



Free Library of Philadelphia | Board of Trustees Meeting
Friday, March 18, 2022 | 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Virtual

Attendance: F. Olanipekun-Lewis; A. Appulingam; J. Chizick-Agüero; J. Benoliel; P. Dembe; T. Dichter; D. Generals; D. Gould; R. Heim; D. Moore; K. Ott-Lovell; J. Shapiro; S. Simons; M. Stitt; E. Tomlin

Staff: K. Richards; D. Henderson; N. Hadi; C. Kowalski; J. Maguire-Wright; C. Patton; J. Pecora; G. Sims; C. Tomlin

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

F. Olanipekun-Lewis called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. and welcomed the Board of Trustees. She stated the public meeting is being recorded and will be posted online per City Ordinance noting participation in the meeting constitutes consent thereto and posting online complies with 65 Pa. C.S. §§709(c.1), 712.1.

Next, she stated that K. Richards began his tenure as President and Director on January 14, 2022. F. Olanipekun-Lewis formally welcomed K. Richards to his first Board of Trustees meeting.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis also noted that there will be an upcoming advocacy visit to Harrisburg with other public library systems. Meetings with members of the State Senate and House of Representatives to advocate for more funding are scheduled.

II. President and Director Remarks – K. Richards

K. Richards stated that his focus is on improving morale and enhancing the mission. K. Richards also discussed building and strengthening the Library’s relationship with elected officials, which will align with funding advocacy efforts.

K. Richards noted that he has worked in his new role for eight weeks. Staffing challenges, building issues, communication transparency and DEI concerns are common themes when K. Richards converses with staff.

Revamping the current organizational structure is important to K. Richards goal of improving operations, improving staff morale and providing better service to the public. The Library’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion will now oversee the Human Resources Department. Recruitment and hiring for a Chief Operation Officer (COO) and a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) will begin soon. The Chief Administrative Officer will focus on building relationships with elected officials and those involved with government affairs. The Chief Operating Officer will oversee planning and organizing of the Library’s administrative functions. Both positions will provide support to K. Richards and assist with moving the Library forward.

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

- a. **Minutes of the December 17, 2021 Board Meeting**
- b. **Minutes of the November 22, 2021 Special Collections Committee Meeting**
- c. **Investment Reports**
- d. **President and Director's Report**

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

IV. Budget Briefing – K. Richards

Info Item: Operating Budget as February 28, 2022

K. Richards mentioned that the Free Library requested an increase in funding for FY23 to increase staffing levels. This will assist with achieving stable, five day service at every library.

D. Henderson noted that the number of personnel is low and that forty-nine people have recently left the workforce.

K. Richards stated that the city is supporting the Library. F. Olanipekun-Lewis stated that the budget hearing date is forthcoming and the date will be shared when it is available. G. Generals shared that City Council is advocating for a budget increase. K. Richards shared that he will have one-on-one meetings with City Council members soon.

V. Facilities Report – J. Pecora

Info Item: At Risk Assessment of Libraries

J. Pecora provided an updated At Risk Assessment of Libraries, which notes capital projects that are completed or in-progress.

VI. Hiring Status – D. Henderson

Info Item: Staffing Report

D. Henderson noted that the HR team is moving forward with hiring as approvals as they are received. These approvals will support stable five day service.

D. Henderson stated that City departments were notified by the City's Office of Human Resources that the Hiring Committee would no longer be meeting to approve position requests. The Free Library hopes to fill any outstanding requests as we continue to go through the standard approval process.

Thirty-one new staff were hired in Q3 of FY22, including Director Richards, 3 Librarians, 21 Clerical Assistants and 6 After School Leaders (ASLs).

HR is working on filling the following by the April 2022 (Q4): 12 Librarians, 13, Library Assistants, 18 Clerical Assistants, 10 Municipal Guards and 2 Library Facility Guards.

VII. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) – G. Sims

Info Item: Quarterly Report

G. Sims informed attendees that the Community Conversations program was launched in January 2022. With two sessions per month for the entire year, staff with differing schedules will have an opportunity to participate. Feedback for the January (Intentional Inclusion), February (Diversity vs. Inclusion: Where is Time Better Spent?) and March (Dismantled Racism) sessions has been positive. Attendance averages 12-15 participants.

G. Sims continues to visit libraries and has met staff at most of the Northeast, Northwest and North Central Clusters. Visits to the North Cluster began in February and will be completed in May 2022.

As a participant in the City’s Budget Equity meetings, G. Sims provides advice and insight about big budget decisions using a racial equity framing. These meetings are a collaboration between the Mayor’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and the City’s Budget Office and the recommendations will be under consideration for the FY23 budget proposal.

G. Sims continues working with the City’s City-wide Racial Equity Strategy for FY22, including attending the Foundational Learning Series. These workshops provided an opportunity to closely examine the root causes of racism and inequities in the City’s systems.

Policy reviewing is underway, in collaboration with J. Maguire-Wright. PS-91 (Safety of Youth in the Library) is currently under review.

VIII. Emergency Connectivity Fund Presentation – C. Tomlin

C. Tomlin shared positive feedback about the Emergency Connectivity Fund Program, which shows the benefit to library users. Created by the FCC to close the homework gap caused by remote learning during the pandemic, the Emergency Connectivity Fund allocated \$7 million to help schools and libraries.

The Free Library requested 5,650 hotspots and 5,650 tablets, totaling 11,300 devices. C. Tomlin noted that this program will greatly benefit patrons who cannot get to our libraries regularly to utilize the public PCs/Wi-Fi, job seekers, individuals needing telehealth appointments and others. Originally slated to end June 30, the FCC extended the service time and all devices will have data until November 30, 2022.

C. Tomlin described the eligibility requirements, which include patrons being 18+, a Philadelphia resident and self-certifying that they do not have access to a computer or internet at home. Those receiving internet through the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) will only qualify for a tablet.

With equity in mind, C. Tomlin stated that all libraries received hotspots and tablets, but those in higher areas of need received increased quantities. Staff were encouraged to reach out to their community partners and patrons to ensure local access. Libraries maintained an interest form prior to receiving the devices to get them quickly into the hands of the patrons. Patrons with fines were allowed to check out hotspots or tablets.

Within six weeks, 74% of the inventory was checked out. C. Tomlin stated that the next step is to focus on digital literacy, since the extension of the program will allow time to work on this endeavor. C. Tomlin also thanked the IT staff and others who helped get ECF up and running.

IX. Public Comment - J. Chizick-Agüero

J. Chizick-Agüero stated each speaker will have three minutes to speak on agenda topics and once time is up they will be informed and the next speaker will be called.

Jenna Scott stated the following:

My name is Jenna Scott. I live and work in Old City and I wanted to let you know that as someone who works a traditional office job from 9-6, the only time I've been able to visit the libraries since I moved here in June has been when I took time off work for another reason and I stopped by the library. And it's been really sad especially during the winter on Saturdays when I just wanted to spend, you know, a couple hours on a Saturday in the library reading. To not have, to not be able to do that because the libraries just weren't open. So if there's any way to shift a couple hours, even it was Wednesdays. The Parkway Central Library is open until 7o'clock. That would make a huge difference in my ability to visit and use the library. That's all I wanted to say. Thank you for your time.

Linda Colwell-Smith stated the following:

Good morning. First I'd like to mention that...first I'll introduce myself. I'm co-chair of the Friends of the Free Library of Philadelphia and we recently had a chance to meet our new Director, Kelly Richards, and I must say we had a very frank and cordial conversation and we look forward to working with him. We seem to be headed in the right direction. And I also wanted to ask. I noticed that the Board is doing Zoom meetings more often. And City Council is as well. We would like you to consider that the Board continue offering a Zoom component to the general public even when the meetings go back to in-person in the issue of providing more transparency. And more individuals are interested in watching what the board does. So if you could consider that, that would be appreciated. And I wanted to report that we've been out meeting with the folks in the various branches. We hear from our other Friends groups. And the need for service is actually growing, as I'm sure you've heard and I know Director Richards has heard from his conversations with staff. I myself was in two recent events. One yesterday was one sponsored by the Sixth Councilmanic District for all the seniors in the district, which is four neighborhoods in Northeast Philadelphia, and the number one question I heard (I was there with several Friends of the Torresdale Library) was when is the library open and when will we be open on Saturdays. So I'm very glad to hear that we're focusing on increasing service. And another issue I would like to bring up and I hate to add to the workload. I notice (I work with several civic organizations) in some neighborhoods, for instance in the Holme Circle Civic which is... I'm vice president, this summer we have four recreation centers. Three of them will not be open for various reasons. So that means the library is going to get a lot of parents with children and a lot of children looking for activities...a lot of teens. We really need to be prepared because I hate to sound like a TV show but summer is coming. And we're going to get swamped. I'm glad to see we're working on this. I'm glad to see we're adding staff. I know the Friends are working. We're pushing an agenda to work closely, more closely, offer more programming in the summer. And I know we will be

giving more attention to this and I know the Board is on board with this as well. Again thank you. This has been a great meeting so far and we look forward to working together in the future.

Rachel Robinson stated the following:

Good morning. So I've been given permission to share the story of a library assistant at a particular library. This library assistant is the most experienced library assistant at their library and, even for a time during the pandemic, they were the only library assistant at their library. And the reason I want to share this is I think it goes into the hiring issues that are present at the library and how historic and deep seeded they are. This particular library assistant started their career at the library in October 2008. They were hired as a seasonal employee and that season went on to last eight years. Eight years they were working thirty hours a week continuously. During that time, they were not getting paid time off. They were not getting sick time off. They were not getting health insurance. They were not hired as a... until, as a Civil Service employee, until March 2016. Eight years later. And even at that time they were not hired as a full time employee. They were hired part-time and it wasn't until a year after that, March 2017, that they were hired full time. Nine years. They were being exploited by this library system. And you as the Board of Governors are responsible for that. You... We want the library to be a place where job seekers can come. But how can we expect to help people find family sustaining jobs in Philadelphia if the library itself is exploiting its workers? And this is not uncommon across the system. It's uncommon that this person was a seasonal for eight years. It's uncommon that they were a continuous seasonal for eight years. I'm not sure where that glitch happened. But it is common for people to be hired and then let go and then hired and let go and then hired and let go for years and years and years as seasonal workers. It's happened to a number of my colleagues at the library. Also, I want to say that during her time as a seasonal worker in the course of duty at the library, she got bedbugs because that sometimes happens at the library. Sometimes materials are returned and they have bedbugs on them. And she was not compensated for, you know, for the price of eradicating bedbugs in her own home. That is a...that's pretty like...that's similar to an onsite injury and the Library did nothing. And you guys at the Board of Governors need to know that these types of stories happen all the time in the Library. And maybe that's part of the reason that we have hiring problems. So I want you guys to know that and I want you guys to reflect on that and to try to fix those problems if you want to have libraries that function at a high performing level. So I thank you for your time and I hope you have a good rest of your day.

David Heayn-Menendez stated the following:

Good morning. My name is David Heayn-Menendez and I'm the Director of Education and Civic Engagement at Al-Bustan Seeds of Culture. I was born and raised in Philadelphia and spent many of my formative years, actually, in the library system. I have joined you today upon the recommendation of my board, our community and Director Richards, after having met with the director and his predecessor, concerning the matter which I wish to bring to your attention today.

We at al-Bustan, along with other organizations, continue to seek a generative outcome following actions taking by the Free Library of Philadelphia's administration in 2021, when two videos were removed from the Free Library of Philadelphia's public forum, videos prepared by Free Library of Philadelphia librarians relating to Arab American books in the Free Library of Philadelphia's collection.

The actions were explained in a public statement issued by the Free Library that we at Al-Bustan, and many others in the larger community found, to say the least, troubling, for its suggestions and for its relegation. How is it that the Free Library's partner, Al-Bustan Seeds of Culture, one of but several Arab cultural organizations in the entirety of the United States, in the service of the Philadelphia community for nearly 20 years, was not consulted in an action of a public institution relating to the expression of members of its own community? Such disregard was perceived as offensive, not least since the Arab community's mention in Free Library of Philadelphia's explanatory statement is as seemingly a mere afterthought. Questions remain regarding the policies enacted to remove said videos and the degree to which the video take-down was influenced by pressure exerted upon Free Library of Philadelphia by the Zionist Organization of America, which is identified by name in the Free Library of Philadelphia's statement. I wish to alert the trustees of the Free Library of Philadelphia that we have sought out a collaboration and partnership with Al-Bustan several times over the years, including a letter of support that we provided for a grant application for the Library to the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art in 2019 as part of its Building Bridges program, for which the Free Library of Philadelphia was awarded over \$100,000 in funding, an effort manifest recently in virtual Arabic courses that the Free Library of Philadelphia is currently running now twice a week and has been for several months. We have an ongoing relationship with the Library. We exist to serve this community. We possess a lot of expertise and we were hoping to have that relationship be expressed in this incident and would like to continue to have that conversation as per the direction of Director Richards with the Board of Trustees to try to figure out how to best navigate this, for solving this in the community and solving this between our organizations. Thank you for your time.

X. New Business – F. Olanipekun-Lewis

There was no new business. The meeting adjourned at 9:44 a.m.