

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON
Meeting of the Trustees as a Corporation and Administrative Agency
Tuesday, September 26, 2023 at 8:30 a.m.
Central Library, Rabb Hall
700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116

MINUTES

The Meeting of the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston (“BPL”) held on Tuesday, September 26, 2023, at 8:30 a.m. at the Central Library in Rabb Hall.

Present at the meeting included: Chair Priscilla H. Douglas, Vice Chair Evelyn Arana Ortiz and Trustees: Navjeet Bal, Joe Berman, Jeff Hawkins, Jose C. Masso III, Representative Chynah Tyler, Christian Westra, and Lynn Perry Wooten. Not present: Cheryl Cronin, John Hailer, and Sen. Mike Rush (who was attending required military training with the US Navy) Also present: BPL President David Leonard, Clerk of the Board Pamela Carver, BPL staff, and members of the public.

Chair Priscilla H. Douglas presided, and convened the meeting at 8:35 a.m. She greeted all with some welcome remarks. She acknowledged the EDI statement, a roll call was taken and determined there was a quorum.

The clerk reminded that the meeting was being recorded and to sign up for public comment by 9:00 a.m.

The first matter of business was approving the meeting minutes from May 23, 2023. With no edits, a motion was duly made, seconded, and approved the minutes.

Ms. Douglas continued the order of business and announced the appointment of three new trustees, Jim Canales, Ray Liu, and Porsha Olayiwola. Each joined via Zoom and gave brief introductions. Mr. Leonard added that the new trustees’ appointment letters were filed on Friday, September 22, 2023, but until they are formally sworn in, they would not join in an official capacity until November.

Ms. Douglas took a few minutes to acknowledge the outgoing trustees. Jabari Asim, Ben Bradlee Jr, and Linda Dorcena Forry, all of whom she thanked for their service to the library. She read their sentiments they asked be shared with the Board and staff.

Chief Jose F. Masso, Chief of Human Services of the Mayor’s Cabinet was introduced. He gave an overview of the six departments of the Office of Human Services. They include the Boston Public Library, Boston Centers for Youth & Families, Office of Veterans Services, Age Strong Commission, Office of Returning Citizens, and the Office of Youth Engagement & Advancement. The mission is to provide equitable access to high quality services, resources, and opportunities so that every Boston resident- especially those with greatest needs- has what they need to thrive.

He noted that Human Services serves all ages, from the youngest to the oldest and everyone in between; meeting people where they are. Each of the departments within this division focuses on these principles. The objective is to break down barriers and advocate for policy and systems change.

Mr. Masso noted he visited all the locations of the BPL within his first 100 days to learn about each of the branches and their patrons’ needs.

Next, Mr. Masso reviewed the four main goals of the cabinet. One of the larger goals for the upcoming years was tackling social isolation especially on the heels of the pandemic which affected older adults and younger adults with mental health issues. The four goals are:

1. Improve infrastructure and programming at our community centers (there was a gap with libraries and Community centers, needed and deserved to be modernized)
2. Reduce Barriers to access for residents and provide High quality services.
3. Provide more comprehensive programming to older adults.
4. Make Boston a leader in youth engagement.

He noted that thriving neighborhoods offer access to parks, retail, libraries, and community centers. The library plays a major role in executing the human services' goals. He offered all to provide feedback or share ideas to help amplify their goals.

The Board thanked Chief Masso for this discussion. They discussed Q&A on collaborating and framing partnerships.

Ms. Douglas continued with the order of business with the report on Trustees Committees. She announced that the Special Collections Committee will be led by Joe Berman and Elliot B. Davis. She introduced Ms. Davis who gave brief remarks on her professional experience.

Christian Westra provided brief updates on the Strategic Planning Committee. He explained that they developed an RFP for a consultant and had a robust response with twelve applicants. The key stakeholders have selected five that will be interviewed over the coming weeks to make the final selection. Once the selection is made, they will move forward and provide updates accordingly.

Ms. Douglas highlighted some recent events and notable programs with photos. Including the Negro Baseball League talk in Rabb Hall, LMEC Building Blocks exhibit, the Special Collections Lobby Sampling, Little Amal's visit to Boston at the East Boston Branch and Book it Around Boston among other events.

David Leonard gave his President's report. He acknowledged two awards that the BPL was given. The first was the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay's award to the Central Library for "*extraordinary intellectual, cultural, and societal contributions to our community*". They have been strong partners in Back Bay with the library.

The 2nd award is the Shattuck Award, which is given by the Boston Municipal Research Bureau. It is given to unsung municipal employees of the City of Boston. This year, Barbara Rose, the Children's Librarian at the Jamaica Plain Branch will receive the award. Next month, Ms. Rose will celebrate 40 years of service at the BPL.

Mr. Leonard continued that it had been a busy summer; he drew attention to the audit report. Within the report it points to the many accomplishments and highlights of the BPL's work from the previous year.

Next, Mr. Leonard highlighted the capital projects. He ran through the list which included the renovations of the Faneuil Branch in Oak Square, Fields Corner, and the South End. The South End recently added some temporary services while they go through the administrative approvals in response to the catastrophic flood at the branch. He also noted a Fenway proposal. Though it is not a formal project, he mentioned it as there was some coverage in the press recently as a proposed smaller branch. The proposal is currently being vetted to determine if it is viable with several criteria to address.

The trustees discussed the process of offering services during closures, with special attention to services offered for the South End Branch.

Mr. Leonard noted that coming out of the first phase of covid, staff hiring was, and remains, the biggest challenge. The BPL is currently staffed at 435 employees. There were several internal promotions and moving to new positions. They hired 113 new staff as of July 1st. There were still 67 vacant positions,

which is a substantial amount to fill. There are many hurdles due to a lack of capacity and can be challenging to do everything that is required of them or what the community expects of the library.

He highlighted some upcoming events/Programs. The first was that the Friends group get together with leadership was postponed a couple months due to recent outbreak of Covid. He explained that Banned Books Week was the week of September 30th and said to be on look out from an announcement from the BPL Fund and the BPL. He announced some dates of upcoming events that included: The Associates Writer-In-Residence reception, Boston Book Festival, BPLF Night in the Stacks, Museum of African American History's Stone Book Award, Salvaging Celtic Spirituality, and the Druker Lecture & Award.

Mr. Leonard concluded his report by noting that the staff were looking forward to a strong year ahead and the Strategic Planning process.

Ms. Arana Ortiz gave updates on the Finance and Audit Committee. The FY23 financial statements were reviewed by the committee members with the auditors. There were no major findings. She noted it was a very seamless and efficient transition from Chief Financial Officer Ellen Donaghey to Emily Tokarczyk. She praised the finance team for their hard work on ensuring these reports are done in a very quick turnaround.

There were no questions. A motion was duly made, seconded and unanimously voted to approve.

VOTED: "that, the Trustees of the Board 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, 2023."

Moving on, Ms. Arana Ortiz gave updates on the Fellowes Athenaeum Trust Fund Advisory Committee. She provided a brief history of the fund.

She reviewed the grants summary for Fiscal Year 2024. There were approximately 50% repeat programs. There were twenty-nine grant proposals, twenty were awarded and will begin October 2023 and run until July 2024 for a total of \$147,685.07.

In addition, the committee approved an annual distribution of \$5,000 to the Roxbury Branch, \$2,500 for administrative costs, along with the Program Manager's contract. The grand total was \$200,905.83.

The Board had discussed some of the programming offered through the grants offered from the FATF.

Ms. Douglas asked for any new business, for which there was none.

Ms. Douglas asked for public comment.

Sadiki Kambon, Director of the Black Community Information Center, an all-volunteer organization, was speaking on behalf of the organization's efforts to rename the branch in Nubian Square. He provided some background on initial renaming of some streets, and the process to change Dudley Square to Nubian Square and the subsequent MBTA station to Nubian Station. He was opposed to the way the Board took a vote with lack of community involvement and asked for them to consider reopening this topic.

Priscilla Douglas thanked Mr. Kambon for his comments and appreciated his providing some history on this matter. However, she noted that the Board did take a vote after hearing from several community members and groups, many who preferred the name "Roxbury" over "Nubian". She noted the Board appreciates their efforts and therefore pays tribute to that community by referring to it as "Roxbury Branch in Nubian Square".

Charles Cary, of SES, noted that the closing of the South End Branch is an important issue. He felt the process is taking forever to repair and reopen the branch. Everyone from the South End would appreciate the Board doing everything they possibly can. He added that the two and a half hours at USES is great, but they need twenty hours. He asked that they please push for more.

Jamaada Smith, she was very thankful for the Boston Public Library and the trustees for all they do. She did want to say something about the Nubian Square name and understands that the Chair Douglas said that the issue was closed, per se, so she felt there was no need to expound on it any further. She welcomed the new trustees and for the most part everything was coming up roses!

Yvette Jarreau, President of the Friends of the South End Library. She appreciated the discussion that they had regarding services during closures. She was there today to alert the Board that she send in recent history regarding the South End Branch (to the Clerk and distributed to Board via email) given the timeframe that has already occurred, which was over a year closure and upcoming continued closing. We need more than just 2.5 hours at USES. They need 3-4 days a week with several hours a day to regain the vibrancy to use the branch. They had a welcoming place where patrons/staff are known and offered important learning. Unless more services are available the connections are not happening because the branch is closed and is affecting seniors and children.

Ms. Douglas noted that the next meeting was on November 7th at 3:00 p.m.

With no further business, Ms. Douglas adjourned the meeting at 9:52 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board