

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

**Meeting of the Trustees as a Corporation and Administrative Agency
Tuesday, March 23, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.
Held 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, March 23, 2021 via Zoom at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Acting Chair, Evelyn Arana-Ortiz and Trustees: Jabari Asim, Navjeet Bal, Joe Berman, Ben Bradlee, Cheryl Cronin, Priscilla Douglas, Linda Dorcena Forry, John Hailer, Jeff Hawkins, Joyce Linehan, Senator Mike Rush, Representative Chynah Tyler, and Christian Westra. Zamawa Arenas was not present due to a personal emergency.

Also present were: David Leonard, President, Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board, former Chair Bob Gallery, District City Councilor Frank Baker, along with BPL staff and members of the public.

Acting Chair Evelyn Arana-Ortiz called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. and addressed the order of business. The public was reminded that the meeting was recorded and to sign up to give public comment via the chat feature of the Zoom meeting. Ms. Arana-Ortiz thanked everyone for attending. She congratulated Mayor Martin Walsh on his appointment as U.S. Secretary of Labor and wished him well as he embarked on his new journey in Washington, D.C. She congratulated Acting Mayor Kim Janey for being recognized as the first woman and person of color to lead the City of Boston. Ms. Arana-Ortiz pledged the Trustees' support in being supportive partners in the City's efforts coming out of the pandemic and was looking forward to their partnership to serve the residents of Boston and the Commonwealth with shared equitable practices.

She continued with the celebratory spirit in welcoming the five new Trustees who were introduced and gave brief backgrounds of themselves and shared in the excitement to serve on the Board of Trustees. They included Navjeet Bal, Joe Berman, Joyce Linehan, Senator Mike Rush, and Christian Westra. [Full bios on BPL Website].

Roll call was taken and determined there was a quorum. Ms. Arana-Ortiz called for the approval of the minutes of the last meeting. Upon a motion made that was duly seconded, the Trustees unanimously voted to approve the meeting minutes of January 12, 2021 through a roll call vote.

Ms. Arana Ortiz noted that among the celebrations, it was then time to bid farewell to their friend and Trustee, Mr. Robert Gallery. She expressed the Board's gratitude for his leadership and example over the past five plus years and that he would be sorely missed. Mr. Gallery was asked to give some farewell remarks.

Mr. Gallery thanked Ms. Arana-Ortiz who served as his Vice Chair and noted that the last 5 years were some of the most memorable working with each of the Trustees. Being a steward for the BPL was one of the greatest honors of his life. He thanked them and the BPL staff and management for all their support. He thought it was ironic and fitting with the appointments of the three representatives of the affiliates serving as Trustees. Noting this marked one of their main goals from the onset of becoming Chair of strengthening the integrations between the library itself, the Trustees, and the affiliates. Mr. Gallery added that the BPL had one of the strongest, most diverse boards in the Commonwealth, and was assured in knowing he was leaving it in Ms. Douglas's hands. He thanked Ms. Arana-Ortiz for allowing him to say goodbye properly and ended by saying, "onward we go!" The Trustees gave him a round of applause. Each of the Trustees offered some kind parting words of support to their friend and colleague in appreciation for all he had done, and wished his well in all his future endeavors.

John Hailer introduced the Governance & Development Committee's nomination for the Officer position of Chair of the Board; explaining that Ms. Douglas would fill the vacancy of Mr. Gallery's chair position for the remainder of his term. Upon a motion made and duly seconded, they voted unanimously to approve by a roll call vote.

VOTED: "that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve the recommendation of the Governance and Development Committee for the officer nomination of Priscilla Douglas to serve as Chair of the Board for the period March 23, 2021 through May 18, 2021."

Mr. David Leonard responded with some kind words for Ms. Douglas, noting she would serve the BPL Board well in this position and welcomed her to the role of Chair of the Board. Mr. Leonard thanked Mr. Gallery for his years of leadership and looked forward to building the same level of collaboration with Ms. Douglas in the future.

Ms. Douglas thanked everyone for the kind introductions and acknowledged Mr. Gallery's leadership and commitment in reshaping the Board. She also thanked Ms. Arana-Ortiz for serving as interim Chair and looked forward to working together and for her wise counsel. She noted for her fellow Trustees, it was great to be a member of this Board, one that represented the diversity of Boston, a majority minority city. She gave a special thanks to Mayor Marty Walsh for appointing her to the Board in 2017. She had thought a lot about what leading this Board meant to her right now. The role was to expand accessibility and to ensure that the library was a welcoming place, free to all. Library had been and will always be a place to increase knowledge, discover, and dream and assist with the work to recover from the effects of COVID, help heal the wounds of 400 years of racial inequity, and bridging the economic and digital divide. Ms. Douglas was honored to be one of the BPL's stewards, and looked forward to the days ahead. She concluded by thanking everyone for their confidence in her, and was excited to get to work.

David Leonard gave the President's report. The first order of business was the proposal for renaming and dedication of the community room at the Adams Street Branch Library, "*The Patricia O'Neill Community Room*." District City Councilor Frank Baker was invited to present the proposal.

Councilor Baker began by thanking the Trustees and acknowledged Ms. O'Neill's son Patrick who joined the meeting. Ms. Patricia "Pat" O'Neill was a long-time Dorchester resident who led the Ashmont-Adams Neighborhood Association for the past twenty years. She was a driving force behind several events and fundraisers that supported the greater Dorchester community. Councilor Baker noted her numerous accolades for her commitment to her community, including: the Robert H. Quinn Award from UMass Boston for her outstanding community leadership, MA Commission on the Status for Women's "Unsung Heroes", and Boston Main Streets recognized her as "Volunteer of the Year".

As a patron of the BPL, Ms. O'Neill valued its role in engaging area residents, both young and old. She would have been a champion for the new Adams Street branch. Her tremendous contributions to the community at large deserved recognition by naming the community room at the Adams Street Branch in her honor and looked forward to the day we could gather in the "Patricia O'Neill Community Room". Sadly, Ms. O'Neill passed away in spring 2020, in the early stages of the pandemic, not allowing her the send-off she deserved and could not see a more fitting way to pay tribute to her life. Councilor Baker noted that he wholeheartedly supported this proposal and thanked the Trustees for their consideration in supporting this proposal.

Mr. Leonard added that the proposal fulfilled all the room naming requirements, which were included in their meeting materials. He further noted that during his tenure, having seen a number of naming opportunities

proposed, this was the most number of letters of support we have ever received for a single naming opportunity and added his own support to approve this proposal.

Ms. Dorcena Forry echoed Councilor Baker in supporting this proposal. She added that Patricia O’Neill was an incredible woman who brought the community together for so many reasons and lifted voices of those who were often unheard. Ms. Forry moved the motion for a vote. Upon a motion made, was duly seconded, and approved unanimously by a roll call vote.

VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve the dedication and renaming of the Community Room at the Adams Street Branch Library, *The Patricia O’Neill Community Room.*”

David Leonard continued with his report. He noted while they were a local organization serving the people of Boston and the Commonwealth. The BPL was also cognizant of national events. He wanted to recognize all those that were affected by the tragedy in Colorado that unfolded in recent events. He read into record his statements on the murders that occurred in Atlanta last week that was sent to BPL staff.

“Early last week, we were reminded once again, in one horrific event, of the myriad challenges our society faces – challenges of systemic racism; of individual racist action; of violence; the lack of responsible gun control; and the ubiquity of not only racism but also misogyny and patriarchy.

I am speaking of the murder of eight individuals, six of whom were women of Asian descent, and the subsequent attention this has brought to a sustained pattern of anti-Asian sentiment and incidents across the nation – of which there has been a resurgence in the era of Covid19.

Let me start by unequivocally denouncing these terrible acts of hate and violence in Atlanta. Our hearts go out to all those directly and indirectly affected. There can be no question that race and gender, along with misogyny and xenophobia, played a role in these killings. These multiple issues make this incident a terrible lesson in the truth of intersectionality.

While a large (although not exclusive) part of our focus on racial equity in 2020 has been grounded in the lived experience of those who are or identify as Black and/or African American, this latest tragedy is a clear reminder that all people of color can be faced with disrespect, unequal treatment, stereotyping, actions rooted in white supremacy, and the potential for violence.

We are all called to ensure that true inclusion is centered in our work and in our dealings with colleagues and community members. Let us now turn our hearts and minds to those in our community who are Asian American, those who claim heritage from the variety of cultures and nations that we include in this aggregate identity. Regardless of the motive claimed by the perpetrator, these were racially informed murders.

One of the key longer term efforts I am most proud of is our work to bring about a permanent Chinatown branch of the Boston Public Library. This branch will ideally not only serve as a space for the immediate residents of Chinatown proper, but will be a resource for Asian-American community members and regional interests more broadly. The BPL, with the support of the City administration, remains committed to seeing this project come to fruition -- just one way in which we can redress the disenfranchisement of this community that dates back to the 1950s.

As a side note, as part of our Repairing America series, I recently hosted a conversation with Dr. Esther Choo, (a not-uncomplicated expert in the subject), about how racism is a public health emergency. Perhaps you may find

it timely viewing as we grapple yet again with the troubling legacy and consequences of our nation's history of systemic racism."

Ms. Douglas thanked Mr. Leonard for his eloquently written words that they all shared during these difficult times.

Next, Mr. Leonard introduced two new managers added to the BPL team. John Towle, new Chief of Staff and Strategy and Mr. Brett Curry, Manager of Facilities-Branches. Both managers offered greetings and gave brief backgrounds of their work experiences.

In general updates, Mr. Leonard noted that the City of Boston lifted the hiring freeze and they hoped to fill the vacant positions across the staff. The BPL received news that BPL workers would be eligible to receive unrestricted COVID vaccinations beginning April 19, noting they were not a requirement for process of reopening. Over the coming weeks, BPL would be adding some modest in-person additions to the "BPL to Go" services. By May meeting would have much more accomplishments and detailed plans to report.

Mr. Leonard moved to the approval of the Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") between the City of Boston and the BPL Trustees. He noted that during Mr. Gallery's tenure they wanted to bring all of the formal relationships under appropriate MOUs; including the LMEC, the Associates of the BPL, BPL Fund, and the City of Boston. The key points of the MOU were (under normal circumstances) the funding and philanthropic contributions to the Library should be seen as supplemental to City and State funding, and not displace them. In addition, the MOU enshrines the Trustees to present nominations when there are vacancies on the Board to the Mayor for approval and appointment. Ms. Douglas made a motion to approve, it was duly seconded, and voted to approve unanimously by roll call vote.

VOTED: "that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston vote to approve the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Boston and the Trustees of the Boston Public Library, effective February 2, 2021 and expiring when both parties agree to the terminations, as written."

Next, Mr. Leonard gave an overview of BPL Strategic Roadmap. He explained it was a bridge document between the COMPASS Principles of 2013 and will carry through the next several years, at which time a new full strategic plan would be developed with stakeholders. The Roadmap was introduced to staff back in November 2019 and Division Directors have been working to gather various initiatives that have been underway under the purview of this document. The purpose to present the draft to the Trustees was to gather any necessary feedback in order to have it fully prepared for a vote to approve at the May meeting. The key principles were: to continue to become anti-racist organization and building a culture of respect, provide programs and services that build and maintain equity, build, maintain and activate collections, expand the BPL reach; with fiscal sustainability, create inspiring spaces that are well maintained and with modern infrastructure, and create patron and staff connections and services through technology. He explained the timeline consisted of four phases over five years. (January 2021-Dec. 2025).

The Trustees discussed this document and its role for establishing actionable goals and timelines. In regards to the principle noted as "becoming an anti-racist organization", a few trustees took pause over the word "becoming". Some Trustees made an argument that the word "becoming" gave the assumption that the BPL was never an anti-racist organization and rather suggested an alternative. They questioned rephrasing it to reflect "continue to strengthen", "continuing to elevate or promote anti-racism", or "being a safe space independent of race, religion, etc."

While others argued that it was not a change in values, but more so a continued commitment to being truly what *Free to All* means in the current climate of the country in which institutions are asked to more formally and

deliberately make these statements explicit. “Becoming an anti-racist organization” was consistent with the Racial Equity Statement that the Trustees adopted last year and suggested the institution was in a state of being enlightened as we all are, in that direction. Ms. Douglas added that the key part of this document was embedding this language in everything we do. To ensure the alignment and actions were crossed to attack issues of racism. We were learning, advancing, and integrating and will have this bridge document to get us where we want. This brought up the topic of the New York Public Library recently making the decision to keep the books on their shelves that were rejected as racist. It was asked if the BPL had a position on these six books and where they would be accessible to the public if at all.

Ms. Imscher responded that the six Dr. Seuss books that were recently announced would no longer be published are in both the circulating collection and in the permanent Jordan Collection. The Jordan Collection will remain accessible as one of our special collections. The items in the circulating collection are treated like other books and remain on our shelves. As interest dies down over time or they are no longer used, items are then weeded out, as is the policy for the circulating collection.

This sparked a greater discussion into the Library’s diversity, equity, and inclusion work and how our decisions reflected our mission around becoming an anti-racist organization. The Trustees agreed that this discussion warranted a deeper dive in a future meeting.

Evelyn Arana-Ortiz introduced the Finance and Audit Committee updates. She introduced Kurt Mansperger, the Chief Technology Officer to provide an executive summary of the BPL’s Technology Plan.

Mr. Mansperger reviewed the BPL Technology Plan. He saw this as opportunity to review the department’s goals and to focus on: outcomes and impacts of Technology, expanding extend the Library’s reach, expanding educational opportunities, developing spaces that meet evolving patron needs, enabling “one library”, driving organizational efficiency, and improving IT fundamentals. He reframed the IT Department’s mission, wanting this Technology plan to show the IT Department as more of a strategic business partner.

Mr. Mansperger reviewed each key part, determining benefits each area was going to have on staff and patrons, and to take time and effort to define our key performance indicators. He discussed the goal of extending the BPL’s reach by looking at how we get services or access to our services. Extending reach through providing more and better Wi-Fi, Chromebooks, hot spots, and expanding advance technology lending.

The Trustees thanked Mr. Mansperger for his thorough and comprehensive plan. Upon motion made by Ms. Arana Ortiz, was duly seconded and voted to approve unanimously by roll call vote.

VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston vote to accept the BPL Technology Plan 2021 as presented.”

Ms. Arana-Ortiz reviewed NEPC’s financial market conditions and impacts on the Library’s endowment. She explained that the Finance and Audit Committee met with our Financial Advisor. In summary, our funds are performing really well with a return of 18%. The Long Term portfolio was at 8% and the current total assets was at \$73 million. The BPL had strong gains, a strong portfolio, and there were no concerns with the Fixed Income Allocations. Ms. Arana-Ortiz explained they assessed emerging themes as we come out of the pandemic. The Finance and Audit Committee reviewed proposed allocations in our portfolio to leverage these proposing themes and mitigate risks. We were not planning to bring a new fund manager into the portfolio but rather a redistribution of funds of the existing funds.

Priscilla Douglas asked for any New Business for which there was none. She welcomed Public Comment.

David Vieira introduced himself to the new Trustees. He explained he was a 20-year member of the City-Wide Friends Board who attends the BPL board meetings in his capacity as the liaison to the Branch libraries. He welcomed the new trustees and congratulated the new Chair. He stated that libraries have been an integral part of City for many years. Strengthening of the library system was going forward and looked forward to working together with the Board.

Mr. Vieira wanted to weigh in on the matter regarding the Dr. Seuss books. It was his personal opinion that libraries should not be involved in providing editorial comment on any author's books in any capacity. He felt the continued availability of books regardless of some offensive language or other items that might be in the book would be detrimental to the intellectual expansion of our city.

Paula Coar noted this was the third BPL Board meeting she had attended. She was a Roxbury resident, and a member of the Nubian Square Coalition (whose efforts assisted in renaming the Dudley area, Nubian Square) along with many others. The Coalition assumed that like Mattapan Square, Codman Square and other communities in Boston that their library would be renamed the Nubian Square Library. They were very confused as the Coalition, having received thousands of votes to rename the area of Dudley Square to Nubian Square. We were not happy that the library was not named Nubian Square after the area it is in. She wanted the Roxbury Library to be renamed Nubian Library to go along with the community. It would be the only library in the whole country named after a black civilization. She questioned, what was the problem with that? She noted they were moving forward to continue to petition to the community that we mean to rename that library the Nubian Library. She questioned why Mr. Leonard wrote a letter that we would have a community meeting, but will not speak of it when mentioned at prior meetings. Ms. Coar stated it was a racist policy for not renaming the library the Nubian Library. She hoped the new Chair would listen to them.

Jumaada Smith was an advocate of doing what is just and right. She congratulated the new Chair and the new Trustees. A few of which she had the pleasure of working with in some shape or fashion in her work with many community groups. Boston commonly known as a "melting pot" and fairness of accentuating and representing ALL people of Boston. She was here on the matter of the improper renaming of the Dudley Branch library; she noted it was not so much a black thing to her, but rather more about culture or ethnic. Parts of the community were not notified of the meeting before the vote. She was only asking for a fair process and ask that you do what is right and just in renaming the Library the Nubian Library or in the alternative, give the people the opportunity to weigh in on the matter.

Samuel Pierce gave acknowledgement and praise to the new Chair. He wanted to speak specifically about what David Leonard said about the Chinatown branch. He said it was wonderful that we are going to be including other ethnic groups as part of our learning here in Boston. He felt if we are going to have an international city, then it makes sense that we have different languages and different ethnicities that we incorporate into our "melting pot". He said that because just like Chinatown, Nubian Square has made history. There is currently a Chinatown in every major city. However, in Boston just like we invented America, has created the first Nubian Square in the history of the United States. He wanted to acknowledge all the people on the Nubian Square coalition for making history. He also wanted to bring the Library's attention to Egleston Square and Chinatown, as we start to consider what the name should be for the library in the Nubian Square as most squares are reflected in their names. It would just make sense using the theory of osmosis that the Nubian Square library would be called the Nubian Square Library and he added that there were a number of people in the community that agree. Mr. Pierce wanted to start looking at what the books would look like, what the artwork will look like, and get the community more involved instead of having circular discussions. He thanked the Trustees for listening. Marie Firmin congratulated Ms. Douglas. She looked forward to meeting and working with her in some capacity. She explained she was a resident of Roxbury and President of the BlackBiz Development Group, which was an organization that restores justice for black businesses in their community. She was an avid BPL user of Central in Copley and the library in Nubian Square. She used the libraries as a teacher and a business owner and learned so

much. The BPL has done a wonderful job educating our community. However, it was a new day and learning new things, and we must learn to incorporate those things. The things that were happening in communities makes a difference and affects the Library. She wanted to say that she was a proponent of naming the Library the Nubian Library for several reasons. She was looking forward to working with the Library in any capacity and making sure it was thoroughly utilized because it was an important structure in the community. She hoped the name would change to Nubian library.

Dr. Reginald Jackson was a part of the Nubian Square Coalition, and wanted to weigh in. He said it was a very uncomfortable feeling to hear about equity, inclusion, and fairness when there seems to be issue with process. As a member of the Coalition, he understood there would be an opportunity for the community at large to weigh in on the name change of the library. Apparently, that had been circumvented and there had not been any acknowledgement on the end run that was done or the disservice to the community of Roxbury. He has lived in Roxbury for almost a half a century and used the library both there in Nubian Square and Parker Hill. He was concerned of the illusion of inclusion and there does not seem to be any ability to rectify missteps of the past. Hopeful with new leadership and with recognition that we all have to figure out how to be on the planet together in a manner that makes sense and hoping we can put this issue to rest. Several organizations that are in this coalition that could write letters to the Trustees just as they did for the renaming of the Community Room that was voted on earlier. He concluded by echoing Mr. Samuel Pierce's comments about the need to determine what will be in the new library and how it will service its folk and move on. He thanked for the opportunity to speak.

Nora Vincent was a resident who lived in West Roxbury and was an avid library user and she had two children who attended BPS who were also avid BPL users. This was her first BPL Board meeting. She was very interested in the discussion around word "becoming". She wanted to echo Jabari Asim's comments and felt it was important to keep the word in. She added that unless there was previous explicit commitment to anti-racism across our organization, you could only say, "becoming". You may note that there had been some past work done around diversity for employees and members of the Board who have been working to incorporate anti-racism into their own practice. She felt that this moment in time called for saying that this was something that the BPL was just beginning to do. She felt it was okay to admit that and patrons would appreciate that, noting that she certainly would. She added as long as she can visit a library and see a sign that people cannot check out books while they have their hoodies up, you can only say, you are "Becoming".

Ms. Douglas thanked all for their public comments. The meeting was adjourned 10:17am.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela R. Carver, Clerk of the Board