

THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
5 WASHINGTON STREET  
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING  
VIA TELECONFERENCE  
MAY 22, 2024, 5:00 P.M.

**MEMBERS:**

Lauren Wells	President/Chair
Domingo Morel	Vice President
Rosemary Steinbaum	Secretary
Jason Ballard	Treasurer (from 5:15 p.m.)
Robert J. Austin II	Trustee
Havier Nazario	Trustee
Antoinette Richardson	Trustee

**STAFF:**

Christian Zabriskie	Director
Scharron Little	Interim Director, Finance
Jorge Rodriguez	Head, Information Technology
George Williams	Assistant Director, Capital Planning

**GUESTS:**

Rafael Cuello	Creative Director, OUT Agency (until 7:03 p.m.)
Vanessa McGee	Project Manager, Libraries Without Borders U.S. (until 7:45 p.m.)
Nina Safane	Executive Director, Libraries Without Borders U.S. until 7:45 p.m.)

**ABSENT:**

Aisha Cooper	Trustee
Miguel Rodriguez	Trustee

Minutes prepared by Shazia Ahmad of Minutes Solutions Inc. from a 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 5:06 p.m.

2. **APPROVAL OF PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES**

The approval of the Public Session Board of Trustees minutes from March 27, 2024, were not discussed.

3. **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

L. Wells acknowledged staff and their organization of the LGBTQ+ flag-raising event held at NPL on May 22, 2024. There has also been progress on setting dates for the Board retreat, and a Doodle poll was sent to Board members. Members who have not yet responded were asked to do so.

The Anti-Prom is scheduled for June 1, 2024, and L. Wells acknowledged the detailed planning already undertaken for the event. There have also been discussions pertaining to a space rental policy in addition to a budget policy.

The Board recognized A. Richardson's term as a member and congratulated her on her retirement. The meeting was A. Richardson's last Board meeting.

#### 4. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

*ACTION – C. Zabriskie will contact two charter schools and other high schools in Newark to advertise the Anti-Prom.*

The construction projects for VTC and the Hispanic Research and Information Center (HRIC) are on schedule and will be completed in 2024. Issues with furniture for VTC were resolved. Demolition has commenced on the third floor of the HRIC, and although this is a complicated process, there has been good progress.

C. Zabriskie highlighted meetings with community partners about the Springfield Branch renovation. He thanked the Board for supporting the staff wellness day. The forthcoming Anti-Prom has been very well-organized and will carry additional event insurance. Summer Reading will begin shortly, and staff contract negotiations are underway. C. Zabriskie invited the Board to provide input on the budget. A tree-planting event at Springfield Branch was attended by the mayor. A staff member attended Ailey Day at New Jersey Performing Arts Center. The Women's History Month library cards were disbursed within two weeks, and there was interest in repeating the project. There is a new seed bank program at the Main Branch, and a new mural in the children's room.

There was minor damage from the earthquake; there was no structural damage. There was a bomb threat called in from a different county and was directed at the LGBTQ+ Center, which is currently closed. Law enforcement acted quickly, and the Library is also reviewing procedures. The Library is undertaking safety measures, although C. Zabriskie noted that this was not due to any events.

The Library has been involved in Read Across America. There was a "Pancakes and Pajamas" event at the Main Branch, which was attended by over 120 children. The New Jersey Room had a successful reopening. C. Zabriskie thanked the staff and acknowledged that the Library is doing very well.

The floor was opened to questions.

C. Zabriskie confirmed that there have been good responses for the Anti-Prom from superintendents and schools. The number of registered students is low, but they have expressed interest in the event

The Pride flag-raising, held on May 22, 2024, was successful and well-attended by the press as well as the current president of the American Library Association.

There were no further questions.

#### 5. TREASURER'S REPORT

**On a motion made by J. Ballard, seconded by D. Morel, it was resolved to approve bill sheet 1346 for March, 2024, in the amount of \$1,943,921.44 and bill sheet 1347 for April, 2024, in the amount of \$1,732,685.03. Motion carried.**

The new cash activity report format, which is made to be easier to read, contains all disbursement information and payroll activity on the same sheet. Banking activity is what is remitted for payment, while disbursement activity pertains to amounts paid out during the month.

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

L. Wells thanked S. Little, J. Ballard, D. Morel, C. Zabriskie, and other members of the finance committee for their work on the new report format.

## **6. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **6.1 Development Committee**

The development committee met on April 30, 2024. Assistant Director of Development J. Mateo presented a detailed fundraising plan with a goal of \$2 million to be raised in 2024. This plan is ambitious and has not been presented before. There is a fundraising event on June 13, 2024, honoring healthcare workers, and tickets are \$100 per head. R. Steinbaum expressed hope that the Board would attend. J. Mateo will send the Board the flyer for this event, and Board members were encouraged to share it with their networks.

Gala planning is underway with the formation of the gala organization committee. The event will be held on December 3, 2024, which is also Giving Tuesday.

There is a new administrator in the development office who has previous experience working for several years in the HRIC.

There will be a mailing introducing the new staff member in the Philip Roth Room. This mailing is being sent to 1,500 people associated with the room and will also solicit donations from the community. There will be a similar activity for the New Jersey Room.

L. Wells acknowledged J. Mateo's contribution in creating the committee reporting template. This will ensure that committee meeting proceedings are captured accurately.

### **6.2 Facilities Committee**

C. Zabriskie gave the report in A. Cooper's absence and presented the 2024 facilities overview. There were new developments with the Springfield Branch and there will be a presentation from the muralist at the North End Branch.

There is an updated memorandum of understanding between NPL and Clinton Hill Community Action. G. Williams, Assistant Director of Capital Planning, provided a chronology of events pertaining to the Clinton Branch and community stakeholders. The Branch was closed due to structural concerns under a previous Director and temporary relocation was discussed but there were issues with the cost.

In 2022, the facilities committee met with architects and the Boston municipality about public library funding and mixed-use development in a knowledge exchange. These conversations continued with the City of Newark and eventually included Clinton Hill Community Action to determine the mixed-use development. This would include both the Branch library and a church. The memorandum of understanding between NPL and Clinton Hill Community Action formalizes and moves this process forward. C. Zabriskie will consider another field trip to visit mixed-use facilities, including one in Brooklyn at Sunset Park.

Clinton Branch was awarded a \$50,000 New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) asset activation planning grant. The NJEDA provided positive feedback on the application.

There is a OneDrive shared drive for important documents for the committee members to access at any time.

The HVAC systems have been turned on and require repair. There will be another update on the Springfield renovation at the next Board meeting. G. Williams invited the Board to visit the temporary computer lab, and C. Zabriskie issued an invitation to see the third-floor renovation at HRIC.

The floor was opened to questions.

G. Williams informed the Board that the latest copy of the memorandum of understanding includes the legal review and the termination clause and does not have a tenancy clause. He agreed to share this version of the document with the Board for its review.

G. Williams confirmed that the OneDrive shared drive will be available to the Board and will be organized logically. The structure will first be tested with the facilities committee prior to the next Board meeting and will then be made accessible to the Board. This structure can be applied to other Board matters.

The Board discussed the necessity of an ad hoc Board committee for the Clinton Branch project. Assisting the facilities committee would be welcomed, but there may be some duplication of effort if there is an ad hoc committee. It was agreed that the Board would support the facilities committee with regard to the Clinton Branch project when needed.

There were no questions for the report.

### **6.3 Finance Committee**

D. Morel presented the committee report. The finance committee met on May 21, 2024, and discussed that the Library was under budget for the first four months of 2024. This was due to less-than-expected grant and endowment spending.

Operations costs were 2.5% higher than expected due to HVAC and boiler repairs. Utilities were higher in the winter months as well. There were several event-related expenses. Annual subscriptions renewed at the beginning of 2024.

As the Library is in collective bargaining negotiations with the staff, the numbers in the budget could increase. The 2019 audit was closed, and there will be further discussion about appointing a new auditor.

There were no questions for the report.

### **6.4 Personnel and Policy Committee Report**

A. Richardson presented her final personnel and policy committee report. The committee met on May 9, 2024. Draft policies will be available for the next Board meeting. The NPL team and Local 2298 began collective bargaining negotiations on May 14, 2024.

All consultant contracts are under review for renewal or termination.

There were no questions for the report.

## 7. **NEW BUSINESS**

### 7.1 **Staff**

*ACTION – C. Zabriskie will send to the Board the Newark Municipal Council’s commendation letter recognizing J. Mateo for her contributions to the community and students.*

### 7.2 **Approval of Summer Hours 2024**

**On a motion made by D. Morel, seconded by A. Richardson, it was resolved to approve the Newark Public Library 2024 summer hours, from June 24 to September 3, 2024. Motion carried.**

There will be late-night hours on Wednesdays at both the Main Library and branches. The schedule is as follows and repeating the 2023 summer hours:

- Main Library: Mondays, Tuesday, Thursdays, and Fridays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Wednesdays from 9:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.; and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- Branch Libraries: Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Wednesdays from 1:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.; and Saturdays from 9:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. The branch libraries will be closed on Mondays.

### 7.3 **Mural Discussion – North End Branch**

R. Cuello of OUT Agency presented the community mural project for North End Branch. An advisory group discussion with members of the community occurred on April 17, 2024, with input sought from all age groups. There was a vision board activity with questions centered on what makes the community special, how books promote unity, and the celebration of diversity. Common themes from this activity included a colorful and vibrant mural, gardens and blooming, a mural that would be fun and inclusive, and representation of Newark.

The Board was presented with three options for the concept and mural design: a pop-up book concept with imaginative storytelling scenes, a book flower garden community safe space, and a Newark reading garden incorporating community members sitting on the letters of “Newark.”

The three designs will be shared via social media for community members to vote, while there will be an online voting opportunity for Library patrons.

The floor was opened to questions.

The mural will be unveiled during the Summer Reading program.

It was also noted that the figures in one of the designs were racially ambiguous, whereas Newark is a very diverse city. R. Cuello informed the Board that the design would be adjusted before it is shared for voting.

The Board expressed thanks for the designs and enquired about the possibility of expanding the voting beyond social media into schools. R. Cuello agreed to reach out to the schools and would be in favor of placing the two non-winning mural designs in the North End Branch.

R. Cuello noted that the mural would be painted with the appropriate paint and materials, and touch-ups and maintenance would be discussed with the facility. Restoration and touch-ups have been completed on other murals two years after they were painted. There would be a block party to unveil the mural.

The Board thanked R. Cuello for his presentation.

#### **7.4 Libraries Without Borders Discussion**

Libraries Without Borders (LWB) U.S. is the American branch of an international non-profit NGO, and it partners with community organizations and public libraries. LWB assesses both the library and external community to develop new outreach strategies and reach new populations and users. These strategies are aligned with the Library's overall goals.

The floor was opened to questions.

C. Zabriskie explained that the community assessment undertaken by LWB and the Library would come at the start of the Library's strategic planning process. The recommendations from the assessment would become part of the strategic plan.

N. Safane explained that the internal library assessment would include an assessment of library assets and offerings, existing library staff capacity, and outreach. As part of the assessment, LWB might only focus on assets and offerings, as well as library staff capacity. Outreach could be a future goal. Board capacity and involvement are a significant component of library assets. LWB would rely on the Board for understanding the community.

V. McGee has been with LWB for over a year, working with library initiatives around the U.S. She was previously an educator for ten years. N. Safane had a ten-year career in education and then worked in the start-up non-profit sector in public health and public policy.

The proposed partnership was completed previously as a pilot project between LWB and the Connecticut State Library. The outcomes are being applied to other libraries across the state. N. Safane will share LWB case study documents with the Board, and she will ask the libraries if they are comfortable sharing their own pilot project outcomes with NPL.

C. Zabriskie noted his positive impression of LWB's assessment work, which aligns with NPL objectives. He recommended working with LWB as part of the strategic planning process.

LWB agreed to share outcome documents with the Board, and both N. Safane and V. McGee were thanked for their presentation.

#### **7.5 Strategic Planning Process**

*ACTION – The Board will begin a conversation for the strategic planning process.*

#### **7.6 Board Retreat**

*ACTION – C. Zabriskie will resend the survey about Board retreat dates on May 23, 2024, as there has been a change in available dates.*

#### **8. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

The floor was opened to public comments.

J. Rodriguez, head of IT, expressed best wishes to I. Betancourt and A. Richardson on their retirement.

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

On a motion made by A. Richardson, seconded by D. Morel, 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 D. Morel, 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 D. Morel, seconded R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the personnel resolutions for the Newark Public Library Board meeting held on May 22, 2024. Motion carried.

12. **NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next Board of Trustees meeting is July 24, 2024.

13. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion made by D. Morel, 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

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Christian Zabriskie, Director

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Date

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Date