

OBERLIN PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

August 12, 2021 Special Bridge Strategic Planning Meeting

President Bruce Ente called to order the meeting at 5:01 p.m. Roll call: Marcia Peterson, Patrick Prosser, Anita Lock, Bethany Baker, and Bruce Ente were present. Meredith Gadsby arrived later as noted. Megan Newson was absent. Also present were Darren McDonough, Director; Kristin Cioffi, Fiscal Officer; and Stephanie Jones, Director of The Bridge. Ann Ingram and Erin Shiba were present from the public.

Lock moved, seconded by Peterson, to accept Resolution # R-21-8-1, approving the minutes of the June 10, 2021, regular meeting. All present voted in favor.

MOTION PASSED

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE BRIDGE

Ente explained that this meeting would be the first of several conversations about The Bridge. He noted that 1/6th of the library's budget is spent on The Bridge, and he wants to make sure we are getting the best possible return on investment. Ente's intention is for the Board to come out of the meeting with an understanding of where we stand now and the first steps for moving forward.

Stephanie Jones, Director of the Bridge, presented a Power Point about The Bridge (copy attached). Topics covered in the presentation included the history of The Bridge, the array of services offered throughout the past twenty years, the results of a survey of current patrons concerning what services they would like to see, and what Jones would like to see moving forward. After the presentation, Jones explained the monthly Bridge report, reviewed patron demographic statistics, and addressed questions from the trustees.

Lock commented that in speaking with one of The Bridge's founders, the goal of creating The Bridge was to bridge the digital divide that appears to hit the African American community the most. Lock asked if The Bridge had met that goal. Jones replied that she addressed it to the best of her ability, and cited examples. Jones further explained that community members often do not take advantage of the services offered. She noted that most people that use The Bridge come in for a specific purpose such as printing or computer assistance.

Gadsby arrived at 5:38 p.m.

Ente asked what makes a patron go to The Bridge instead of the library. McDonough answered that patrons go to The Bridge: when the library is at total

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computer-use capacity, for lengthier computer, to use Apple computers instead of Windows, and for receiving additional computer help. Peterson asked if closing the Senior Center has impacted The Bridge. Jones replied that it has not, but she has received a few calls asking about computer classes. Peterson asked about the after-school program. Jones replied that she hopes to open the Backspace after school on Mondays through Wednesdays.

Ente noted that 2.5% of The Bridge's open hours are spent on staff assisting patrons. He thinks perhaps the services offered at The Bridge should change to draw in more people. He also commented that a decision is necessary to determine whether or not The Bridge should still be a vehicle for social change. Prosser commented that it seems like there is a lack of city services in some areas. He wonders if The Bridge should compete with other services to help patrons or create new and unique services to draw people into their space.

Peterson commented that in looking forward, perhaps The Bridge could offer vocational assistance to help kids gain more post-high school education. Jones replied that The Bridges already offers camps that address that need, but most of the kids attending are not from Oberlin. She noted that after-school kids just want to have fun after focusing on academics all day in school. Baker and Gadsby agreed, noting that most kids have already learned computer skills through school.

Gadsby asked if having college students in the Backspace is helpful. Jones replied that it was. Because the college students were close in age to the kids, they could relate to them better. Gadsby asked if Jones looked at other technology centers to see what succeeded and at the possibility of The Bridge implementing those tools. Jones replied that she talked to other libraries with Maker Spaces. For the most part, they are not very successful at drawing in people. Jones thinks that a Cricut, a green screen or virtual reality, might draw in people. Gadsby suggested asking the kids what they would like to use. Gadsby commented that data, such as a community survey that reflects who don't use The Bridge, would be vital information for The Board in understanding The Bridge's services. Ente noted that he doesn't necessarily think new hardware is the answer. Lock and Gadsby stressed the importance of working with other community groups to strengthen partnerships. Gadsby thinks Jones's next steps should be to investigate working with other community groups, ask students what services they would like, and share her findings.

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Shiba left the meeting at 6:35 p.m.

Ente commented that he doesn't know if an after-school center is a correct route for The Bridge. Gadsby replied that it is an important and needed service and that she would like for The Bridge to be a resource for that. Lock commented that maybe it's time for community groups to meet regularly to discuss social issues. Ente commented that he would like to hear from Jones and McDonough with their ideas for programs The Bridge can offer the community. In turn, Jones commented that she would like to hear what the trustees would like The Bridge to offer. Ente noted he would like to have data regarding community needs. Ente stated that he would sit down with Jones and McDonough to develop a timetable of the following steps to take. Peterson commented that the city is hiring people to survey the community and that maybe we should give them some questions to ask.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ann Ingram from the Friends of OPL commented that the Friends of OPL shares news in their newsletter and churches in Oberlin. She noted that they could send out information about The Bridge as well. Ingram also expressed that the Friends would like to help put together programs for the schools if needed. Jones noted that The Bridge already goes to the schools at the beginning of each school year to introduce their programs and stays connected with the teachers throughout the year, but will let Ingram know if she needs any help.

NEXT MEETING & COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

The next regular meeting will be Thursday, September 9 at 5:00 p.m. Discussion on The Bridge will be on the agenda. Committee meetings will resume in September.

Peterson moved, seconded by Lock, to adjourn. All present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 6:51 p.m.

President

Attest