

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

**MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
VIA TELECONFERENCE
NOVEMBER 19, 2025, 5:00 P.M.**

MEMBERS:

Aisha Cooper	Co-President/Chair
Lauren Wells	Co-President
Rosemary Steinbaum	Vice-President
Havier Nazario	Secretary
Robert J. Austin II	Trustee
Shanee Brown	Trustee
Miguel Rodriguez	Trustee

STAFF:

Sarah Wiggins	Interim Director
Leslie Colson	Assistant Director for Human Resources
Scharron Little	Interim Director of Finance
Zuhare Meri	Building Superintendent
George Williams	Assistant Director, Capital Planning

GUESTS:

Mia X	Newark Poet Laureate
Jim Burns	Managing Partner, Genova Burns LLC (from 5:48 p.m. until 6:26 p.m.)
Neil Cleary	Counsel, Genova Burns LLC (from 5:48 p.m. until 6:26 p.m.)

ABSENT:

Jason Ballard	Treasurer
Jacqueline Quiles	Deputy Mayor

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

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 5:00 p.m. It was noted that Deputy Mayor Jacqueline Quiles has resigned from the Board.

2. PUBLIC COMMENTS

The floor was opened to public comments.

Y. Lopez, Director of the Hispanic Research and Information Center (HRIC), expressed gratitude to the Board and Newark Public Library (NPL). She thanked individual Board members M. Rodriguez and R. Steinbaum. She also thanked the NPL's leadership team in maintaining the institution and its operations during the Director vacancy. She acknowledged

NPL staff and colleagues and their commitment to the Library. She expressed concern about the new Director's hiring and noted that there has not been an update on this issue. She informed the Board about her conversations with library colleagues across the country and their perception of issues with the Director position. She noted concern about the NPL's reputation without a Director and a lack of transparency on this issue. She requested that the Board expedite its search for a new Director and recommended the creation of a Deputy Director position. She noted that large libraries have this administrative leadership structure. She reiterated her support for NPL.

H. Nazario responded and noted the Board's emphasis on due diligence during the Director search process. He explained that the Board would take its time with this process and also noted that an Interim Director has been hired. The Board is also taking staff and community input into serious consideration for the new Director selection. H. Nazario added that the Board is not aware of the discussions happening in the wider librarianship community and that it cannot make decisions based on these conversations. The vetting and hiring process will be thorough; however, the Board cannot set a deadline at this time.

L. Wells explained that she and R. Steinbaum are the longest-serving Board members and outlined their respective responsibilities. She reiterated what H. Nazario said and added that there is also due diligence for ensuring the Director's longevity. She noted that this will be her third search for a Director and that the Board wants to have consensus on the person hired. L. Wells thanked Y. Lopez for her concerns.

There were no further public comments.

3. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

L. Wells inquired about the two speakers listed on the agenda. Interim Director S. Wiggins responded that one speaker is Mia X, the Newark Poet Laureate, and the second speaker is no longer in attendance. This speaker was a representative from Friends of the HRIC.

4. MIA X PRESENTATION

Poet Laureate M. X spoke to the Board about the honors for the Newark Mayor scheduled for December 2, 2025. She asked to speak at that event to share her experience as the inaugural Poet Laureate to honor the Mayor. She also read from her new work, titled *Kujichagulia*.

M. X noted that, as Poet Laureate, her project involves 5,000 poems in the community. She set up in community spaces, including the farmer's market, and received suggestions from the public regarding poem topics. The Board thanked her for her reading.

5. RESOLUTION TO MOVE INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by M. Rodriguez, it was resolved that the Newark Public Library Board of Trustees move into the Executive Session. Motion carried.

6. RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION

On a motion duly made, it was resolved that the Newark Public Library Board of Trustees will reconvene in the Public Session. Motion carried.

7. HR RESOLUTION

On a motion made by Trustee, seconded by Trustee, it was resolved to adopt the human resources resolution during the Executive Session for the Newark Public Library Board meeting held on November 19, 2025. Motion carried.

8. APPROVAL OF PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the Public Session Board of Trustees minutes of September 24, 2025, as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the Public Session Board of Trustees minutes of July 23, 2025. Motion carried unanimously.

9. INTRODUCTION OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR

On behalf of the Board, L. Wells welcomed Interim Director Wiggins to NPL and introduced her to the public. She thanked Interim Director Wiggins for supporting the Board through its transition.

10. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Interim Director Wiggins noted that she has been in the position for 23 days and that there has been much work to do. She has visited all except one branch at this time and is scheduled to visit the Springfield branch on December 15, 2025. She has had conversations with the Director of Facilities and the Facilities Committee about the condition of the branches. She also referred to the Facilities spreadsheet and anticipates that the identified issues will be addressed in due course.

Interim Director Wiggins noted that an ad hoc committee has been established to develop short- and long-term solutions for the Branch Brook Library. There were some issues with the heating system, which appears to be working at this time. A meeting is scheduled for November 21, 2025, for that branch.

K. Brown is the new Assistant to the Director, and Interim Director Wiggins invited the Board to meet her. She noted K. Brown's eagerness to learn in her new position and urged patience.

Interim Director Wiggins also updated the Board on volunteer recruitment, noting that there have been interviews. One of the volunteers interviewed is a Princeton student who impressed the interviewers. The volunteer policy and procedures also require revisions and updates, which are underway.

HR has been working with Interim Director Wiggins on 12 staff training sessions, some for the entire staff and some specifically for managers. Areas of focus include sexual harassment, customer service, professional communication, active shooter situations, and management. The plan is to identify 12 training areas and provide one per month. H. Nazario recommended Levi Holmes, the Newark Public Schools' Director, for assistance with security drills and offered to connect Interim Director Wiggins with him.

Interim Director Wiggins informed the Board that the finance manual and HR manual have been completed. The Public Information Office also has a manual, and the emergency evacuation procedures manual has been completed. She noted that these four manuals require updates. Interim Director Wiggins has also requested drafts of manuals that have not

yet been completed by February 1, 2026. All of these manuals will be posted on the intranet for all staff, along with the union agreement.

Circulation statistics for the Main and other branches were also provided to the Board. Interim Director Wiggins noted decreases in some areas and increases in others. She has met with the Assistant Director of Public Services and acknowledged the programming delivered by the staff. There was an increase from September to October, 2025, and increased foot traffic into NPL would be welcome. Nonetheless, the quality of programming currently offered is excellent. L. Wells acknowledged the staff's tremendous work on programming.

A computer upgrade is in progress, with replacements planned for 277 computers. This upgrade is expected to be completed by early 2026, with three or four NPL branch upgrades completed by the end of 2025. This upgrade was scheduled before Interim Director Wiggins joined NPL. She is also working with IT to improve the intranet.

Interim Director Wiggins reported that Special Collections held its annual Philip Roth event, which drew 114 attendees. NPL held its staff appreciation breakfast on October 24, 2025. 13 staff members were honored for their service, ranging from 5 to 50 years. Interim Director Wiggins extended her thanks to Trustee Austin for attending the event. Cynthia Shearin was honored for 50 years of service by both the staff and the City of Newark. All honorees received a certificate, gift card, and NPL pen. Retroactive payment cheques for Local 68 and all non-union staff were also distributed on October 24, 2025, and Interim Director Wiggins noted the staff's appreciation.

An ad hoc committee has been created to review website options for the Public Information Office. The shortlist has been narrowed to two vendors, Web Links and ionicNET, and the next meeting is scheduled for mid-December, 2025. The Board will make the final decision. On inquiry from H. Nazario, Interim Director, Wiggins confirmed that the process for selecting website vendors had started prior to her joining NPL. There was a procurement process for this, and she confirmed that the Board would be able to test the new website. She anticipates that the Board will receive a vendor presentation.

Interim Director Wiggins informed the Board that an ad hoc committee has been created to review emergency evacuation procedures. She confirmed that this is one of the completed procedure manuals. On inquiry from R. Austin, Interim Director Wiggins confirmed that she meets with the head of NPL security weekly and will discuss the lighting issues around the security desk.

On inquiry from L. Wells, Interim Director, Wiggins confirmed that she would redesign the format of the Director's report to the Board. She asked if the Board found the photos included in the report helpful, and members confirmed that they did. It was also recommended that the Interim Director tabulate the statistics into a spreadsheet and include a calendar of events in her report. She also agreed to include an overview in her written report.

L. Wells inquired about the Facilities' spreadsheet and noted Interim Director Wiggins' optimism in addressing the issues in that report. Interim Director Wiggins explained that Facilities is understaffed and that two staff members are currently on leave. She meets with the Facilities Director weekly and emphasizes how busy he is. There have been discussions about staffing, current projects, and their anticipated completion. The Facilities Director has identified contractor issues.

H. Nazario informed Interim Director Wiggins that prior to her arrival at NPL, he reached out to the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) to undertake a complete facilities assessment. NJIT had previously completed an assessment of the major systems in the

Newark Public Schools. He agreed to share the NJIT contact with Interim Director Wiggins and noted that the Board can attend the first meeting.

The Board thanked Interim Director Wiggins for her report.

11. TREASURER'S REPORT

A. Cooper informed the Board that there were two bill sheets for approval, bill sheet 1364 for September 2025, in the amount of \$2,433,484.67, and bill sheet 1365 for October 2025, in the amount of \$1,761,703.49. She noted there were two retroactive wage events that affected the October, 2025 cash account balances. The first was the payout of retroactive wages back to January 1, 2024, at a 2.5% year-over-year annual adjustment. The second event pertained to retroactive wages from January 1, 2025, reflecting salary adjustments for staff members not covered by any collective bargaining agreement, although fulfilling equivalent job roles.

12. COMMITTEE REPORTS

12.1 Development Committee

This report was included in the Board package.

12.2 Facilities Committee

Z. Meri and G. Williams updated the Board on the Clinton Hill joint venture agreement. H. Nazario noted that although the City may own the property, NPL and the Board govern the assets. He added that the deed should clearly outline that the property in question is intended for library use. L. Wells inquired about whether there is a location on the website publicizing this process.

Z. Meri also provided an update on HRIC and noted that there are some minor items outstanding.

12.3 Finance Committee

This report was included in the Board package. The Finance committee recommended that its meeting time be changed to a later time. This item will be postponed until the Treasurer can provide feedback.

12.4 Personnel and Policy Committee

H. Nazario presented the report and noted that Interim Director Wiggins had been welcomed to NPL. He highlighted an update to the volunteer policy, stipulating the inclusion of a reference letter to NPL. He also updated the Board on the Search Committee.

13. NEW BUSINESS

13.1 Nominating Committee

This item was discussed.

13.2 2026 Board Committee Dates

The Board briefly discussed the proposed committee meeting dates. L. Wells noted that it is necessary to have clarification with regard to committee meeting days.

13.3 Paid Holidays

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the calendar for the paid holidays for the 2026 calendar year. Motion carried unanimously.

13.4 Search Committee

R. Steinbaum agreed to chair the Search Committee and was joined by H. Nazario, A. Cooper, and S. Brown, in addition to staff representatives T. Wright and P. Barada. C. King has also agreed to assist the committee as a member of the public. L. Wells noted that there will be an incoming Board member who has a background in evaluating talent and that this person would be an asset to the committee. A. Cooper noted that, as this person has not joined the Board yet, the committee will be struck with the previously discussed Board representatives at this time.

L. Wells emphasized that there needs to be a process in place for choosing members of the public to sit on the Search Committee. There is no transparency at this time.

14. NEXT MEETING

The date of the next Board of Trustees meeting is January 28, 2026.

15. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made and carried, it was resolved to adjourn the meeting at 8:53 p.m. Motion carried.

Aisha Cooper, Co-President

Director

Date

Date