

**PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**Minutes of Meeting  
June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

---

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  
Stephanie Dallaire  
Peter Bakula  
Fran Gallugi  
Kate O'Brien  
Anne Quinn  
Don McAllister  
Stephanie Najjar  
Tom Pappas

**Absent**

Morgan Yeo

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

Trustee Quinn noted language clarification needed in the discussion of Audubon project, as well as under discussion of Building and Grounds.

A **MOTION** was made by Trustee Najjar to approve the minutes of the meeting held on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 with the appropriate amendments. The motion was seconded by Trustee McAllister.

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.

---

**Director's Report to the Board of Library Trustees**

## June 2021

### Staffing

Senior Local History Librarian Catherine Badal and Senior Children's Librarian Allison Bridgewater began in May, and have jumped directly into working with the public and planning future projects. Five Aides who were laid off last year return this week, and a sixth Aide is being hired this week. Director Merlin stated that it is incredibly heartening to see both new and familiar faces who are excited to help the Library rebuild and reopen.

### Reopening

In accordance with Governor Baker's lifting of mask rules and capacity limitations, and in collaboration with the City and Health Department, the Main Library is now fully open to all patrons, and masks are not required but are *strongly encouraged*. We have left up all dividers for the time being, and plan to keep all hand sanitizer and wipes dispensers available. All collections are open for browsing, and limited study tables are available. We will begin outdoor programming this month, and will return to indoor programming and meeting rooms later this summer/fall.

On Monday, June 14th, thanks to our recent hiring, the Branches will reopen on a limited schedule, and hours will expand at the Main Library. The Branches will be enabled as Holds Pickup locations on Monday.

### June Hours

South Branch:

- Mondays 9am-5pm
- Tuesdays 1pm-9pm
- Alternating Saturdays (6/19, etc) 9am-1pm

West Branch:

- Wednesdays 9am-5pm
- Thursdays 1pm-9pm
- Alternating Saturdays (6/25, etc) 9am-1pm

Main Library:

- Mondays & Wednesdays 9am-9pm
- Tuesdays & Thursdays 9am-5pm
- Saturdays 9am-5pm

Any additional hiring done this summer will be focused on reopening the Branches to their full weekdays, followed by adding evenings at the Main, evenings at the Branches, Fridays at the Main, and Sundays at the Main after Labor Day.

## **Budget**

Director Merlin provided the current budget; nothing is of concern. The Outside Services budget line is overspent due to our elevator and HVAC issues earlier in the year, but as others lines are underspent, funds are easily shifted around.

Director Merlin stated that she and President Pappas had a very optimistic budget meeting with the Mayor, and are fully confident that the FY22 budget will allow us to hire enough staff to reopen to our pre-pandemic services by Labor Day, and will also allow us to reach the full MBLC funding requirements. The City's Budget Meetings are scheduled to begin next Tuesday 6/15, and I will send you the budget information as soon as it's available.

Regarding the Outside Services budget line- in FY19, the Custodian's salaries were removed from our budget and put into the City's Facilities department, at the same time that we were brought under the City's Facilities Department as whole. Beginning in FY22, the City Facilities Department will now pay for HVAC and elevator services, leaving us with a smaller but easier to handle Outside Services budget. As soon as Director Merlin knows how these funds will even out, the MBLC will adjust our funds requirement to take this into account, so that our MAR will reflect funds being transferred, not eliminated.

## **Programs & Initiatives**

Thanks largely to the tireless work from our Senior Teen Librarian Joanna Corea, who has kept lines of communication open throughout the pandemic with the school department, the library has contributed new summer reading lists for grades K-12. Joanna Corea has redone the entire middle school summer reading list, worked with the High School librarian to adjust the high school summer reading list and as one of her last efforts as Children's Librarian, Asst. Director Hayden redesigned the K-5 summer reading list. Both librarians designed their lists with a focus on accessibility to patrons (including direct links to the library catalog and ensuring copies are on-hand in Peabody and tips on using the library catalog), #ownvoices authors, diverse characters and engrossing storytelling. The schools' responses have been enthusiastic and the new lists are being distributed to the students before school ends.

The free Summer Lunch program will also return this summer in a slight different format. On Tuesdays from 12pm-1pm, kids of all ages, regardless of need, will be able to pick up a full week's worth of free lunches provided by Citizens Inn/Haven from Hunger, and Children's and Teen staff will offer outdoor programming. The Peabody Health Department will also provide information about the efficacy and safety of vaccinations. This program will begin the week of June 21st, and end the week of August 26th. Senior Teen Librarian Corea is also partnering with Citizens Inn at their other lunch distribution sites to bring pop-up libraries out into the city, and to sign both kids and adults up for library cards on the spot. This will continue around the city throughout the summer.

Director Merlin stated that now that the library is reopening to the public, hiring staff and offering even more in-person and digital services to its patrons (self-checkout, additional databases, etc.) we want to ensure that as many of our community members as possible are able to access and take advantage of all of our free resources. To that end, we'd like to start a library signup campaign this September, coinciding with Library Card Signup Month, encouraging as many people as possible to sign up for or renew a lapsed library card. We would particularly like to

encourage our City leaders and elected officials to be a part of this campaign. This is a great opportunity for our Trustees to update their library cards, ensuring their information is correct and to contact and encourage other elected officials throughout the City to do the same. It is important for adults in family units to model having and using a library card to encourage our youngest community members to become lifelong readers, learners and productive citizens. So we would like to encourage caregivers who do not yet have a library card to sign up, even if their children use their library cards.

It is also a great opportunity for our City Leaders to show their support for the library and to lead by example, encouraging other Peabody community members to take advantage of the wide array of resources the library provides at no cost, but that have great value. We would love to do a mailing and social media campaign that outlines the benefits of a library card and encourages people to sign up for a card or update their information if it's been a while. We would also like to invite our community members to post pictures of themselves with their current or new library card so that we can share the images on social media. This is a great opportunity for City leaders to gain extra publicity and demonstrate their support to the Library and their community.

Director Merlin stated that they would like to run this campaign for a full month - from September 6 through October 6th and would love a commitment from all of the Trustees to show their library love and pose with their library card. I will be contacting you later in the summer, as this campaign will begin before our next meeting.

### **Policy**

The Peabody Institute Library has suspended overdue fines of its materials since closing our doors in March 2020. The Trustees approved the suspension of fines through the end of June, and now is the ideal time to discuss the permanent elimination of overdue fines for all Peabody items. Fines would still be collected for lost/damaged items.

Please refer to the included Elimination of Overdue Fines Proposal for more information.

### **Audubons**

If our FY22 budget is finalized at a level that guarantees us MBLC certification, I propose that the Board discuss the restarting of this process at our September meeting.

### **Building & Grounds**

The South Branch air conditioners and water heaters have been replaced, thanks to the City Facilities Department.

The cleaned Main Library downspouts are working correctly, and I will work on a larger project later this summer to fix, clean, and reconnect the remaining downspouts. I will also finally be scheduling a walk-through with Trustee Pappas, Trustee Shruhan, Asst Director Hayden, and Custodian Sean Meagher this month to determine any necessary repairs and projects for this summer.

With the guidance of the City Purchasing Department, proposals for basic landscaping at all 3 locations have been sent to 5 local landscaping companies. The bids are due back to City Hall by

the end of the month, and encompass a spring/summer cleanup and fall cleanup for this year, renewable every year. I plan on allocating State Aid funds to our landscaping needs every year, as our staff is not able to keep up with the cleanups, and I would love to give the Peabody Garden Club a clean slate every year for their beautiful landscaping. I feel that annual investment in our landscaping is a good use of State Aid funds, as it sets the tone for each patron entering the Library, and brings pride to our staff and City.

**-End of Report -**

President Pappas inquired about how the Trustees should take their pictures for Library Card Signup Month. Director Merlin responded that they should take selfie with their card and email it.

Trustee Gallugi and Director Merlin discussed the plans of the Garden Club to clean-up and plant at the main library and both branches. Director Merlin stated that the clean-up will be done by landscapers in advance, so the club can focus on planting.

Trustee Najjar discussed the success of Teen Librarian Joanna Coreira's outreach program at the Higgins Middle School. Trustee Najjar shared a story of a girl who was so excited about her new library card and books that she came down to the office to call her dad.

Trustee Shruhan showed off his key chain library card and highly recommended it to his fellow Trustees.

Trustee Quinn commended the posters at the library that depict the library's "return on investment". Trustee Quinn congratulated Director Merlin on the success of the poster's impact. Director Merlin stated that Assistant Director Hayden was responsible for the posters.

Trustee Quinn inquired about the movement of the custodial salaries to the City of Peabody Facilities Department. She asked if the custodians report to the City or to the Director. Director Merlin responded that the custodian reports to both. She stated that he reports to the City, but when he is in the building he reports to Assistant Director Hayden and herself. Director Merlin stated that in the future when they hire another custodian, they will need to lay down rules. She stated that currently it is a gray area, but it causes no confusion.

---

A **MOTION** was made by Trustee Najjar to accept the Director's Report 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.

---

**Reports of the Committees**

**BUILDINGS & GROUNDS:** Committee Chair Richard Shruhan stated there was nothing beyond what was stated in the Director's report.

**AUDUBON PRINTS:** Committee Chair Anne Quinn stated there was nothing beyond what was stated in the Director's report.

**PERSONNEL:** Committee Chair Don McAllister stated there was nothing beyond what was stated in the Director's report.

**POLICY AND PROCEDURES:** Committee Chair Kate O'Brien stated that the Trustees will vote on fine policy.

**LIAISON TO THE FRIENDS OF THE PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY:** Committee Chair Morgan Yeo was not present.

**LIAISON TO THE PEABODY HISTORICAL SOCIETY:** Liaison Stephanie Dallaire stated there was nothing beyond what was stated in the Director's report.

**LIAISON TO THE PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY FOUNDATION:** Liaison Stephanie Najjar stated that geranium fundraiser last month was successful, and she hopes to do it again. They sold out all the flowers and made \$712.

### **President Pappas reported on important happenings:**

He stated that his meeting with Mayor Bettencourt on May 11<sup>th</sup> went great, and that the Mayor reassured them of his support of the library's funding needs.

President Pappas also stated that he would like to have a welcome back coffee and pastry get-together as a nice gesture for the returning staff who have been very supportive.

President Pappas shared that on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2021, he gave out George Peabody Medal Awards to eight recipients at Peabody High's Class of 2021 Convocation Ceremony. He stated that the Trustees have medal ceremony every year, but didn't have it last year due to Covid-19 and thanks to Trustee Najjar he was able to go to convocation this year to give out the medals.

President Pappas recognized and commended the work of Teen Librarian Joanna Coreira who he has received positive feedback and praise of.

President Pappas discussed the idea of having the Trustees visit the library at least once a month, so that they can discuss their experiences. President Pappas shared the experience of his most recent visit to the library.

Trustee McAllister asked Director Merlin approximately what percentage of the staff will be returning to the library. Director Merlin stated that out of 13 aides, 5 chose to return and they

were not able to rehire any pages who were laid off. Trustee McAllister asked if people who had worked at the library long-term were returning. Director Merlin stated that it was mostly newer employees who decided to return. Director Merlin stated that those who decided to return are great, and when they started it was like they never left.

Trustee Najjar asked if all those who were hired and going to be hired came from FY 2021 budget. Director Merlin responded that the funding for these positions came from money that was transferred to the FY 2021. Director Merlin stated that according to the budget for next year, if everything goes according to plan, once they bring back the Senior South Branch Librarian position, then the branches can be fully operational. They also need an addition 9 part-time aides. She stated that there is going to be part-time hiring frenzy this summer. There will be 15 total aides going between all locations.

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

A vote was taken.

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

### **Unfinished Business**

Nothing to report.

### **New Business**

President Pappas shared his support of the potential new policy. He stated that it would be positively received by the patrons, it is supported by the Massachusetts State Library Board and is already being implanted at many libraries across the state.

Director Merlin presented the Elimination of Overdue Fines Proposal:

### **Elimination of Overdue Fines Proposal**

The Peabody Institute Library has suspended overdue fines of its materials since the Pandemic began in March 2020. The Trustees approved the suspension of fines through the end of June, and now is the ideal time to discuss the permanent elimination of overdue fines for all Peabody items. Fines would still be collected for lost/damaged items.

### **Background**

Within the NOBLE Library Network (17 public libraries):

9 libraries **do not** charge fines on materials:

- o Beverly
- o Danvers
- o Gloucester
- o Lynn

- o Lynnfield
- o Reading
- o Revere
- o Stoneham
- o Wakefield

8 libraries **do** charge fines on materials:

- o Everett
- o Marblehead
- o Melrose
- o Peabody
- o Salem
- o Saugus
- o Swampscott
- o Winthrop

The Boston Public Library will become fine-free on July 1. Professional literature on the subject suggests that fines may discourage returns of materials. Our fine amnesty program's popularity reinforces that opinion; patrons who inquire about the next fine amnesty date (Food for Fines, typically during the winter) will typically report to staff that they are waiting until that date to return their materials.

Meg DePriest's [SPELL project research \(prepared for the Colorado State Library\)](#) suggests that:

- The data doesn't support the assumption that fines result in items returned in a timely manner
- Fines result in low-income families using the library less due to fines incurred
- Removing barriers to borrowing provides equitable access for all and promotes literacy

### **Fines Income**

Peabody items accrue \$0.10 per day, up to a maximum of \$2.00 per item. After 6 weeks, an item's replacement cost is billed to a patron's account. If a patron returns a long-overdue item, they are no longer billed for the total cost, but are still responsible for the overdue fines.

Over the past three fiscal years (not including FY21), library fines have generated about \$7,000 each year on average. Fine income is recaptured by the City's general fund and deposited back into our Books & Materials budget line throughout the year.

### **The Cost of Fines**

In relation to the cost of collecting fines, there are two separate issues: customer service and the amount of time staff spend concerning fines collection and enforcement. Circulation staff currently alert patrons at every transaction, if any fines are accumulated on their account. This is time consuming and often embarrassing to patrons. We are obligated

to remind patrons of their overdue fines, whether for \$0.10 or \$10.00.

The time spent on collecting fines and fees could be spent on other tasks, including promoting other library services, providing computer assistance, additional tasks at the desk, or simply helping the next patron in line.

### **Benefits to Eliminating Overdue Fines**

- Return of long-overdue items occur during fine amnesty periods, so removing fines potentially results in a higher rate of return on long-overdue items.
- Potential increase in new/renewed library cards and circulation as we recapture lapsed patrons.
- Improved access to library services, especially for low-income individuals and families.
- Children and youth, who cannot dictate when their items are returned, would not incur barriers to service.
- A majority of daily interactions with patrons at the circulation desk would not include reminding them of fines, which can lead to negative interactions.
- While it would seem that hold time would be longer, Libraries who have adopted fine free policies have not reported this and NOBLE wait times have shown the opposite, decreasing significantly.
- **Removing fines and expanding access increases goodwill in our community for the library.**

### **Potential Loss of Fine Funds**

- The City provides us with a fixed Books & Materials budget every year. Any overdue fines collected are deposited into the City's revolving fund and credited to our Books & Materials budget (expected to be \$210,000 in FY22).
- If we were to collect \$7,000 in fines during one year, we would be able to purchase an additional \$7,000 of books and materials, on top of the budgeted \$210,000 (an additional 3.33%).
- Eliminating overdue fines will end this yearly "credit" to our Books & Materials budget of approximately \$7,000 per year.
- This can be offset by funneling \$7,000 of our State Aid funding so there is no net impact.
- We will also encourage donations in lieu of fines that would directly support the Library through the Friends. Anecdotally, other NOBLE libraries that have become fine-free report patrons being very generous with donations as an act of kindness and thanks.

### **Next Steps**

If this proposal to eliminate overdue fines is approved, Trustee O'Brien and I will draft an official policy statement, to be voted on via email later this month, and to take effect on July 1.

All patrons (from Peabody and other NOBLE libraries) with current overdue fines for Peabody Items (from before March 2020) would receive an email notification that their overdue fines on returned Peabody items have been forgiven.

580 current Peabody patrons have cards that are blocked from usage because they have over \$10 in overdue fines- their fines will be eliminated, and they will once again be able to use all Library resources. 1,112 Peabody patrons have cards that are currently blocked due to high fines from overdue and lost/damaged items. We will encourage these patrons to return long-overdue Peabody items- if returned, those overdue fines will also be forgiven, and they will also once again be able to use all Library services.

Overdue fines would be eliminated for all items regardless of format (i.e. books, DVDs, Library of Things items), to eliminate confusion for staff and patrons, and to encourage all patrons to take full advantage of our collections.

The Foundation supports this new policy, and has committed to helping to get the word out to patrons who may not receive our email, who are not current patrons, or who have outstanding fines. We will work together to begin a publicity campaign, including local press, school visits, and a large-scale physical mailing campaign to Peabody residents.

### **-End of Proposal -**

The Trustees discussed the policy proposal. President Pappas stated that George Peabody didn't not support library fees. Trustee Shruhan asked if the change would affect turnover for materials on hold with a waitlist. Director Merlin stated that wait times on Noble have been very fast, and have been getting faster since libraries are going fine free.

Trustee Quinn asked how they will explain to Patrons that this only applies to Peabody materials. Director Merlin stated that it will be a learning curve, and they will have to explain that every library has its own policy. She stated that patrons are usually very understanding of this.

Trustee Quinn asked if the \$7,000 credit lost due to eliminating fines would affect State Aid. Director Merlin stated that it is treated as a slush fund, so it has no bearing on budget. She stated that it is a small percentage, and that if needed they could use money saved from the State Aid.

Trustee McAllister asked how successful the library is in collecting fines for materials that are long overdue. Director Merlin stated they are pretty successful in getting items either returned or paid for. She stated that does not believe there will be any effect on returning long overdue books.

Director Merlin stated that once an item is marked as "lost", then the patron's card is frozen. Therefore, people can't lose books and continue using their cards. Director Merlin also explained that when a patron's overdue fines gets to \$10 the card is also frozen. The card is unfrozen when a payment is made and the total is under \$10. Lost materials are different, and the system for lost materials will not change.

Director Merlin stated that they are getting a new payment system at the main library, so there is not a payment system currently. The library has been asking for donations instead of payment. Director Merlin stated that other libraries that have implemented this system report that they are

bringing in more money every year in donations than they did previously in fines. Instead of feeling punished, patrons feel thankful and want to show their gratitude. Director Merlin stated that donations go directly to the Friends and can be spent on programming and other things.

A **MOTION** was made by Trustee Najjar to accept the Elimination of Overdue Fines Proposal. The motion was seconded by Trustee Quinn.

A vote was taken.

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

Director Merlin and the Trustees discussed how excited they were for this new policy.

President Pappas asked if there were any ideas to publicize the elimination of fines, like a banner in front of the Main Branch. Director Merlin stated that was a great idea. Director Merlin also explained that she and Assistant Director Hayden wanted to utilize the billboards owned by the City of Peabody to advertise the reopening of the library. They could add that they are also fine free to the billboard.

The Trustees discussed getting the budget line back to pay for gifts. Director Merlin stated that it could be added to budget going forward. However, her priority is getting people hired. She also stated that she has to do some research into why it was dropped from the budget.

---

The next meeting will be on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 7 pm on location at the Main Library.

Director Merlin stated that she will not be able to make it, but Assistant Director Hayden will be there.

As there was no additional business to come before the Board, a **MOTION** to adjourn was made by Trustee Gallugi. The motion was seconded by Trustee O'Brien .

A vote was taken.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:19 pm.

Submitted by,

Catherine McGrath  
Secretary