

MEETING OF TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2021

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE HOBOKEN FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY, HELD IN A ZOOM ONLINE VIDEO CONFERENCE IN HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY ON TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2021 AT 6:30 P.M.

----- Meeting Excerpt -----

1. Call to Order

President Abernathy called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. and certified that pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, notice of the meeting had been given in the annual meeting notice, which was adopted at the July 28, 2020 meeting of the Library Board, which notice was provided to the Jersey Journal and the Hudson Reporter, was posted at the Library website and at Hoboken City Hall, and filed with the Hoboken City Clerk. The meeting notice was amended at the outset of the Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) emergency to provide the telephone conference number and access code in advance of the scheduled meeting.

2. Roll Call

Roll call was taken:

Attendance	Present	Absent	Notes
Dr. Jerome Abernathy, President**	X		
Mrs. JoAnn Serrano, Treasurer**	X		
Ms. Susan Murcko, Secretary**	X		
Ms. Amanda R. Blaney**	X		
Ms. Jennifer Evans, School Superintendent's Designee***	X		
Mr. Jason Freeman, Mayor's Designee***	X		
Ms. Raakhee Mirchandani**	X		
Mr. Jack Silbert**	X		
Mr. Kurt Thoens**	X		

**Ex officio* under NJ state law.

**Present via remote connection.

Also in attendance were: Library Director Lina Podles, Recording Secretary Clark Matthews, Library Counsel Michael Cerone, Esq., and members of the library staff and public.

3. Acceptance of Minutes

---Dr. Abernathy: Asked if the trustees had any comments or corrections for the minutes of the January 28, 2021 and February 23, 2021 trustees' meetings. There being none, the minutes were added to the meeting consent agenda.

4. Public Comments

---Dr. Abernathy: Invited comments from the public. There were none.

5. Director's Report

---Mrs. Podles: Highlighted several items from the Director's Report: It has been exactly one year since the board has been meeting remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. February was a short month, but circulation continued to be very good and programming was popular beyond all expectations; there are two types of online programs: local and general topics, and while local programs generally draw local attendees, the general programs draw participants from all over the U.S. and even internationally, often with many thousands of views.

Staff and the Buildings and Grounds Committee continue to review past grant applications and plan for this year's grant opportunities; the governor has announced a second round of NJ Library Construction Bond Act (NJLCBA) grants for 2021 with a June 6th deadline and the city's grant writer says the library grant application can be completed by June 1st.

The governor has eased COVID capacity restrictions but the library is only admitting more visitors to the upper floors; masking enforcement is taking priority now because patrons are becoming lax about pandemic measures. Also, staff is anticipating the upcoming renovations by making more space in the building: the library historic collection is going into storage and some circulating titles are being distributed in the community. In-person programs are almost all on hold for now because staff, patrons and public are all hesitant to resume them. The library is examining ways to participate in the city project of rebuilding computers for people in need; also examining participation in the "Book Exchange in the Park" events.

The city has been very good about transferring library funding this year, but there are some further issues for discussion as part of the Budget and Finance Committee report.

6. Committee Reports, Including Finance Committee and Payment of Bills

---Mr. Chapka: Reported for the Buildings and Grounds Committee: Bidding for the second and third floor renovation has begun: bids were issued on March 2nd to the 3 pre-approved bidders and all three bidders showed up for the in-person session and walk-through on March 10th; the three bidders are Hall Construction, Merrell & Garaguso, and John O'Hara Company. One bidder requested an extension to bid, which was granted in an addendum that moved submittals back one week to April 13th with the board approval vote now scheduled for the regular April 27th trustees' meeting. The Facilities Director is working with department heads to plan for impacts that construction will have on their spaces; a schedule to close spaces and relocate, store or discard furniture and materials is being worked out. There are also discussions with Hoboken Housing Authority (HHA) about renewing their approval to use unoccupied space at the Fox Hill complex; there was initial agreement to use the space before the pandemic forced postponement of the project last year. Visitor capacity in the building has been increased to 50% on the second and third floors, and visitor time limits have been extended to two hours.

---Mrs. Serrano: Reported for the Budget and Finance Committee; there will be a committee report this month on bookkeeping issues related to grant funding. She described the financial matters before the board for approval: 1.) to pay from the capital improvement Construction Account at Bayonne Community Bank (BCB) check no. 8945 for \$86.81; 2.) in Part A, to pay library operating expenses with checks no. 9127-9184 totaling \$135,110.79 and to pay via Paypal \$500.00 to Facebook and \$99.00 to Wordpress; 3) in Part B, to pay expenses for library materials with checks no. 9185-9192 totaling \$23,426.05.

---Ms. Evans: Moved the board approve paying the Part B bills for library materials.

---Ms. Blaney: Seconded.

---Adopted by roll call vote as follows: YEAS: 8 NAYS: 0 RECUSED: 1 ABSTAIN: 0

Trustee	Yes	No	Recused	Abstain
Ms. Blaney	X			
Ms. Evans	X			
Mr. Freeman	X			
Ms. Mirchandani	X			
Ms. Murcko			X	
Mrs. Serrano	X			
Mr. Silbert	X			
Mr. Thoens	X			
Dr. Abernathy	X			

---Mrs. Podles: Continued the Budget and Finance Committee report: She advised the board that there are two issues concerning unpaid receivables for the library's grant awards and the related bookkeeping entries for the grant funding for the library. Because her retirement is near, she wanted to make the board aware of the status of this grant funding that was awarded and is due to the library from two separate grants but that has not been fully paid; at this point, these receivable payments have been carried forward for several years by the library auditors.

First, grant matching funds are due from the city for the lower level renovation; the matching match from the New Jersey Historic Preservation Trust (NJHPT) was for \$750,000 and that sum was delivered to the City of Hoboken, but \$255,000 remains unpaid to the library and is still outstanding. The \$255,000 has been carried forward by the library auditors for two years, since the downstairs renovations were completed and the building re-opened in January 2019. Since that time the auditors have requested paperwork on the status of the payment to clarify the bookkeeping, but it has not been forthcoming from the city up to now. Mrs. Podles suggested that the board officer(s) or counsel write a letter to City Hall on the status of this payment and decide how to handle the accounting for it. There was extensive discussion about the grant, accounting and whether any unpaid matching funds will need to be returned to the NJHPT if the funds do not reach the library. Mr. Freeman will investigate the situation and get back to the president and other officers about the situation and the need for correspondence with the city.

Second, the library was identified as qualifying for a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for damage and recovery from Hurricane Sandy, and eventually a FEMA grant in excess of \$700,000 was awarded to the library; that sum was also delivered to the City of Hoboken. The funds were requested for the library and the grant was earmarked for the library, but the application did not originate with the library and the paperwork was handled by the city. Discussion about Mr. Freeman locating the relevant paperwork from the NJ State Police at city hall and clarifying the status of the grant amount and payment. Mr. Freeman and Dr. Abernathy will discuss the issue after Mr. Freeman checks at City Hall.

---Mrs. Podles: Added that she has always tried to be careful with money and accounting, and wanted the status of the grants to be clarified or at least formalized before her retirement. Discussion about the total unpaid funds being close to \$1 million and whether that would impact the library's 2021 grant application; the \$255,000 from the first grant will count toward 2021 grant matches but the Director wasn't certain about the FEMA grant funds.

---Mrs. Murcko: Reported for the Personnel and Policy Committee: The committee drafted a resolution on personnel policy that is before the board for discussion in an executive session. Looking ahead, several projects are planned: 1. A review of pandemic policies to see what worked and what didn't; 2. Starting work on the library's 5-year strategic plan, which will need to be finalized and adopted by 2022; and 3. Forming a committee to develop library diversity and equity goals. Discussion about how the library goals developed will provide the new Director with a possible roadmap. Further discussion thanking Ms. Murcko and Mr. Silbert for the time they spent on this project.

7. Executive Session

---Dr. Abernathy: An executive session has been scheduled to discuss personnel matters.

---Ms. Murcko: Moved the board enter Executive Session.

---Mrs. Serrano: Seconded.

---Adopted by unanimous voice vote as follows: YEAS: 9 NAYS: 0 RECUSED: 0 ABSTAIN: 0

---The board entered executive session at 7:16 p.m. and returned to open session at 8:29 p.m.

---Dr. Abernathy: Summarized the executive session: It concerned personnel matters; no votes or board actions were taken.

---Dr. Abernathy: Proposed a resolution in two parts, approving: 1.) A 2.25% increase to the Director's pay retroactive to January 1, 2021; and 2.) adoption of the resolution regarding the Director's retirement (attached).

---Ms. Evans: So moved.

---Mr. Silbert: Seconded.

---Adopted by roll call vote as follows: YEAS: 7 NAYS: 2 RECUSED: 0 ABSTAIN: 0

Trustee	Yes	No	Recused	Abstain
Ms. Blaney	X			
Ms. Evans	X			
Mr. Freeman		X		
Ms. Mirchandani		X		
Ms. Murcko	X			
Mrs. Serrano	X			
Mr. Silbert	X			
Mr. Thoens	X			
Dr. Abernathy	X			

---Ms. Mirchandani: Left the meeting at 8:36 p.m.

8. President's Report

---Dr. Abernathy: Previous discussions have covered the content of his report, so in the interest of time there was no formal report.

9. Friends of the Library (FOTL)

---Dr. Abernathy: There is no report from the Friends this month.

10. Library Foundation Report

---Mrs. Serrano: Reported for the Library Foundation: The foundation has signed up to participate in this year's "Hudson Gives," which takes place on May 13th.

11. Old Business

---Dr. Abernathy: Called for any old business; there was none.

12. New Business

---Dr. Abernathy: Called for any new business; there was none.

13. Consent Agenda

---Dr. Abernathy: Moved the board approve the meeting consent agenda as follows:

- a. Accept the minutes of the January 26, 2021 and February 23, 2021 board meetings.
- b. Approve payment of Part A bills for non-media operating expenses.

---Ms. Blaney: Seconded.

---Adopted by roll call vote as follows: YEAS: 8 NAYS: 0 RECUSED: 0 ABSTAIN: 0

Trustee	Yes	No	Recused	Abstain
Ms. Blaney	X			
Ms. Evans	X			
Mr. Freeman	X			
Ms. Murcko	X			
Mrs. Serrano	X			
Mr. Silbert	X			
Mr. Thoens	X			
Dr. Abernathy	X			

15. Trustee Comments

---Mrs. Podles: Thanked the trustees and especially the Personnel and Policy Committee for working with her to finalize the arrangements for her retirement; she was grateful and hoped that the board will not have to go through the process again for another twenty years. She thanked the board for its support during her tenure, over 20 years of her life, and looked forward to supporting the board and the library in the future.

---Ms. Blaney: Moved to adjourn.

---Mrs. Serrano: Seconded.

---Adopted by voice vote as follows: YEAS: 8 NAYS: 0 RECUSED: 0 ABSTAIN: 0

The board of trustees adjourned at 8:42 p.m.