



**Free Library of Philadelphia | Board of Trustees Meeting
December 9, 2020 | 8:00 AM – 9:30 AM | Virtual**

Attendance: P. Dembe, Chair; C. Arlene; D. Allie; J. Chizick-Agüero; J. Cooper; M. DiBerardinis; T. Dichter; G. Generals; R. Heim; M. Rashed; S. Simons; B. Sutherland; E. Tomlin

Staff: L. Walker; J. Benford; D. Edwards; C. Kowalski; A. Nurkin; J. Pecora

Guests: James Engler (Office of Mayor); Cynthia Figueroa (Office of Children and Families)

I. Call to Order/Chair's Remarks – P. Dembe

P. Dembe called the meeting to order at 8:05 AM and welcomed the Board of Trustees. She began with sharing D. Edwards was appointed to a comparable position of L. Walker as Interim Director to that of the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation. She noted the Foundation has received impressive grant funding and donations recently and the Author Events series has restarted.

Additionally, P. Dembe stated the Board has been provided with DiverseForce report and noted DiverseForce also assisted the Library with hiring the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Officer whom is scheduled to begin work next week. She also shared the firm has facilitated training with Executive staff and the training sessions for both the Board of Trustees and the Foundation's Board of Directors will be completed next week.

P. Dembe stated the search for the permanent Director has begun.

Lastly, she shared the Foundation's scholarship fund is progressing with more information to come. She also noted five scholarships to Drexel University's program for Library and Information Science will be offered to staff once criteria and the process for applying is established.

II. Consent Agenda – P. Dembe

P. Dembe called for the approval of the consent agenda. The motion was made, seconded, and carried.

III. Director's Report – L. Walker

L. Walker stated her weekly Friday Communication continues to keep staff up-to-date on Library operations and relative information.

She noted the Library ceased curbside services on November 23, 2020 due to Covid-19, but has since restarted those services and is offering them at forty-two locations. She explained several locations are not offering services due to building issues.

Additionally, L. Walker shared the Library is hosting Access Centers at several locations in collaboration with the School District of Philadelphia and the Office of Children and Families and they are operating well.

With regard to Covid-19, L. Walker stated the Library has reported six positive cases. She explained when a positive case is reported communication to staff does not occur immediately to ensure information is accurate and confidentiality is preserved. She stated staff at the location is contacted, then the Health Department followed by the Library's Safety Committee. Once these parties are informed, a communication, she explained, is provided to all staff.

L. Walker shared Dr. Guy Sims, the newly hired DEI Officer is scheduled to start on December 14, 2020 and the onboarding plan is comprehensive.

IV. Office of the Mayor – J. Engler

P. Dembe introduced J. Engler, Chief of Staff with the Office of the Mayor.

J. Engler stated he would be providing a brief update on organizational structure within City Administration related to the oversight of the Library.

With regard to the Office of Children and Families, J. Engler, explained the Mayor at the end of 2019 began to review how the City is structured as an organization with a focus on serving children and families better. He stated focus was placed on improving the function of services such as after school programs, community schools, pre-K, and now with the access centers due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and so, it was established shifting the Library from the Managing's Director's Office to the Office of Children and Families (OCF) would be most beneficial to this service population. J. Engler then shared C. Figueroa, Deputy Mayor of the OCF, would present more information on what the office does, its structure, and the role of the Library within the office.

V. Office of Children and Families (OCF) – C. Figueroa

C. Figueroa shared OCF was created to ensure that policies, resources, and services for children and families are aligned and coordinated in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia. The office, she explained, merged with the Department of Human Services in January 2020 and impacts of the pandemic brought on new services and realignments of other City agencies as well, such as providing food access sites and including Adult Education under OCF.

She went on to share the realignment vision of OCF is now "to improve outcomes for all Philadelphia's children, families and adults and to reimagine a more inclusive and equitable world where children are safe, families are strong, and communities have access to strong schools, libraries, recreation and public parks." With this, she noted early childhood, out-of-school time, workforce, and emergency response efforts (access centers and food sites) initiatives have become more aligned and more accessible.

R. Heim asked if the City anticipates decreased budget support of Read by 4th and the Learning Enrichment Afterschool Program (LEAP). C. Figueroa explained with regard to the upcoming budget, the City is creating multiple planning scenarios, reviewing the budget through a racial equity lens, and establishing key services. J. Engler shared the City is focusing on how to maximize funding to essential services needed by residents.

It was asked if adults without children would be left out of Library services with this transition from the Managing Director's Office to OCF. C. Figueroa explained adult education and digital literacy both fall under the purview of OCF and OCF partnerships with other City departments to meet the needs of adults without children.

VI. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DEIC) – C. Arlene

C. Arlene stated the Committee is currently meeting bimonthly and two Library staff members have joined the Committee. He further stated the Committee was involved with the hiring of the DEI Officer. Also, he shared the Library Board and the Foundation Board have their second DEI training with DiverseForce scheduled for next week and the training for staff will be scheduled for early 2021.

Additionally, C. Arlene stated the Committee's DEI action plan was presented to both Boards. He shared the DiverseForce report would be released later today.

VII. Strategic Plan Oversight Committee – C. Arlene

C. Arlene shared the Committee is in the beginning stages of establishing the process for the new strategic plan for the Library. He explained due to a number of factors such as the pandemic, the transition to OCF, the leadership change, and other internal issues within the Library, a short-term plan is being discussed. He shared the focus of the plan will be to strengthen the Library for when the permanent director is hired. Part of the planning for the short-term plan will be holding conversations groups with Library stakeholders which will include staff and Board members in order to establish key areas of focus for the Library.

P. Dembe shared M. DiBerardinis is chairing a Committee on reviewing the organizational structure of the Library.

VIII. Search for Permanent Director Committee – R. Heim

R. Heim shared the composition of the Committee is representative of the Library's internal community. He noted the Committee has met two times and will be interviewing the top three search firms, one of which will be hired next week. After a search firm is selected, he shared, the Committee will focus on establishing a candidate profile. Lastly, he stated the goal is have a permanent director hired by July 1, 2021.

IX. Action Item: Recommended Policies for Elimination – P. Dembe

P. Dembe referred to a list of policies within the Board meeting packet. She explained the Executive Committee is recommending them for elimination as there are out-of-date and/or irrelevant. She called for a motion to eliminate the recommended policies. The motion was made, seconded, and carried.

X. Public Comment – P. Dembe

P. Dembe shared the public comment portion of the meeting would now begin.

Abbe Klebanoff inquired as to why the Search Committee for the permanent director does not include a member of the Concerned Black Workers (CBW) when the Board made a commitment to having a member participate on the Committee.

L. Walker requested citizens speaking to address the questions they submitted prior to the meeting and asked those speaking to respect the process.

A. Klebanoff stated the questions regarding CBW and the Search for the Director Committee have been ignored several times. She then inquired as to why P. Dembe is still on the Board when requests for her resignation have been demanded by several parties. J. Cooper responded comments and questions provided to the Board will be considered.

C. Figueroa stated as a point of clarification the Mayor's recommendation was in relation to the resignation to the former Library Director and not in relation to the Board Chair, P. Dembe.

A. Klebanoff stated she was informed the meeting between P. Dembe and the Mayor was "angry," and so, she asked for clarification on this. P. Dembe stated the meeting was not "angry." C. Figueroa once again stated the Mayor's recommendation related to the Library Director resigning.

R. Heim, then, stated he would like to respond to the inquiry regarding CBW and the Search Committee. He noted there was a commitment by the Board to have representation of CBW on the Committee, but CBW is a cohort of employees whose identities are unknown by the Board and the only information they have is provided by the communications sent out by CBW. He continued to note CBW is performing an important service to the Library community and he will not underestimate the importance of those communications. With regard to the composition of the Committee, he clarified the Committee requested two representatives from the DC33 and DC47 locals of the union as the majority of Library staff are members of those respective locals, and so, representation from CBW would be provided via one of those seats. Overall, he stated the Committee is well-representative of the Library and if there is an issue with staff representation, union leadership should be contacted as they appointed members.

Rachel (last name unknown) stated the Board should know a large percentage of staff is not represented by the Union and to assume CBW members are primarily Union is a risky assumption. They went onto share it is not librarians in need of scholarships, but Library workers such as After-School Leaders (ASL) and Digital Resource Specialists (DRS). They then emphasized the importance of the Board understanding the staffing structure of the Library and the education requirements for positions.

Rachel (last name unknown) stated the comment they submitted prior to the meeting was in regard to P. Dembe continuing to serve on the Board as she is "not able to lead this Board into [an] anti-racist

movement” which the Library and the city deserves and P. Dembe does not understand how the pandemic and racial inequity are “tied hand-in-hand” and to put that aside is not just.

Michele Teague shared she did not want to ask the question she submitted prior to the meeting nor speak as the Board is not answering the questions.

Julie Lipson inquired as to why the Director Search Committee does not have representation from CBW on the Committee. They stated as a community member they are “disturbed” by the fact the Board is not addressing the question. They also noted they wanted to continue to amplify the question and shared they are aware Library staff is not pleased with the Union representation on the Committee. Also, they stated the Board needs to be paying more attention to the people who are working at the Library.

Lolita Walker stated as someone who has performed Library programs for children and families, the concern is how toxic the Library culture is and expressed concern how such a culture is transferred to the Black and Brown community members the Library serves. They also thanked C. Figueroa for providing the presentation on the Office of Children and Families as it focused on serving the Black and Brown children of the city. However, they noted it taking an hour and twenty minutes for the Board to address CBW is “quite disturbing” and the concerns need to be addressed directly as the Board needs to be accountable to the communities the Library serve.

E. Tomlin expressed the impression from the union locals was the representatives chosen to serve on the Search Committee were part of CBW and if they are not, this is news to the Board, and so, allow time for the Committee Chairs to review the Committee composition in light of this new information.

Erme Maula, a representative of the Friends of the Whitman Library, shared the group supporting this library location has been “able to learn and grow together as a group and with our library staff. It has been a valuable learning experience about how to rally around and speak up for our public spaces and services offered in libraries.” They went on to state local politicians serving that area are very supportive of the Whitman Library as well. Additionally, they noted before Covid-19, the Whitman Library was offering an array of programs and services to the community, but with the library being closed due to the pandemic, it is impacting the community as homework help, computer, and internet access is limited.

Additionally, E. Maula noted the loss of staff and the lack of future resources is concerning, and so, they hope the Library is able to maintain full benefits for current staff and “find ways to incorporate and create a pipeline for other staff, especially [B]lack and [B]rown staff,” to enter librarianship through education. E. Maula also shared the Friends of the Whitman Library look forward to collaborating with other Library Friends group along with supporting CBW in having representative roles in the Strategic Plan and Director Search Committees.

Alexis Ahiagbe stated she recently learned the Foundation's Board of Directors created an Education Assistance Fund Committee with T. Dichter as the Chair of the Committee and several other Board members and "only one of whom is a person of color." She stated the composition of the Committee is predominantly white, which is problematic as "we continue to come against this issue where people of color are not in the room. Or at the table when fundamental decisions are being made. It is also my understanding that more people of color will be subsequently added to this committee."

She went on to share she previously stressed to the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors fundraising efforts need to align with the strategic plan goal of promoting diversity and inclusion as DEI efforts cannot be fully supported if there are no resources. She noted she also requested the Development Department of the Foundation share what types of grants and funding have been sought by the department overall. She shared her request has yet to be fulfilled.

Additionally, she stated with the hiring of the new DEI Officer, it is important for the position to have direct support staff and financial resources to support the work and the DEI plan he will be expected to carry out for the Library. She noted by not providing him with such supports, this will impact the work and result in only performative efforts and not organizational change.

A. Ahiagbe also stated she views the Board is weighing heavily on two Board members of color to carry out the Library's DEI efforts on the Board level, which she finds to be inappropriate as this work should be handled equitably across the Board. She also noted the lack of Board members' participation in the DEI training facilitated by DiverseForce is concerning. Also, she stated transparency and a DEI strategic framework needs to be established moving forward as it is crucial to all aspects of the Library, including fundraising and grant efforts.

Also, she stated the Foundation and the Library must do the hard work of implementing DEI strategy "or we will continue to perpetuate the systems of white supremacy and institutional racism that currently exists and oppressed staff and patrons alike."

Lastly, A. Ahiagbe stated the Board needs to provide quarterly communications to staff. Also, she stated Foundation's Development Department needs to provide staff with a newsletter similar to how the Human Resources Department of the Library is doing. She also stated the Board needs to do serious work with regard to DEI and seek staff input.

P. Dembe thanked A. Ahiagbe for her comments. She, then, noted the Foundation is not part of the Board of Trustees, and so, the Board has no control over their operations. She further noted the Library is a City agency separate from the Foundation, so, concerns regarding fundraising should be directed to the Foundation's Board of Directors.

T. Dichter shared multiple members of the Education Assistance Committee are Black members of the Board Foundation. She stated Board members need to educate themselves on DEI, but she also stated those providing public comment need to educate themselves on the Board and its committees before making remarks on the member composition of committees. T. Dichter further shared she resents being

yelled at when Board members are providing donations for the Education Assistance Fund. She noted the Board members have provided enough funding for ten staff members to complete undergraduate degrees and a Board member is providing five scholarships to Drexel University's Master of Library Science program. Lastly, she asked for the public to reduce anger and lower their tone.

A. Ahiagbe clarified she did not intend disrespect to the Board, but was explaining how the lack of communication from the Board, from the Foundation, from the Development Department on the creation of the Education Assistance Fund was not appropriate. She further stated when information is not shared with transparency, misinformation is then created.

B. Sutherland shared the Foundation is working on promoting the Education Fund and wanted to ensure what was eventually presented to staff could be delivered on, and so, that is why the Committee has not yet shared information with the staff.

C. Arlene acknowledged those providing public comments spoke with much passion and the difficult work which is ahead of the Library was made clear during the meeting. He noted the Board will be finding ways to strengthen the connection between the Trustees and the staff of the Library. C. Arlene also shared the Board recognizes why people are frustrated with the Library, especially with regard to DEI matters.

E. Tomlin stated she was on the Interim Director Search Committee and representatives from CBW participated on that Committee. She noted she would like CBW to be represented on other Committees. Lastly, she shared the Board is working hard to improve the Library and with the hiring of the DEI Officer more work can be accomplished.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 9:47 AM.