

# TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

## Meeting of the Trustees as a Corporation and Administrative Agency

Tuesday, September 28, 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 via Zoom, on Tuesday, September 28, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting: Chair Priscilla H. Douglas, Vice Chair Evelyn Arana-Ortiz, Zamawa Arenas, Jabair Asim, Navjeet Bal, Joe Berman, Ben Bradlee, Cheryl Cronin, Linda Dorcena Forry, John Hailer, Jeff Hawkins, Joyce Linehan, Mike Rush, Chynah Tyler, and Christian Westra.

Also attending: David Leonard, Pamela Carver, BPL Staff, and members of the public

The Clerk of the Board noted that she had some technical issues with posting meeting materials to the website prior to the meeting. She apologized for the inconvenience and would post the materials as soon as possible.

Ms. Douglas convened the meeting at 8:34 a.m. and reminded everyone that the meeting being recorded and began by reading the reaffirmation welcome statement of the Trustees.

Ms. Douglas gave an update to two trustees committees. There was a newly formed Strategic Community Engagement Committee (SCEC) and a revamped Special Collections Committee. She listed the members of both committee (which is available on the BPL website) noting that the membership represented different neighborhoods, ethnicities, interests and backgrounds. The Strategic Community Engagement Committee held an orientation in June and the members left as ambassadors for the BPL already working on collaborations with our staff. The Special Collections Committee orientation was scheduled for October.

Mr. Leonard was invited to give his President's Report. He noted the importance to hear from Library Services on what has been happening since we reopened in June.

Michael Colford, Director of Library Services, reviewed recent highlights of the past few months and also gave a look ahead to what is planned for FY22. Some program partners were recently approved at the Finance and Audit committee that the BPL will be working with in the coming year. He began outlining the youth programming that was very active over the summer. He noted that to date there have been no in-person indoor programming but maintained a very robust virtual and held some programs outdoors, such as the Future Readers Club. This program was generously funded via the BPL Fund which hosted a slate of events including virtual story times throughout the library system, Countdown to Kindergarten events, and the return of Read Your Way to Fenway.

Mr. Colford explained the partnership with Boston Parks and Recreation Department through a grant from the Highland Street Foundation and BPL Fund to do a series of outdoor wordless literacy Story Walks for families and children. The Homework Assistance Program ("HAP") recently launched at sixteen branch both in-person and virtually.

Moving to adult programming, there was a very strong slate of marquee speaker series through the Lowell Lecture Series. They were evolving the Repairing America theme into a "Renewal of Joy" focus for the

winter and spring 2022. The Nord Family Foundation and Mayor Janey's "Joy Agenda" funding provided significant grants to do some high profile author talks starting in September.

Mr. Colford highlighted Tech Goes Home, a program that provides basic computer skills classes and upon the completion of the course, participants receive a laptop and internet access. He noted they were focusing on different groups this year including one geared for returning citizens and early tech literacy.

New England Blacks in Philanthropy would be offering a six-week G Code program to women of color learning how to build a web application, gain career insight from Tech professionals, and provide mentorships. We will also work with the Chinatown Neighborhood Center through its adult education and workforce initiatives.

Jewish Vocational Services', was partnering with their "English for Advancement" program to provide a series of employment focus workshops; providing office hours as well as one-on-one coaching for those enrolled in the BPL's ESOL programs.

Company One, who has done two theatrical productions at the BPL, will be doing a third in-person production in the April/May timeframe.

Grub Street would be continuing to offer successful writing programs for adults and teens. Currently, the programs are offered virtually but we anticipate returning to in-person classes in 2022. Grub Street has also collaborated with our Community Learning Department working to offer older patrons in East Boston a memoir instruction course done that are accessible through the Digital Commonwealth. In closing, Mr. Colford noted that they were really focusing the work on vulnerable populations to provide diversity and equity and reach a wide swath of people throughout the neighborhoods of Boston.

Mr. Leonard continued with the tree votes before the Board in relation to the BPL Fund. By way of background, he explained that the Fund was in its third year since its inception and relaunch. One of the strategic goals was to formalize the relationship between the BPL, the City of Boston, and our fundraising affiliates (of which the BPL Fund is the primary). He thanked the BPL Fund Executive Director, Paula Sakey for all her work over the last year. He explained the three votes before the Trustees included the Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") between the BPL and BPL Fund, the Named Giving Policy, and the Gift Acceptance Policy. These clarify what the fund is allowed to do, but in each case, continue to subordinate decisions as appropriate to the BPL Trustees so that you will see that the language is focused on the trustees acknowledging receipt of the policy documents, but equally consenting to support and collaborate on their implementation.

The Gift Giving Policy guidelines determine when or whether or not to accept a specific gift. Understanding there may be circumstances that it may not be in the best interests of the library (ex. have hidden costs or cause potential harm to reputation, etc.) The policy, as written, provides flexibility in evaluating potential gifts and allows for future amendments to the policy as we grow the Fund's plan to giving efforts.

The Named Giving Policy was voted and approved by the BPL Fund's Board. As we grow the Fund, naming rights become an important part of conversations with higher and larger amount donors. This policy is a clear way to communicate what options may be available to donors while ensuring we are consistent and equitable in our recognition and stewardship that is given to generous support in line with the library's mission.

The Board had a discussion to determine how the existing room naming policy of the Trustees vs. the BPL Fund Named Giving Policy would work in collaboration. Mr. Leonard explained that the Trustees

retain ownership of the process for all naming opportunities. These documents serve as a tool to communicate with potential donors as to how this would work. Mr. Leonard explained that nothing in these policies removes, delegates, or subordinates what the Trustees have under their purview business of naming responsibility.

Ms. Douglas made a motion for each of the votes, they were duly made, seconded, and voted to approve via roll call votes:

**VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston vote to acknowledge receipt of the Boston Public Library Fund’s Named Giving Policy and consent to support and collaborate on implementation.”**

**VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston vote to acknowledge receipt of the Boston Public Library Fund’s Gift Acceptance Policy and consent to support and collaborate on implementation.”**

**VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve the Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU) between the Boston Public Library and the Boston Public Library Fund pending final review and approval as to form by the Corporation Counsel of the City of Boston.”**

Mr. Leonard continued his report reviewing the summer utilization numbers. He noted they were continuing to see a steady increase of transactions with 500,000 transactions for both July and August.

The BPL experienced a cyber-security incident in late August that took many of our technology-based services offline for approximately one week. The BPL has no evidence that any patron or staff’s personal information was taken. Operations were restored the following week with minimal data loss. Mr. Leonard noted that staff pivoted to a paper system to check books out during this timeframe and have made steps to improve our security posture. He apologized for any inconvenience this may have caused the public as we worked through this problem. Mr. Leonard explained that due to an ongoing investigation he was not able to answer any specific questions publically.

Next, Mr. Leonard continued that while still dealing with the reality of Covid 19, mask wearing was still required at all BPL locations. We do not have the capacity to offer every service we would normally be able to, due to a large number of vacancies. He recognized that we will move as deliberate and as quickly as it makes sense to. The BPL has about a 20% vacancy of our workforce. The vacancies are a result of the necessary hiring/ budget freeze of 2020, but equally, the number of retirements and life choices that staff have made. The next several months would be driven by the underlying Covid 19 public health emergency and the pace at which we can fill these vacancies.

Next, Mr. Leonard highlighted that the courtyard fountain renovation was completed and we were able to host the “Concert in the Courtyard” series. The Hyde Park Branch reopened in early summer after a year of repairs. He noted that they were seeing challenges around construction, labor, availability of contractors, and in some cases, deep supply issues that caused delayed projects. The Adams Street Branch celebrated its ribbon cutting and reopening in July; marking the biggest milestone of 2021 for the Library.

Upcoming milestones included the celebration of the Roxbury Branch in Nubian Square’s one-year anniversary celebration and ribbon cutting ceremony with Mayor Janey on October 23rd. The Roslindale Branch has experienced some supply delays but working aggressively to reopen hopefully later in the year.

Mr. Leonard explained that future trustee meetings will take deeper dives into a few topics. The first will be the McKim Master Planning and potential capital campaign, the second will be the YW Boston work, REAL Training, and BPL Equity Agenda & Action Plan in collaboration with our roadmap. Together these topics will carve out the work of the Library for the next year or two.

This concluded the President's Report.

Next, Ms. Arana-Ortiz began the Finance and Audit Committee Report by asking Matt Hunt from CliftonLarsonAllen ("CLA") to briefly review the FY21 Financial Statements. She noted these documents were reviewed at length with the Finance and Audit Committee previously.

Mr. Hunt reported that it is CLA's policy not to include the auditor's opinion in the draft financial statement. It is expected that the rating will be "Unmodified," which is the highest available.

In describing the Financial Highlights of CLA's report, Mr. Hunt pointed to the General Fund reporting balances in each categories: Restricted Fund (programs and general trust holdings); Unassigned and Assigned Funds (state aid, and enterprise funds). The remaining unassigned funds was at \$1,690,388 which had increased by 26% or \$348,000. Mr. Hunt reviewed the year-end balances overall of approximately \$77.9 million.

Mr. Hunt noted revenues performed very well despite the Covid-19 pandemic. He noted one significant decrease due to the pandemic was reflected in event revenue, which was only \$43,000 in FY21. He highlighted contributions and gifts were up significantly to \$3.9 million and investment markets had done very well. He also noted that the audit only reviews Trustee funds, and does not include the Library's City funding, which is included in the City's audit.

There were no questions asked. Ms. Arana-Ortiz made a motion that was duly made, seconded, and,

**VOTED: "that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve the Boston Public Library's Draft Audited Financial Statements for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2021."**

The vote was unanimously approved by a roll call of the Board.

Ms. Arana-Ortiz reviewed the Donors and Gifts Report. She explained the process for accepting donations. The chart included in the meeting materials which itemized various donors' contributions was briefly reviewed noting a total of \$3,859,260.00. Mr. Arana-Ortiz thanked all the Friends Groups, the BPL Fund and the affiliates and all that donated to the BPL this year. It was a hard year financially for many people and organizations and their contributions are always appreciated.

Ms. Douglas moved onto the vote for an Executive Session that would immediately follow the public meeting. The purpose of the session was to discuss cyber security under exemption #4 of the MA Open Meeting Law. Ms. Douglas noted that they would not be reconvening in a public meeting.

A motion was duly made, seconded, and voted via a roll call vote:

**VOTED: "that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston vote to enter into Executive Session."**

Ms. Douglas asked for New Business. Ms. Arana-Ortiz noted she wanted to give a brief update on the Fellowes Athenaeum Trust Advisory Committee. The Committee met in June and reviewed the RFP process. A number of programs were selected around arts, instruction, and health/well-being. She noted

that the Committee was not able to spend all of the expenditure for FY22, therefore they will be launching a second RFP for spring programming at the Roxbury Branch. She asked that members of the public submit proposals for additional programming. She explained the Fellowes Trust Program Manager offers technical support to assist applicants with the process if needed, please reach out with any questions or suggestions.

Ms. Douglas asked if there was any public comment.

Chris Strunk, spoke about the current Collection Development Policy and issues that have arisen from the dramatic shift in the way books are ordered. The new plan shifts the responsibility of maintaining, updating, and adding to the collection away from forty librarians down to four. He stated it caused problems with getting and maintaining the quality of the collection and tarnishes the reputation of the Library as a great cultural institution and does a disservice to patron's children's collections. He noted that children tend to browse over reserving books and the lack of items at a branch impedes them from attaining access to the collection at another branch. Book series are being split across the system randomly, making it difficult for patrons to find titles they want to read. The books are given randomly and therefore negatively impact browsing behavior by disregarding the needs of each separate community.

Cindy Dye, spoke to the Jordan Collection. She noted it is the collection of historic children's materials from the BPL named after Alice Jordan. The Jordan Collection has been shunted aside and put into storage, suppressed from being able to see it or add to it. She noted she was facing a renovation of her branch and has a great deal of material that is going to have to go and hoped it would go to the Jordan Collection. .

Claire Waldron Gross, Children's librarian at Egleston Branch had concerns over the new Collection Strategy which involves selecting books on a system-wide basis rather than a service to the distinct neighborhood needs. She felt it was hurting the BPL's institutional goal of racial equity. Limited copies of books by authors of color were alienating patrons from vulnerable communities whom their outreach is targeting. She asked the Trustees to reconsider this strategy and put book selection back to the branch librarians.

Allison Hahn works at the Brighton Branch, two years of which she observed as part of the young adult selection team with collection development. She explained the process before this current model, where librarians selected books, now this is being done by only 3 people. She goes to great lengths to provide context and advice about the titles they are recommending to no avail. Under the new purchasing model, they are relying on the knowledge of only a few people to make decisions for the entire system and therefore patrons do not see themselves represented in each branch's collection.

Lauren Peter, Friend of the Roslindale Branch thanked the BPL for the renovation of the branch, and is very excited to have it reopened. She was disappointed to hear that there were further delays. She spoke on behalf of the branch librarians. She was proud of the programming they have done in the neighborhood and have space to do it going forward. She encouraged the Trustees to think seriously about what they heard today from all the librarians because they are the people in the neighborhoods and hearing from patrons about their needs.

Elizabeth Smith, Children's Librarian at the West Roxbury branch. She noted her experience in various communities and felt the collection plan that is in place is doing a disservice to the neighborhoods. She cannot buy books that her patrons are requesting and feels that the branches are just being used as warehouses.

Philecia Harris, Children's Librarian at the Roxbury Branch, Her her surprise the collection has been divided in half and reopened the children's room in spring 2021 without a core collection. Entire sections were missing. After writing letters and assessments, she can say Roxbury is finally being promised books. The problem of not enough books is not just a Roxbury problem, but also Mattapan and the Adams Branch. She added that eBooks was a whole other problematic conversation and felt there were racial and economic disparities. She noted despite meeting with administration, and the PSA union writing letters, she feels there are still unanswered concerns and urged the Trustees to look into it.

Anne Langone, Children's Librarian at Faneuil Branch who is currently serving at the Lower Mills Branch during renovations. She wanted to talk about the damaging effect the collections policy is having on the book collections at Lower Mills. She urged the BPL to return to a policy that allows the front line librarians who work directly with patrons, to select books for the neighborhood branch collections.

Stephen Toropov, teen librarian at the Roxbury branch. He noted one of his duties was to order the opening day collection after the renovation. He has engaged the new collections development team with an honest and forthright manner to try and work with the current system, and joined the graphic novel collection selection team. He still cannot, as a member of the team, ensure that his branch gets the selections they request.

Akunna Eneh, of the Roxbury Branch, discussed her concerns over a book that was ordered for the branch that she felt was Islam phobic and alienated Muslim patrons. She was able to get Collection development to agree to remove from their shelf. Noting thi was an example of how the racial equity issues play out with the current collection policy. She feels the branch would never have selected that book. She felt having to speak to the Committee was terrifying because it referenced the area of racism. She was glad that they listened to her but it should not have to be that way.

Elissa Cadillic, President of AFSCME 1526, Her comments were focused on the agenda that was put forward today. She wanted to put out a positive comment regarding her front line AFSCME members that stepped up during the cyber-attack. They brainstormed and came up with various idea, created forums for all to work together to figure out better ways to get through this while we were down. She also recognized the IT department who worked tirelessly and she wanted to publically recognize them for their efforts.

Yvette Jarreau, South End Friends, she asked if there were any more details regarding the assignment of a project manager from the City for the Programming Study for the South End Branch.

Marleen Nienhuis, South End Friends, expressed her concerns and support of former staff members from the South End Branch. She noted she was told BPL does not comment on personnel matters. She hoped her comments would inspire the Trustees to reconsider the notion that what happens at libraries with staff is not just an internal matter

Sadiki Kambon, Director of the Black Community Information Center spoke in regards to the library's name in Nubian Square. He reminded the group that in April 2020 the naming of the Branch was on the May 2020 agenda for discussion without a vote. It was determined at the meeting to vote to name it the Roxbury library. He reiterated his efforts for some community process. He noted his petition to declare the vote null and void. He emphasized they do not want any other name besides the Nubian Square Library.

With no further comments, Ms. Douglas adjourned the meeting at 10:17 am

Respectfully submitted,



*Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board 11.16.21*

Pamela Carver  
Clerk of the Board of Trustees