

THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY
5 WASHINGTON STREET
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
JULY 24, 2024, 5:00 P.M.

MEMBERS:

Lauren Wells	President/Chair
Rosemary Steinbaum	Vice President
Jason Ballard	Treasurer
Robert J. Austin II	Trustee (from 5:56 p.m.)
Aisha Cooper	Secretary

STAFF:

Christian Zabriskie	Director
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GUESTS:

Alan Burger	Library Development Solutions
Leslie Burger	Library Development Solutions

ABSENT:

Domingo Morel	Trustee
Havier Nazario	Trustee
Miguel Rodriguez	Trustee

Minutes prepared from a recording by Shazia Ahmad of Minutes Solutions Inc.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Adequate and proper notice of the meeting having been given, the meeting was called to order at 5:21 p.m. as an informational session until quorum was met at 5:56 p.m.

2. **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

L. Wells acknowledged the summer events at the Library and thanked the staff for making these successful.

3. **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

ACTION – C. Zabriskie will provide the Board with a month-by-month comparison of visitors, computer use reference, circulation, and programming.

ACTION – C. Zabriskie will provide the Board with a brief budget advocacy explainer document to highlight how requested funds will impact the Library's staffing and programming.

C. Zabriskie had attended the American Library Association (ALA) annual conference, and there has been an increased interest in the impact of AI on public libraries. However, at this time, academic libraries are experiencing a greater impact than their public counterparts.

There will be Board training with Library Development Solutions, and budget advocacy is underway. The summer of 2024 has been successful for the Library. The Hispanic Research and Information Center (HRIC) construction project is going well.

The floor was opened to questions.

C. Zabriskie agreed to provide updates and documents on the Library's operations and budget as requested by the Board.

There were no further questions.

4. TREASURER'S REPORT

On a motion made by J. Ballard, seconded by R. Steinbaum, it was resolved to approve bill sheet 1348 for May, 2024, in the amount of \$1,428,854.56 and bill sheet 1349 for June, 2024, in the amount of \$1,397,563.99. Motion carried.

J. Ballard reported no abnormalities or extraordinary activities for the treasurer's report for the periods of May and June, 2024.

There were significant investments and capital expenditures pertaining to the HRIC construction project in the amount of \$245,000. There are anticipated reimbursements from the New Jersey State Library in July, 2024.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

5.1 Development Committee

The development committee met on June 11, 2024, and discussed the library space rental policy. The issue pertaining to pricing of individual spaces and specific events was raised during this discussion and included the topic of waivers, the endorsement of organizations at the Library's discretion, supervision, and damage policies. The committee is expecting an updated report from C. Zabriskie pertaining to these issues, with recommendations for addressing them.

The "Salute to Healthcare Heroes" fundraising event in June raised \$5,000. R. Steinbaum expressed thanks to J. Mateo, assistant director of development, for the event's success.

R. Steinbaum noted the grants received between the May and July, 2024, Board meetings:

- \$50,000 from Greater Newark Health Care Coalition to enroll undocumented children into healthcare coverage;
- \$75,000 from Victoria Foundation for staff development and capacity building;
- \$3,000 from ArtStart program for the Library's now-completed North End Branch mural project; and
- \$375,000 from the New Jersey State Legislature for furnishing the HRIC.

R. Steinbaum thanked the Library staff, A.C. Gill (a long-time supporter of HRIC), and the Friends of HRIC for their support facilitating the New Jersey State Legislature grant.

Other funding sources for the period included matching donations, corporate donations, and merchandise sales. Audible provided \$25,000 in support of its community programming held at the Library. Wellpoint donated \$1,000, while individual donations and merchandise sales totaled \$75,776. The annual campaign for the period yielded \$1,405.

The floor was opened to questions.

R. Steinbaum confirmed that the donations were from a mix of new and existing donors.

It was clarified that hosting an organization on Library premises does not mean that there is an endorsement of that entity. This will become clearer with the space rental policy.

C. Zabriskie clarified that Audible's support is for both its community programming at the Library and for the Library's outreach wagons, which are bookshelves on wheels. Audible has expressed interest in supporting the Library's Girls Who Code program.

There were no further questions.

5.2 Facilities Committee

The committee met on July 9, 2024. There have been HVAC issues at the Centennial Hall and Philip Roth Room. The Weequahic Branch was closed for a period because of HVAC issues as well. C. Zabriskie thanked the staff for addressing these issues as they occurred. He highlighted that the HVAC issues always occur when the seasons change.

The HRIC construction project is progressing without issue, and the Board was offered a tour of the VTC. The committee will be discussing finding an alternative library space in the Clinton Hill neighborhood. This may involve a storefront or partnering with the Clinton Hill Community corporation.

There has been progress with the Springfield Branch "Digital Connect" grant in the amount of \$1.3 million for the family incubator. Architectural renderings have been received for the space and there have been meetings with the public and other organizations.

The floor was opened to questions.

C. Zabriskie confirmed that the Clinton Hill project is being completed in conjunction with the Clinton Hill Action Network, and the latter also represents the stakeholders. The organization providing the grant is a stakeholder. There have been delays on the Board's part, but the Board agreed that it needed more detail before it could vote on any aspects of the project. Copies of the project details will be shared with the Board.

There were no further questions for the report.

5.3 Finance Committee

The finance committee met on June 20, 2024, and J. Ballard met with interim comptroller S. Little and C. Zabriskie on July 16, 2024.

Reimbursement request submissions were made to the New Jersey State Library on June 30, 2024, for the HRIC construction project at the Main Library. There were over-expenditures in the operating account versus the endowment account and an interfund analysis is underway to modify it.

Grant funds have been underspent because of the delay in the reimbursement of capital expenses. Grant spending is above projections in contracted library services in the amount of \$241,000. This is due to \$181,400 being spent on the Newark Evening News digitization project. Endowment funding is below average at this time.

Facilities has been a significant budget stressor. HVAC issues have occurred at several branches and, although repairs are underway, staff have had to work remotely due to the high summer temperatures. J. Ballard recognized the efforts of the staff and S. Little in helping to redirect Library resources to address the issue. It may be necessary to apply for grants to offset some of the repairs.

The Library staff is creating a list of unexpected expenditures from 2023 for the Board to plan accordingly. The HVAC issues in Centennial Hall and the Philip Roth Room are related and can be attributed to aging equipment and building stock. State funding for capital upgrades will be considered, including for the HVAC, water infiltration, and roofing issues.

5.4 Personnel and Policy Committee Report

The committee had no updates to report.

6. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

On a motion made by J. Ballard, seconded by R. Steinbaum, it was resolved to approve the agenda as amended and to move the public comment and Executive Session to the beginning of the meeting and to move the Board training to the end. Motion carried.

7. APPROVAL OF PUBLIC SESSION AND EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the Public Session Board of Trustees minutes of May 22, 2024, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the Executive Session minutes held on May 22, 2024, as presented. Motion carried.

It was noted that the Executive Session minutes would be approved during the Public Session going forward.

8. NEW BUSINESS

8.1 Newark City of Learning Collaborative (NCLC)

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by J. Ballard, it was resolved to approve the Newark Public Library resolution for the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs grant in support of the Newark City of Learning Collaborative (NCLC) as follows:

- Whereas the Newark Public Library desires to apply for and obtain a grant from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs for approximately \$200,000 to carry out a project to support a project partnership with the New York City Learning Collaborative to offer a range of workshops, educational services, and activities that will improve college and career readiness for Newark residents.
- Be it therefore resolved, one, that the Board of Trustees of the Newark Public Library does hereby authorize the application for such a grant, and two, recognizes and accepts that the Department may offer a lesser or greater amount, and therefore, upon receipt of the grant agreement from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs does further authorize the execution of any such grant agreement, and also upon receipt of the fully executed agreement from the Department, does further authorize the expenditure of funds pursuant to the terms of the agreement between the Newark Public Library and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs.

- Be it further resolved that the persons whose names and titles and signatures appear below are authorized to sign the application and that they or their successors and said titles are authorized to sign the agreement and any other documents necessary, and the names are Lauren Wells, Jason Ballard, and Christian Zabriskie.

Motion carried.

8.2 Independent Financial Auditing Services Contract

On a motion made by J. Ballard, seconded by R. Steinbaum, it was resolved to approve the Newark Public Library resolution as follows:

- Whereas the Board of Trustees of the Newark Public Library, as its governing body, has awareness of the need to engage an independent audit firm to provide services in accordance with OMB Circular A-133 audits of institutions of higher education and other non-profit organizations; and
- Whereas the Board of Trustees of the Newark Public Library has been presented with the proposed agreement for review; and
- Whereas the Board of Trustees has reviewed the proposed agreement and discussed its terms and significance; and
- Whereas the issuance of independent audits is in the best interest of the Newark Public Library, and its continuance to operate and provide services to the community; and
- Whereas the authority to enter into significant value contracts with external organizations shall be needed for the Newark Public Library to continue its operation.
- Therefore, be it resolved that the Board of Trustees at the Newark Public Library hereby authorizes the Newark Public Library to enter into, sign for, and perform any and all responsibilities in relation to such agreements with Olu Olabintan CPA, Inc. a registered New Jersey corporation, in the amount of \$120,000, as follows:
 - Single audit for fiscal year 2020 - \$35,000
 - Single audit for fiscal year 2021 - \$35,000
 - Single audit for fiscal year 2022 - \$25,000
 - Single audit for fiscal year 2023 - \$25,000
- Be it further resolved that the persons whose names, titles and signatures appear below are authorized to sign the application, and that they or their successors and said titles are authorized to sign the agreement and any other documents necessary and the names are President Lauren Wells and Director Christian G. Zabriskie.

Motion carried.

ACTION – C. Zabriskie will draft a report with the interim comptroller pertaining to the audit timeline and will submit it to the Board.

Olu Olabintan has more capacity in bringing the Library audits up to date.

9. PUBLIC COMMENTS

The floor was opened to public comments.

B. Cohen, president of Local 2298 at the Newark Public Library, informed the Board that the union has been performing budget advocacy with the administration and has met with council members. The Library is spending approximately 55% of its budget on staff, whereas public libraries in similar-sized locales are spending between 70% and 80%. In addition, there has

been a lack of advancement for staff, and the hourly wage is lower than in other areas of New Jersey. The union continues to work with the City of Newark to achieve a raise and has offered to share its advocacy materials with the Board.

10. RESOLUTION TO MOVE INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a motion made by R. Austin, seconded by J. Ballard, it was resolved that the Newark Public Library Board of Trustees move into the Executive Session. Motion carried.

11. RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by J. Ballard, it was resolved that the Newark Public Library Board of Trustees reconvene in the Public Session. Motion carried.

12. HR RESOLUTION

On a motion made by J. Ballard, seconded R. Steinbaum, it was resolved to approve the personnel resolutions for the Newark Public Library Board meeting held on July 24, 2024. Motion carried.

13. BOARD TRAINING – LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS

Library Development Solutions has worked with over 150 libraries, mostly on the US East Coast, including those with older facilities and systems. All Board members were interviewed prior to the Board meeting. It was noted that more than half of Newark Public Library's Board members are fairly new and there is no formal onboarding process. The meeting with Library Development Solutions will help develop a more cohesive and effective Board.

Several trends were highlighted during the training:

- The need for a strategic plan that sets the course for the library and is response to the community's needs. Trustees are key to a library's success and are advocates for the library to external organizations and individuals.
- The Library's mission needs to be clarified.
- L. Burger recognized the importance of the work the Trustees do in volunteering their time.
- A library is a pillar of democracy within the community, and it welcomes everyone who visits.
- Deferring issues that affect the library, including capital projects, can have a detrimental effect on branch attendance and visits.
- AI is a pressing issue for libraries.
- The City of Newark provides the minimum amount of funding for its municipal library, Newark Public Library, and the municipality owns the buildings.
- Most library boards in New Jersey are selected by city mayors and many include school superintendents.

During interviews with Board members, one of the common issues highlighted was facilities. A master facilities plan could address concerns. The Board can rely on the Director to make recommendations about managing facilities and bringing existing facilities up to code. A structural and mechanical engineer would need to evaluate the state of the current buildings and inform the Board about whether these require extensive improvements. Population data is necessary to evaluate if the library branches are in the correct locations.

The Board acknowledged that Newark Public Library could play a role in addressing early childhood literacy statistics and a widening generational digital divide. The Board could identify the most pressing issues in Newark and pinpoint where the Library could have an impact. It was noted that municipal challenges and library challenges are interconnected.

The floor was opened to questions.

To transition to a working board and to change the culture to accommodate such a transition if the Board saw fit, Library Development Solutions recommended rethinking the current committee structure and deciding on what standing and ad hoc committees are needed. The need for a strategic plan was reiterated. It was noted that it would be helpful for the Board to meet monthly instead of every two months or to institute a consent agenda for regular items like resolutions to save time during Board meetings. A selection of important topics could be decided before each meeting and experts could be invited to address those with the Board.

There were suggestions for high-impact, low-cost initiatives to engage the community. For example, the library branches could be more visible to communities with colorful and imaginative banners. A weekly email newsletter sent through Mailchimp could increase the Library's visibility. Door counts are helpful for keeping statistics, especially when advocating for the library with municipal and other government officials.

It was noted that it may be necessary to consider repurposing space. Assets could be sold or loaned to generate funds for the Library.

There were no further questions and the Board thanked A. Burger and L. Burger for their presentation.

14. NEXT MEETING

The date of the next Board of Trustees meeting is September 25, 2024.

15. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made by J. Ballard, seconded by A. Cooper and carried, it was agreed that there was no further business to transact; the meeting closed at 8:20 p.m.

DISCLAIMER

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

Lauren Wells, President

Christian Zabriskie, Director

Date

Date

THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES

JULY 24, 2024

Restricted Records (Open Public Meeting Act)

The Newark Public Library Board of Trustees met in the Executive Session to consider personnel and other sensitive matters in accordance with the Open Public Meeting Act, which exempts such matters from discussion at public meetings. Final decisions regarding the matters discussed in the Executive Session will be entered into the public record.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The session was called to order at 6:22 p.m.

2. HR DISCUSSION

There was one Librarian I resignation and two staff member Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) absences. One staff member is returning from leave, while another is about to start.

There is a \$5,000 salary difference between the Librarian I and Librarian II positions, and there are positions currently open at several branches. Branch manager positions are Librarian II positions, but these are not highly paid. The librarian salaries at Newark Public Library are below industry standards. C. Zabriskie will highlight how many Librarian I and Librarian II positions are needed, with the salary requirements, in the budget advocacy document.

The Board highlighted three overall staffing issues:

- Vacant librarian positions;
- Current staff are not earning salaries similar to staff in comparable positions in other locations; and
- It is difficult to fill the vacant positions.

There are budgetary constraints, as the Library is still repaying its PPP loan. C. Zabriskie has been making a list of positions that are currently budgeted for and positions that are needed but are not in the budget. He will share the document with the Board for feedback and noted that all of the positions are for essential staff. The topic will be discussed with the Finance Committee. There is a need for leadership at Weequahic Branch, which also has a vacancy.

3. RECONVENE TO PUBLIC SESSION

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by J. Ballard, it was resolved that the Newark Public Library Board of Trustees reconvene in Public Session. Motion carried.

Lauren Wells, President

Christian Zabriskie, Director

Date

Date