

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

Meeting of the Trustees Special Collections Committee Tuesday, November 29, 2022, at 9:30 a.m. Central Library, Commonwealth Salon 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116

MINUTES

A meeting of the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee was held at the Central Library on Tuesday, November 29, 2022, at 9:30 a.m. after a private tour of the Special Collections spaces. The meeting was also available via Zoom for the public.

Present at the meeting included: Committee Chair Ben Bradlee, Committee Vice Chair K. Matthew Dames (via Zoom) and Committee members: Joe Berman, Charles Cooney, Elliot Davis, Juan Enriquez, Lillie Johnson, and David Leonard. Committee member Jabari Asim and Jeff Hawkins were absent due to conflicts.

Also, present were Boston Public Library staff including Beth Prindle, Head of Special Collections, Clerk of the Board Pamela Carver. Chair of the Board Priscilla Douglas, and members of the public were also present.

Mr. Ben Bradlee presiding called the Meeting of the Trustees Special Collections Committee (“Committee”) to order at 9:35 a.m. The Committee Chair read the welcoming reaffirmation statement of the Trustees. A roll call was taken by the Clerk and determined there was a quorum. Everyone was reminded that the meeting was being recorded and how to sign up for Public Comment.

The first matter of business was approval of meeting minutes of April 13, 2022. With no comments or edits, the minutes were approved.

Beth Prindle began with a review of the spaces the Committee had toured earlier that morning, giving context of the collections content across BPL’s holdings. She explained there were approximately 21 million items over all types of formats. This included: 1,883,630 in circulation collection, 16,300,000 in the research collection, and 3,435,000 in the special collections. She explained what the archives included (records of institutions, people, personal papers, business records, artwork, etc.).

Ms. Prindle displayed an organizational chart of the Special Collections team. She noted positions were funded from various sources like City funding and private funding for specialty positions.

Next, Ms. Prindle reviewed the 2022 achievements. They included the Special Collections renovation and reopening, the Reading Room and Reference work, along with some major projects. The Founding Research Collection project hired a project manager and cataloging team, cleaned 150,000 volumes, and launched digitization pilot of the Boston Herald Traveler Photo Morgue. The Collection Storage Study was completed. Lastly, she highlighted that they hired and onboarded twelve new employees for the department.

Ms. Prindle reviewed the 2023 priorities to improve discovery, enhance research, document processes, and build engagement.

David Leonard gave a brief review of the McKim Master Plan. He noted that they hoped that the next “big ask” would be to completely reimagine the unrenovated spaces on the third floor of the McKim Building.

There will be three main, bold concepts of the renovation. The first would be making the McKim Plaza more welcoming and accessible. Second would be adding the possibility of a Courtyard enclosure. The

third is revitalizing the third floor of the McKim Building . Mr. Leonard added they still need to refine the vision and secure funding but were looking at a two-to-ten-year arc.

Mr. Bradlee asked each member what interested them the most in their role and what they felt their top priority as committee members were. They had a robust discussion. Their priorities ranged from informing the public of the breadth of the collections, protecting, and amplifying the collections through outreach, supporting staff, and helping to advocate for the BPL and the collection and provide feedback to the management of the BPL.

Mr. Bradlee noted his strong feelings for the committee to work toward offering exhibits. Mr. Dames weighed in on his knowledge and experience and noted that despite the desire to showcase the special collections like the BPL has, you are faced with many challenges. Dealing with COVID and having back of the house functions stop and being understaffed, along with the acculturation of hiring and onboarding of new employees takes time. He suggested offering smaller more attainable goals to satisfy the public.

David Leonard added that more public engagement sounds to be the goal and did not think an exhibit was the right place to begin. He noted that the Leventhal Map and Education Center was opening a new exhibit at the Central Library in the coming week. To execute an exhibit well requires space, funding, and staff and the process takes up to three to five years. Mr. Leonard explained that the Committee's role was to set policy and strategy and not to get in the weeds of whether we do an exhibition or not.

Next, Mr. Bradlee asked if there was any New Business.

Ms. Douglas announced some upcoming events at the BPL, including the BPL Fund's "State of the Library with David Leonard".

Mr. Bradlee asked for Public comment for which there was none. With no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 10:28 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pamela R. Carver, Clerk of the Board