related matters. Laura Inscher, Chief of Collections was invited to brief the group on usage statistics during the COVID period and explain some changes made to the ordering process. Ms. Imscher explained that since March 16, 2020, there have been 66,719 e-card registrations, which is an increase of 50% from the registrations of the prior year. They have loaned 242, 476 physical items and have loaned 2.9 million digital items across the various platforms.

Ms. Imscher explained the updated collection ordering plan was implemented in December after an extensive evaluation and revision process done in the fall. The plan addressed operational challenges as well as the evolving patron needs. The plan will deliver a collection that is diverse and responsive to local communities around the city; using a model that combines benefits of a systemized approach that incorporates expertise of various librarians at each branch location.

The pandemic shed light on long standing issues of inefficiency in the ordering practices and also a lack of diversity in the collections. The improved plan will address workflow delays and bottlenecks that were experienced internally due to staffing issues due to COVID and with vendors.

Ms. Imscher explained the configuration of the Collection Development Department and the ordering process. Beyond this department there were three significant ways for staff to be involved in the collection building: dedicated funding streams for librarians at each location, the 17 selection teams that select by interest/subject, and the third area was suggestions by titles and subjects (which is ongoing for all staff and patrons alike). She continued that other considerations for the collections will be made by working groups, such as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion working group to help support the BPL’s racial equity action plan. Time will be needed to assess the effects and changes COVID will have on collection usage. They plan to review and evaluate the success of the plan and make improvements needed.

She gave a brief budget snapshot of how the collections are funded. The collective FY21 budget of approximately \$4 million comes from city funding, state funding, and donor gifts. She noted that of this budget, \$140,000 or 10% of the total amount spent on physical material, is set aside for local branch selection which was equivalent to about \$7,500 per branch. The Trustees had a brief discussion on the budget allocation and support services for digital materials and programming.

Mr. Ellen Donaghey, Chief Financial Officer, gave a high level update on the submitted FY22 Maintenance budget. She explained the maintenance budget describes the cost to do next year what was initially intended to be done this year. The figures are based on the previous year budget. She explained that there was a relatively minor increase of 1% to the budget, with the major cost driver being employee salaries. She noted that both union contracts were out of date which may include cost of living increases and step increases in salary.

Mr. Leonard added that in addition to the maintenance budget submission, they also submit potential reductions, new initiatives and some reform ideas to the City. The reduction model spans between the maintenance budget described and up to a 5% reduction in operating costs. The underlying fiscal realities for the city and priorities for the next year will govern where on that spectrum the BPL's budget will ultimately fall. Mr. Leonard noted that once they receive feedback they will be able to provide more details on what the final version of the submitted budget to City Council will look like.

Mr. Leonard concluded his President's report.

Next, Ms. Arana-Ortiz gave the Finance & Audit Committee updates. She provided some background on Dr. Karamechedis who left a generous gift of \$235,710 to the BPL to establish a fund used solely for the preservation and/or conservation of the library's collection. She explained the vote was to accept this gift. A motion was duly made, seconded and voted to approve unanimously by roll call vote.

VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston accept a donation in the amount of two hundred thirty five thousand and seven hundred ten dollars and zero cents (\$235,710) from the Estate of Dr. Miltiades Karamechedis to establish the ‘The Dr. Karamechedis Preservation and Restoration Fund’. The funds are to be used solely for the preservation and/or conservation of the Library’s Collection.”

Ms. Arana-Ortiz explained the next vote was to request approval for delegation to the Finance & Audit Committee for approval of two E-rate contracts for federal grants that have very strict deadlines, requiring a quicker approval to meet the tight timelines. A motion was duly made, seconded, and voted unanimously via a roll call vote.

VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston delegate approval of any E-rate contracts during the period between February 2021 and May 2021 to the Finance and Audit Committee.”

The final vote was to delegate to the Finance and Audit Committee the approval of the security contract. This contract was due to expire, and as customary, the BPL would be issuing a Request for Proposal (“RFP”). The RFP will need approval before the next Board meeting and therefore will need to be voted on in a timely manner. With no questions or comments, a motion was duly made, seconded and voted to approve by unanimous roll call vote.

VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston delegate approval of the Security Contract to the Finance and Audit Committee.”

Mr Gallery thanked the Karachemedis family for their generous donation. He asked for any New Business for which there was none. Mr. Gallery called for any Public Comment. The process to sign up for Public Comment was explained. Questions made would be answered at a later time and encouraged those seeking follow up to reach out to the clerk to provide their email addresses.

Reginald Jackson was heartened to hear the opening remarks by David Leonard and many members of the Trustees relative to the current situation as they were challenging democracy. They wanted to applaud

that recognition. They heard about the equity across the branches and the feedback of patrons. Their comment was more of a query to understand, much to their chagrin, how the Roxbury library got its name. Across the branches are named after their location. They were a longtime resident of Roxbury over forty years, and currently live in the Nubian Square. They were very disappointed not to be able to look forward to the library not being named Nubian Sq. Library, after much effort by the Mayor and residents of the area. Resoundingly express their positive support of the naming of the Square and transit stop. They want to know why the people who lived here did not have a chance to understand why it was renamed Roxbury Library.

Stephen T, just wanted to have comment and a query on the collection strategy discussion. One of the trustees wisely asked about the definitions of words like “diversity” and “equity” as it will be used in the collection plan. Ms. Irmischer was using the operative definitions as presented by the YW strategic decision making process. Their question was of the order of operations and why this fundamental change was being made before that process was complete and being cloaked in those terminologies before there was an operative definition of them. Why not wait instead until after such process that the library has made a public commitment towards anti-racist actions was completed and have operative definitions of those terms that can be used to implement from the ground up, rather than trying to retroactively fit?

Paula Coar, resident of Roxbury in total agreement with Mr. Jackson. They have documents in writing that there would be a community meeting to Mr. Kambon. They had no input as residents of the community. Next thing you know it was called the Roxbury Library with no meeting. We in the community want to have this meeting. Due to lack of transparency, those in the community, that live in community, should have a say of the name of this library. This would not have happened if you followed protocol. She gave examples of branches named after the area. Mr. Gallery noted Mr. Kambon did participate in the discussion at the Board meeting. And noted for the record that the Trustees have no intention on reopening this issue at this point in time, it was renamed the Roxbury Library. Ms. Coar stated that it was unacceptable and would be making further issues around this.

Claire Waldron-Gross, commented on the collection policy and demystify the collections process. She was the Children’s Librarian at Egleston Square branch for eight years. Up until March, every month, she was able to see comprehensive lists and reviews, through the vendor of almost all new children’s books available for purchase. She was able to weigh value to each one to the community and build a collection responsive to Egleston Square. She could choose accordingly with broad, balanced, and culturally competent choices. It allowed her them to have a deep knowledge about everything on the shelf, which is systemized through that ordering process. It informs programs, outreach and reference instruction. All that work informs the collection work library, which is multifaceted. When you try to silo it, the quality will suffer. That is what this plan does, even if the librarian is on a selection team, they do not see everything that is coming out, just the sliver that they are responsible for. Librarians can suggest books for a location but not suggest the need. At many of the feedback meetings, which were not discussions, librarians were told that it does not matter where a book is shelved because patrons can just request it. This is a very privileged mindset and ignores the patrons who rely on the branch system the most. It removes librarian power to choose the collection.

Celeste Boccachino-Chaudri, Children’s librarian at Roslindale Branch and on the Equitable Collections Committee of the PSA Union. She too wanted to comment on the Collections Development Plan. She wanted to talk a little about the money. She knows that Laura Irmischer stated they were starting to have line item budget for branches which they had not had in a long time. She was very happy to hear that and thought it was a great step in the right direction. She asked how that money compared to what they had to spend monthly. The monthly allocations were comparatively \$2,500 for branch materials. She noted that the annual distribution was approximately \$600 less each branch. They wanted to know how they derived that amount. She also asked for clarification regarding diversity to piggy back on earlier comments made by Stephen regarding timing of diversity and operations.

Kay Sweeney was a community member who often checks out books from the Copley Library. She wanted to advocate the book selection not be centralized as people had mentioned. Librarians and the communities they serve are much more diverse than the centralized leadership of the BPL. To remain responsive and continue to build trust with diverse and underserved communities, asked that they please do not centralize them. Although not a librarian, her understanding was that this plan is largely opposed by librarians and community members, and the decision was not being made democratically. It could not possibly be about improving diversity if it was also done against the wishes of the diverse communities and librarians.

David Vieira, City-Wide Friends member, wanted to piggy back on Ms. Sweeney's discussion of the autonomy of ordering books went back a long way, and goes back to former administration. Many books that were donated, were removed from the collection, Discussion needed to be discussed at the branch level and the library could do better with offering the branches in ordering. He also wanted to point out that he heard nothing at all about the ability of branch librarians to accept books into the collection that have indeed been donated to the collection by local patrons in honor of an event or the passing of a person, and the involvement of the community members in this process was very important. It shows they support and defend their local library system. He hoped this continued to be an ongoing and informed good discussion.

Elissa Cadillic, President of AFSCME, 1526. She wanted to remind the Trustees that the work her members were doing during this pandemic. They were the first group to return to in-person service. The Facilities Department was keeping our buildings safe for staff and our patrons. The Shipping Department was moving materials around the system. The Welcome Services and Tech Central staff were servicing the in-person computer sessions. The Borrower Services staff were maintaining almost full day services. Branch staff were handling the in-person holds of BPL to Go and/or reporting to support these services. Many were taking public transportation during this time while trying to figure out child and elder care, and did not have the luxury of working fully remote. Their stress levels continued to rise. They understood there may be hard budget discussions and understood choices had to be made due to physical issues. She hoped this Board would agree that services and staff should have a higher priority over new initiatives and budget accordingly. Many had lived through the 2009-2010 years, and she requested we take a different path this time by having good faith discussions. Laura Irmscher described the revised plan for moving forward on collection development. We think much of it makes sense. We are all in a pandemic and we much adapt. However, AFSCME 1526 members have brought up that branch librarians had been colorblind when ordering for their neighborhoods by the overwhelmingly white representation of librarian staff in our diverse neighborhoods. My members voiced suggestions and have largely been ignored and this plan does not do anything to enhance the relationship between librarians, and her diverse membership in these communities. What this plan does was reduce the AFSCME membership and their expertise, to the same as a generic purchase. She also asked that security members become BPL employees as they were in the past and AFSCME represented department. She was happy to discuss further if needed.

Anne Langone, President of the PSA union which represented the librarians. She noted there were approximately 165 members. They were against this collections policy. She noted there were some great parts to it, training and opportunities for professional development in collection development matters. We loved the part about being able to order books from more than one vendor, because it also enhances diversity and it made sense for a system of the BPL's size to be able to order from more than one vendor. She loved that there were diversity audits; lots of good things. She added but to its core, what the plan does was take the selection ability away from all or most of the branch librarians, and puts it in the hands of four other librarians that do not work with the public. It meant centralized collections, it meant the depth of the individual and particular branch collections where there had to be room for. There was no reason they couldn't have diversity audits, increased trainings, a steady stream of revenue without having to take the other bullet. It did not make sense that things would become more diverse when all the

ordering power was to be put in the hands of four librarians. They are unhappy with it and how it was rolled out at the Roxbury branch. She noted that the community was against it; over 600 people had written letters to David Leonard asking for him to reconsider.

Sadiki Kambon, Chairman of the Nubian Square Coalition, responded to Mr. Jackson and Ms. Core's comments regarding the library name in Nubian Square. He would like to transfer that vote that was taken on May 26, 2020 orchestrated by Mr. Gallery, and have it declared null and void. What was mentioned was the fact that he had received written correspondence from the office of Mr. Leonard, essentially stating that in regards to the library name change in Nubian Square, in fact the May 26, 2020 meeting, there would be "no vote taken" because Mr. Leonard assured us that we wanted to have a community meeting to get input to determine the new name. As a coalition requested once again, that the vote from May 26, 2020 be declared null and void. The Trustee Board make a determination that the promise made would be fulfilled with a community meeting, getting community input on the final name. He echoed the comments of Mr. Jackson, it was Nubian Square and Nubian Station, and that the residents made it very clear that the preference for the library be Nubian Library. Would like a democratic process and not dictatorship in terms of the final name because they did not believe that what Mr. Gallery orchestrated was spontaneous. He felt there was in fact a plan to have it named Roxbury Library and to not allow community input and he wanted it changed.

Akunna Eneh, Librarian at the Roxbury Branch, wanted to offer suggestion about the conversation about diversity, more specifically defining it and how to think about it. She listened to the comments and felt there was an issue. Being a resident of Boston, she was very familiar with the issue of diversity and inclusion becoming meaningless as it is said because it was mentioned more and more. She felt that what was missing was the actual voices, opinions, thoughts, and interested of people who do the work, who were working directly with a diverse set of patrons. She clarified when saying "diverse", most of the time, it referred to people of color, people who have been marginalized at every level in society, and not just a blanket diversity and inclusion. She noted there were a number of issues where the people are not heard, or invited to in a genuine way, to participate in decision making. She offered that the part of the discussion of "what diversity means" should not be just a checklist of how many black, brown, or indigenous can you see in a picture. She echoed Elissa Cadillic's comments on not just shutting out librarians, but other staff, in general as well that work at the library. It is not just one person, in their own head picking books, but rather it is the patrons and other co-workers of all levels that help determine what would be best and where to shelve it.

Marie Firmin, a lifelong resident of Roxbury and President of the Black Business Development Corp., LLC. They organize businesses in the community to develop sustainability in terms of servicing the community. She wanted to ask people to write down all the names of the libraries and take note that there were no names that represented diversity. Ruggles Street does not represent diversity but Nubian Library does. She said they did not fight to get 70% of the vote there in Roxbury to name Nubian Square for nothing. The library was a part of Nubian Square and should be named as such. Those who were fearful of that, fearful that they would take over their own community that they built; a community that her mother and grandmother built, they have the issue, not them. They will fight for Nubian Library because it represented them, the community, and was diverse.

Laura Gang, of the Roslindale Friends, thanked the Library for launching the "Repairing America" initiative. She had two questions related to it. First, does the BPL staff see a role for friends groups in making it as successful as it could be. Second, is there any provision for staffing or financial help for the branches that are currently closed. She was not suggesting you put this on Celeste, the Roslindale Branch Children's librarian, because she was being overloaded with lots of extra work. Rather, she noted they could use some help in Roslindale and bet those around the Adams St. Branch could as well. She added that they would be out of commission for most of the year and would like to participate.

Mr. Gallery they do not often comment after public comments, but wanted to respond due to there being several librarians on the call. He let them know that their efforts to enable them to serve the patrons of the library, the citizens of Boston, and the Commonwealth were very much appreciated. He noted that all comments were always taken to heart and that the leadership team of the BPL takes these issues very seriously and always has. Ultimately, as in any enterprise, you come down on decisions that you believe are in the best interest of the library, its employees, and its patrons. He assured that any deliberation they have taken on that is always their intent and continues to be their intent.

Mr. Gallery thanked everyone for their presence and for their ongoing support of the library. With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:53 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela Carver