

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON
Meeting of the Trustees as a Corporation and Administrative Agency
Tuesday, September 24, 2024 at 8:30am
Central Library, 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 24, 2024 at 8:30 a.m. at the Central Library in the Rabb Hall.

All present at the meeting included: Chair, Dr. Ray Liu, Vice Chair Evelyn Arana Ortiz and Trustees: Navjeet Bal, Joe Berman, Jim Canales, Cheryl Cronin, John Hailer, Julie Kim, Jose C. Masso III, Porsha Olayiwola, Christian Westra, and Lynn Perry Wooten. Jeff Hawkins, Jonathan Lavine, and Senator Mike Rush were absent. Also present: BPL President David Leonard, Clerk of the Board Pamela Carver, BPL staff, and members of the public.

Chair Ray Liu presided, and called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m. He read the EDI reaffirmation statement. A roll call was taken and determined there was a quorum. (Jose C. Masso III arrived after roll call was formally taken). Everyone was reminded that the meeting was being recorded and the procedure on how to sign up for Public Comment.

The first matter of business was approval of the meeting minutes from May 21, 2024. No edits or comments were

Dr. Liu gave some brief welcome remarks and welcomed the two new trustees, Jonathan Lavine and Julie Kim, to the Board. He also congratulated Vice Chair Evelyn Arana Ortiz on winning the BPL “Bookies” golf tournament for the second year in a row.

Dr. Liu invited David Leonard to give his President’s Report. Mr. Leonard began by introducing three new managers to the BPL.

- Judah Hamer, Human Resources Manager
- Nicole Santiago, Research Services Manager
- Audrey Wynne, Policy Advisor/Legal Liaison

Each provided a brief overview of their backgrounds and roles at BPL. Mr. Leonard then presented two proposals for naming rooms in honor of influential individuals:

The first proposal was the renaming of the Grove Hall mezzanine level community room in honor of Mimi Jones, a long-time Friend of the BPL and civic leader. Mimi’s activism and contributions to the library and the community were acknowledged. Mimi was a champion for equality and literacy.

After extensive discussion, a motion was made, and the proposal was approved unanimously.

VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve the proposal to rename the Mezzanine Community Room at the Grove Hall Branch the *Mimi Jones Community Room.*”

The second proposal was renaming the children’s room at the Jamaica Plain (“JP”) Branch in honor of Barbara Rhodes, a dedicated children’s librarian for 40 years, with 30 years at the JP Children’s Room. A grassroots endowment fund in her name was established with the BPL Fund, and the goal has already been met. Don Haber, President and Co-Chair of the Friends of the Jamaica Plain Branch, spoke passionately about her impact.

The motion was made, and the proposal was approved unanimously.

VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve the proposal to rename the Children’s Room at the Jamaica Plain Branch the *Barbara Rhodes Children’s Room.*”

The Management Discussion & Analysis Report (“MD&A”) report was reviewed. It highlighted FY24 accomplishments which included defining a new strategic plan, a focus on economic empowerment, and serving the community.

Mr. Leonard highlighted ongoing vacancies (51 full-time positions), safety and security challenges, and increased incidents of violence, particularly involving unhoused individuals or those with mental health issues. The BPL staff responded to these incidents immediately, and measures such as increased security and a zero-tolerance policy on inappropriate behavior were implemented.

Mr. Leonard discussed efforts to enhance safety and security, including adding more security staff for additional patrols, emphasizing the balance between compassion and prioritizing safety for all. Mr. Leonard also acknowledged the ongoing challenges voiced by both staff unions.

Mr. Leonard then reviewed the ongoing capital projects. They included the upcoming Fields Corner project and the McKim transformation.

He congratulated Tracy Wiggins, long-time Special Library Assistant at the Roxbury Branch on her being chosen as a 2024 Shattuck Award Winner. Winners are selected for their dedicated service to the City of Boston and the Boston community.

They had a robust conversation regarding staffing shortages affecting operations, though some of the turnover was due to retirements and relocations. They discussed reviewing a trend analysis at a future meeting. The Board expressed their support for the measures taken to ensure the safety of both staff and patrons.

Next, Christian Westra, Committee Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee, introduced an update on the committee’s work with Gensler. A full-day workshop was held on September 23, 2024, and significant progress was made in defining the library’s core values, mission, and vision.

Erin Corcoran of Gensler reviewed the following:

- **Core Value:** “Free to all” emerged as a top value for the BPL.
- **Mission:** The BPL’s mission is to serve as a welcoming and inclusive space that fosters lifelong learning and community engagement.
- **Roles:** Four key roles were identified:
 - Welcoming Destination
 - Community Engager
 - Lifelong Learning & Research Partner
 - Trusted Resource

Mr. Leonard added that the strategic plan will help prioritize initiatives and direct funding needs, with an emphasis on long-term sustainability and actionable outcomes.

Further discussions with the Trustees Executive Committee will explore the priorities, as well as the financial resources needed for the strategic initiatives.

Ms. Evelyn Arana Ortiz gave the Finance & Audit (“F&A”) Committee report. The FY24 auditors report from Marcum resulted in “no findings” which is the highest to receive. She noted that the library’s special events revenue has plateaued at \$2 million, largely due to COVID-19 and operational limitations.

A motion was made to approve the F&A report. The motion passed unanimously.

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, 2024.”

Ms. Arana Ortiz provided an overview of the Fellowes Athenaeum Trust Fund Advisory Committee (“FATC”), its history, and how funds are distributed through the Fellowes Fund. She announced that a new Request for Proposal (RFP) process would be issued to ensure transparency regarding the Program Manager position. She reviewed the grant selections for FY25. This year, the most popular grant categories included piano lessons and public concert performances. The total applications for funding amounted to approximately \$133,000.

Dr. Liu asked for any new business. Mr. Joe Berman announced the Associates of the BPL would be hosting their Pierce Performances in October and November and encouraged all to attend.

Dr. Liu asked for public comments.

Amber DeAngelis, Research Programming, highlighted upcoming programs, which were shared with the Clerk to distribute to the Trustees.

Elissa Cadillic, AFSCME President, welcomed new trustees and raised concerns about security, staffing shortages, and communication regarding incidents at the Central Library and not communicating with all staff. She urged for more efficiency with the city regarding staffing issues. She concluded by suggesting including potential return of supervisors to the AFSCME bargaining unit.

With no further business, Dr. Ray Liu adjourned the first meeting at 10:09 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board