

OBERLIN PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

January 13, 2022

President Bruce Ente called to order the meeting at 5:06 p.m. Roll call: Bethany Baker, Lili Sandler, Megan Newson, Anita Lock, Bruce Ente, Marcia Peterson, and Meredith Gadsby were present. Also present were Darren McDonough, Director, and Kristin Cioffi, Fiscal Officer. There was a well-attended public.

President Ente welcomed new Trustee Lili Sandler and asked her to say a few words. Sandler commented that she has lived in Oberlin for fifteen years and has spent much time at the library. Sandler noted that she applied for the library board before and was excited when she saw a vacancy. Sandler commented that she is excited to support the library and the community. Notary Cioffi administered the oath of office to Sandler.

Gadsby moved, seconded by Baker, to accept Resolution # R-22-1-1, approving the minutes of the December 9, 2021, regular meeting, as corrected and the 2022 Organizational meeting. All present voted in favor.

MOTION PASSED

Ente commented about his repeated sentiments expressed towards the public from last month's meeting minutes to this month's meeting.

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FISCAL OFFICER'S REPORT

Fiscal Officer Cioffi reviewed the December 2021 financial reports (Fund Status, Revenue Status, Appropriation Status, and Bank Reconciliation), reporting on year-end carryover, the Amended Certificate of Estimated Resources received from the County Auditor, and permanent appropriations. Newson moved, seconded by Lock, to accept Resolution # R-22-1-2, accepting the December 2021 Financial Reports. Roll call vote: Baker, Sandler, Newson, Lock, Ente, Peterson, Gadsby, ALL AYES.

MOTION PASSED

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director McDonough noted that he had used the same first paragraph in his report for the last six months, and only time will tell if he will continue in this manner. McDonough reported 3,900 home COVID-19 test kits were distributed in 2021, with 2,255 designated in December. The State of Ohio has slowed down on sending tests to libraries due to supply chain issues and because they are giving more to schools. McDonough noted the train display at the library in December was not as well-attended as in the past, but it was enjoyed by those

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who visited. McDonough reported that work has started on the Community Technology Needs Assessment. McDonough reported about attending several meetings with Oberlin community members regarding planning the Big Read event for Oberlin, with *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi as the selected title. Unfortunately, the book may not be readily available to purchase in the quantities needed for the event. McDonough answered questions about the Big Read event.

Ente noted that December's monthly statistics were included in the meeting packet. Ente reported that the library received several generous donations in December. McDonough noted that the donations from the Friends of OPL were compilations of donations received throughout the year. Lock moved, seconded by Baker, to accept Resolution # R-22-1-3, to accept the following gifts:

From Friends of OPL:

- \$1,200.00 for the purchase of books from Mindfair Books
- \$8,310.07 for Programs, Give-aways, PPE, etc.

From Roger & Frances Cooper

- \$5,000.00 in memory of Barbara Pitts

All present voted in favor.

MOTION PASSED

Ente reported that he would respond to the multitude of community members that sent correspondence to the Board regarding how much they like the library and the performance of the Director. Ente asked Secretary Lock if she would volunteer to respond to Board correspondence in the future, and she agreed to that position. Peterson commented that she thinks donors should receive a thank you letter from the Board.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Ente reported the reason Trustee Sandler's vacancy was due to former Board member Patrick Prosser, who resigned in November for personal reasons. Ente noted that he wasn't sure about the public announcement of his resignation. Ente reported that Lock volunteered to succeed Baker as Board liaison to the Friends of OPL.

Ente read the following prepared statement:

"It hardly seems possible that one year has flown by since I gaveled to order my first Board of Trustees meeting as the newly elected president.

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Needless to say, this has been a very eventful year; the environment has been fraught:

- politically in the aftermath of the January 6 insurrection and its fall-out, including the persistence of the Big Lie, the myth of massive election fraud, and
- epidemiologically with the persistence, subsidence and current resurgence of the Covid virus and its variants, which has had a massive impact on the library, its users and its staff.

Special kudos to Director McDonough and the Oberlin Public Library staff for their dedication in keeping the library afloat in stormy seas and continuing to provide excellent patron service.

One year ago in my introductory remarks as new Board president, I expressed my commitment to the Continuous Quality Improvement or Total Quality Management principle that “world class organizations are never satisfied; they never rest on their laurels.”

That is one of my touchstones in life, and I believe the library Board as a whole shares that commitment: No matter how good the OPL is today — and by the way, it is very good — we aspire to be better tomorrow ... and the day after that. Of course we want an excellent collection that fulfills all patron requests for materials; of course we intend that every patron visit be a warm, welcoming experience. These are baseline expectations that every library ought to achieve.

Our aspirational goal is for the OPL to be a world-class library *within the limitations of our resources*. We don't want to settle for being small town institution or a “little country library” as Director McDonough has often put it. The city of Oberlin is more than an Ohio farming community, and the board is aiming high for the OPL as well.

It is the obligation and burden of leadership to lead: to think outside the box, be strategic thinkers, challenge our assumptions. Setting “stretch goals” is part of that. Excellence is a moving target; the environment around us is always changing; technologies evolve; knowledge grows as we learn from our experience.

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One of our resources is a small but mighty staff. Another is our supportive community which has been consistently generous in its fiscal underwriting of the library. Another important resource is this Board of Trustees. This board includes six of the most dedicated, talented, knowledgeable, experienced and committed public servants I've had the pleasure of serving alongside over my long volunteer career in the public library field.

This Board has stepped up to bat this past year and tackled two projects and important accountabilities:

- The first is developing a much-needed strategic plan for the library's community technology center, aka "The Bridge."

Director McDonough has repeatedly referenced (or complained about) the failure of previous boards to do more than just talk about The Bridge. I commend this board for taking action and committing ourselves to reach a good resolution on behalf of our community about the future of The Bridge, with the help of library staff and an outside consulting firm.

- The second is conducting the first ever (to my knowledge) formal performance appraisal of Director McDonough in his 17 year tenure at the OPL — even though our Personnel Manual says it should be accomplished annually.

Once again the Board of Trustees has stepped up to bat, fulfilled its responsibility, and completed a thorough, fair, professional evaluation of Darren. A corresponding assessment of Fiscal Officer Kristin Cioffi, the board's only other "direct report," is now in process.

One consequence of the Board carrying out its duties, its statutory obligations, has been the spreading around town of dastardly rumors: that we have decided to close The Bridge and we have determined to fire the library director. This is "fake news," circulated by people who should know better. Neither of these allegations could be further from the truth!

As I have said previously to the Board and to Director McDonough, the biggest challenge we have to solve is a breakdown of trust. Whether or not Darren has fairly and accurately portrayed the board to library staff, I know that I have never expressed anything but appreciation for all OPL employees. And to the best of my knowledge, no other member of this

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board has ever been critical of any staff person. Rather, the trustees are universally respectful and complimentary toward our staff.

Personally I look forward to having a productive, collaborative, professional relationship with Director McDonough although as my mother was fond of saying, "It takes two to tango." I am also 100% confident that this entire board is committed to working as a team along with library staff to be restless and creative about finding innovative, exciting ways to show the community what the Oberlin Public Library is capable of."

TRUSTEE REMARKS

Lock reported that she attended her first Friends of OPL meeting on Monday. The meeting took place via Zoom, and Lock noted she was late in coming into the meeting. Lock commented that it was interesting to observe the members engaging with each other and she appreciated their comradery. Lock reported that the most pressing issue for the group is where to store books for the book sale.

Gadsby asked if it would be possible to use a microphone at Board meetings in the Community Room in the future so that everyone could hear better. McDonough responded that they have a wired microphone and that the quality of the portable microphone is not good.

OLD BUSINESS

Ente reported that the Board packet for this month's meeting includes a copy of the Community Technology Needs Assessment work plan and timeline. Ente reported that McDonough and he, along with staff members Stephanie Jones and Rebecca Wedge, met with the consultants from Library IQ to develop the plan. Ente noted that Lock and Peterson have joined the Community Technology Needs Assessment team. Ente commented that the library wants input from the community stakeholders. Some discussion regarding the community survey and community focus groups followed. Ente expressed thanks to the Board for taking on this important project.

NEW BUSINESS

Ente reported that the library received three public records requests from an anonymous requester asking for the individual Director's performance evaluations; any emails relevant to the Director's performance evaluations; and any email communication about The Bridge sent between May and November of 2021. Ente reported McDonough and he met with the library's attorney, Dan

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Petticord. Petticord advised that the individual evaluations are transitory communications and work papers and are not subject to disclosure. Ente explained that the Trustees have each received Petticord's advice and instructions regarding disclosing the requested emails. He asked that everyone start with the emails they still have in their possession.

Ente distributed a copy of a lawsuit filed by David Ashenhurst against the Board. Ente explained that Ashenhurst is alleging the Board failed to adhere to statutes regarding executive sessions. Ente reported that Petticord is drafting a response to the complaint. Ente reported that McDonough thinks Petticord has a conflict of interest regarding the lawsuit. Ente commented that conflict of interest is not with Petticord but with McDonough, because McDonough has said that he agrees with Ashenhurst's complaint. Gadsby asked what action the Trustees should take regarding the lawsuit, and Ente replied not to do anything until they receive advice from Petticord.

Gadsby left the meeting at 5:54 p.m.

Tom Lock commented that if any Board member uses Oberlin.net for email service, they often can retrieve old emails.

Ente reported that Ann Fuller had written each Trustee a letter. Ente commented that he asked McDonough to mail them to the Trustees several weeks ago, and he didn't.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Aliza Weidenbaum asked what should be the correct way for the public to respond to the Board. Ente responded that the City of Oberlin's website includes a listing of Trustee contact information and that correspondence can be sent either to their home or the library. Ente noted that the Board is committed to the welfare of the community and the library. Weidenbaum commented that in regards to Gadsby's request for the use of microphones, being too loud is just as bad as not being able to be heard. She suggested the use of hand signals. Weidenbaum commented that the community survey for the Technology Needs Assessment should be at least six weeks, not three. Weidenbaum commented that in regards to comments made at the December meeting, an article could not be read on a public computer without a subscription to the publication. McDonough replied that Scott Medwid uses EBSCO to access articles. Weidenbaum commented that using EBSCO to access articles is too cumbersome.

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Weidenbaum commented that the library needs a science room or a local government access room.

Tom Lock read the following prepared statement:

“The board’s performance evaluation of the director for the year 2021 prompted public comments in the board’s December meeting. I would like to comment on the director’s self-evaluation. I cannot tell whether the director did not take his self-evaluation seriously, whether he was intentionally uncooperative, or whether he simply does not know how to do a self-evaluation. I would hope the latter. What I can tell is that his self-evaluation was pathetically incomplete. I am surprised that the board would accept such a woefully inadequate document.

A self-evaluation is the place to enumerate your accomplishments. It is an opportunity to “strut your stuff.” Most importantly, it is the vehicle by which you give your boss the complete, specific, and verifiable information they need to accurately evaluate your performance. The director’s self-evaluation failed to do any of these things.

The form adopted by the board lists twenty-four evaluation criteria. For fifteen of those criteria the director offered no explanation of his self-rating. For eight of the remaining criteria the director made vague comments lacking any specific or pertinent information that would be useful to the board. Several of them are nonetheless worthy of note. For two of them – written staff evaluations and in-service training – the director explained why he does not do them and gave them a rating of not applicable. The board does not agree that those parts of his job description are not applicable. His comment regarding pursuit of grants and other funding was basically, “I don’t do that,” while giving himself a perfect rating of five. And, in regard to coordinating a levy campaign, he gave himself a rating of five and commented that it was not applicable, even though the library’s levy was on the May 4, 2021 ballot. More explanation should have been given. The one meaningful and pertinent comment he made is that his “relationship with the current president lacks a spirit conducive to communication and productivity.” Personally, I wonder if that is because, for the first time in a long time, the board has a new president who acts more like an impartial board president and less like the director’s personal cheerleader.

I listened carefully to the public comments made at the December board meeting. The board would do well to heed the excellent remarks made by

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David Ashenhurst and Aliza Widenbaum. I particularly appreciate Dorothy Luciano's apology for responding to "fake news." One person asked, "To whom is the library board responsible?" That question has an answer. They are responsible to the public in forums such as this, and to the city council, which appoints and can remove them. Another person mentioned that the library had made it onto the Library Journal's list of Star Libraries. It is true that Oberlin's library was on that list for the years 2008, 2009, and 2010, but I would like to point out that, while these are interesting historical details, what the director did more than ten years ago is not pertinent to his evaluation for the year 2021. Others at the meeting spoke of the library's excellent collection, the personal delivery of materials, and the director's participation in public events. It is sad that it was left to them to bring such things to the board's attention. The members of the board do not live with the director. The board members are not mind readers. The board members do not follow the director around taking notes. By neglecting to mention such accomplishments in his self-evaluation the director hindered the board's evaluation and created unnecessary public controversy.

A long time ago when I taught electronics at Case Western Reserve University I would tell my students, "No one will know what a great job you do unless you tell them." And so, to conclude, I would like to encourage the director, in his next self-evaluation, to enumerate all of his many accomplishments during the evaluation period, to "strut his stuff," to give the board all of the information they need for their evaluation, and, in the time until then, to keep in mind what ought to be first of an employee's Ten Commandments:

Remember, thou, to keep thy boss happy."

Eric Carpenter commented that he has been a resident of Oberlin since 1981. During the years of 1981 to 2007, Carpenter noted he was in charge of collection development at Oberlin College. Carpenter commented that OPL has an astonishing collection and range of services. Carpenter commented that he doesn't like the Board's undertones and noted that McDonough deserves better.

Baker left at 6:09 p.m.

Dorothy Luciano asked where the Director's evaluation document came from. Ente responded that it was created from McDonough's job description. Luciano commented that she had trouble reading parts of the evaluation document and asked for clarification on a particular section. Newson and Peterson explained the

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section and clarified that the evaluation was created from ALA and OLC example documents. Luciano commented that she has been on many non-profit boards, and their roles have been changing from reactive to proactive. Luciano commented that she looked up the role of a library trustee in the Ohio Revised Code, and their job is to make sure the library's mission is followed and to set policy. It is the Director's job to run the library. Luciano commented that she does not understand why the Board is looking into so many personnel issues like staff training, which seems to be muddying the water.

Kathy Carpenter asked where she can find the reports and minutes covered at the meeting. She was told the reports are passed out to the public just before the meeting. Carpenter asked if the technology survey covers just the library or The Bridge. Ente responded that the survey covers both because the Board wants to make sure the technology needs of the community are met and exceeded in years to come.

Dorothy Luciano commented that it seems that the Board and McDonough have different management styles. Luciano commented that McDonough's style is to hire the best people and to let them do their jobs without micromanaging his staff, but that doesn't seem to be the Board's style. Luciano noted that McDonough is very effective. Ente responded that the Board's goal is not to manage the library, and the Board is very sensitive in respect to what is governing and what is management.

Erin Shiba commented that she agrees with Dorothy Luciano's comments regarding staff training. Shiba commented that all of the managers are involved in continuing education to keep up their expertise and not to waste time. Shiba asked if McDonough's evaluation was developed from his old job description or his new one. Newson responded that it was developed from his old one. Shiba commented that although she understands Tom Lock's perspective regarding McDonough's self-evaluation, it is not McDonough's style. Shiba noted that the Board should get their information from visiting the library and talking with people there.

McDonough commented that in response to Tom Lock's comments regarding his work of levies, it is illegal for him to get paid for levy activities. Tom Lock responded that working on levies should be removed from McDonough's job description.

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Erin Shiba commented that she appreciated Ente mentioning COVID in his President's remarks because she felt there was not any concern for staff safety at the beginning of the pandemic. Shiba commented that the Board didn't see the staff's efforts and kept asking for them to do more.

Eric Carpenter commented that during COVID, the library seemed to step up and offer more services and respond to changes in an admirable way.

Sandler asked if Shiba was referring to a lack of support from the Board. Shiba confirmed that she was.

Ente commented that the Board appreciates the hard-working, accomplished staff. He commented that in regards to the Director's evaluation, the Board has tried to respect the privacy of all involved. He noted that the Board has set performance goals for McDonough and will circle back to them soon enough. Ente commented that one of the first goals was to improve communication, but things seem to have gotten worse. Kathy Carpenter asked when McDonough would be reassessed. Ente responded he would be reassessed in 120 days. Carpenter commented that employees are generally given a year until reassessment. Ente commented that the Board felt there was an urgency in this matter and made a judgement call.

Dorothy Luciano commented that the evaluation form itself states reassessment should take place in six months. Luciano commented that Gadsby should have abstained from voting on the December minutes since she was not present at the meetings.

Ente reviewed the committee assignments and the meeting schedule for next month. McDonough noted that the Personnel committee of Sandler and Gadsby need to set a meeting date.

Newson moved, seconded by Peterson, to adjourn. All present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 6:39 p.m.

President

Attest