

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

**MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
MARCH 27, 2024, 5:00 P.M.**

BOARD MEMBERS

Lauren Wells	President/Chair
Rosemary Steinbaum	Vice President
Robert Austin	Trustee
Antoinette Richardson	Trustee
Havier Nazario	Trustee

STAFF:

Christian Zabriskie	Director
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ABSENT:

Jason Ballard	Treasurer
Aisha Cooper	Secretary
Domingo Morel	Trustee
Miguel Rodriguez	Trustee

Minutes prepared by Shazia Ahmad of Minutes Solutions 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, the meeting was called to order at 5:13 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES

On a motion of R. Austin and seconded by R. Steinbaum, it was resolved to approve the Public Session Board of Trustees minutes of January 31, 2024. Motion carried.

On a motion R. Steinbaum and seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the Special Public Session Board of Trustees minutes of February 28, 2024. Motion carried.

3. PRESIDENT'S REPORT

L. Wells provided an update on action items developed over six different domains and explained that both internal and external communications have been prioritized. These items were collected from past Director evaluation forms in the areas of finance, facilities, staff development, development, quality of library services, community relations, and board relations. A document with the action items will be edited and distributed to the Board for the NPL 21C program.

The floor was opened to questions, but there were none.

4. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

C. Zabriskie thanked the staff and public in his opening remarks. He reported that a Woman's History Month event was held at the Library and was well attended, and the Women's History Month library card program with Audible was a success.

C. Zabriskie informed the Board that the policies pertaining to patron behavior and code of conduct were in the process of being implemented. Conversations have occurred around the policies, as well as a higher level of incident reports, which indicates an improved response to incidents.

C. Zabriskie invited people to join the foundation board. He recommended that conversations be scheduled about the future directions of NPL 21C.

C. Zabriskie informed the Board that conversations have been ongoing with union colleagues concerning the new union contract, but time constraints have resulted in delays. Both sides are entering the process in good faith.

The development team organized a successful fundraising event. One of the prizes was an evening with the special collections. Staff held tours, and the event received positive feedback. There was some interest in running this fundraising event again.

Programming numbers were lower in January, 2024, compared to January, 2023; however, these numbers increased in February. The branch teams are in favor of more programming, although there is limited space in the Library. The LGBTQ space and the café are now unavailable.

Through conversations with staff in cataloging and acquisitions, C. Zabriskie advised that it would be prudent to have a more structured purchasing method, both at the central and branch levels. C. Zabriskie recommended a combined purchasing model. Branches would be reflective of the communities they serve.

C. Zabriskie thanked his colleagues for past class visits and encouraged a conversation to schedule these for 2025, as it was too late to arrange them for 2024. He highlighted that children could sign up for library cards during class visits. He thanked his colleagues for a successful Black History Month and its related programming.

C. Zabriskie drew attention to the community and professional activities document, which highlights staff work outside the Library. The work benefits the community and the Library, making the latter a trusted source for culture in the city. He highlighted the New Jersey Hispanic Research and Information Center and JBAAR, which were both awarded at the Marion Thompson Wright Lecture.

The floor was opened to questions.

C. Zabriskie confirmed that the library security committee includes both security and non-security personnel.

Regarding a monthly analysis of programming, C. Zabriskie suggested that attendance is lower after the holidays. January is a slower month, but as February is Black History Month, it is a busy time for programming. C. Zabriskie acknowledged that tracking this data would be a benefit.

C. Zabriskie confirmed that NPL 21C pertains to a vision for the Library's future. The Board could develop a strategic plan as part of NPL 21C, possibly in-house or outsourced.

There were no further questions.

5. TREASURER'S REPORT

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by H. Nazario, it was resolved to approve bill sheet 1344 for January, 2024, in the amount of \$1,651,403.04 and bill sheet 1345 for February, 2024, in the amount of \$2,101,650.99. Motion carried.

R. Steinbaum reported no abnormalities or extraordinary activities for the treasurer's report for the periods of January and February, 2024. She noted that current cash flow levels are not in jeopardy.

6. COMMITTEE REPORTS

- a. **Development Committee:** *ACTION – R. Steinbaum will ask the personnel and policy committee to review the Library's space rental policy document.*

ACTION – R. Steinbaum will distribute a one-page explainer document for the NPL Foundation to the Board.

The development committee met on March 19, 2024. Planning is underway for the next Library Gala, which will be held on December 3, 2024. The theme for 2024 will be health and healthcare, as well as first responders from healthcare in Newark. R. Steinbaum asked the Board to present suggestions for networking for the Gala. A fundraising plan is currently in development and at the second draft stage.

The need for a library communications specialist will be discussed further. An opening for an administrative assistant position in the development office has been posted.

The mission of the NPL Foundation is to fundraise for the Library. R. Steinbaum recommended recruiting three new members from the community to assist with this fundraising work.

R. Steinbaum explained that she currently serves as the head of the Foundation, along with Tim Crist a former Board member and past interim Library President, as well as some citizen members. Other members belong to the friends and affinity groups for the Library. This group is interested in raising funds but does not have the resources to renew these efforts. The Foundation is seeking members who are willing to raise funds, have means and networks, and/or possess fundraising experience. This could include people from corporations and other corporate entities. June 3, 2024, would be an optimal date to hold the Foundation's first meeting.

- b. **Facilities Committee:** *ACTION – C. Zabriskie will share with the Board the planning process timeline for the recently awarded New Jersey Economic Development Authority grant to Clinton Branch.*

ACTION – C. Zabriskie will notify the facilities committee of the issue with the fact that the windows will be replaced at the Main Library, but water seepage through the brick is possible if these are not repaired or replaced as well.

C. Zabriskie gave the report in A. Cooper's absence and presented the 2024 facilities overview. The chimney repair has been completed in the Main Library, and elevator repairs are scheduled to commence in April, 2024. There was a delay due to incorrect pricing for the freight elevator. The 2023-2024 NPL repair and maintenance priority plan is discussed regularly and tracks preventative maintenance.

The key capital projects are the construction completion of the VTC in April, 2024. Furniture will be installed, and the final opening is expected to be held at the end of May, 2024. Demolition on the third floor for the Hispanic Research and Information Center is scheduled to commence in early April, 2024. Staff are working with an interior designer for furniture, walls, and flooring.

Clinton Branch was awarded a New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) asset activation planning grant in the amount of \$50,000 and received positive feedback on the application. C. Zabriskie thanked partners at Clinton Hill Community Action for initiating the application. The grant will be used for spaces that facilitate community input and for outward facing projects. The revised MOU for this project is with Clinton Hill Community Action and should be ready for distribution at the next Board meeting. Financial responsibility should be clarified in the MOU.

Springfield Branch received a Community Center Digital Connect grant from the New Jersey State Library in the amount of \$1,360,535 for capital improvements and branch redesign. Currently, design proposals are being reviewed, as well as a preliminary work plan. The terrace and ramp repair has been completed at the North End Branch, and the mural work plan is underway.

There is an environmental study of Roseville Branch currently underway to confirm that there is no hazardous material exposure. There is a historic preservation grant application being developed for the Main Library. This will be used for advanced exterior lighting, front entrance gate repairs, and restoration of the front entrance decoration.

The Board thanked the committee for its focus on upgrading the Main Library lighting. C. Zabriskie confirmed that there is new lighting for the stacks, with plans for upgraded lighting in the basement.

- c. **Finance Committee:** R. Steinbaum presented the report for J. Ballard. She thanked interim comptroller Sharon Little for her help with the report. The finance committee met with the interim comptroller on March 19, 2024, to review the operating results from January and February, 2024, and the 2024 budget assumptions.

The 2024 budget of approximately \$17.5 million is higher than the actual spent amount of \$13.7 million in 2023. The 2024 higher budget includes the impact of higher staffing levels and expenses for major capital improvement projects. Hiring 21 new staff members in 2023 resulted in an increase of \$500,000 in the salary category.

Renovations to the Hispanic Research and Information Center and the Springfield Branch are the two major forthcoming capital improvement projects. These expenses will be offset by grants.

Year-to-date actuals at the end of February, 2024, show that expenses exceeded the budget by 6% or \$141,400. This is due to data processing, utilities reflecting higher billings due to seasonal weather, facility services including HVAC repairs, and subscription costs. Currently, the Library is on track to be within the annual budget. One of the biggest challenges in 2024 will be the impact of PPP repayments, pressures from new staffing, and the new collective bargaining agreement.

d. **Personnel and Policy Committee Report:**

On a motion made by R. Austin, seconded by A. Richardson, it was resolved to approve the service animal policy. Motion carried.

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the Newark Public Library collection development policy. Motion carried.

On a motion made by R. Austin, seconded by R. Steinbaum, it was resolved to approve the Newark Public Library material challenge form. Motion carried.

On a motion made by A. Richardson, seconded by R. Steinbaum, it was resolved to approve the Newark Public Library's adoption of the American Library Association's freedom to read statement and to declare the Newark Public Library as a book sanctuary. Motion carried.

ACTION – C. Zabriskie will provide the Board with a list of current consultants, highlighting roles, responsibilities, contract information, and units to which they belong.

ACTION – The Board will circulate a memorandum publicly stating that Newark Public Library has adopted the American Library Association's freedom to read statement and is a book sanctuary.

All consultant contracts are up for review and contract negotiations are underway with the unions. The City of Newark increased the insurance premiums for employees, and as the Library is a city institution, employee contributions have been raised.

The committee is performing an on-going conversation regarding the hiring process and addressing conflicts of interest.

The service animal policy aligns with New Jersey State law. Should a patron enter the Library with an emotional support pet that does not meet the service animal designation, the patron would be asked to leave. Allergies remain a concern. Only dogs and miniature horses are considered service animals; emotional support animals do not qualify.

There is an appendix to the collection development policy that solicits feedback from the community about materials that may be of concern and the process for submitting this feedback. Approving the American Library Association's freedom to read statement declaring the Newark Public Library a book sanctuary would connect Newark Public Library to both the Hoboken and Jersey City libraries.

7. **NEW BUSINESS**

a. **Strategic Plan:** *ACTION – C. Zabriskie will provide the Board with the names of potential consultants for the Library's strategic plan.*

The Board noted that a full-day retreat prior to the summer holidays would be ideal for a discussion regarding the move toward NPL 21C, and a Doodle poll will be sent to the Board for a time and day. An outside consultant with a background in libraries could aid in this process and facilitate the retreat. The Board, Director, community stakeholders, and Library staff will also be involved in this conversation. The Board desires to reclaim Newark Public Library's position as an important library on the east coast.

- b. **Ad Hoc Committee for Clinton Branch:** The Board agreed to table the discussion about an ad hoc committee for the Clinton Branch until the next Board meeting. The plan is to have this committee in place before the strategic planning retreat.

8. **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

The floor was opened to public comments.

Beth Zakcohen recommended that the budgeting process factor in salary increases to offset the rising cost of living. Several employees are classified as Librarian I who are not doing entry-level work, including special programming. The Librarian II position pays only \$60 more in salary.

J. Rodriguez, head of IT, presented the difficulties experienced by his department to the Board and expressed his pride in the Library's programming and services.

9. **RESOLUTION TO MOVE INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION**

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

10. **RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION**

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

11. **HR RESOLUTION**

On a motion made by H. Nazario, seconded A. Richardson, it was resolved to approve the personnel resolutions for the Newark Public Library Board meeting held on March 27, 2024. Motion carried.

12. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion made by H. Nazario, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m. Motion carried.

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