

**PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**Minutes of Meeting  
May 3<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

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The meeting was called to order by President Thomas Pappas at 7:00pm. This meeting was held via Zoom virtual webinar and was broadcasted live on PATV's television station and on Facebook. President Pappas noted the meeting was being recorded by Catherine McGrath.

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

**Present**

Rick Shruhan  
Peter Bakula  
Morgan Yeo  
Kate O'Brien  
Anne Quinn  
Don McAllister  
Stephanie Najjar  
Tom Pappas

**Absent**

Stephanie Dallaire  
Fran Gallugi

**Approval of the minutes from the previous meeting**

Trustee Quinn indicated a need for language clarification in the April Meeting Minutes concerning an error in the March Minutes. The April Minutes have been amended to read following:

“Trustee Quinn shared a clarification error in the March meeting minutes regarding the handling of materials by staff. The discussion after the Director’s Reports has been corrected to read that materials will be quarantined, but staff will still be touching the materials.”

A **MOTION** was made by Trustee Quinn to approve the minutes of the meeting held on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 with the appropriate amendments. The motion was seconded by Trustee Najjar.

A vote was taken.

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

**Receipt of Communications**

President Pappas reported there were no communications received.

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## **Director's Report to the Board of Library Trustees May 2021**

### **Staffing**

Director Merlin reported that staff are working in the buildings full-time, and happy to be somewhat back to business-as-usual. Main Library staff are working solely at the Main Library, and Branch staff are alternating between the South and West Branches in preparation for reopening. I have offered the full-time position of Senior Local History & Public Services Librarian to Catherine Badal, who currently works at the Harvard Botany Library. She will begin on Monday, May 17th. Allison Bridgewater has accepted the position of Senior Children's Librarian, and will begin on Monday, May 29th. She previously worked in our Teen and Reference Departments before teaching abroad, and is excited to return. We have begun the hiring process to fill the currently funded 6 Aide positions that are necessary to open the Branches and expand Main Library hours, and expect to welcome back many aides who were unfortunately laid off last Spring.

### **Reopening**

Director Merlin reported that the Main Library opened for browsing and appointment-based computer use on Tuesday, April 20th. Crowds have been steady, and increasing as more and more people learn about our reopening. Patrons and staff alike are thrilled for the Main Library to return to a semblance of normal, and patrons have largely embraced the changes necessary to open with everyone's safety in mind.

The MeeScan self-checkout system has proven to be extremely popular with patrons and easy to use. The addition of the Welcome Desk and Holds Pickups in the Lobby have proven to be a good use of a previously underutilized area, and patrons enjoy seeing a friendly face upon arrival. As soon as Aide positions are filled, we will move forward with reopening the South and West Branches on a limited schedule. All further expansions of Branch and Main Library hours will require the restoration of more Aide positions in the FY22 budget, so we will be in this holding pattern for a while.

Current Main Library hours for the public are:

Mondays - Thursdays 10am-4pm, Saturdays 10am-2pm

Future Branch Hours:

South Branch- Mondays 10am-4pm, Tuesdays 2pm-8pm

West Branch- Wednesdays 10am-4pm, Thursdays 2pm-8pm

Alternating Saturdays, hours TBD

When 6 Aides are hired, the Main Library will also add Monday and Wednesday evenings until 8pm. The State has removed the Library-Specific reopening guidelines, and with this removal has rescinded the requirement that Libraries quarantine materials before reshelving. As research has continued, the CDC now states that, "based on available epidemiological data and studies of environmental transmission factors, surface transmission is not the main route by which SARS-CoV-2 spreads, and the risk is considered to be low"

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/science-and-research/surface-transmission.html>).

Director Merlin stated that in accordance with the most recent recommendations, we (and all other NOBLE libraries) are eliminating the quarantining of returned, delivered, and browsed materials, and will return to our pre-pandemic check-in and shelving protocols. This will mean faster check-in times for patrons, and that holds will arrive from other libraries in 2-3 business days.

### **Budget**

The current budget is included for your review. Director Merlin reported that our Outside Services line item is overspent due to elevator and HVAC expenses, but funds may be shifted around at the end of the FY to cover these costs, and a few items are underspent due to our being closed for so long (Supplies). We are on track to spend the correct amount of Books & Materials funds (12% of our **original** FY21 budget, or \$178,000) to meet that part of the MBLC Certification requirements.

President Pappas and I have our budget meeting with the Mayor, Head of Finance, and Head of HR soon. As a reminder, the budget proposal that was request by the City was for “level funding,” which, staffing-wise, would keep us to the limited Main, South, and West hours outlined in the “Reopening” section of this report, and would also necessitate the further reduction of Branch hours in September, when a full 63 hours/week are required at the Main Library for MBLC Certification.

### **Policy**

Director Merlin reported as she requested via an email vote in late April, in order to avoid confusion among patrons and staff, she is requesting that the Board approve the following highlighted addition:

“In alignment with Commonwealth of Massachusetts and CDC guidance, face coverings are required for all individuals over the age of two while in the buildings & outdoor spaces of the Peabody Institute Main Library, South Branch Library, and West Branch Library, in order to address asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission (transmission from infected individuals who may or may not have symptoms) of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status. Face coverings must cover a visitor’s mouth and nose simultaneously.”

### **Audubons**

The Peabody Institute Library Foundation has voted to revisit the funding of Audubon restoration until our FY22 budget is finalized, as the Foundation does not wish to fund this expensive undertaking if the Library is not funded at the level it needs to be to be fully certified by the MBLC. As the Trustees allocate State Aid funding for this venture, Director Merlin also suggests that the spending of State Aid for restoration also be suspended until we learn more about the FY22 budget.

### **Building & Grounds**

Director Merlin reported that during this past week’s storms, a downspout at the Main Library that has a history of overflowing, backed up, causing water to flow into the Courtyard Lobby & Hallway under the glass walls around the Courtyard entrance, wetting carpets well into the

Teen Room. The water also flowed down into the Children's Room ceiling directly below, causing 5 ceiling tiles to fall in, and wet the carpet below. The downspout has done this for years. A normal rainstorm wets the carpets around 6" into the lobby and hallway, so this damage was unprecedented. The seeping of the water happened after the story had ended, so Saturday staff arrived to wet carpets, fallen ceiling tiles, and a musty smell.

After Senior Adult Services Gabriela Toth's heroic efforts to determine how to still open the Library while avoiding the wet areas, the flicking of a few staff computers led Director Merlin to determining that the best and most safe course of action was to close for the day (10am-2pm). She arrived, along with President Pappas and Trustee Shruhan, to assess the situation, and more issues with the area were noticed (downspout not correctly secured to building, another downspout not connected to the gutter, etc). I reported this information to the Assistant Head of Facilities, who sent employees to the Main Library this morning. As of noon, the fallen tiles in the Children's Room have been replaced, and the drains in the Courtyard were snaked. There do not appear to be any continued electrical issues, but the City Electrician will also do an evaluation later this week. President Pappas, Trustee Shruhan, and I are determined that this problem downspout and related issues finally be solved, and I will continue to speak with the Facilities Department and Mayor this week and beyond to move forward.

**-End of Report -**

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The Trustees began a discussion regarding the downspout damage.

President Pappas noted that the water damage was surprisingly very bad. Trustee Quinn wondered if it was a basic design problem. Director Merlin stated that when it rains hard, the rivets don't work in the corner where the new and old building meet causing overflow. She added that it has been an issue for a while and that previous Director, Melissa Robinson, brought it up in the past. However, the issue was ignored and accepted as something that just happened and could be dealt with by putting up fans. However, this time was much worse.

Trustee Najjar asked if the issue is all exterior, and if so, why not redo the gutters as a simple fix. Director Merlin responded that the library had recently become part of the city's facilities instead of having its own independent facilities which has made requests become fulfilled more quickly.

Trustee Shruhan responded that the drains are big enough, but are very old, falling apart, and coming away from the building, so they all need to be fixed. Trustee Shruhan stated that they need to walk around building and look at the other gutters as well, and that they can discuss more under committee reports.

Trustee O'Brien inquired about the timeline on opening the Branch locations.

Director Merlin stated that she had sent a letter to all aides that are eligible for rehire, based on seniority. Those aides will contact her regarding their availability by this coming Friday, and then they will go through the CORI process. Director Merlin stated that once everyone is hired

reopening will be quick, but the hiring process can be slow, and she hopes to reopen by early June.

Trustee O'Brien asked Director Merlin after they rehire those positions, how many positions they are down total from the cut. Director Merlin stated that they had 13 aides before, so they would still be down 7 aides, 8 pages (who reshelve materials, which was not requested in next years budget, so that is extra work that 8 people used to do part time), the Sunday librarian position, the West Branch Children's Librarian, and the Senior South Branch position. Director Merlin hopes the FY22 budget will be restored to include more aides and the Senior South Branch Librarian position in order to expand operating hours.

Trustee Najjar asked if that will affect recertification. Director Merlin responded that for certification there is a population-based hours per week and days open per week requirement by the MBLC. Director Merlin added that for cities our size the requirement is being open 6 days and 63 hours a week. Currently, the Main library is not open 63 hours per week and only open 5 days per week. Before COVID the schedule was a couple hours over the weekly requirement, so they have to work back to that schedule. This will include taking aides from the Branch locations to the Main and reducing Branch hours. Only the Main Library hours are counted towards the requirement.

A **MOTION** was made by Trustee Najjar to accept the Director's Report as presented. The motion was seconded by Trustee Yeo.

A vote was taken.

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

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### **Reports of the Committees**

**BUILDINGS & GROUNDS:** Committee Chair Richard Shruhan stated that the main priority is fixing the gutter problem, and that the second priority is addressing the electrical wiring in the garage. Trustee Shruhan also recommended a walkthrough with Trustee McAllister, himself, Director Merlin, Assistant Director Hayden and President Pappas through the attic down to the basement to put a fresh pair of eyes on everything, and make a spreadsheet of everything that needs to be fixed. Director Merlin responded that is a great idea and she would like to include Sean the custodian, as well as do the same at the Branches.

**AUDUBON PRINTS:** Committee Chair Anne Quinn stated the Foundation met and has agreed to suspend funding until the budget is more settled. Trustee Quinn added that Trustee Najjar would speak more about the foundation activity.

**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 more in addition to the report provided by the Library Director.

**LIAISON TO THE FRIENDS OF THE PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY:** Committee Chair Morgan Yeo stated there was nothing to report.

**LIAISON TO THE PEABODY HISTORICAL SOCIETY:** Liaison Stephanie Dallaire was not present.

**LIAISON TO THE PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY FOUNDATION:** Liaison Stephanie Najjar stated that after the Foundation committee meeting and quarterly meeting they are mostly discussing ways to move forward with fundraising. They are trying to focus more on experiences like Starry Starry Night, raffles or adventure experiences. One initiative proposed by Foundation President, Martha Holden, was to sell flowers in the courtyard to raise funds and make connections. A date has not been chosen for this yet.

There was a vote taken to put funding the Audubon restoration project hold until they verified that the City is responsible for the funding. The Foundation is concerned with certification, and does not want to take fundraising money and put it towards a restoration project that is the monetary responsibility of the city. There was also a discussion of possibly working together with the Friends, and the Foundation has begun to open up dialogue in that regard.

President Pappas inquired about the funding the Audubon project in the past. Trustee Najjar responded that in the past it had been a 50/50 split between the Foundation and State Aid. There was also a previous Trust that no longer is available. President Pappas inquired about the old collection of books they decided to sell. Director Merlin responded that Trust is the Brattle Books Trust, which is only to be spent on local history, and that she doesn't think it can be spent on Audubons. She stated that she would rather spend that money on the Sutton room. Trustee McAllister added that the project is 15 years old, and that he is glad to hear it is near the end. Director Merlin stated that 311/434 prints have been restored and they are \$1,000 each and are done in batches of 20 prints.

A **MOTION** was made by Trustee Najjar to accept the Committee reports as presented. The motion was seconded by Trustee McAllister.

A vote was taken.

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

### **Unfinished Business**

A **MOTION** was made by Trustee Najjar to amend the Face Covering Policy to include language stating that face coverings must cover a visitor's mouth and nose simultaneously. The motion was seconded by Trustee Shruhan.

A vote was taken.

All in Favor: Trustees Shruhan, Bakula, Yeo, O'Brien, McAllister, Najjar, and Pappas.

Any Opposed: Trustee Quinn.

The motion was approved with a majority vote.

Trustee Najjar asked Director Merlin if they were having trouble with the face mask policy. Director Merlin responded that it has been mostly good, but the only time there was trouble was people not wearing their mask above their nose. Therefore, she felt the need to amend the policy to ensure consistency.

### **New Business**

No new business was discussed.

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President Pappas reminded the Board that the next Trustees meeting would be held on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 7pm.

Trustee O'Brien asked if the next meeting would be over zoom. Trustee Najjar stated that she would prefer to come back in person sooner rather than later, potentially starting in September. There are no meetings in July and August, so that would allow ample time to prepare. Director Merlin agreed and stated the June meeting would be easier to do on Zoom but could do in person with masks. President Pappas agreed with the timeline of starting in person in September.

As there was no additional business to come before the Board, a **MOTION** to adjourn was made by Trustee Najjar. The motion was seconded by Trustee McAllister.

A vote was taken.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:49 pm.

Submitted by,

Catherine McGrath  
Secretary