

HOBOKEN FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

MEETING OF APRIL 28, 2026

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE HOBOKEN FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY, HELD AT 500 PARK AVENUE IN HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY ON TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2026 AT 6:30 PM.

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

1. Call to Order

Board President Jason Freeman called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and certified that pursuant to the Open Public Meeting Act, notice of the meeting had been given in the annual meeting notice, which was adopted at the July 22, 2025 meeting of the Library Board and such notice was provided in the Star Ledger and Bergen Record, was posted to the Library website, and filed with the Hoboken City Clerk.

2. Roll Call

| Attendance | Present | Absent | Notes |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Mr. Jason Freeman, President | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Ms. Susan Murcko, Secretary | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Mr. Kurt Thoens, Treasurer* | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Mr. Damian De Benedetto | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Ms. Amanda R. Blaney | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Ms. Kathleen Heaney, Mayor’s Representative | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Ms. Jordan Hernandez | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Ms. Raakhee Mirchandani | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Excused |
| Ms. Leslie Norwood, School Superintendent Designee * | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Also in attendance were: Library Director Jennie Pu, Recording Secretary Karla Aybar Reyes, Library Council Douglas S. Zucker, Esq., and members of the Library staff.

*Present via remote connection

3. Acceptance of Minutes

—Mr. Freeman: Asked if the Trustees had any corrections or comments regarding the minutes of the Board meeting of March 24, 2026. There being none, the minutes were added to the consent agenda.

4. Public Comments

—Mr. Freeman: Invited comments from the public. There were none.

—Mr. Freeman: Welcomed and introduced Kathleen Heaney as the Mayor's Alternate on the Hoboken Public Library Board of Trustees.

5. Director's Report

—Ms. Pu: Highlighted items of note: The prequalified bidders for the first floor and mezzanine renovation did a walk-through of the library with architects from Clarke Caton Hintz. The timeline for the project has been extended. Ms. Pu participated in interviews in conjunction with National Library Week and about eBook pricing. She stressed how eBook pricing is affecting libraries on a regional, state, and national level. The Library held a sold-out comedy show fundraiser and a successful "Rank the Cheese" event where participants learned about ranked choice voting. The Library held a staff appreciation lunch in honor of National Library Week, which was celebrated by holding special programs and story times with guest readers. Ms. Pu was a guest speaker at Ridgewood Public Library for a screening of *The Librarians*. She encouraged the group to watch the film and spoke about her experience testifying at the State House for the assembly hearing. Interim Assistant Director James Cox attended the Public Library Association's biennial meeting. A new part-time social worker has begun working at the Library. The Library has added two new eResources- LOTE4Kids and Newsreel. LOTE4Kids is the leading digital library of children's audio-picture books created to support English and bilingual language learning. Newsreel delivers journalist-written stories every day in a swipeable, ad-free stack. The Library has begun a new series of Tech Time smartphone classes for seniors. There is now an intermediate class facilitated by staff and a beginner class facilitated by Konnekt Global, a local teen-led nonprofit. Hoboken Middle School Special Needs students visited the MakerSpace; students toured the space and worked on projects using the Maker equipment. Ms. Pu thanked the IT/MakerSpace team for holding a successful NJ Makers Day. Outreach season was kicked off by taking the BookBike to the Mile Square Mommies' 3rd Anniversary celebration and a Main Street Pops Earth Day celebration. The Library held its bi-monthly blood drive in partnership with the New York Blood Center.

—Ms. Murcko: Asked for insights on the Director's Statistical Report. She noted that adult programs have gone down by 33% compared to last year but that attendance increased by 18%.

—Mr. Cox: Explained that we have been focusing on quality over quantity and Ms. Pu added that we have also been onboarding our new Events Coordinator during that time.

—Ms. Murcko: Asked about the decrease in tech lending throughout the year.

—Mr. Mendez: Stated that we have upgraded our computers, so patrons have been using them for longer amounts of time on premises during the day and borrowing fewer items.

—Ms. Norwood: Asked whether the City’s social workers are still coming to the Library.

—Ms. Pu: Confirmed that they are.

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

—Ms. Norwood: Reported on behalf of the Buildings and Grounds Committee. Ms. Pu forwarded the latest update from Clarke Caton Hintz (CCH) to the committee. CCH received feedback from one of the prequalified bidders asking if we can move the construction timeline, as they are unable to meet it due to a conflicting project. Because there are only three bidders, CCH agreed to revise the construction plan. They have extended the bid due date to May 4 and plan to begin construction in September.

—Mr. Thoens: Reported for the Finance Committee: Mr. Thoens described the financial matters before the Board for approval: 1) in Part A, to pay 2026 library operating expenses with checks no.13341-13418 totaling \$141,816.61; to pay via PayPal and ACH: \$23.19 to Courtney Codaro, \$26.54 to Eventbrite, \$120.00 to Play! Hoboken, \$24.33 to Printful Inc., \$2,600 to Quipu Group LLC, and \$99 to WordPress.com; 2) in Part B, to pay 2026 library operating expenses with checks no.13411-1317 totaling \$29,159.42. Mr. Thoens asked if there were any questions concerning the bills to be paid. There being no questions, approval of the Part A bills was added to the consent agenda.

—Ms. Murcko: Moved the Board to approve payment of the Part B bills for library materials.

—Ms. Blaney: Seconded.

—Adopted by roll call vote as follows: YEAS: 6 NAYS:0 RECUSED: 1 ABSTAIN: 1

| Trustee | Yes | No | Recused | Abstain |
|------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Ms. Blaney | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Mr. DeBenedetto | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr. Freeman | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Hernandez | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Heaney | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Murcko | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Norwood | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr. Thoens | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

—Mr. Kurt: Added that also before the Board is a Resolution Authorizing the Award of a Non-fair and Open Contract for Public Relations Services. He asked if there were any questions regarding the resolution.

—Ms. Murcko: Expressed her concerns about the contract with Rosica. She acknowledged the value of the contract, noting their highlighting of the library’s leadership in advancing the Freedom to Read Act and the importance of continuing to lead on issues like eBooks. However, she felt the contract’s scope closely mirrors the previous one- focused mainly on regional media and TV coverage- rather than addressing the more urgent need of making residents aware of the library’s free services through targeted local outreach like social media and community flyers. Given the nearly \$70,000 annual cost and the city’s projected \$13 million deficit, she questioned whether this level of spending on broad PR is the best use of funds or would be well received by the community.

—Mr. Freeman: Answered that Rosica’s role would be to strengthen the library’s regional brand and visibility while also helping develop a more localized, organic strategy to better connect residents with library services. Unlike the previous contract, they would support both planning and execution, including content development, to help elevate the library’s work and outreach. The Friends & Foundation have been approached about helping offset costs but they want to see the plan in action first. Mr. Freeman added that funding may also come from money originally set aside for the now-canceled Mile Square Theater initiative.

—Ms. Hernandez: Asked about the length of the contract and about how much input we would have on the strategy.

—Ms. Pu: Stated that it would start on May 1st and run one year.

—Mr. Freeman: Stated that we would have complete control over the strategy. He added that Rosica has effectively been our marketing team over the last few years and that they understand our strategy and vision.

—Ms. Pu: Emphasized that the library prioritizes local outreach first, but with local media greatly diminished, Rosica has been essential in helping pitch stories and strengthen marketing efforts. With only a one-person marketing team still in its first full year, Rosica provides valuable support and continuity without the added cost of hiring another full-time staff member with benefits. She also noted that the library already uses direct community outreach methods such as flyers at the senior center, new mover postcards, and the Book Bike to connect with residents.

—Ms. Murcko: Suggested sending a letter to City Council members periodically outlining the Library's accomplishments and highlighting how we are maximizing taxpayer dollars.

—Ms. Pu: Responded that that is something we can do.

7. Personnel and Policy Committee

—Ms. Murcko: Reported on behalf of the Personnel and Policy Committee. Ms. Pu shared the first quarter turnover stats with the committee. On January 1st, there were 44 staff members. Two part-time library assistants have resigned- one for personal reasons and the other received a full-time teaching position. The current attrition rate is 4.56%, which is within the HR guidelines of 10% annual attrition.

8. President's Report

—Mr. Freeman: Stated that he sent an email to the Board regarding the end of the Library's potential partnership with Mile Square Theater and asked if the group had any questions about that.

—Ms. Murcko: Asked if he knows with whom Mile Square Theater has partnered.

—Ms. Pu: Replied that they were in the process of partnering with Art House Productions in Jersey City.

—Ms. Murcko: Asked what the plan is now for storing the items on the first floor and mezzanine during renovation.

—Ms. Pu: Explained that we are keeping the second floor fully open and that there will be temporary walls around the construction area so the front door, stairwell, and stairs leading to the lower level will be available. Lending operations will be moved to the second floor and to Grand Street, and some items will be placed in storage.

—Ms. Murcko: Noted that during third floor renovations, asbestos remediation required closing the building temporarily. She asked whether we are anticipating doing the same for the coming renovation.

—Ms. Pu: Replied that we underwent some environmental remediation on the first floor already and that more is planned during renovation. There will be continued environmental monitoring. If we find something unexpected, we may need to close temporarily.

—Mr. Freeman: Jason reported on the meeting he and Ms. Pu held last week with members of the Friends & Foundation Board, following the library's recent request for its annual allocation. While past requests have focused mainly on programming, this year emphasized a broader need for fundraising support, noting that the organization currently holds about \$400K in reserves, some of it in CDs earning interest. The library proposed using a portion of those funds to invest in capacity-building efforts, including hiring a part-time development director to serve as a liaison to the Friends & Foundation, bringing on a grant consultant, supporting marketing and branding work, and continuing programmatic funding. The organization was receptive to funding a part-time development director and also expressed interest in covering a grant consultant. A contract for a grant writer is expected to be presented at next month's Board of Trustees meeting. The Friends & Foundation agreed to continue supporting programmatic initiatives as well. However, for marketing and branding, they asked to review a more detailed plan before committing funds.

—Mr. Zucker: Asked if the Development Director would be a library employee funded by the Friends & Foundation.

—Mr. Freeman: Clarified that this person would report to Ms. Pu and the Board of Trustees.

9. Friends & Foundation

—Ms. Blaney: Reported on behalf of the Friends & Foundation. Ms. Blaney thanked Mr. Freeman and Ms. Pu for meeting with her and the Friends & Foundation co-presidents about library allocations. She thanked Ms. Aybar Reyes for her assistance organizing a successful comedy night fundraiser. She also reminded the group that Hudson Gives is on May 14 and that she will share the website link with the rest of the Board. Ms. Blaney reported that the Friends & Foundation will be tabling next to the Library at the Arts & Music Festival.

10. Old Business

—Called for any old business. There was none.

11. New Business

—Called for any new business. There was none.

12. Acceptance of Minutes

—Ms. Murcko: Moved the Board to approve the minutes of the March 24 Board meeting.

—Ms. DeBenedetto: Seconded.

—Adopted by roll call vote as follows: YEAS: 6 NAYS:0 RECUSED: 0 ABSTAIN: 2

| Trustee | Yes | No | Recused | Abstain |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Ms. Blaney | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr. DeBenedetto | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr. Freeman | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Hernandez | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Heaney | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Murcko | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Norwood | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr. Thoens | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

13. Consent Agenda

- a. Excuse the absence of Ms. Mirchandani
- b. Approve the minutes of the March 24, 2026 Board meeting
- c. Approve payment of part A bills
- d. Approve the Resolution Authorizing the Award of a Non-fair and Open Contract for Public Relations Services

—Mr. DeBenedetto: Moved the Board to approve the consent agenda.

—Ms. Murcko: Seconded.

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

| Attendance | yes | no | recuse | abstain |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Ms. Blaney | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr. DeBenedetto | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr. Freeman | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Hernandez | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Heaney | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Murcko | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms. Norwood | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr. Thoens | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. Trustee Comments

—Mr. Freeman: Invited any comments by the Trustees. There were none.

—Mr. Freeman: Moved to adjourn.

—Ms. Blaney: Seconded.

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:22pm