

OBERLIN PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

April 14, 2022

President Bruce Ente called to order the meeting at 5:07 p.m. Secretary Anita Lock took minutes in lieu of Kristin Cioffi, Fiscal Officer, who was attending Ohio Library Counsel's annual Fiscal Officer Conference in Columbus. Roll call: Marcia Peterson, Anita Lock, Bruce Ente, Megan Newson, Bethany Baker, and Lili Sandler were present. Meredith Gadsby arrived later, as noted. Also present was Darren McDonough, Director. There was a well-attended public.

McDonough mentioned that he gave the wrong total for 2021 OPL programs during the March Board meeting and stated that the correct total was 108, not 126.

Baker moved, seconded by Sandler, to accept Resolution # R-22-4-1, approving the minutes of the March 10, 2022, regular meeting. All present voted in favor. Roll call vote: Peterson, Lock, Ente, Gadsby, Newson, Sandler, Baker. ALL AYES.

MOTION PASSED

FISCAL OFFICER'S REPORT

President Ente mentioned that Cioffi included with her monthly statements bulleted Fiscal-Officer notes, which replaced her monthly verbal report. Director McDonough stated that there wasn't anything outstanding but mentioned that OPL is 25% through the year. Ente said that the BF&A Committee would report on expenditures on building repairs of the south wall. Lastly, Ente announced that there would be a 2023 Budget Hearing and Records Commission Meeting before the May Board meeting. All present voted in favor; however, no motions—moved and seconded—were made to accept the March 2022 Financial Reports. Motion to accept Resolution # R-22-4-2 should be added as an agenda item for the May Board meeting.

Gadsby arrived at 5:11 p.m.

Roll call vote: Peterson, Lock, Ente, Gadsby, Newson, Sandler, Baker. ALL AYES. Gadsby abstained.

NO MOTION PASSED

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director McDonough commented that there wasn't much to report and that some days were busier than others. He mentioned that OPL distributed 294 home COVID-19 test kits in March. McDonough also noted they received an estimate

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to repair the building's south wall and were still waiting to receive an estimate from the roofers. McDonough added that the BF&A Committee would report on that.

McDonough mentioned with the Community Technology Needs Assessment survey completed, OPL was waiting for Library IQ's final report, which they would present at the upcoming Zoom meeting on Monday, April 25.

Lastly, McDonough reported that the Personnel Committee accepted his verbal resignation and that the committee was working on making the transition to his successor as smooth as possible. He also mentioned that the date of his final day had not yet been determined.

Ente asked if there were COVID tests still available, to which McDonough replied in the affirmative.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Ente stated that the President's Report would be brief. He thanked the public for their support of the library and reminded them that they would have an opportunity to share their perspectives with the Board later in the meeting. Secondly, Ente mentioned that he was not a fan of rumor-mongering. Ente continued by saying that to keep rumors from starting, he reached out to the Human Relations Commission (HRC), reporting that because of the contentious communication between the Board and McDonough, Ente hoped their office would be a vehicle to address and remedy the communication challenges of late. Ente stated he believed that communication was about 90% of the game in so many areas of life, including public service.

Additionally, Ente mentioned that HRC turned down his request since they were not ready to take on this kind of mediation because of the legal liabilities of the employer-employee relationship between the Board and McDonough. Baker asked if another local agency was available. Ente responded by saying that he had not found anything to date.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Sandler reported that there were two resignations. She passed copies of the employee resignation letters for the Trustees to examine. The resignations were

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moved and seconded by the Personnel Committee to accept Resolution # R-22-4-3, approving the following resignations:

- The resignation of Cameron hogan (Circulation Clerk) effective March 23, 2022
- The resignation of Margaret Swendseid (Public Services Team) effective March 23, 2022

Roll call vote: Peterson, Lock, Ente, Gadsby, Newson, Sandler, Baker, ALL AYES.

MOTION PASSED

BUILDING, FINANCE, AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Peterson mentioned the BF&A Committee looked at the proposal from Mid State Restoration and read from their report:

“We opened an area approximately 1x2 feet at the horizontal crack in the south elevation wall to further investigate causes of the horizontal crack and examine the conditions of the steel bar joists that bear on the concrete block back up wall at that elevation. The horizontal crack runs the entire length of the south elevation wall. At the middle of the wall the parapet is leaning inwards towards the roof and is approximately 2.5 inches out of plumb. The bearing plate of the roof bar joist bears on the 8-inch of concrete block back up wall. The bearing plate appeared in good condition with no evidence of corrosion present.”

Peterson stated that the abovementioned description would be the first phase. She mentioned that while BF&A did not yet have a final estimate from the roofing company, it was necessary to point out that the library was in its 10th roof warranty year. Peterson continued by saying that the BF&A Committee approved the initial estimate of \$43,854.00. She noted that additional work would be done on the expansion joints on the building's west, north, and east corners. She added that cement over expandable building material in those joints caused the building to shift. While repairs were substantial and much joint work would be done later, it was imperative to take care of the south wall immediately. Ente reiterated the BF&A Committee's recommendation to the Board that the library contract with Mid State Restoration. The contract came moved and seconded by the BF&A Committee to accept Resolution # R-22-4-4, approving a formal contract with Mid State Restoration and payment of \$43,854.00.

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Roll call vote: Peterson, Lock, Ente, Gadsby, Newson, Sandler, Baker, ALL AYES.

MOTION PASSED

LIBRARY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Lock followed up on McDonough's comment about the total change for 2021 programming at OPL by saying that the committee contacted Kirstin Krumsee, State Library Consultant, asking for their definitions for programming—more for educating the committee on programming to ascertain which programs should be kept or not. She added that the State Library considers Make and Take (or Grab and Go) kits as “passive programming” and did not place them on the list of library programming. Lock also stated that she disagreed with the State Library's decision because of monies spent for such programs. Regardless, OPL followed suit and eliminated the kits from their total count.

GIFTS

All present voted in favor; however, no motions—moved and seconded—were made to accept the March 2022 Gifts. Motion to accept Resolution # R-22-4-5 should be added as an agenda item for the May Board meeting.

Resolution # R-22-4-5, to accept the following gift:

In Memory of Judith “Judy” Fannin:

- \$300.00 from Marvin Fannin

Roll call vote: Peterson, Lock, Ente, Gadsby, Newson, Sandler, Baker, ALL AYES.

NO MOTION PASSED

OLD BUSINESS

Ente directed attention to an update on the Community Technology Needs Assessment. Peterson mentioned there was a Library IQ Zoom meeting on March 31 to go over raw data generated from the survey and focus groups. She added that Library IQ asked the task force to give their reflections on the data, which was submitted. Ente mentioned that the task force committee included an ad hoc committee from the Board—Anita Lock and Marcia Peterson, alongside Director McDonough, Rebecca Wedge, Stephanie Jones, and Debbie Joy and Susan Considine of Library IQ. Ente continued by saying that the committee would

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meet and review the data on Monday, April 25 via Zoom. Sandler requested to attend the meeting since she likes data. Peterson offered to email Joy, requesting an invitation for Sandler.

Ente mentioned that another piece of old business was the latest update on the lawsuit filed in February by Oberlin citizen David Ashenhurst. Ente refreshed everyone that the lawsuit alleged that special meetings of the Board were not proper and that actions taken at those meetings should be mooted. He continued by saying that the Board filed a response, which extended time for the plaintiff to file an amended claim, the library's attorney filed an order to dismiss, the plaintiff filed a response to that, and now we were waiting to see how the judge will adjudicate the lawsuit. Ente commented that while there was no resolution, he had supplied copies of the latest filing for the public to take home and read. He said that Greg Peltz, who is the Board's attorney, had offered to speak to the Board at some point. Ente closed by saying, "the wheels of justice grind slowly but they are grinding, so stay tuned for further information."

NEW BUSINESS

Gadsby commented on the agenda's order and placement of Public Participation. Gadsby shared a concern that time might be taken away from Executive Session by having Public Participation first rather than after the session and that, as has been the Board's practice, for the public to stay and participate after Executive Session to provide time for them to respond to the session's outcome. Ente countered that he thought there might be members of the public who would not want to stick around until Executive Session was over and would rather speak their minds beforehand. Gadsby objected to the earlier Public Participation model. Peterson asked for a show of hands from the public who would like to speak, which amounted to five people. Ente mentioned that the Board talked informally about a time limit to public comments. He was open to the idea for the sake of time. Gadsby suggested a 3-minute public comment. Peterson and Ente concurred with Gadsby's suggestion.

TRUSTEE REMARKS

Sandler read notes from her computer:

"I just want to say a few words. Joining this Library Board in the midst of multiple tense situations was not how I imagined serving my community. I've spent a long time thinking about what has taken place over the last 9-12

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months—so much so that I had no fewer than 3 dreams about today’s meeting last night and then was awake for an hour at 4 a.m. thinking about it.

Having joined the Board after the evaluation of the director was completed—and I want to note that I am fully in favor of employee evaluations, I think they are essential and valuable and can provide constructive paths for growth for both employee and employer. I believe I have a different perspective than the rest of the Board because I wasn’t here during the evaluation process.

However, the approach to Darren’s evaluation by those on both sides of the process has had, from my perspective, nothing but negative results. A wedge has been driven between this Board and the library staff, we’ve alienated ourselves from many members of the community, and we’re losing the director who, despite what may be found in his evaluation, has created and nurtured the library we all know and love. I’ve heard many declarations saying just that in this body’s meetings.

And so, here’s my final thing: As a Board, I urge us to proceed with greater compassion and empathy in all future evaluations and other tasks. No one ever regrets being kind. We have work to do to rebuild our credibility with the library staff and the community at large. I’m hopeful we can do that, and I’m here to put in the work. And Darren, I want to personally thank you for your significant role in directing the beloved Oberlin Public Library. In my 15 years in Oberlin—two years fewer than your tenure running the library—it has always been a symbol of what makes Oberlin special. Thank you.”

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Tony Wilgus read portions from a memorandum addressed to Oberlin Public Library, Board of Trustees that regarded the “Library Board Trustees and Community Collaboration.” He also passed out copies to each of the Trustees.

Mr. Wilgus quoted Flannery O’Connor, “A good man is hard to find,” stating that 17 years ago, the library found a good man, and as a community member, he was sad that they were losing a good man. He thanked the Library Board and McDonough for their contributions.

Pulling from the memorandum, Mr. Wilgus stated that his proposal consisted of two listening sessions between the new Board of Trustees and community members. He added that he had not heard from the Trustees, except for Trustee Sandler, about what they like about the library, and he thanked her for what she

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had to say this evening. He continued by saying that in the first listening session, each Trustee would have the opportunity to individually share their perspective regarding their vision of the library for the present and the future. He mentioned that the Board would be on an honor system if they agreed to this by not collaborating one with the another. Wilgus added that the conventional thing would be for all to have a group get-together. He once again emphasized his desire to hear each of the Trustees' views about the abovementioned topics.

Mr. Wilgus went on to say that in the second 60-minute session, the community would get together with each member who wished to speak and say what they liked about the library and what they hoped to see and not see from the project. He mentioned that with each session, there would be a back-and-forth discussion with a mutual facilitator to ask and clarify questions and provide an opportunity for the community and the Board of Trustees to listen. He read from the memorandum:

“The primary role of the library board is to provide services and materials that reflect the community's values and standards.”

Mr. Wilgus commented that statement came with responsibility, but that the community also had a responsibility to let the Board know how they fit in with the library. Wilgus mentioned that inasmuch as this speaks to the collaborative nature, the Board and community were in this together. He added that it would be productive for the Board of Trustees to engage in dialogue that might contribute to greater common knowledge and mutual planning. Mr. Wilgus also raised that both the Library Trustees and the community had a substantial investment in sustaining this vital organization here in Oberlin. He concluded by saying that he had copies for the Secretary and remaining members of the Board.

Below is the memorandum Mr. Wilgus provided:

“Proposal for a series of 2 Listening Sessions between the Oberlin Public Library Board of Trustees and the Community at large.

- 1) In the initial 60-minute session, each member of the Board of Trustees will provide a personal vision of the library both in the present and in the near and long-term future, including aspects of the library in the present that they appreciate. These respective visions will reflect the individual thinking of each trustee without collaboration with other members. An impartial facilitator will facilitate clarifications as part of this listening session.

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- 2) In the second 60-minute session, members of the community who so choose will provide a personal vision of the library both for the present and in the near and long-term future, also including aspects of the current library that they appreciate. Again, a neutral facilitator will facilitate any clarifications requested by listeners.

Rationale for this proposal:

Inasmuch as the role of the Library Board of Trustees is the following as stated in the Ohio Library Council Trustee's Handbook:

Providing library services and materials that reflect the community's values and standards is the overriding responsibility of the board. (p. 11).

Gadsby asked about the video recorder and phone recording. She mentioned she was not aware that any members of the Board had been asked for consent to record. Gadsby commented that she was not comfortable with that situation. Henry Bent from the public responded by saying that he understood that permission for recording was not required. He added that an Ohio Attorney General stated in 1988 that the public recording of audio and video was permitted at public board meetings like this one. Gadsby countered that the public library is a separate entity. She gave the example of the City Council meetings where recordings are required. Gadsby added that she was not taking issue if there was prior consent. She also mentioned that for the years on the Board, meetings, including Zoom, had never been recorded. She contended that the video camera recording was a personal camera intended for private use. Gadsby closed by asking that the recording devices be turned off, and they were.

Eric Carpenter stated that he was disappointed with the Board.

Jan Thornton responded to President Ente's comment about not finding any other local organizations that dealt with conflict resolution. She commented that there are people in the psychology department at Oberlin College and community members trained in conflict resolution. Eboni Johnson from the public quickly chimed in to identify herself as one of those trained community members.

Nina Young mentioned that she worked for OPL years ago and now works for Overdrive. She also commented that she had gotten along with the staff when she

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worked for OPL. In closing, she said that one thing that hinders library development is community tension.

Dorothy Luciano mentioned that she recently read and recommended an article from the Nov 2021 issue of Smithsonian Magazine about the Memphis Public Libraries in Tennessee. She found the article eye-opening and exciting, especially when she read about the vast possibilities of reaching out to teens and getting them involved in outstanding programs.

Centrilla Scott mentioned that she had been a resident of Oberlin for 66 years. Although her concern had been about the Bridge, she was very sad to learn most recently of Director McDonough's resignation.

B Mann mentioned that he, like Nina Young, was a former library employee at OPL. He also stated that having worked in a variety of libraries, one thing he learned was that many staff was necessary to run library programs.

Linda Rothacker raised that even though she's not an Oberlin resident, OPL has been her sanctuary for many years. She also raised that all of the library levies had passed by high percentages and that people's opinions against the director should be in question.

Francis Stewart shared that he has been a resident of Oberlin for 20 years and that in the last 10 years, he's led the genealogy group. He talked about teaching family history to kids and his appreciation to Darren for the opportunity to use space for the program. He raised the question: "So, what's wrong with this library?" Mr. Stewart questioned the competency of the Trustees, contending that they hadn't been a part of the community and OPL long enough to understand and appreciate the library and its rich history.

Gadsby cut Mr. Stewart off since he started to go beyond the 3-minute rule.

Newson moved, seconded by Sandler, to accept Resolution # R-22-4-6, to go into executive session at 6:14 p.m. to discuss the employment of a public employee. Roll call vote: Peterson, Lock, Ente, Gadsby, Newson, Sandler, Baker, ALL AYES.

MOTION PASSED

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Director McDonough joined the executive session at 7:36 p.m. The Board and McDonough returned from the executive session at 8:04 p.m. via motion by Peterson, seconded by Lock.

Peterson moved, seconded by Baker, to accept Resolution # R-22-4-7, accepting Director McDonough's verbal resignation, and asked that it be committed to writing by Monday, April 25, 2022. All present voted in favor. Roll call vote: Peterson, Lock, Ente, Gadsby, Newson, Sandler, Baker, ALL AYES.

MOTION PASSED

Ente thanked the public for coming to the meeting.

Newson moved, seconded by Baker, to adjourn. All present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

President

Attest