

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

Meeting of the Trustees as a Corporation and Administrative Agency

Tuesday, November 16, 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 via Zoom on November 16, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. via Zoom.

Present at the meeting were: Chair, Priscilla H. Douglas and Vice-Chair Evelyn Arana-Ortiz and Trustees: Zamawa Arenas, Navjeet Bal, Joe Berman, Ben Bradlee, Cheryl Cronin, John Hailer, Linda Dorcena Forry, Joyce Linehan, Senator Michael Rush, Representative Chynah Tyler, and Christian Westra. Trustees Jabari Asim and Jeff Hawkins were absent. Also present were: David Leonard, President, Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board, along with BPL staff and members of the public.

Chair Priscilla H. Douglas called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m. and began by reading the Trustees reaffirmation statement. Ms. Douglas thanked Mayor Kim Janey for her all of her support as well as all of the BPL affiliates and partners. A roll call was taken and determined there was a roll call. All in attendance were reminded that the meeting was being recorded and to sign up for public comment before the sign up period closed.

David Leonard was asked to give his President's report. Mr. Leonard echoed Ms. Douglas' sentiments for Mayor Janey's support and was looking forward to working with Mayor-Elect Wu who was being sworn in later that day. He noted the BPL would be involved in the swearing in ceremony, but was not able to share details just yet.

Mr. Leonard recognized that it had been a banner year for the branch system in support of the capital budget projects, despite all the challenges we faced. Starting under Mayor Walsh, continuing with Mayor Janey, and ending with one or two events that were anticipated before the year's end under the Mayor-Elect Wu. They included the ribbon cutting at the Adams Street Branch, the one year reopening celebration at Roxbury, and the reopening of Roslindale (which was scheduled for December 4, 2021). The first Percent for Art project was revealed in the Jamaica Plain Branch and one of three projects was installed at the Roxbury Branch.

Mr. Leonard shared that Utile Architects notified him that in addition to the eight awards for the architecture of the Roxbury Branch they have already received, they anticipated one or two more. Mr. Leonard noted that he this was the most accolades of any Branch and congratulated all that were involved in the project.

Mr. Leonard introduced three new managers to the BPL team: Angelique Davis as Assistant Human Resources Manager, Jessi Snow as Assistant Youth Services Manager, and Sarah Zaphiris as Chief of Staff. They were welcomed and each gave brief backgrounds on themselves.

Next, Mr. Leonard addressed the staff issues raised during public comment at the last Board meeting in September regarding the collection ordering process and the work around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. He wanted to assure the Board and staff that the BPL management team were looking into these comments regarding the collections ordering process to determine potential solutions to improve the current practices to ensure the best patron experience. He commended the staff for bringing these concerns forward but also commended those who already manage, participated in this process, and those who observe the results of the process firsthand; noting that all involved want the same results. The expressed evaluations did not show the entire picture as there are some protocols in the process not mentioned, such as discretionary branch spending which was not being fully utilized to date.

Regarding issues related to the internal organizational change related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (specifically to racial equity). Mr. Leonard noted the organization was engaged in this work for over a year and had some great progress in some areas. However, it was not an overnight solution. He was resistant to jump onto quick solutions that would merely be paying lip-service to a very important topic. Mr. Leonard acknowledged their concerns, and emphasized they regard the input of staff very seriously. The agenda for the January Board meeting would be dedicated to this topic to allow discussion in more depth. He appreciated the Trustees attention to this matter and their endorsement of their racial equity commitment.

The Board discussed some of the issues around vacancies, hiring goals, and the current status of operations of the BPL. The group suggested to include DEI updates as a standing agenda topic for the coming year to discuss short term and long term plans and progress.

Mr. Leonard pivoted to the topic of the McKim Master Plan. He gave a brief background on the project that began in the 1990s. He noted through engagement and support of the City's Capital Budget, to essentially update the old master plan. He invited the architectural firm, Shepley Bullfinch to give their presentation (who worked on the reimagination work of the 1990s on the original project).

Janette Blackburn, Managing Principal of Shepley Bullfinch, introduced Kelly Brubaker, Library Planning Principal and their architecture partners at DesignLab who helped give historical assessments and managing the community input process.

Ms. Blackburn started with an overview of the project process and scope which included updates to the McKim Building and Dartmouth Street Plaza. She noted the process was a series of steps beginning with the development of the Master Plan, followed by review and strategy, reviewing the funding strategy and campaign, developing the design, and then beginning construction.

Ms. Blackburn noted that throughout the process they met and heard from community stakeholders. Due to the pandemic, all community engagement was done virtually, but was very well attended. There were three community meetings and received input from internal Library focus groups, external stakeholder groups, several historical groups, and the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay.

There are three primary goals of the Master Plan: building improvement and sustainability, promote engagement with the library's collections, and renew the spaces to deliver modern services as effectively as possible.

Community stakeholders expressed their desire to find ways to make the McKim Building more welcoming and easy to navigate, the importance of the historical significance of the building's architecture and art, and to identify the BPL as a place for research and scholarship that is open to all.

There were several challenges that emerged during their assessments of the building. The building's systems overall are outdated, limited climate control, water infiltration, and level changes throughout which created accessibility issues and ease of flow throughout the internal spaces.

The recommendations that were developed for the Master Plan center on the redesign of the Dartmouth Street Plaza to create a more accessible and welcoming entrance and improve way-finding inside and outside the building. Provide updates to the building systems to be more sustainable and resilient. Utilize the courtyard to support preservation, circulation, and increase space by enclosing it with the creation of a sky let covering. They will renew the interior spaces, including the reopening of the third floor, to improve the public experience and to support modern library services.

Kelly Brubaker reviewed the plan of the third floor with the goal to transform it. Changes included more public seating, a new public elevator from the Courtyard, access to the Cheverus Room, and providing classroom space to accommodate BPL programming. The focus would be to give the room back to the community, providing more access to reference, teaching spaces, and a welcoming reading room.

Ms. Brubaker continued with the enhancement proposals for the first floor. They included taking down walls in the lobby to help create a more welcoming entrance and create better movement into the meeting rooms. They would enlarge the windows from the Commonwealth Salon to overlook into the Courtyard. The vision for the Courtyard was to provide an enclosure/skylight over it while maintaining the garden and fountain as is. Adding the roof closure would help with the preservation of the building from degradation from the elements as well as provide space for gathering and programming year round. They showed examples of other museums with a similar feature (including the Smithsonian Museum in D.C., the Museum of Fine Arts, and the Isabella Gardner Museum).

The Dartmouth Street Plaza enhancements would offer a new sloped pathway, offering accessibility and shade for patrons and outdoor seating with the addition of trees. The goal being to transform the outdoor space into a more comfortable area that is active and inviting to the public. She noted that Copley Square was currently being reimaged and this plan was meant to tie into this renewed community space.

The recommendations called for a top to bottom renewal of the building infrastructure and systems. They would prioritize sustainable choices that are energy efficient and healthy that meet new climate resiliency standards, protect collections, and preserve the building's art and architecture.

The implementation options included keeping the McKim operational during construction through a series of phased projects. This would allow for phased budgeting as well. They concluded their presentation with a vibrant question and answer discussion which included having operable openings of the Courtyard enclosure, budget, and timeline expectations.

Ms. Douglas called for a motion to accept the McKim Master Plan as presented. The motion was duly made, seconded and,

VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston vote to endorse the recommendations of the McKim Master Plan as presented, and authorize the Library administration to proceed with plans to pursue funding and engage in the next level of planning design and implementation.”

Ms. Douglas asked if there was any new business. Ms. Douglas acknowledged that Trustee Ben Bradlee agreed to serve as the Chair of the Special Collections Committee and K. Matthew Dames will serve as the Vice Chair. She also reminded everyone of the Roslindale Reopening celebration on December 4th. Ms. Douglas asked if there was any public comment.

Sadiki Kambon, Director of the Black Community Information Center which hosts the Nubian Square Coalition, expressed his concerns for the Trustees vote for the naming of the library in Nubian Square. He noted that he received support for the renaming of the Square and the MBTA station. He stated that Councilor Wu had endorsed his petition.

Cindy Dye, Children's Librarian at Fields Corner, noted concerns over the suggestion for the McKim waterproofing for collection storage and asked that collections not be placed in the basement. She expressed concern for the increased patron spaces rather than more spaces for collections and librarians.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela R. Carver

Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board of Trustees

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