



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

Guests: C. Figueroa (Office of Children and Families)

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

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

P. Dembe called the meeting to order at 8:06 AM and welcomed the Board of Trustees. She encouraged the Board to review the Covid-19 infographics within the meeting packet if they have not done so already as they share important information pertaining to the continued use of Library services throughout the pandemic. She also mentioned Library staff will be participating in a diversity, equity, and inclusion training facilitated by DiverseForce this week. Also, she noted the One Book, One Philadelphia kickoff is scheduled for April 14, 2021. Lastly, she shared Frank Stephens, the first Black manager of the Library who also oversaw exhibits passed away. She emphasized his significant contributions to the Library during his time with the organization.

II. Consent Agenda – P. Dembe

P. Dembe called for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was made, seconded, and carried.

III. Public Comment – P. Dembe

Rachel Robinson demanded P. Dembe stepdown as the Chair of the Board of Trustees immediately. R. Robinson explained one of the tenets of the Library’s strategic plan is to promote diversity and inclusion; however, R. Robison stated P. Dembe has demonstrated in multiple public meetings she does not understand how DEI is an umbrella that encompasses all library endeavors and cannot be “put aside” in order to address Covid-19 safety concerns as DEI and safety are inextricably tied in just the same way as racism and present day America. R. Robinson concluded by stating P. Dembe does not understand that and should not be governing or leading a cultural institution of a majority Black and Brown city.

Next, Linda Colwell-Smith spoke to the Board as a representative of the Friends of the Free Library. L. Colwell-Smith stated the public is demanding more services as virtual programming is very limited. She stated the Friends advocated in FY21 for a budget increase and during this fiscal year the Library lost over fifty jobs and LEAP’s budget was drastically reduced and so the Friends are advocating for a budget increase for FY22 as they are meeting with City Council members and carrying out public outreach. She stated she welcomes working with the Board and the Free Library Foundation with these efforts.

Abbe Klebanoff stated T. Dichter needs to apologize to Alexis Ahiagbe because of the way T. Dichter responded to A. Ahiagbe during the last Board meeting regarding the Education Assistance Committee. A. Klebanoff stated P. Dembe needs to step down as Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Next, G. Generals read questions submitted by the public and provided responses:

Kate Eckert: Why haven't has a CBW representative been placed on the Director search committee?

Peter Santa Maria: Free Library staff, community members, and most of City Council (per this Aug 2020 signed letter: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1O67Q9459wwgdJJVY1ru-0FnySzCfGcCo/view>) has asked Pam Dembe to step down from the Library's Board of Trustees. When will Pam Dembe address these concerns and when can we expect her to resign?

Peter Santa Maria: Elaine Tomlin stated at last meeting in Dec 2020 that the Board would review exclusion of Concerned Black Workers from committee to select new Director. As of today, CBW still does not have seat at the table. When will this issue be addressed and CBW be able to have voice in selecting a new Director?!

Kayla Hoskinson: It was stated in December 2020 that the Board would review the exclusion of the Concerned Black Workers Caucus in the Director search. CBW still has not been given a voice in the search. When will this problem be acknowledged by the Board and when will CBW given a seat on this search committee?

- **Response from the Board:**
 - ***The Concerned Black Workers are members of other groups represented on the Director Search Committee, including employees represented by their unions as well as unrepresented employees. The Concerned Black Workers can ensure that their interests are expressed through those channels and through the employee conversations conducted by the search firm.***

Kayla Hoskinson: In light of the immense public & staff support for Pam Dembe to retire (especially this statement made by most City Council members: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1O67Q9459wwgdJJVY1ru-0FnySzCfGcCo/view>), when will the Board & Pam Dembe address the problem of her presence and (inappropriate) power on the Board? When will Pam Dembe resign from the Board?

- **Response from the Board:**
 - ***An election for a new slate of officers will take place during this meeting of the Trustees. The leadership change will take place at the June meeting of the Trustees.***

Elizabeth Gardiner: Have all board members completed DEI training per DiverseForce recommendation? If so, how will this training inform your work going forward? Please give specific examples. If not, when can we expect board members to complete DEI training?

- **Response from the Board:**
 - **11 members of the Board of Trustees have completed the DEI training. Those who have not and new members will be provided with an opportunity to complete the training before the next meeting of the Board of Trustees.**

Erin Hoopes: In what specific ways are best DEI practices being incorporated into the current strategic planning process? This question is in regards to Agenda Item VI. Strategic Planning Oversight Committee.

- **Response from the Board:**
 - **At this meeting of the Trustees, a motion will be made for the Board DEI Committee to be formally approved as a standing committee under the by-laws. The Library has hired a Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. A staff DEI Committee (the DISC) has been established to assure concerns are heard. Senior Library leadership and representatives from the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors of the Foundation attend those committee meetings. A fund has been established to assist employees in furthering their educational training so that opportunities for career advancement are more equitable.**

IV. Interim Director's Remarks – L. Walker

L. Walker shared there are twenty to twenty-five libraries providing limited in-person services, which includes limited use of computers and printers and browsing of materials. These locations, she noted, are also offering materials pickup. Also, twenty-two libraries are offering materials pickup only. She explained staffing will determine further openings of limited in-person services.

Additionally, L. Walker stated Falls of Schuylkill Library is closed and is offering no services due to boiler issues and the South Philadelphia Branch is closed as well due to its co-location with one of the City's Health Centers. She shared four locations will continue to operate as School Access Centers until June 2021 when the school year comes to an end.

With regard to Covid-19 vaccines, L. Walker shared in collaboration with the Office of Children and Families, the City's Public Health Department, and Board Chair, P. Dembe, Library staff are now included in the category 1B and 1C with childcare workers and educators, and so, staff qualify to receive vaccines at the FEMA site in Center City currently. She noted staff are sharing the process of distribution at the site is efficient.

P. Dembe asked since the second vaccine dose is causing some reactions, if the Library is providing paid time for staff to regain health. L. Walker stated staff has been provided with information from the

Mayor's Chief of Staff outlining how to handle the use of sick time from vaccines, which includes staff using their own.

R. Heim asked how LEAP is doing and L. Walker stated while LEAP is not on the meeting's agenda, LEAP programs are currently all virtual due to the pandemic and she noted the FY22 budget will determine more possibilities with LEAP moving forward.

C. Figueroa shared LEAP is one of the Office of Children and Families' top priorities. She explained conversations regarding the budget for FY22 are taking place with the Mayor. She noted stimulus funding will help with the overall budget for FY22, but the focus is on supporting critical services.

E. Tomlin inquired if Kalela Williams' position within the Division of Cultural and Civic Engagement has been filled. L. Walker explained K. Williams was a Free Library Foundation employee.

Lastly, L. Walker shared today and tomorrow DiverseForce will be facilitating DEI training for staff.

V. Covid-19 and Staff Safety – J. Pecora and M. Teague

J. Pecora stated he is currently the Acting Pandemic Coordinator for the Library along with his position as VP of Property Management. He provided a short timeline of Covid-19 stating on March 17, 2020, the Library began preparing for the lockdown and on March 18, 2020, nonessential staff was told to not report to work and did not have to return until June 2020. He noted essential staff including maintenance and security continued workings during the shutdown ensuring locations were properly maintained.

Also, J. Pecora noted the Library had contract with four companies which handled deep cleaning and disinfecting before staff returned to onsite work. He noted the Library obtained a significant amount of personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies. Every location, he stated, was surveyed and prepared for proper social distancing and safety. Air ventilation, he shared, was and continues to be a priority. Overall, J. Pecora stated there was no roadmap for handling Covid-19, and so, learning occurred as things progressed with the pandemic.

Furthermore, between November 2020 and January 2021, he stated thirty-seven libraries were voting sites and all were disinfected post-election day. He noted a second lockdown occurred and the Library closed once more to staff and staff returned on January 19, 2021. Later that month, he noted the Pandemic Coordinator/Safety Officer retired.

Currently, since February, J. Pecora shared commercial air purifiers are being installed at location along with more plexiglass, and safety procedures are being amended as necessary. He noted moving forward towards April and June 2021, Property Management will continue to prepare libraries for limited in-person services along with preparing sites for the May primary election.

With regard to Covid-19 cases, J. Pecora shared there have been twenty-one positive cases, which none were determined to be transmitted on site at work. He noted regardless when a positive case is reported, the work location is disinfected.

M. Teague of the Safety Committee shared the Committee includes Union representatives, Executive Staff and other staff. She explained there is no hierarchy within the Committee. Pre-Covid-19 time, she shared the Committee would meet once a month at a library location and inspect the building and discuss safety concerns.

An *Inquirer* editorial published on March 8, 2021, M. Teague shared, highlighted how Library staff has creatively pivoted services to respond to Covid-19. Also, she stated in March of 2020, staff along with Michelle Jamison of Union DC47 shared concerns regarding the health and safety of staff regarding Covid-19. Simple procedures, she noted were put into place, such as wiping down surfaces and washing hands. On March 13, 2020, the Library made a commitment to keep facilities open to both public and staff and had no plans to close unless a positive case occurred. She stated DC47 emailed Library administration, the Library and the Foundation Boards, and the City begging to close the Library for safety reasons. However, the lockdown occurred shortly thereafter, she noted. She explained due to technology limitations the Safety Committee did not meet until May 2020.

M. Teague shared during May 2020, two Library staff members lost parents to Covid-19; the Library drafted the reopening plan; a survey was sent to staff regarding returning to work in June 2020. She shared in June many staff members returned to work onsite. Some sites, she noted, had no PPE or expired PPE supplies upon return. Also, it was shared guidelines for service were released in July 2020 and complaints of staff not wearing masks or wearing them improperly increased. It was noted in September phased re-opening began along with library locations serving as school access centers and during this time the Library continued to quarantine items for seven days.

Additionally, she shared when a positive case came about at one of the access centers, the Library followed protocol with the City's Public Health Department. It was requested the Safety Committee be included in this communication protocol.

On November 13, 2020, M. Teague shared the Committee recommended returning to virtual work and closing all Library locations due to a Covid-19 surge of cases, however, she noted this recommendation was denied. On November 30th, the Library paused its in-person services and continued with curbside service only until January.

In January, dialogue around vaccines began and J. Pecora took over as the Pandemic Coordinator. She noted a recommendation for staff to wear badges was made due to masks. Also, during this time, the Library provided the finalized version of the school access centers protocols. As variants continued to become known, another work-from-home request was made to Library administration and the Office of Children and Families.

P. Dembe thanked M. Teague for the thoughtful history.

VI. Strategic Planning Committee – C. Arlene

C. Arlene shared the Committee has essentially finalized the approach on how to handle the plan with a focus on internal work and healing of the organization. He shared the Strategic Initiatives Department has been leading conversation groups with staff which also include Board of Trustees and Board of Directors members. These conversations, he explained, will inform the foundation of the plan. He noted since the Library is in a time of transition, the Committee will recommend a more internal plan which is less traditional of strategic plans typically.

VII. Search Committee – R. Heim

R. Heim stated the Committee elected Issacson Miller as the search firm. He noted the firm has conducted listening sessions with staff and Library stakeholders to determine which qualities are desired in a Director for the Library. He shared the position description will be finalized soon and the plan as of now is to have a person identified and hired by July 2021. It was noted the timeline is an ambitious goal.

VIII. Governance Committee – J. Cooper

J. Cooper shared the Board voted for the election of two new members via email, and so, a motion to confirm the election of Donald Moore and Matthew Stitt to the Board of Trustees was requested. The motion was made, seconded, and carried. It was noted there are still vacancies on the Board.

Next, a recommendation to amend the by-laws to have former Board Chairs serve on the Executive Committee if they are still serving as a Trustee was put forth to the Board. A call to make a motion to approve the recommendation was made, seconded, and approved.

Also, a recommendation to amend the by-laws to formalize the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee as a standing committee of the Board was put forth to the Board. A motion was made to approve the recommendation; the motion was seconded and carried.

With regard to the FY22 – FY23 Officer Slate, a motion to make an exception to the by-laws to allow for the Board to elect the recommended slate and have the officers assume their positions at the annual June meeting assisting with the transition of leadership was requested. A motion was made to approve the recommendation, then seconded and carried.

The slate of Officers for FY22 – FY23 were recommended to Board for approval. A call to approve the recommendation of the slate as follows was requested:

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| Chair | Folasade (Sade) Olanipekun-Lewis |
| Vice Chair | Suzanne Simons |
| Vice Chair | Jeffrey Cooper |
| Secretary | Jenée Chizick-Agüero |
| Treasurer | Guy Generals |

E. Tomlin stated she was not informed of nominations for the slate prior to the meeting and she would like to be more involved with the Board. J. Cooper stated he would have a discussion with E. Tomlin regarding this matter.

A motion was made to approve the FY22 –FY23 officer slate; the motion was seconded and approved.

IX. New Business – P. Dembe

P. Dembe noted the Mayor’s budget will be released on April 15, 2021.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 9:25 AM.