



Attendance: P. Dembe, Chair; A. Appulingam; J. Chizick-Agüero; J. Cooper; M. DiBerardinis; T. Dichter; G. Generals; D. Gould; R. Heim; D. Moore; M. Rashed; S. Simons; J. St. Geme; M. Stitt; B. Sutherland; E. Tomlin

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

Staff: L. Walker; J. Benford; C. Caputo; D. Edwards; D. Henderson; C. Kowalski; L. Moore; S. Moran; A. Nurkin; J. Pecora; G. Sims; C. Tomlin; L. Williamson

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

P. Dembe called the meeting to order at 4:09 pm and welcomed the Board. She shared over the last year the Library has begun to move forward among its challenges with the Covid-19 pandemic and its diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. She shared gratitude for what she has learned from others during this time, particularly in terms of social justice. She thanked L. Walker for her work as Interim Director and S. Olanipekun-Lewis for taking on the role as Board Chair.

II. Public Comment and Questions – G. Generals

Linda Colwell-Smith spoke on behalf of the Friends of the Free Library Board. She congratulated S. Olanipekun-Lewis on her new role as Board Chair. She stated the Friends continue to advocate for the Library sharing last week they held a rally outside of Parkway Central Library which received press coverage. She shared Friends groups of neighborhood libraries throughout the city will be assisting with Summer Reading, programs, and fundraising efforts. She noted Friends groups have assisted with “grab n’ go” bags for Library patrons and Friends group members had an informational table outside of the Flower Show.

Additionally, she shared Friends group members are active in their communities in various ways, including being Reading Captains for Read by 4th. She closed by stating the Friends are pleased with the progress the Library is making, but there is always more to do.

Before moving to the next agenda item, P. Dembe shared the Board had elected new members, A. Appulingam and D. Gould and welcomed them. She noted A. Nurkin, Deputy Director of the Division of Cultural and Civic Engagement (DCCE) is resigning from the Library. A. Nurkin shared appreciation for the Library and his gratitude for being able to work for the Library and for the opportunity to build the DCCE from ground up. He went onto share he will be working at Duke University focusing on public policy.

III. Action Item: Consent Agenda – P. Dembe

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

IV. Interim Director’s Remarks – L. Walker

L. Walker shared within the meeting packet contains a brief “Year-in-Review” of the Library. She noted she was named Emergency Interim Director in July followed by being named the Interim Director in September. During the last year, she stated the Library has experienced challenges and successes noting the Library hired its first DEI Officer who is working well with staff, the Library and Foundation Boards, and City Administration, the opening of 31 libraries for limited service, the collaborating with the School District of Philadelphia on access centers led by C. Caputo, Chief of Youth Services and Programs, and buildings being outfitted for Covid-19 safety led by J. Pecora, Vice President of Property Management.

For FY22, L. Walker shared the Library will be seeking to hire more staff to offer 5-day service along with offering LEAP. She noted hiring for the Library is priority for the Office of Children and Families (OCF) as the Library is now under this City office.

With regard to the FY22 budget, she noted for the City Council hearing, the Library prepared extensively, but was not called to testify. One question was asked from City Council regarding air ventilation in the buildings which was promptly answered by explaining modification have been made to spaces as necessary to improve air circulation. She noted now the Library is awaiting City Council’s approval of the proposed budget.

R. Heim shared it is rare for no questions to be asked during a budget hearing and he asked with LEAP funding beings restored if the program will be ready for the start of the school year. L. Walker stated LEAP will be good to go by the first day school as long as the hiring process runs smoothly. She explained the Library’s Human Resources Department is working closely with the Office of Human Resources (OHR) to ensure hiring process can start on July 1 as the new fiscal year goes into effect.

T. Dichter asked if there is any feedback on the 31 libraries offering limited services and L. Walker shared more libraries are being prepared to be open, but overall communities are grateful to have access to the buildings once more.

E. Tomlin asked how much of the staff is vaccinated. L. Walker shared due to HIPPA, the Library cannot ask, but staff members can self-identify there vaccination status. She further noted staff is being offered comp time in exchange for receiving the vaccination, but she noted the City is providing the number of staff vaccinated but not names of staff. She also added the Library will not shame individuals who choose to not get vaccinated as some individuals cannot.

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

P. Dembe shared C. Arlene’s term as a Board member has come to an end, but she wanted to recognize his work, especially his effort in co-chairing the DEI Committee as he was did great strategy planning in addressing issues.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis shared C. Arlene is currently doing service work in Africa for 9 months, and so, he was unable to attend today’s meeting. She noted she will continue to serve as chair of the Committee until a new one is identified.

She went onto note the Committee presented its DEI plan to the Board in October 2020 establishing three pillars focused on Leadership & Oversight, Opportunity, and Culture & Climate. Furthermore, she explained under each pillar objectives and key performance indicators (KPI) are included. She noted some KPIs are hiring a DEI Officer and creating educational opportunities for staff. She stated the role of the Committee is to support the work of the Library’s DEI Officer, G. Sims.

Finally, she stated the Board will need to formally vote on the pillars and the plan, and so, this is to be planned for the September 2021 meeting.

R. Heim stated a resolution for C. Arlene’s service to the Library should be created and presented. A motion was made to do so; the motion was seconded and approved.

VI. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Report – G. Sims

G. Sims informed the Board during the past three months’ time exponential movement within DEI has been made. He shared in his meeting with staff and other stakeholders, he determining how to define his role. He shared he has learned staff is proud of their work and are committed to improving the Library.

With regard to the Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee, G. Sims noted the initial goals since he has joined the Library are to reaffirm the role of the Committee and what the Committee does for the Library. He shared the Committee has approved their bylaws and charge, and has developed an orientation for new members.

Additionally, G. Sims shared staff engages with DEI on various levels and each person approaches it differently, and so, determining and establishing a fully comprehensive approach to engage staff successfully is at the forefront of his work.

G. Sims stated the Executive Staff of the Library and of the Foundation recently participated in DEI focused training thanks to a grant from the Office of Commonwealth Libraries.

VII. Director Search Committee – R. Heim and F. Olanipekun-Lewis

R. Heim shared the Committee is large as this was a deliberate choice to ensure it fully encompasses Library stakeholders. Due to the size of the Committee, he stated, the review of candidates thus far has

been a blind review to maintain confidentiality of the process. The timeline goal is to present a candidate to the Board at the September 2021 meeting or before.

He also noted the requirement of the candidate having a Master of Library Science (MLS) degree is being discussed as without one the pool of the candidates widens; however, no decision has been made as of yet as candidates are still being reviewed.

L. Walker noted the State requires a MLS, but a waiver may be possible to obtain and this is being investigated currently.

VIII. New Business – P. Dembe

P. Dembe noted the meeting dates for FY22 have been shared and may be found within the meeting packet.

IX. Governance Committee – J. Cooper

J. Cooper commended R. Heim and F. Olanipekun-Lewis on their work with the Search Committee thus far.

He then stated during the last year terms for C. Arlene and N. Torres have come to an end along with J. Soroko's term and M. Stitt and D. Moore were elected as Trustees. He shared the Mayor recently appointed A. Appulingam and D. Gould to the Board and he welcomed them.

J. Cooper on behalf of the Board expressed appreciation for P. Dembe serving as Chair, especially during this past year. He noted her steadfast leadership.

P. Dembe shared serving as Chair was a wonderful experience and expressed her appreciation for the Library and its many accomplishments. Other Board members expressed their gratitude for P. Dembe's service to the Board and the Library.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 5:05 pm.