

## OBERLIN PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**February 10, 2022**

President Bruce Ente called to order the meeting at 5:05 p.m. Roll call: Marcia Peterson, Anita Lock, Lili Sandler, Bruce Ente, Bethany Baker, and Meredith Gadsby were present. Megan Newson was absent. Also present were Darren McDonough, Director, and Kristin Cioffi, Fiscal Officer. There was a well-attended public.

Peterson moved, seconded by Baker, to accept Resolution # R-22-2-1, approving the minutes of the January 13, 2022, regular meeting. All present voted in favor.

MOTION PASSED

### FISCAL OFFICER'S REPORT

Fiscal Officer Cioffi reviewed the January 2022 financial reports (Fund Status, Revenue Status, Appropriation Status, and Bank Reconciliation). Cioffi noted that she had completed all the necessary financial filings for 2021, including filing the 2021 financial reports with the Auditor of State. Lock moved, seconded by Peterson, to accept Resolution # R-22-2-2, accepting the January 2022 Financial Reports. Roll call vote: Peterson, Lock, Sandler, Ente, Baker, Gadsby, ALL AYES.

MOTION PASSED

### DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director McDonough reported 1,122 home COVID-19 test kits were distributed in January. McDonough reported a significant crack in the library's south elevation exterior masonry wall. McDonough gave an overview of the crack and reviewed the steps taken so far to determine the cause. McDonough reported that the library's insurance company is sending an adjuster to look at the crack and determine the next steps. McDonough noted that he would keep the Trustees informed throughout the process. McDonough reported that the library had started the process of migrating its ILS system to the updated version. McDonough explained the process, which will take place over the weekend of Juneteenth. McDonough answered questions from Trustees related to the crack in the building. McDonough reported that The Bridge had started implementing the Northstar program but had not officially launched. McDonough noted usage statistics at The Bridge have increased over last year at this time.

Baker moved, seconded by Peterson, to accept Resolution # R-22-2-3, to accept the following gifts:

In memory of Jean Broadwell:

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- \$50.00 from Jennifer Pease Eastvold

In memory of Jeanne Pease:

- \$25.00 from Allyson & Richard Grills
- \$50.00 from the Silver Wheels Cycling Club
- 50.00 from Scott & Ellen Broadwell
- \$100.00 from Mary Moore Vento

All present voted in favor.

MOTION PASSED

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Ente thanked Lock for writing a thank-you letter to the Coopers as discussed at last month's Board meeting. Ente reported that he would mail the letter after all the Trustees signed it. Ente distributed a photocopy of an article about the library's Technology Survey that appeared in the January 25, 2022 edition of *The Chronicle-Telegram*. Ente reviewed the article and made a few comments about it. Ente reported a couple of discoveries while reviewing his old emails to comply with a public records request regarding The Bridge. A few emails he had sent indicated he did not want to close The Bridge. They also stated that he wanted to work with McDonough and Bridge Director Stephanie Jones to revitalize The Bridge. Ente reviewed the status of the public records requests for emails and asked that any Trustee who hadn't reviewed their emails do so and forward anything relevant to the library's email account. Ente asked that in the future, Trustees cc the library's email account on any emails sent on such topics. Ente reported that the library's attorney had filed a response to the complaint filed by David Ashenhurst, seeking a dismissal. Ente distributed a copy of the response to the Trustees.

Ente commented that he wanted to clarify that the statement he read at the January Board meeting contained his personal opinions and that he was not speaking on behalf of the Board.

### COMMITTEE REPORTS

#### BUILDING, FINANCE, & AUDIT

Baker reported that the committee met and discussed the crack in the wall of the building and Permanent Appropriations. Cioffi reviewed the Permanent Appropriations documents. The committee moved and seconded, to accept Resolution # R-22-2-4, approving 2022 Permanent Appropriations as follows:

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General Fund \$2,000,000.00, comprised of \$1,047,500.00 salaries and benefits, \$351,000.00 purchased and contracted services, \$319,000.00 library materials, information and supplies, \$7,500.00 other objects, \$190,000.00 capital outlay, \$85,000.00 transfers and contingency; Building Fund expenditures of \$200,000.00; and Non-Expendable Trust Funds expenditures of \$5,000.00 for a grand total of \$2,205,000.00. Roll call vote: Peterson, Lock, Sandler, Ente, Baker, Gadsby, ALL AYES.

MOTION PASSED

### PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Gadsby reported that the scheduled committee meeting had been canceled due to snow, and the committee would convene next month. Gadsby reported that the committee has three items to follow up on from last year: the technology survey, the evaluation of the Fiscal Officer, and a reevaluation of the salary chart. Ente noted that he has extra copies of the Fiscal Officer evaluation form if anyone needs one.

### OLD BUSINESS

Lock and Peterson reported on the status of the Community Technology Needs Assessment. They reviewed the technology survey, focus groups, community outreach, and answered questions from the Trustees.

### NEW BUSINESS

Baker reported that Oberlin Schools would be holding an event on February 17 recognizing Black History Month. The library provided copies of the book *The Brown Crayon* for the event.

### TRUSTEE REMARKS

Gadsby thanked Ente for his statement acknowledging that his President's message was not coming from the Board as a whole. Ente reported that Oberlin College alumni will be having an event on the life and work of bell hooks. He noted he was happy to see that the OPL had a display of the works of bell hooks on their website. Gadsby commented that February 18 is Toni Morrison Day, and there will be several events coming up.

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Tony Wilgus thanked the Board for their time spent, working on things that impact the community and allowing the public the opportunity to speak. Wilgus cited the books *Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me)* and *The Scout Mindset*:

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*Why Some People See Things Clearly and Others Don't*, noting that many qualified, well-intentioned, bright people get things wrong. He commented that there may be things the Board missed in their assessment of the Director, such as community opinions and staff knowledge. Wilgus commented that everyone connected to either the Director or the staff of the library is affected by the actions of the Board. He asked that the Trustees consider that they could be wrong and to listen to the comments from the community. Wilgus commented that the former Board President said the Director had been evaluated in the past. Wilgus noted that the members of Oberlin City Council have no jurisdiction over the Library Board.

Carrie Schwimmer commented that she lives on Vine Street and did not receive a Technology Survey. Peterson commented that the surveys were given to Alma Jean Trawick for distribution. Schwimmer commented that Vine Street is Section 8 housing, and its residents may not have money, but they use and need the library, and it satisfies their needs.

Aliza Weidenbaum asked what “rents and leases” refer to on the financial statements. Ente responded the library rents the space used for The Bridge. Weidenbaum suggested that between the focus group sessions held on February 16, someone from the library should hang out at the high school and talk with the students. Ente responded that Lock and Peterson could investigate that suggestion.

Tom Lock read the following prepared statement:

“On January 12th the board voted to accept a generous gift made by the Coopers. The board did so because the Ohio Revised Code (3375.40K) specifically calls for the board to, “By the adoption of a resolution, accept any gift [to the library] upon the conditions connected with the gift.” I note that the money was deposited on December 17th and that a thank-you letter was sent by the director on January 3rd. Making such a deposit and sending such a letter before the vote called for by law is, at the very least, inappropriate. I would like to suggest that, since the legal responsibility for accepting gifts rests squarely on the board, the responsibility for sending such thank-you letters should also be the board’s, not the director’s, and that such letters be signed after the acceptance vote by both the board and the director, acting together as a team.

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During the January 12th meeting board member Anita was given the task of drafting an additional thank-you letter to the Coopers. To that end, Anita sent an email to the director asking for the Coopers' address. The director's reply was, "I can't give out their address from the Circ. Database. Riva probably has it from the donation. She isn't in right now. Please let me know what you want me to do. I'm sure if you Google their name and add Oberlin it should come up... They live @ Kendal." Later I made a public records request for the letter sent on January 3rd, received it, and the letter includes the address. So I, a member of the public, received the address without actually asking for it, and when Anita, a member of the board, explicitly asked for it, the director suggested she look for the address herself. Now, I concede that this was a relatively small insult toward a board member, but over time such small things can add up and be perceived as insubordination, and I don't think anyone here wants to see that – I certainly don't. I therefore once again leave the director with the admonition, "Remember, thou, to keep thy boss happy." To do so would be to his and the library's benefit."

Dorothy Luciano commented that everyone in the room cares about the library. Luciano commented that there is a disconnect between what the Board and the public consider to be important, noting that she doesn't hear comments from them on how McDonough has created a wonderful library with a great collection and staff. Luciano commented that she spoke with a Black friend who said that the library is the only place she feels welcomed and safe in Oberlin. She stressed that the disconnect was serious and asked the Board what they were going to do about it.

McDonough responded to Tom Lock's comments by noting that he should have redacted the address from the letter furnished in response to Lock's public records request.

Dorothy Luciano asked what happens to complaints from the public. She asked if the Board even cares what the public thinks since they have pointed out numerous flaws in the Director's evaluation and nothing had been done about it. Ente responded that he thought discussing an employee's performance evaluation in public was not respectful. He commented that the merits of an evaluation conducted by seven thoughtful Board members was not subject to an argument with the public. He commented that the public's points have been heard and taken to heart. Luciano noted she was concerned with the disconnect. Ente

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replied that he did not want to argue with her if he was wrong. Ente commented that a warm and welcoming library was something he highly valued, as was having a wonderful collection. He commented that in his perception, those measures were an entry requirement and the minimum expectation of a fine library, and OPL was an excellent library. Lock agreed that OPL's collection and service were excellent, but was not the baseline since we were looking for better and beyond. Luciano commented that she didn't hear any credit being given to McDonough for his large role in creating a wonderful library.

Carrie Schwimmer commented that at last month's meeting, Ente talked about creating a world-class library, but perhaps that goal was too ambitious. Ente replied that the goal was subject to the limits of the library's resources.

Palli Holubar commented that the meaning of the term world-class library had not been shared with the public. She asked if it only referred to The Bridge and what the library needed to aspire to. Holubar commented that she didn't know how to trust the Board and shared ideas with them. Gadsby asked what she thought the library needed. Holubar responded that she would like to be able to relax and talk and share ideas with McDonough. Gadsby asked what was preventing that now. Holubar responded that there needed to be momentum to get things going.

Tony Wilgus commented that seventeen years ago, there were problems in the library with the staff and the community. McDonough was hired as the Director at that time because he was a man of integrity and principle. He addressed the problems with the staff and community because there wasn't a baseline seventeen years ago. Wilgus noted the law of unintended consequences, cautioning the Board to be careful what they wished for. He commented that the former Board President was astonished by what was currently happening at the library.

Aliza Weidenbaum commented that she disagreed with Wilgus. She noted that she was at the library before McDonough was hired and it was not as Wilgus described.

Erin Shiba commented that, generally speaking, staff morale under McDonough's leadership had been fantastic, but throughout the past year morale has been really bad under this Board's leadership. Shiba noted that was not because of anything McDonough had said, because he did not discuss anything

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regarding the Board with staff. Shiba commented that at the November meeting, Lock and Peterson were tasked with nominating a slate of officers. The slate was voted on at the 2022 Organizational Meeting, but should have also been mentioned at the January meeting since the public was not aware. Shiba commented that there was a missed opportunity to appoint a new President that didn't have such a contentious relationship with the Director.

Bethany Baker commented that this Board had taken on some pretty ambitious initiatives and were doing hard work on behalf of the public. She commented that the next step would be for the Board to do an evaluation of themselves.

Cioffi responded to Tom Lock's comments that according to ORC, the library was required to deposit revenue when it was received, not wait until after it was accepted by the Board.

Ente commented that as far as he could tell, no one was questioning the integrity of the Director. McDonough responded that Ente had said the Board didn't trust him. Ente commented that he was not going to engage in a point-by-point rebuttal. Ente stated that he and the Board had other issues with the Director, when planning and innovating had created a sticky relationship, despite his efforts.

Gadsby commented that the meeting was not productive. Gadsby moved, seconded by Lock, to adjourn. All present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 6:57 p.m.

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President

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Attest