



Attendance: F. Olanipekun-Lewis; A. Appulingam; J. Chizick-Agüero; J. Cooper; T. Dichter; C. Figueroa; G. Generals; D. Gould; R. Heim; D. Moore; S. Simons; J. St. Geme; E. Tomlin

Guests: Mayor Kenney

Staff: L. Walker; J. Benford; D. Henderson; C. Kowalski; J. Pecora; J. Zimmer

I. Call to Order and Chair’s Remarks – F. Olanipekun-Lewis

F. Olanipekun-Lewis called the meeting to order at 8:07 a.m. and welcomed the Board. She welcomed and thanked Mayor Kenney for attending the meeting.

II. Mayor Kenney’s Remarks

Mayor Kenney congratulated the Board of Trustees for electing new leadership noting their election of F. Olanipekun-Lewis to Board Chair. He expressed confidence in her ability to work with the members of the Board towards an equitable future for the Library. He thanked the Trustees for their commitment to the Library.

The Library, he stated, during the pandemic was reorganized to the Office of Children and Families (OCF) which is overseen by Deputy Mayor C. Figueroa. The Mayor stated OCF created to ensure that policies, resources, and services for children, adults and families were coordinated across all City departments. OCF, he explained, oversees services for early childhood education, adult education, and out-of-school time programming among others. He noted the Library’s transition to OCF was especially important as the Library has a vital role in adult education, workforce development, afterschool programming, and technology access.

The Mayor stated the FY22 budget for the Library provides residents with 5-day service and restores LEAP, the longstanding afterschool program. Additionally, the budget, he shared provides funding for a Fiscal Director to be hired to manage the Library’s budget.

The ambitious Rebuild program, he stated, includes a number of Library locations which are planned to be renovated. He noted the program focuses on engaging with and listening to residents to ensure their input drives the renovation plans.

The Mayor concluded his remarks by thanking the Board for the opportunity to speak.

III. Library Facilities – J. Pecora

a. General Update

J. Pecora stated he would provide a brief overview of facilities and noted significant resource challenges continue with capital and operational budgets. He stated the Library consists of fifty-eight facilities covering one million square feet with many of the facilities being 100 years old or older.

With regard to capital projects, J. Pecora stated, fourteen are currently in progress with about \$1.1M worth of work being completed. He noted this leaves no capital funding left currently as the Library waits to obtain access to the FY22 funds, which is \$1M.

Additionally, he shared the designing element for the Frankford Library renovation is complete; the renovation of the 2nd floor of the Nicetown-Tioga Library is complete with assistance from Councilperson Bass; and the Children Department of Parkway Central Library is being improved.

R. Heim inquired as to why certain library locations were closed. J. Pecora shared the Fumo Family Library is undergoing a capital project with plans to be reopen in October 2021; Oak Lane Library was impacted by a roof leak, which is being repaired currently and will reopen in October 2021; Kensington Library is closed due to the collapse of a nearby building and while the remainder of the building is being demolished Kensington will remain closed.

L. Walker asked for J. Pecora to provide an update on the Queen Memorial Library. J. Pecora explained the tenet located above the library has sprinklers activated which flooded the children's area of the library. He noted the Library is working with the building management to complete the repair.

b. Request for Qualifications(RFP) for 1901 Wood Street

The RFP being sent out by the City, he clarified, is for a development project which includes the former Family Court building on 1801 Vine Street, but will also include Wood Street, the area behind Parkway Central Library. The RFP includes development plans for a children and family center along with an auditorium for the library. He noted the project is being run by the PIDC with him and L. Walker serving on the Selection Committee for the RFP. He noted the RFP was released on July 9 with full submissions due January 2022.

IV. Interim Director's Remarks – L. Walker

L. Walker began by expressing gratitude towards Mayor Kenney and Deputy Mayor Figueroa for their support.

She then noted F. Olanipekun-Lewis will be providing a budget update before she continues with her report.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis shared during the summer, the Library continued to determine what additional needs are needed for the Library. She noted while the Mayor provided a budget for five-day service, upon further review, additional funding is needed to achieve this. It is anticipated progress will be made on this.

Furthermore, she noted there is a funding gap from FY21 being carried into FY22 and it is likely for that to be resolved in the coming months.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis thanked Deputy Mayor Figueroa for all her support related to budget matters.

L. Walker stated as the Library continues to work through its budget challenges, hiring has begun. She shared the Library is in process of hiring the Fiscal Director. She stated when the new President & Director comes on board more exempt positions will be filled.

Currently, L. Walker shared, fifty locations are open with sixteen to expand to evening hours shortly. She noted as hiring progresses service will across the Library will stabilize and become consistent.

V. Action Item: Consent Agenda – F. Olanipekun-Lewis

F. Olanipekun-Lewis called for a motion to approve the consent agenda. The motion was made, seconded, and carried.

VI. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee – F. Olanipekun-Lewis

F. Olanipekun-Lewis stated last October, she and C. Arlene presented a strategic action plan for DEI work to the Board. She explained as the Library continues to move forward with its DEI work, three pillars are guiding this work with each having action items and key performance indicators. She noted the Library is now shifting towards implementation of the plan, and so, the Board will need to take action and approve the plan. She called for a motion to approve the plan; the motion was made, seconded, and carried.

S. Simons asked if internal promotions are possible as a way for filling vacant positions. L. Walker shared the Library currently has six Library Supervisor promotions in progress along with two Municipal Guard Supervisor promotions. She noted more are in process, but does not have the information at hand.

S. Simons thanked her for the information stating promotions will be a key metric for the Library's DEI work.

J. Chizick-Agüero asked for an update on the LEAP afterschool program. L. Walker stated hiring is currently paused as budget issues are being resolved, so it will begin soon. She noted children and youth continue to visit the Library afterschool.

J. Chizick-Agüero asked when it is anticipated LEAP will be fully operational. L. Walker responded while an exact date is not possible to provide within the next 45 days hopefully.

R. Heim asked what action is being taken to address the staffing issue at the Wyoming Library as the location has been closed. L. Walker shared she could not provide exact details at this time, but would follow-up. She stated she would keep the Board abreast of all hiring and staffing information as progress is made.

VII. Public Comment

Jason Oscar comments:

Thank you very much, and thank you for your time um it's my first time at one of these meetings so it was nice to be able to attend in here. And I wanted to comment on the aim to lift up Palestinian voices narratives. I want to express my concern really into the library capitulating to one of the most right wing nominally Jewish organizations in the country, the ZOA. It's an organization that many other Jewish organizations, want to Center for spotting racist Islamophobia and even anti-Semitic rhetoric for decades. ZOA has advocated against resettling Islamic refugees denounce the black lives matter movement and attempted to derail the careers of Jewish journalists who don't share their big interviews. Their complaints only stand to get in the way of educating our next generation about injustices in the world. Their complaints go against the library's own State desire to lift up all voices. As I say, I say all of this as a Jewish person, a Jewish person who wants to hear these types of ideas books videos and wishes, they were more commonplace. I will start with all of myself standing on the shoulders of my Holocaust surviving grandparents that the ideas presented in the remove content or not anti-Semitic. The Jewish or not, the facts are that constantly what was taken down by the library is exactly the kind of thing that can teach our children how to make a more just world. It's the kind of content lessons that every one of us needs to engage with I think the library should stand by all the Palestinian content curated and rereleased the remove content. Major human rights organizations such as the Human Rights Watch are recognizing the same claims that were stated in the produce content. To full to the worst, with actors in the city is to take a step backwards for attempt seeking to make the library and more anti-racist inclusive and forward looking institution in the city. Moving this content sets a precedent that makes these values more hollow and I'm for the library, to reconsider and reflect on this process for the future, I want the best for the library I love the library so speaking as a constructivism Thank you very much for your time.

Linda Colwell-Smith comments:

Thank you very much today first off, I want to congratulate the board on one of the quickest board meetings I've ever been to. And again I'm giving you my request to please move it a little later in the morning. But otherwise the friends of the free library remain committed to working with the board on the projects and on advancing especially advancing the project for Wood Street since our book corner, is part of that project, we would love, in fact, we are going to insist on being very much involved with the process so. You'll be hearing from us on that. We are concerned about it, even though we have been assured that we will be will have a new space. So whatever we can do to help whatever we can do please, we want to cooperate, we want to work on this with you we're also gearing up for our next advocacy session and coming with City Council so we're looking forward to working again with the board and with our friends in the library to advance the free libraries objectives and to get more funding, because even though we're getting a new building 1901 would lot of plans in the fire, there are still. 50 plus branches that need our attention as Jim pointed out earlier, and as I said, I want to thank Leslie I want to thank shut a I want to thank Cynthia I want to thank Bob I'm I want to thank the board for working so hard on our behalf, and rest assured, we share the same goal, we want a strong vital free library or Philadelphia and I'm glad to hear leap is coming back on because I heard, I was at the tar stale branch, the other day and. They were showing the children how to access the homework help online and a couple little felt a little guys and gals were saying artist is great, but you know where's our where's up rotini our leap leader, they prefer the in person. So thank you again and have a great day.

VIII. Chair Remarks – F. Olanipekun-Lewis

F. Olanipekun-Lewis made the following statement:

The Free Library stands against racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinian bias, and any form of bigotry. In doing so, we removed two story times that featured language that did not belong on our institutional platforms. We stand by that decision, the books featured in the story times are an important part of our collection. While we offer materials and offers of many cultural backgrounds, the library and its employees do not adopt any one cultural perspective on our platforms. Thank you.

Prior to adjourning, F. Olanipekun-Lewis shared her thanks to the Board for electing her as Chair and she also thanked P. Dembe for her service as past Chair. She also expressed her commitment to the Library.

With regard to the search for the President & Director, F. Olanipekun-Lewis stated she and R. Heim, Co-Chair of the Search Committee, are prepared to present the final three candidates along with their recommendation to the Board for selection. R. Heim stated a special meeting of the Board would be called for October 1, 2021 to vote. Discussion arose regarding if the meeting should be in-person or hybrid and if doing so would abide by the Sunshine Act. It was determined hybrid was acceptable per the City Law Department. F. Olanipekun-Lewis noted she would reach out to Board members to determine if in-person or hybrid is preferred.

With no further business to discuss, F. Olanipekun-Lewis called for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made, seconded, and carried.