



**Free Library of Philadelphia | Board of Trustees Meeting  
Friday, December 8, 2023 | 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. | Virtual**

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**Attendance:** F. Olanipekun-Lewis (Chair); J. Chizick-Agüero; A. Appulingam; J. Benoliel; J. Cooper; D. Generals; D. Gould; D. Moore; J. St. Geme; M. Stitt; E. Tomlin; L. Walke

**Staff:** K. Richards; D. Cottman; T. Dupass; D. Henderson; S. Maccari; C. Patton; J. Pecora; G. Sims; P. Suero; T. Smiley

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

F. Olanipekun-Lewis called the meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. and welcomed the Board of Trustees and meeting attendees.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis thanked Mayor Kenney for his support during his tenure. The Trustees look forward to working with Mayor Elect Parker.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis announced that elections for the Executive Committee will take place at the March board meeting and thanked the current Executive Committee/Board for serving.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis thanked J. Pecora for his service to the Free Library and wished all a safe and happy 2024.

**II. President and Director Remarks – K. Richards**

**Info Item: President and Director Report**

K. Richards acknowledged his appreciation for the support received from Mayor Kenney and City Council during his time as Director.

K. Richards announced that fourteen additional Neighborhood Libraries will begin Saturday service on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Gratitude was extended toward FLP staff who provided training to new hires in order to staff up and prepare for six day service.

Rebuild groundbreakings were held at Lawncrest and Blanche A. Nixon/Cobbs Creek. K. Richards. K. Richards looks forward to reopening these renovated libraries to their communities next year.

Eastwick, Haddington and Wyoming Libraries welcomed K. Richards for visits.

K. Richards shared that the Safety and Security Director position is currently in the resume review process. The individual selected for this role will provide direction, leadership and daily oversight of safety and security measures of the Free Library of Philadelphia’s 59 facilities. In addition, the Deputy Director of Communications and Engagement is currently filling vacancies on his team, including two key positions in public relations.

K. Richards stated that budget increases for FY23 and FY24 led to:

- An 86% decrease in total closed hours per week
- An 83% decrease in closures by day
- A 26% increase in staffing
- A 22% increase in total hours of service

K. Richards stated that J. Pecora worked tirelessly during difficult fiscal times to keep Neighborhood Libraries open to their communities and thanked J. Pecora for his service.

### **III. Action Item: Consent Agenda – S. Simons**

Info Item: Minutes from the September 22, 2023 Meeting

Info Item: Information Regarding the Resolution for State Aid

Info Item: Resolution for State Aid

F. Olanipekun-Lewis asked C. Patton to explain the Resolution for State Aid. C. Patton replied that one of the requirements for state aid requires our board to pass a resolution committing the library to participate in the District Library Center Cooperative Program.

Per the Pennsylvania statutes, no state aid shall be given to a local library until the library participates in the district library center cooperative program through either of the following procedures:

- (1) The local library board shall commit the library to participate in the district library center cooperative program, including attendance at district meetings and the use of interlibrary loans and interlibrary references.

C. Patton added that the Free Library already participates in the District Library Center Cooperative Program and provides interlibrary loans and interlibrary references. The Free Library's Director of Performance Management and Technology also attends the district meetings referenced above.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis asked if the Board had questions and none were brought forth.

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

### **IV. Budget Briefing – S. Maccari**

**Info Item: FY24 Operating Budget**

S. Maccari stated that the FY25 budget process is underway and his team is meeting with each division to discuss. S. Maccari added that his team is meeting with each division to track expenditures for FY24. In addition, three new staff members onboarded in the Finance Department.

E. Tomlin inquired about additional funds in FY24 for programs. S. Maccari replied that divisions can discuss these funding needs for FY25.

**V. Facilities Report – T. Dupass and J. Pecora**

**Info Item: Info Item: Status Report**

J. Pecora thanked the Trustees for their support during his tenure.

T. Dupass noted that the 1801/1901 Vine Street project is entering into the concept phase of programming. This process will determine space needs and cascading moves created by departments moving into the new space. After this process is completed, the design phase will begin.

T. Dupass shared that Rebuild renovations at Kingsessing are 63% completed and will include site improvements that meet ADA standards. Lawncrest's Rebuild work is progressing and McPherson is undergoing a stabilization of the structural elements prior to the start of its Rebuild work.

E. Tomlin asked about space on the basement level of Greater Olney being utilized and noted this library does not have an elevator. Greater Olney serves as a polling place and people want to come to community meetings there. T. Dupass stated that he is looking into these concerns.

J. Pecora added that Wyoming will receive a new HVAC system, modernization of its elevator and LED lighting.

D. Generals commended J. Pecora for his service.

J. Chizick-Agüero acknowledged appreciation for the update on McPherson Square and asked if there is a process for community organizations to give input on the outdoor space and its programs. K. Richards shared that the community is involved every step of the way.

**VI. Hiring Status – D. Henderson**

**Info Item: Staffing Report**

D. Henderson shared that there 130 new hires and 56 promotions occurred through the second quarter of FY24.

D. Henderson stated that 56 Library Assistants will be onboarded in support of the 14 Neighborhood Libraries beginning Saturday service on January 6<sup>th</sup>. D. Cottman added that the leadership team is grateful to front-line staff for interviewing and training new hires. K. Richards remarked that the hiring events held for the Library Assistant position are amazing to see. F. Olanipekun-Lewis asked for the next date, as board members may want to support.

L. Walke asked about the process for seasonal workers. D. Henderson stated that the Library no longer uses the seasonal position for Library Assistants and the position now uses part-time status.

D. Henderson is looking into having a part-time Municipal Guard position for the seasonal Library Facility Guards to promote into and changing the After-school Leader position from seasonal to permanent. Hiring for both positions is ongoing.

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

**Info Item: Quarterly Report**

G. Sims shared that he is working to bring an Employee Resource Group (ERG) to the Library. The group will focus on staff with disabilities.

G. Sims added that the Library ranked first among City departments for completion of sensory inclusivity training.

Other highlights from G. Sims included participating in a racial equity panel and providing DEI workshops to the Free Library Foundation staff.

**VIII. Action Item: Policies for Recommendation**

**Info Item: P #14 Personal Appearance**

**Info Item: P #9 Religious Holidays**

**Info Item: PS49 Meeting Space Regulations**

Three updated policies were presented to the Trustees for consideration.

G. Sims worked with staff committees and gathered feedback on P#14 Personal Appearance and P#9 Religious Holidays. G. Sims recommended moving to approve #14 Personal Appearance. G. Sims received two comments from DC47 about P#9 Religious Holidays, which asked to remove language stipulating two weeks notice for approval and to receive a list of common religious holidays. The first request will be addressed by administration and G. Sims will provide the list of common religious holidays.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis asked if the Board had questions and none were brought forth.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis called for a motion to approve these policies. The motion was made, seconded and approved unanimously.

**IX. Public Comment - J. Chizick-Agüero**

J. Chizick-Agüero stated each speaker will have three minutes to speak on agenda topics.

J. Chizick-Agüero asked C. Patton to call the first speaker. C. Patton asked Lou Walinsky and Maurice Louis Offen to raise their hand twice before proceeding to the next speaker.

C. Patton asked Joanna Markind to please raise their hand. J. Markind stated:

*“Last week's Watermelons and Kefiyyehs, plus protest Art of Palestine and Palestine Solidarity Day Painting project, held on the anniversary of the U.N.'s 1947 partition vote was a continuation of efforts to indoctrinate children and parents against Israel through books, videos, and so forth, showing a biased pro-Palestinian agenda for which the Free Library received negative publicity and criticism over 2 years ago. It's not a new phenomenon. On top of that, the Free Library last year did a 6-month program called in the Path of Islam that went well beyond teaching about Islam to promoting it, including, but not limited to, a program that was a pure religious homily. This sort of advocacy violates anti-discrimination law. The establishment clause, good sense, and the mission of the Free Library. We can see the results in the riot that took place this week outside a local restaurant owned by a Jewish Israeli. The Free Library should immediately stop promoting this agenda. When lawsuits began charging the library with violating anti-discrimination law and the First and Fourteenth Amendments, you've been warned.”*

C. Patton asked Steve Feldman to please raise their hand. Steve Feldman stated:

*“Hi, good morning. Thank you for having me speak. I am deeply concerned as a Philadelphia resident and taxpayer about the well-being and safety of Jewish users of the library. The Jewish community is one of the smallest minorities in the city, and the programming that is clearly anti-Jewish, anti-Israel, anti-Zionist that has been going on not only on November 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> of this year, but it's been documented. It's been going on for multiple years, directed at children and their caregivers to indoctrinate those children to and to hate the Jewish people, and possibly to commit violence against the Jewish people, because, after all, what is resistance? Over and over again we see the word resistance. There is not that kind of programming presented by the library and librarians to discuss Israeli culture, Jewish culture, not nearly as many, or if ever as there is with so called Palestinian culture that clearly there is a bias. And that bias needs to end. And the library trustees and directors are responsible for that bias on the part of the librarians. You're all accountable, and will be held accountable by your, for your actions.”*

C. Patton asked Marcia Arch to raise their hand. Marcia Arch stated:

*“There have been 3 events just recently, in the last month that are pro-Palestinian. 2 of them aimed at children. One was a film for adults. What are you doing? And when will you do it? Having pro-Israel events at the library. When will that occur? Because there must be some balance?”*

J. Chizick-Agüero thanked the commenters for speaking. F. Olanipekun-Lewis asked C. Patton to repeat the names of the two speakers scheduled to comment. C. Patton asked Lou Walinsky to please their hand. Lou Walinsky stated:

*“I grew up in Philadelphia. I've spent most of my life here. I've always seen the public libraries as an unfettered good, a place to learn about all manner of things, a place where we can expand our knowledge and awareness. This is true as well for my wife, my children, and my grandchildren, all of whom live in Philadelphia. We all see great value in our public library. But recently I've become aware of some very disturbing things going on in our libraries with respect to Israel and the Palestinians. Mark Lamont Hill, a decidedly partisan activist has spoken here. He accuses Israel of committing apartheid, engaging in ethnic cleansing, of being occupier and a colonizer. He was not here as part of a debate. There were no opposing points of view, presented no counterbalance to what he was saying.*

*There are children's books that erase the existence of Israel on the map, only to be replaced by Palestine. There are librarians, I understand, from different branches, presenting a biased anti-Israel view to children in story hours. There's been a widespread effort in the library system to promote a positive narrative about Palestinians, often to the detriment of Israel into Jews. I find this dangerous, especially in light of what's currently taking place throughout our country, with huge numbers of people marching and chanting free Palestine from the river to the sea without understanding the fact that Palestinians have refused offers of statehood a number of times, and instead have opted for terrorism with the goal of destroying Israel and killing Jews. Without understanding that, there is no entity without understanding that there is no Palestinian entity that is willing to accept the state of Israel and live in peace with it. I don't see any attempt to bring in speakers who would present an alternate viewpoint. I'm not aware of any blog posts that talk about the October 7th pogrom in Israel, carried out by Hamas, yet alone the multiyear terrorist attacks by as well as by the Palestinian authority. I don't see a curated list of books about Israel, and about Jewish heritage as there is for Palestinians. I don't see an attempt to promote an understanding of Israel's situation to have any kind of debate or civil dialogue between supporters of Israel and the Palestinians. For years my wife and I were happy to donate to the Free Library Foundation to support the work of the library. We have put that on pause in light of the situation I'm describing. We would love to resume donating to the foundation, but need to see that the library will return to its function of education rather than indoctrination. I'm hoping that my remarks today will help spur the action required to make that take place. Thank you very much."*

J. Chizick-Agüero thanked the commenters for speaking. C. Patton asked Maurice Louis Offen to raise their hand, but received no response.

**X. New Business – F. Olanipekun-Lewis**

No new business was brought forth to the Trustees.

**XI. Adjournment**

F. Olanipekun-Lewis asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting and enter executive session at 9:08 a.m. The motion was made, seconded and approved.