

PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES OF MEETING
NOVEMBER 2ND, 2020

The November 2nd, 2020 Trustees Meeting was called to order by President Najjar at 7:00pm. This meeting was held via Zoom virtual webinar and was broadcasted live on PATV's television station and on Facebook. Meeting minutes taken by Recording Secretary Frances Gallugi.

As there was a quorum, the roll call was taken:

Stephanie Najjar, present
Richard Shruhan, present
Peter Bakula, present
Kate O'Brien, present
Anne Quinn, present
Don McAllister, present
Wes Merrill, present
Stephanie Dallaire, absent
Morgan Yeo, absent
Frances Gallugi, present
Tom Pappas, present

Please note that while motions and votes were accurately recorded, the persons making, approving, and seconding motions were not noted in the minutes.

Approval of the minutes from the previous meeting.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Library Director's Report for November 2020

Staffing

Staff continue to work 85% in the building and 15% from home. Director Merlin anticipates further staffing shortages over the next few months due to holiday vacations, etc., and hopes that she does not have to reduce service and hours because staffing levels are so low.

President Najjar, Assistant Director Hayden, and Director Merlin met with the Mayor this past Thursday. He continues to express his hope that enough funds can be added to the FY21 budget to avoid becoming decertified by the State in the spring. Director Merlin has submitted a proposal to fill positions that are already funded into the budget, and to fill a position that is not currently funded in the budget, and hopes to have a final decision made this week regarding those positions.

Reopening

After much consideration, Assistant Director Hayden and Director Merlin have made the painful

decision that, due to the aforementioned staffing shortages due to our budget cuts, staff accommodations, and already requested holiday vacations, the library does not have enough staff to safely open the Main Library for *any* in-person services at this time. Current staffing levels are already leading to difficulties with continuing current curbside and virtual services, and may lead to a reduction of services and/or operating hours. The library does not have enough staff to implement the additional cleaning and sanitation measures that would be necessary to keep staff and patrons safe, let alone the customer services that would be needed to help with computer use and browsing, and Director Merlin has informed President Najjar and the Mayor that the library is unable to even consider any in-person services or curbside services at the Branches until staffing increases drastically.

Therefore, the library will only be able to offer curbside and virtual services through the end of 2020, and will reassess at the beginning of 2021. The positions that Director Merlin hopes to fill will allow the library to continue the services that are currently offered; not being permitted to fill these positions, two of which are already funded in this year's budget, will likely lead to a reduction of services and hours, and the possibility that Director Merlin will need to request additional Trustee's Holidays to close altogether on days when the library does not have sufficient staff to open the Main Library safely.

The need to reduce hours and possibly close for entire days puts the library in an even more precarious position regarding receiving a waiver for state certification. Director Merlin has already reduced library hours drastically due to staffing cuts by eliminating evenings, Fridays, and Saturdays. Closing for staffing/budget reasons, and not for the MBLC-approved emergency reasons (COVID shutdown, snow, etc), puts the library in danger of not meeting the certification requirements of hours open per week, which are already relaxed.

Current Services

- Curbside Pickup
- Curbside Printing
- Curbside Museum Passes
- Curbside 3D Printing
- Library Takeout
- Grab and Go Crafts for All Ages
- Expanded Library of Things

Programming

Adult virtual programming continues with Professor Theoharis's lectures, yoga, meditation, writing workshops, and upcoming job searching programs. Other than grab-and-go crafts, the lack of a Senior Children's Librarian and staffing shortages mean that the library is unable to offer virtual children's programming at this time. Director Merlin hopes that the Mayor allows her to fill this position soon, because parents and teachers will need early literacy, teacher professional development, and research and project help even more if Peabody continues to be designated a "Red" community.

Building & Grounds

The elevator passed its re-inspection!

Budget & State Certification

Director Merlin has attached the current budget for your review. Nothing is the cause of any concern.

Director Merlin submitted the library's State Aid Financial Reporting to the MBLC, and she and President Najjar will be finalizing the letter requesting a waiver for certification. The following additional paperwork is due to the MBLC this Friday, as quoted from the MBLC website:

- FY2020/FY2021 Disproportionate Cut Worksheet
- A letter or statement from a municipal official describing the budget process leading to the municipality's inability to meet the MAR, and provides evidence that any reduction to the library's budget is not disproportionate relative to other budget changes in the overall municipal budget.
- One letter or statement from the Library Director and the Library Trustee Chair explaining the library's FY2021 budget process and reasons that the municipality did not meet the FY2021 MAR.
- Municipal budget documentation for FY2020 and FY2021 that shows the appropriation to each municipal department

Director Merlin has included the Disproportionate Cut Worksheet, filled out by city Finance Director Michael Gingras. The MBLC's calculations to determine the city's Adjusted Municipal Budget (line I) takes additional numbers into account, and Director Merlin was disappointed to learn that according to the MBLC, the city's municipal budget actually *increased* this year, by 0.51%. The library's departmental budget decreased by -17.21%. With these final numbers, the library's budget needs to now increase by **\$226,000** to not be considered a disproportionate cut, which is obviously considerably more than Director Merlin had previously believed was needed. Director Merlin informed the Mayor of this number last week, and he still hopes that enough funds can be added to the budget by the time the Mayor, President Najjar, and Director Merlin meet with the MBLC in January, and they vote on waiver status in February. As a reminder, the MBLC looks at (Section III) the net difference between the city's municipal budget (+0.51%) and our cut (-17.21%), and if that difference (17.72%) is greater than 5%, the petition for a waiver must be defended to the MBLC, and the greater than difference is, the much harder it is to receive a waiver.

Assistant Director Hayden and Director Merlin met with representatives from the MBLC last week. They reported that out of 350 municipalities that participated in the State Certification program, only 50-60 have applied for a waiver this year. This is much less than they expected, and only 50% of the applications received during the height of the 2009 financial crisis. Director Merlin does not have information regarding how many of those applications are within the 5% "safety zone", and how many are facing disproportionate cuts. So, Peabody's situation is *not* a common one. Of the few libraries that Director Merlin knows are applying for a waiver in NOBLE (two currently), they do

not have a disproportionate cut, or their cities have guaranteed the transfer of funds needed to avoid having a disproportionate cut, so Peabody is in, as far as she knows, one of the worst positions in all of the NOBLE network.

During the previous meeting, several Trustees asked for language for how you can talk about the cuts in the library. Director Merlin has included a document that explains services provided to the community, the city's return on investment when funding the library, and what is at stake currently (this is something that can also be distributed to patrons if need be). President Najjar has sent you documents with some FAQ about the budget cuts and their effect on the library, along with a document of talking points so you are able to discuss budget cuts based on people's specific interests in the library.

Mayor Bettencourt Joined the Meeting.

The Mayor wished to ensure the Trustees and public that he has no intention that the branches be closed. He stated that he is totally invested in the City and its libraries, and acknowledged that the pandemic has put a strain on budgets and state aid. The mayor stated that he understands the concerns of the libraries, and that he wanted to discuss the situation with the Trustees in person. He stated that he is committed to working together to return the libraries back to normal operations, and that he understands the importance and seriousness of State Certification by the MBLC. The Mayor stated that he plans on setting up further meetings to discuss updates and library operations.

Mayor Bettencourt left the meeting, and Director Merlin continued with her Director's Report.

Audubons

Director Merlin has not heard back from the City Solicitor regarding the legal documents pertaining to the Audubon Prints, and will be following up.

-end of report-

A **MOTION** was made to accept the Library Director's Report as presented.

The Motion was approved and seconded. A vote was taken.

All in Favor: Yes. Any Opposed: No. The motion was unanimously approved.

Reports of the Committees

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS: Committee Chair Wes Merrill stated there was nothing to report in addition to the report provided by the Library Director.

AUDUBON PRINTS: Committee Chair Richard Shruhan stated there was nothing to report in addition to the report provided by the Library Director.

PERSONNEL: Committee Chair Don McAllister stated there was nothing to report in addition to the report provided by the Library Director.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES: Committee Chair Kate O'Brien stated there was nothing to report in addition to the report provided by the Library Director.

LIAISON TO THE FRIENDS OF THE PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY: Committee Chair Morgan Yeo was absent.

LIAISON TO THE PEABODY HISTORICAL SOCIETY: Liaison Thomas Pappas reported that three communications would be sent to Trustees via email.

LIAISON TO THE PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY FOUNDATION: Liaison Anne Quinn stated there was nothing to report in addition to the report provided by the Library Director.

A **MOTION** was made to accept the Reports of the Committees. The Motion was approved and seconded. A vote was taken.

All in Favor: Yes. Any Opposed: No. The motion was unanimously approved.

Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business.

New Business

Trustee Gallugi mentioned that the Peabody Garden Club would like to decorate the Main Library for the holiday season, in conjunction with Peabody Main Streets, at no cost to the Library.

Trustee Merrill began a discussion regarding the Library's budget.

Staffing of Main Library curbside services and Branch services continues to be of concern. Curbside pickup continues to be a success, but more staffing and therefore funds would be necessary to expand Curbside to the Branches, so it is impossible at this time. A discussion was had regarding opening the Main Library for limited computer use or browsing services, but the Library's staffing situation is also too limited to offer any in-person services. Digital services and usage has increased greatly.

A recording secretary is needed for future Trustees meetings. A recording secretary earns \$150 per meeting.

Trustee Bakula had a question about Curbside logistics, and Director Merlin answered his question. Trustee Merrill suggested that the City should be encouraged to plow the Wallis Street parking lot more often, for the safety of patrons and staff, in inclement weather.

The next Board of Trustees meeting will be December 7th, 2020 at 7:00pm.

As there was no additional business to come before the Board, a **Motion** to adjourn was made. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Frances Gallugi
Recording Secretary