

**THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY
5 WASHINGTON STREET
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY**

**MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
VIA TELECONFERENCE
MARCH 24, 2021, 5:00 P.M.**

BOARD MEMBERS:

Lauren Wells	President/Chair
Timothy Crist	Treasurer
Hassan Abdus-Sabur	Trustee
Domingo Morel	Vice President
Antoinette Richardson	Trustee
Rosemary Steinbaum	Secretary

STAFF:

Joslyn Bowling Dixon	Director
George Williams	Assistant Director, Capital Planning, Facilities & Security
Anna Coats	Assistant Director, Public Services

ABSENT:

Anasa Maat	Trustee
Miguel Rodriguez	Trustee
Nicole Johnson	Trustee

Minutes prepared by Cassidy Civiero from Minutes Solutions Inc. from an audio recording.

1. CALL TO ORDER

There being a quorum present, and the Trustees having been given adequate and proper notice of the meeting, L. Wells called the meeting to order at 5:06 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

On a motion made by T. Crist, seconded by R. Steinbaum, it was resolved to approve the minutes of the Public Session dated January 27, 2021. Motion carried unanimously.

3. PRESIDENT'S REPORT

L. Wells provided the President's Report. She commended the Library on its work connected with COVID-19 by closing the Library when necessary and following health protocols. An ad-hoc Hahne Committee has been formed. The timeline of the strategic planning process has been streamlined. All Committees have met with G. Johnson from Face-To-Face Consulting. The Library recently lost two staff members, Hector Quinones and Noah Oyewalemi, and the Board extended its condolences to their families.

4. DIRECTOR’S REPORT

J. Dixon provided the Director’s Report and previously sent the 2021 goals to the Board for review. January 2021 statistics were low, and the strategic plan will aim to get visitors back into the Library safely. J. Dixon commended staff for their facilitation of virtual programming, which has been going well. In addition, the engagement has increased for the Library’s social media, video views, and Google searches. For February 2021, media checkouts were up 12%, and engagement with the e-library was up 35%.

Rutgers University and Audible remain closed. Audible may re-open in Summer 2021. Rutgers provided 15 reimbursable parking spaces; Audible provided 15 free parking spaces.

J. Dixon served as a panelist for Publishers Weekly’s Library Lounge Webinar Series. The Lounge included information on the latest CDC guidelines for libraries nationwide. The ALA President was also on the panel for the Lounge. J. Dixon is now President of the New Jersey Library Association (NJLA) section of the Urban Libraries Council. J. Dixon was able to speak with T. Ruiz about The Newark Public Library as facilitated by the NJLA.

J. Dixon presented the working 2021-2023 strategic planning document. The Board’s changes were implemented and will be discussed later in the meeting. The branches have been doing well with the pre-packaged crafts that used to be done in person. There were outstanding programs for Black History Month in February 2021. Lonnie Birch from the Smithsonian was one of the speakers.

R. Steinbaum asked whether a retreat date had been selected. J. Dixon responded that the virtual retreat would either be May 1, 2021, or May 22, 2021; she is leaning toward May 1.

5. TREASURER’S REPORT

T. Crist stated that there were two cash activity reports to review and approve:

Bill Sheet 1308, January 2021

The below invoices for BOOKS, BINDING, INCIDENTALS, AND PAYROLL, for \$678,081.60, were certified as correct by the Library Director and presented for examination and approval:

Gross Payroll Activity	
January 8 th	\$ 239,411.88
January 22 nd	\$ 226,647.75
Disbursement Activity	
Operating Account	\$ 176,821.90
Grant Account	\$ 23,631.75
Endowment Account	\$ 3,911.03
Capital Account	\$ 7,657.29
Total Disbursement for January 2021	\$ 678,081.60

Bill Sheet 1309, February 2021

The following invoices for BOOKS, BINDING, INCIDENTALS, AND PAYROLL, for \$1,003,155.66, were certified as correct by the Library Director and presented for examination and approval:

Gross Payroll Activity	
February 5 th	\$ 219,832.69
February 19th	\$ 221,095.51
Disbursement Activity	
Operating Account	\$ 530,120.82
Grant Account	\$ 31,141.82
Endowment Account	\$ 964.82
Capital Account	\$ 0
Total Disbursement for February 2021	\$ 1,003,155.66

On a motion made by T. Crist, seconded by R. Steinbaum, it was resolved to approve Bill Sheet 1308 for January 2021 and Bill Sheet 1309 for February 2021. Motion carried unanimously.

6. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Development Committee: R. Steinbaum presented the update. The Committee had a productive conversation with G. Johnson to determine a strategic planning process going forward from a development vantage point. To date, the Library’s fundraising has been responsive instead of creative, and the Committee is determined to take a more proactive stance. J. Dixon and K. Giardi will draft a statement on development priorities and goals.

The Library is severely hampered from pursuing grants because of the lack of two years of audited financials that have yet to be completed. J. Dixon noted a company is working on the audits for 2017, 2018, and 2019. The goal is to address 2020 in Summer 2021. A meeting will be held on April 1, 2021, with an accountant who has been recommended for the audited financials. The Library’s development arm will be seeking to bring in potential friends and donors during this period where grants cannot be pursued. R. Steinbaum requested recommendations from the Board on potential donors.

The State Library Construction Bond has a deadline of June 6, 2021, and staff are working on the Library’s application. The Hispanic Resource and Information Center, a technology corridor at Main, and ADA Compliance are considered within the application.

Finance Committee: D. Morel provided updates for January 2021 and February 2021. The Finance Committee has considered scenarios with and without PPP dollars. The Library put in another application to PPP, and a response is expected by the end of the month.

R. Jefferson and J. Dixon will be providing the Committee with monthly reports to identify areas to cut costs and increase savings for the Library. The Federal Relief Package of \$1.9 trillion may include funds for libraries. The Committee will stay on top of it, and the Library may also qualify for State, County, and local funding.

T. Crist asks which areas of funding appear to have the most significant opportunity for the Library. J. Dixon responded that technology, capital projects, and potential afterschool programs are the most promising. There is a grant for replacing cars with zero-emission models for non-profits and small businesses.

Facilities Committee: T. Crist presented the update. There were fewer emergency repairs and outstanding issues than normally discussed at the March 12, 2021 Committee meeting. A building manager was hired and has attended all branches to survey each branch's needs. The construction manager is drafting a capital needs analysis over a multi-year period.

G. Williams noted that the Library is looking to obtain funding to match Round 2 of the State Construction Bond. There is less money available for Round 2 and likely more applications; therefore, expectations should be set accordingly. The focus should continue to be on the City capital bonding process. Discussions have been ongoing with Senator Ruiz to ensure she is aware of the Library's position.

T. Crist noted that all should be aware of what is happening in the neighborhood of the Clinton Branch. It is an area of great activity with several players, and the Library should seek to be one of those players.

Personnel and Policy Committee: A. Richardson presented the update. The Committee has reviewed the Code of Behaviour provided by J. Dixon. A bag policy is being considered, and supporting documents, including practices of other libraries, will be considered before a recommendation is made to the Board. Union negotiations are ongoing with Local 2298, and Local 68 will be met on March 25, 2021. The Committee planted a tree in honor of the late Hector Quinones, who worked in the circulation department for over 40 years.

Ad-hoc Hahne Committee: A. Abdus-Sabur presented the update. The Committee met on February 11, 2021 and gave feedback on the survey generated by K. Giardi, which has since been distributed to the Newark community and various stakeholders. The survey has 14 questions and has been translated into Spanish and Portuguese. A subscription to Survey Monkey has been obtained so more surveys can be conducted for community and staff input, which could be valuable for the strategic plan.

J. Dixon met with Mayor Baraka to pitch the Hahne project. She shared a floor plan and pictures of the property. There will be two entrances, one from Halsey Street and one from Broad Street. There is room for staff offices, worktables, informal seating, a computer lab, podcasting, video editing, 3D printing, and self-checkouts. The project is affordable for the Library. The property will be left mostly industrial using existing light fixtures and with concrete walls.

A muralist may be engaged to liven up the walls of the building. A. Richardson noted that if a muralist were to be hired, they would need to be paid a fair wage, significantly increasing the project's costs. J. Dixon responded that grants could potentially be obtained for the mural.

D. Morel asked for further detail on the discussion with Mayor Baraka. J. Dixon responded that the Mayor asked about revenue generation and was taken through the details on engaging owners and the products that will be available. Mayor Baraka was given a one-pager and asked some follow-up questions before stating that the project is innovative. A. Richardson noted that the contact with the Mayor should be retained periodically, with all visuals and resources available to be distributed to him.

J. Dixon has been speaking with the developers and negotiating the prices down to roughly \$290,000 per year instead of \$320,000. T. Crist requested a package of all items about the Hahne project prior to the Main Branch meeting.

Ad-hoc Roth Committee: T. Crist provided the update. The Roth Room project has been ongoing for approximately seven years. The deadline for the project is May 22, 2021. The room restoration will soon be complete, and the shelves and inaugural exhibition will be installed. The final inspections for construction will occur this week. Everything has been chosen for the exhibition, and the labels have been created. On Saturday, April 2, 2021, CBS will be airing a segment that they have already filmed in the Roth Room.

T. Crist thanked J. Dixon, G. Williams, the construction company, the architecture firm, C&G Partners, and N. Sergejeff for their work on this project. It is hoped that the Mayor and City Council will attend an opening ceremony and small reception for the Roth Room.

7. **STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE**

J. Dixon presented the strategic plan update. COVID-19 must be considered within the strategic plan; however, a hybrid plan has been considered that does not focus solely on the pandemic. Newark's vaccination rate is low thus far, under 5%. The pandemic plan contract was previously distributed to the Board, and the Board provided feedback. Staff and community focus groups are ongoing to gather information. There will be an opportunity to re-evaluate the strategic plan in another year or 18 months to consider the post-COVID environment.

The retreat this year will be a half-day virtual retreat. Preliminary information from the focus groups held with the community will be discussed at the retreat, in addition to the focus groups at the retreat itself. Following the retreat, a draft of the strategic plan including all ideas, concepts, and hopes will be created considering 2021 to 2023.

The goal is to finish the strategic plan by July 2021. The strategic plan is broad and pertains to the vision and direction of the Library. Details on how those objectives will be completed will be impacted by external considerations outside of the Library's control.

8. **NEW BUSINESS**

Capital Plan: J. Dixon stated that, as the audits are wrapped up, and the Library looks toward the budget, there should be consideration of funding set aside yearly for capital projects. The branches are all a certain age and require love and care. For this reason, a capital plan should be implemented.

Assistant Director of Public Services: J. Dixon introduced A. Coats, Assistant Director of Public Services. A. Coats has been working closely with P. Baratta in Programs and Outreach to centralize the programs offered through the Library across the branches and create program goals. Patrons are regularly offered surveys to gain feedback and plan for the future. A. Coats is seeking funding for Beanstack, which is a program that logs summer reading participation online. Alternate avenues for summer reading for those without internet access are being considered.

9. **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Jeff L_[cc1] stated that he loves the work NPL does for the community; however, he is concerned to attend the branches as he works with uninsured individuals and has been advised that there

have been high COVID-19 case counts at the libraries. He asked whether it is possible to safely operate remotely while temporarily closing the branches. J. Dixon responded that there had been cases consistent with the City numbers. Executive orders from the State are followed.

PPE is available, and temperatures are checked when people enter the Library. Staff and visitors must wear masks. If cases are identified, City quarantine protocols are followed. The Library is closed every two hours for cleaning, including high-touch surfaces and common areas. J. Dixon added that if residents are uneasy attending, there are remote options and curbside pickup.

There has been an update to the executive order that the Library can operate at 50% capacity. Staff meets bimonthly to discuss the COVID-19 situation. The Library does not wish to make anyone ill, and the situation is being taken seriously; at the same time, some people depend on libraries being open.

L. Gluck asked about the timeline for the gender-neutral washroom, which was planned for 2019. J. Dixon was not here in 2019, but this can be considered with the strategic plan.

J. Rodriguez stated that how people receive information post-pandemic has changed, which will improve service providers and businesses. He appreciates the visionary approach to the Hahne’s building and hopes the Library can continue to generate revenue as a non-profit organization.

F. Trigo asked how many staff members have tested positive for COVID-19. L. Wells responded that a COVID-19 update can be prepared to provide a report with percentages to residents.

10. MOVE INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a motion made by D. Morel, seconded by T. Crist, it was resolved that The Newark Public Library Board of Trustees move into Executive Session at 6:48 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

11. PASSAGE OF RESOLUTIONS DISCUSSED DURING EXECUTIVE SESSION

In accordance with the By-laws, Article VII, Section 1, J. Dixon recommended ratification of the following appointments and personnel actions:

Keegan Fletcher	Promotion/Salary Increase	February 15, 2021
Yesenia Lopez	Return from Leave	February 15, 2021
Hector Quinones	Death/Passing	February 28, 2021
Jacqueline Jones	Salary Increase	March 1, 2021
Noah Oyewalemi	Death/Passing	March 2, 2021
Zuhare Meri	New Hire	March 15, 2021
Rashida Williams	Promotional Exam/Salary Increase	March 15, 2021
Thyson Halley	Transfer to Another Title	March 29, 2021

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by A. Richardson, it was resolved to approve the Personnel Resolutions for March 24, 2021. Motion carried unanimously.

12. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion made by D. Morel, seconded by A. Richardson, it was resolved to adjourn the meeting at 7:16 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

DISCLAIMER

The above minutes should be used as a summary of the motions passed and issues discussed at the meeting of the Board of Trustees. This document shall not be considered a verbatim copy of every word spoken at the meeting.

Lauren Wells, President

Joslyn Bowling Dixon, Director

Date

Date