

From: Priscilla Foley <pfoley@bpl.org>  
Subject: Boston Public Library South End Branch  
Update-USES-BPL Partnership  
Date: September 1, 2023 at 5:46:17 PM EDT  
To: Priscilla Foley <pfoley@bpl.org>  
Cc: Christina Jones <cjones@bpl.org>, David Leonard  
<dleonard@bpl.org>, Jerrell Cox <jcox@uses.org>,  
Kimberly Crucioli <kimberly.crucioli@boston.gov>

Good Evening,

I'm thrilled to announce USES-BPL partnership starting October 5, 2023.

Each Thursday from 10-12:30, our BPL Team will be onsite at USES on 48 Rutland Street, Boston, MA 02118 for weekly storytime and other library services for the neighborhood.

Programs will be listed on <https://www.bpl.org/locations/south-end/> under Upcoming Events.

Also, on July 19, our Public Facilities Department voted to approve a contract to Utile, Inc.: To provide architectural design and construction administration services associated with the South End Library project located at 685 Tremont Street, South End:

<https://www.boston.gov/public-notices/16039016>

We anticipate the community engagement process for our Capital Project to start later this year, once the architect is officially on board. This is a huge step to move this project forward.

Thank you for all for supporting the Boston Public Library.

We look forward to continuing to connect with our library users.

Best,

Priscilla Foley  
Director of Neighborhood Services  
Boston Public Library

From: Yvette Jarreau <ydjarreau@gmail.com>  
Subject: South End Library Services During Closure  
Date: September 7, 2023 at 3:59:52 PM EDT  
To: Benjamin S Siegel <bsiegel@bu.edu>, Robert Barney <robert.l.barney@gmail.com>, Gary Bailey <gary.bailey@simmons.edu>, Jane Siegel <janebrsiegel@gmail.com>, Marleen Nienhuis <marleen.nienhuis@comcast.net>, Stephen Fox <stephenfox@verizon.net>, Yvette Jarreau <ydjarreau@gmail.com>, Ashley Watson <ashwatson@gmail.com>, Joanna Wendel <joanna.wendel@gmail.com>, Elizabeth Beutel <ebeutel@colwenhotels.com>, AI DESTA <yal12@comcast.net>, gisela griffith <gisela.griffith@gmail.com>, Kathleen Enright <kmenright@gmail.com>, Roger Dickinson <rogerbdickinson@gmail.com>, Kaitlin Coffin <kcoffin@uses.org>, Lauren Cook <laurencook@ellisearlylearning.org>, bbarreto@ellisearlylearning.org, "ByronRushing@comcast.net" <Byronrushing@comcast.net>, Frieda Garcia <garciafrieda@comcast.net>, Jonathan Cohn <jrfcohn@gmail.com>, fishing66@gmail.com, Kimberly Crucioli <kimberly.crucioli@boston.gov>, Sophia Wang <sophia.wang@boston.gov>, Ed Flynn <ed.flynn@boston.gov>, "Leonard, David" <dleonard@bpl.org>, Sarah Zaphiris <szaphiris@bpl.org>, Priscilla Foley <pfoley@bpl.org>, rtwnd@aol.com, Rohn MacNulty <jay.macnulty@boston.gov>, Joshua Rosenthal

<jrosenthal@bpl.org>, Paul Wright  
<paul.wright@umb.edu>, Alison Ford <aford@bpl.org>,  
Councilor TFA <tania.anderson@boston.gov>, Christina  
Jones <cjones@bpl.org>, Lynne Potts  
<lynnepotts312@gmail.com>, Chip Huhta  
<chuhta@verizon.net>, Alex Reis  
<alexreiswrites@gmail.com>, Barbara Sommerfeld  
<Barbara.Sommerfeld@verizon.net>, "Barbara T. Faires"  
<fares@westminster.edu>, Derek Lessing  
<dpling@pennstate.edu>, Dorothy Kelley  
<dorothy.kelley@gmail.com>, Joseph Rondinelli  
<jarondinelli@gmail.com>, Lauren Begley  
<lmurray7@gmail.com>, Michael Hinchcliffe  
<hinchcliffe47@gmail.com>, Nancy Downer  
<nandowner@gmail.com>, Sara DiVello  
<sdivello@gmail.com>, Tracey Bolotnick  
<tjbolotnick@gmail.com>

Hello Working Group members,  
Here is our response to the BPL announcement about space at USES one day  
per week for 2.5 hrs.

The South End has been without a branch library since a flood  
closed the building in April 2021, and a second flood in February  
2022 forced the permanent closure and replacement of the library  
building. No alarm systems were installed before the first flood,  
despite a complete renovation of the interior in 2019. And no  
alarm system was put in place after the first flood, either. As a  
result, the South End has not had library services since April  
2021, and will not have full library services until three + years  
from now, when a new building is estimated to be opened.

Here is a reflection on the loss of five years of library services to  
our neighborhood:

- a. By its own numbers, in the first quarter of 2019 the South End branch had 94 programs; it had 20,632 visitors; it had 22,303 items in circulation; there were 738 wireless sessions and 2,845 computer sessions.
- b. Children and day care groups have lost their branch library, including those from Chinatown Access, Ellis Memorial, Castle Square and Pine Village Preschool, as well as from St. Stephens and the Blackstone Community Center.
- c. Children also don't have access to the SE branch for the Summer Reading Club or the Read Your Way to Fenway contest; Read Boston won't come by for programs and book distribution; Countdown to Kindergarten won't be there, either.
- d. A whole cohort of young children miss the rich experience and exposure to a library that builds lifelong learners in the formative years.
- e. Staff cannot provide traditional and modern services, such as reference; readers' advisory; photocopying; or printing.
- f. No meeting space for small or large groups, or just a place for people to be. Libraries are **free, non-sectarian** community centers that offer a safe space, with access to bathrooms, water, and air-conditioning. In the BPL's 2012 Strategic Plan a branch library's significance as a *Community Gathering Place* is the second most important goal listed.

In late 2022, Friends of the South End Library conducted a survey of South End residents to assess the need for temporary library services. Those results have been widely circulated and highlighted a consistent anchor space for temporary services. A Working Group of some two dozen South End stakeholders was established in November 2022 to explore temporary library services with BPL leadership. It has been meeting every 1-2 months. Several locations and options have been discussed, most prominently a community space available at 566 Columbus Avenue, the location of the former USES headquarters. In

addition, a comfortable, temporary, accessible mobile vehicle was considered, as well as a construction trailer that, like an accessible vehicle mentioned above, could be placed either inside in Library Park or on Tremont Street, at the cost of a few parking spaces, or on the sidewalk next to Library Park.

Despite numerous sessions to seriously explore how to meet the devastating loss to the community of library services, the BPL has just informed the community they will merely offer once-a-week programming at Rutland Street's USES's facility, on Thursdays from 10-12:30 starting October 5.

**Given the loss of important library services for so many people in the South End, this once per week space does not come anywhere near our expectations or needs. We need consistent, available, accessible, and adequate library services from now until the new building is opened, minimally 3-4 days per week and hours from 10-2 and 3-6, accommodating children and adults for programs and visits.**

Important programs and services urgently needed in the South End include:

- Computer access with WIFI
- Children's story hour
- Tax preparation assistance
- Workforce development programs
- Book club discussions
- Children's music programs
- Homework help workshops
- Technical help appointments
- ESOL groups

[L]  
[SEP]

A library of BPL's stature and reach into the community should

always be open to improve and enhance its services. A core principle stated on the BPL website says, “the BPL is a user-centered institution with services that anticipate and respond to neighborhood interests and the changing demographics of the City and Commonwealth.” This principle does not seem to be guiding the BPL’s approach to the South End Library.

We insist that the BPL’s leadership up its game and provide adequate temporary space and services to the community of a closed library. This may require a shift in its approach from **Capital Projects** focused solely on completing 5 major branch projects to a focus of ***Capital Projects and Temporary Replacement of Library Services***. In other words, **a citywide plan to build no more than 3 capital library projects and at the same time replace critically needed library services in a temporary location while a branch is closed for reconstruction.** We strongly recommend using the South End Library Branch project to create and implement a citywide template for temporary services during a library’s closure for reconstruction or repair.

Yvette Jarreau  
Marleen Nienhuis

Stephen Fox

**To the South End Library Community**  
**9/21/23**

I am writing today to provide an update on BPL's services for the South End, and to clarify some misperceptions that have been circulating in the wake of our most recent announcement regarding additional in-person services in the neighborhood.

Please first note our continued focus on and commitment to the accelerated redesign and renovation project for the existing South End branch site.

Since the floods that required the branch's closure, we have participated in ongoing conversations with the community, meeting in person, by phone, and online with many of you, in several different configurations.

Some of the rhetoric in these meetings and follow-on emails has grown particularly strong and heated. I must ask that we reestablish a discourse based on mutual respect, recognizing that while there are well defined community needs, our staff who are public servants are committed to doing all that is possible and equitable. I personally believe we actually do want the same things: a vibrant branch, a well-served and engaged community, and the ability to access BPL services while the existing branch is being redesigned and renovated.

I also want to be clear that while the South End situation is unique in that the closure was unplanned and caused by a catastrophic facilities failure, the South End continues to receive the same level of service that we have delivered to all other neighborhoods during closures – whether those closures were planned or unplanned; brief or extended.

During recent long-term capital project closures in eight other neighborhoods across the city, BPL staff have successfully offered programs, services, and opportunities for engagement with the community in each neighborhood. This has been a successful model, and it is the same model we are deploying in the South End. We are absolutely committed to offering services and to exploring ways to add additional offerings on an ongoing basis. I've added a list of what we have done in other neighborhoods at the bottom of this note.

Our South End branch staff have been making themselves available. For example, on August 22, *Countdown to Kindergarten* in Library Park drew 90 participants, and our Children's Librarian, Margaret Gardner, has continued her outreach to schools and has been holding weekly programs and story times in Library Park. Additional information about library resources, book giveaways, and library card signups has been available weekly with the assistance of branch and



Community Learning staff in Library Park, while just last week, our new Branch Librarian Christina Jones launched a South End book group.

The latest service we have added will be a regular weekly presence at the USES Rutland Street location, as we now finally have clarity on the terms of our usage of that space and yes, the fees for use of the space. In addition, two new library staff members are coming on board this week to assist with additional outreach.

Our Community Learning team also stands ready to provide even more additional services; however, to be fully activated they need accessible, fee-free space. As you will see in the list below, many interim services were provided in community spaces, and we were grateful for those community groups who stepped forward to offer those spaces. We would welcome – and, frankly, *need* -- your help to find it. If you or your organization are willing to help us, find an accessible, fee-free space in which to deliver service, please contact Priscilla Foley immediately. This community-led model of finding space has been successful in other communities that have experienced closures; it is a model that we hope to replicate in the South End.

In addition to receiving the same level of ongoing services deployed in other neighborhoods, the South End is also receiving a significantly heightened level of attention and funding from the city to design and build the new branch. While BPL and our partners at the City's Public Facilities Department work to execute much-needed and long-deferred capital projects to refresh and renovate nearly all 25 of our neighborhood branch locations, the South End's project is not only now fully funded (pending future design estimates) but has been jumped to active status with an accelerated programming and design process.

For patrons whose needs extend beyond the services already offered in the community, there are several other places to pick up books, print, attend a story time, or to take advantage of any other of the services we provide. Many community members are already taking this opportunity; we were very glad to see that our usage data show there has been zero drop-off in aggregate library card usage from patrons with an 02118 ZIP code for example.

Not only can residents visit the Central Library in Copley Square, located less than a mile away, but many neighboring branches are also easily accessible by public transportation, such as Parker Hill, Uphams Corner, Roxbury, and Chinatown. And there are considerable services and programs available online at [bpl.org](http://bpl.org).

We are, of course, also planning to serve the specific needs of more mobility-challenged community members who require in person services; we are currently in discussions with the City's AgeStrong Commission about implementing a shuttle service and expect to finalize those plans shortly.

For additional information about ongoing community activities, please visit the South End [events page](#). We are currently preparing an updated social media presence for the branch and will share information about that when it has been launched.

The next step in the renovation project will be a notification about the first formal community meeting for the launch of the design process. We will share that information with you once an architect is fully on board and under contract and ready to engage with the community.

Thank you for your continuing partnership. We look forward to strengthening the relationship between the BPL and the South End communities, in what I know will be continued dialogue.

Sincerely,

*David Leonard*

David Leonard  
President, Boston Public Library

List of prior interim services during capital project closures:

- Faneuil Branch in Oak Square, closed for renovation in 2020:
  - Programs started online and switched to in person once Covid vaccine was available
  - Outreach to schools
  - Children's programming once a week at the YMCA, Weekly children's programming at the Presentation Community Center, Monthly Book Discussion Groups, Spanish Classes sponsored by the Friends at local community center, Poetry Reading and workshops, presence at Farmer's Market
  - Continued hiring/ replacing staff throughout closure
- Adams Street Branch, closed for renovation in 2019
  - Outreach to schools
  - Weekly story time/ March 2020 switched to online
  - Teen Outreach on Twitch during Pandemic
  - Book Discussion Group in person and then online March 2020 and then returned in person
  - Continued hiring/ replacing staff throughout closure
- Roslindale Branch, closed for renovation in 2019

- Outreach to schools
  - Weekly story time/ March 2020 switched to online
  - Winter 2020-2022 Outdoor storytime when over 40 degrees because of COVID
  - Book discussion group
  - Friends sponsored Little Libraries throughout the neighborhood
  - Friends worked with West Roxbury Branch to continue Yard Sale and other programs presence at Farmer's Market
  - Continued hiring/ replacing staff throughout closure
- Roxbury Branch, closed for renovation in 2017
    - Outreach to schools
    - Book discussion group at Frugal Books
    - Teen outreach at Frugal Books
    - Multiple programs held at Egleston Square, Grove Hall and Parker Hill branches sponsored by the Fellowes Committee
    - Continued hiring/ replacing staff throughout closure
    - Attended City Sponsored Open houses in neighborhood
    - Homework help at Frugal books
- Parker Hill, closed for renovation in 2017
    - Outreach to schools
    - Weekly storytime at Mission Hill Church
    - Book discussion group
    - Tech Classes at Mission Hill Health Collaborative
    - Continued hiring/ replacing staff throughout closure
- JP, closed for renovation in 2015
    - Outreach to schools
    - Weekly story time
    - Book discussion group
    - JP Friends worked with Connolly Branch Staff and Friends Group to host multiple events
    - Continued hiring/ replacing staff throughout closure

September 25, 2023

Ms. Pamela Carver  
Clerk of the Board of Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston

Dear Ms. Douglas, Ms. Arana-Ortiz, Mr. Asim, Ms. Bal, Mr. Berman, Mr. Bradlee, Ms. Cronin, Ms. Dorcena Forry, Mr. Hailer, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Masso, Mr. Rush, Ms. Tyler, Mr. Westra, and Dr. Wooten:

I am respectfully addressing you today to draw your attention to a case involving the Boston Public Library (BPL) at the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD). This case is the result of a complaint filed on my behalf by counsel in 2021. It has only recently been assigned to an MCAD compliance officer and is now active and under investigation.

This complaint was filed after my termination from the BPL on May 14, 2021. Previous to that date, I had spent over 15 years at the library as the Digital Imaging Production Manager, Digital Projects Manager, Technical Services Manager, and Content Discovery Manager. In these roles, I was responsible for making BPL collections as discoverable, usable, and empowering as possible. I believe that my team and I were extremely successful in doing so. Some of you on the current board engaged with me directly during this time and know of the work we accomplished.

Towards the end of 2020, however, I became the subject of an investigation that was launched because of my refusal to execute a series of directives from my immediate supervisor that I believed were capricious, inequitable, unfair, and threatened the rights, integrity, and health of my staff. Suddenly, over subsequent months, I was accused of a variety of unsubstantiated infractions including violating COVID protocol, speaking to my staff directly about confidential restructuring matters, creating a backlog of incoming items to be processed for public distribution, contributing to the death of a staff member, and gender bias. These accusations and the subsequent investigation were incredibly surprising and insulting to me. I assert that they were launched as retaliation for my objection to the unethical, unsafe, and discriminatory directives from my supervisor. I intend to prove that the reasons given for my termination were pretextual, unfounded, and indeed, retaliatory.

Many of my former colleagues are no doubt in the audience before you today. They can all attest to my years of dedication to, and love of the BPL's mission. This remains true to this day, despite the events that unfolded during the depths of the pandemic, and within the context of the holiday season of 2020 that resulted in my ouster. Whatever the outcome of my case at MCAD may be, I encourage you all to remain particularly vigilant and attentive to matters concerning the fair and equitable treatment of both patrons and staff of the BPL.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,  
Tom Blake (he/him)  
[toblake1118@gmail.com](mailto:toblake1118@gmail.com)  
617 833-1291