



**Free Library of Philadelphia | Board of Trustees Meeting
Friday, December 17, 2021 | 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Virtual**

Attendance: F. Olanipekun-Lewis; D. Allie; A. Appulingam; J. Chizick-Agüero; J. Cooper; P. Dembe; M. DiBerardinis; T. Dichter; C. Figueroa; D. Generals; R. Heim; D. Moore; S. Simons; J. St. Geme; E. Tomlin

Staff: K. Richards; J. Benford; D. Henderson; C. Kowalski; k. Maguire-Wright; J. Pecora; G. Sims

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

F. Olanipekun-Lewis called the meeting to order at 8:05 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 in October 2021, the Board held a special meeting to select the Library’s President & Director. She shared that the Board unanimously voted for K. Richards and on November 16, 2021 his appointment was officially announced with his first day scheduled for January 14, 2022.

K. Richards, she stated, brings with him nearly three decades of library experience and he began his career with the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District. He then served the Genesee District Library in Flint, Michigan before taking his role as the Director of the Muskegon Library District, his most recent role.

It was shared K. Richards had not yet joined the meeting, but would be introduced when he joins.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis shared that a welcoming reception is scheduled for late January for K. Richards and would be held in-person depending on the status of Covid-19 at the time.

On November 26, 2021, F. Olanipekun-Lewis stated, Leslie Walker who served as the Interim Director of the Library resigned as she was named the Executive Director of the Sixers Youth Foundation. On behalf of the Board, sincere gratitude for L. Walker’s service was expressed.

Currently, J. Maguire-Wright is serving as the Interim Director of the Library until K. Richards begins his tenure. F. Olanipekun-Lewis stated the Board took emergency action to appoint J. Maguire-Wright and the appointment would be ratified during the meeting today.

Also, F. Olanipekun-Lewis shared C. Figueroa, Deputy Mayor of the Office of Children and Families (OCF) will be resigning and joining JVES as its President and CEO. She went on to express gratitude for C. Figueroa’s support of and advocacy for the Library.

C. Figueroa shared it was great to work with the Library and with the Board of Trustees. She also stated it was great getting to serve on the Search Committee for K. Richards.

Following this, F. Olanipekun-Lewis stated the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation is inviting the Board of Trustees to a governance workshop as requested by K. Richards scheduled for February 4, 2022. She noted more information is to follow and the workshop will focus on best practices regarding governance along with the Foundation and Library relationship.

II. Interim Director – F. Olanipekun-Lewis

Action Item: Appointment Ratification

F. Olanipekun-Lewis called for a motion for the ratification of the appointment of J. Maguire-Wright as the Interim Director of the Library. The motion was made, seconded, and carried.

J. Maguire-Wright shared the Library through the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) purchased tablets and hotspots for residents over the age of eighteen to borrow noting the Library is currently doing a soft launch of the program with the full program to begin in January 2022. She stated the Library has over 11,000 devices to provide.

Next, she stated the Library continues to hire After School Leaders (ASLs) for the LEAP program with new hires onboarding each week. The Library is preparing for the FY23 budget call with the City as well and various scenarios are being reviewed including an increase to achieve six-day service for the Library.

Additionally, she shared the Library receives annual funding from the State and each year the Library needs to inform the State on how the funds will be used. This year, she explained, the Library is receiving over \$7M in funding and more details regarding this are within the Board packet, as the Board will need to approve this plan.

III. Plan for State Aid – F. Olanipekun-Lewis

Action Item: Approval of the 2021 – 2022 Plan for State Aid and Notification of Request for Waiver of Standards

With regard to the plan for State aid and the request for a waiver of standards, it was once more noted information is in the Board packet.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis called for a motion to approve the plans for the State aid. The motion was made, seconded, and carried.

Prior to moving the next agenda item, T. Dichter stated the ECF program also includes a digital literacy component.

- IV. Action Item: Consent Agenda – F. Olanipekun-Lewis**
- a. **Minutes of the September 17, 2021 Board Meeting**
 - b. **Minutes of the October 1, 2021 Special Board Meeting**
 - c. **Minutes of the August 13, 2021 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee Meeting**
 - d. **Minutes of September 30, 2021 Special Collections Committee Meeting**
 - e. **Investments Report**
 - f. **Interim Director’s Report**

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

- V. Budget Briefing – F. Olanipekun-Lewis**
Info Item: Operating Budget as June 30, 2021
Info Item: FY22 – FY23 Budget Schedule

F. Olanipekun-Lewis stated the Library worked with the Office of Children and Families to acquire an additional \$730K of funds for the FY22 budget via a transfer ordinance.

J. Benford stated the additional funds will be utilized to stabilize five-day service through onboarding of additional staff.

For the upcoming FY23 budget, J. Benford stated, the Library will be requesting additional funds for six-day service.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis noted J. Benford will be retiring and thanked him for his service to the Library.

She also stated the Library is in the process of interviewing individuals for the Fiscal Director position.

- VI. Facilities Report – J. Pecora**
Info Item: Info Item: At Risk Assessment of Libraries

J. Pecora stated the Library’s facilities portfolio is approximately 1M square feet and includes fifty-eight buildings.

He shared eight capital improvements related mainly to ventilation issues are complete with \$1.9M invested and another fourteen improvements are planned with the cost of \$1.2M.

Also, \$3.4M was requested for the FY23 capital budget, but the Library typically only receives \$1M per year. The \$1M covers about three roof improvements, and so, it is a limiting budget to work with.

J. Pecora shared upgrades to the Nicetown-Tioga Library and to the Central Children Department of Parkway Central Library are finished. He also shared the Frankford Library renovation, which will be about a \$5.5M project, is being funded through various sources including a grant through the State’s Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program and the William Penn Foundation. He noted the schematic design portion of the project is now complete with the design development plan to be completed in January 2022. Construction is set to begin in early 2023.

Next, J. Pecora shared that twelve of the Library's locations are designated Rebuild sites with four being full scope projects and with eight being targeted projects such as a roof replacements. The total budget for this project overall is \$39M.

The PIDC, J. Pecora explained, is working on behalf of the City on the 1801 Vine Street and 1901 Wood Street development project. This project includes the space behind Parkway Central Library which is approximately 90K square feet. In July, he stated, a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was issued, and part of this included 60K square feet to be developed for the Library including a center for children and families, space for staff operations, and parking. J. Pecora stated the RFQ submissions are due in January 2022 and both he and K. Richards will be serving on the Selection Committee.

T. Dichter asked which Library locations are the four full scope Rebuild projects and if the Library retains the 60K square feet of the 1801 Vine Street and 1901 Wood Street project.

J. Pecora stated Paschaville, Kingsessing, Cobbs Creek, and Lawncrest libraries are the four Rebuild sites.

He also stated building the 60K square feet of space for the Library for the 1801 Vine Street and 1901 Wood Street project is embedded in the proposal, but financing for the project has yet to be determined.

C. Figueroa also stated RFQ submissions must incorporate the Library into the development plan and financing is part of it as well.

VII. Hiring Status – D. Henderson

Info Item: Status Report

D. Henderson began with sharing in 2020 during the onset of Covid-19 pandemic, the City enacted a hiring freeze and created a mechanism for hiring approvals. While the funding for Library positions was included in the FY22 budget, approval from the City was still required.

Currently, the Library has been approved for hiring fifty-five After School Leaders (ASLs) and as of now twenty-one have been hired. The Library is also approved to hire forty Clerical Assistants and is approved for additional Librarian positions. It is anticipated that hires will be in place by late January and early February.

D. Henderson also noted in 2020 no permanent Civil Service staff was laid off, but seasonal part-time staff members were relieved of their positions. However, a Clerical Assistant exam will be announced and these former staff members will be notified of the exam.

D. Moore asked how many total opportunities are available for hire. D. Henderson stated fifty-eight vacancies are available to be filled within FY22. He also asked where the employment opportunities are advertised. D. Henderson stated exam announcements are on the City's website under the Office of Human Resources (OHR). He also asked for the Library to pursue finding additional ways to make the finding and hiring of applicants a more accessible process. D. Henderson stated the Library works with OHR on establishing recruiting efforts and is always looking for ways to improve the process.

D. Henderson asked if any branches in particular are impacted by the lack of staff. D. Henderson stated staffing vacancies are evenly spread out throughout the system. She noted the Neighborhood Library Services Division works diligently to shift staff to ensure service throughout the system, but more staffing is still needed.

E. Tomlin asked if hires are hesitant to work in certain areas of the city such as those areas with high crime. D. Henderson stated some locations have had long-term vacancies, but the Library is also seeking ways to improve the situation.

J. Maguire-Wright added while some locations are within high-crime areas, they have very dedicated staff. Issues with filling vacancies sometimes are tied to transportation and other factors.

J. Chizick-Agüero asked what the hiring process is for guards and if the process could be streamlined in some way. D. Henderson stated Municipal Guards go through the standard Civil Service hiring process and she also shared that the Library has a contract with Scotland Yard which assists with having security in place at a branch when a Municipal Guard is not on site.

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

Info Item: Quarterly Report

G. Sims shared the Library's continues to incorporate the Board's three DEI pillars [Climate & Culture, Opportunity, and Leadership & Oversight] into its DEI work. He stated the priorities of the Library's DEI action plan, *Pathway to Progress*, speak to the pillars as do the goals and objectives established by the Executive Staff as part of the plan.

With regard to the goals and objectives, Executive Staff members also developed success measures for each as a way to assess effectiveness and establish further and future action. Staff will also be asked to develop complementary goals and objectives as capturing their input is critical.

G. Sims also shared one of the goals is for the Executive Staff to visit branches, which is what he is currently doing. With these visits, he stated, he is able to bring information to Executive Staff and they can determine how to respond to certain issues or concerns.

G. Sims stated he continues to participate in the City-Wide Racial Equity program, a project emanating from the City's Office of Diversity and Inclusion. The program's purpose is to review key practices and procedures of the City and develop recommendations to advance equity.

Additionally, he shared he continues to participate with the Library's policy working group with the reviewing and updating of policies. He noted he has led the review of the Standards of Acceptable Behavior and of the Safety of Youth in the Library policies.

To conclude his update, G. Sims stated the launch of the Community Conversation series will be in January 2022. The series will provide staff with opportunities to discuss DEI topics. Each month, he

explained, one topic will be discussed with two sessions being offered to staff. He also noted he would be seeking staff members to volunteer as co-facilitators.

D. Moore asked for G. Sims to share more information regarding the Safety in Youth policy. G. Sims stated this policy is challenging as the Library serves many different purposes for youth aged patrons and there needs to be balance with providing a safe, nurturing environment and the varying experiences of staff.

A. Appulingam asked if G. Sims could share more about the Community Conversations. G. Sims explained that the series will be held virtually and attendance will be limited to twenty-five individuals to ensure discussion among participants on one topic with the end of the session being reserved for focus on how the Library can address the topic discussed. As of now, he shared, the series is only planned for one year, but it may be continue depending on response.

Before moving to the next agenda item, F. Olanipekun-Lewis asked for K. Richards to introduce himself. K. Richards apologized for joining the meeting late explaining he was traveling in-between libraries in Michigan as there was a storm the evening before. He shared he is very excited to serve the Library and it is an awesome opportunity. He also shared he is looking forward to developing relationships with staff and with Board members.

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.

Rachel Robinson stated the following:

Good morning, so my comment is staff levels at the free library Philadelphia are 20 our site 67% pre-recession pre 2008 recession levels, leading to. Lack of much needed things like Saturday service and chronic closure throughout the city. Knowing this, what plan does the board of trustees have in place to advocate for appropriate funding from the city of Philadelphia, and the reason that it needs to be.

Funding from the city of Philadelphia, is this is staff shortages, this cannot be made up through grants are seeing anything like that this needs to be funding from the city. And I believe that it is the Boards part of the board's job to advocate appropriately for funding, so thank you so much that's my comment.

Liz Gardiner stated the following:

Thank you, everybody can you hear me. Yes, Okay, I am waiting in line to get a rapid test, so I apologize for any noise, you might hear obviously I'm not at my branch right now so.

Let me try to be brief, my comment is also about short staffing, I appreciate that you all, are taking time to talk about our staffing situation, I wanted to give you my perspective, as a library worker and branch manager on what short staffing is like and how it's experienced by staff. I am the children's librarian and the branch manager of the Queen Memorial library in Point Breeze. And I know you're aware of the impacts of short staffing on our library system, our library in June in 2019 had a staff of 11.

And 14 if you include our after school team leadership assistance. We are currently operating with just four full time and one part time staff member. Four staff in the building is the bare minimum required to offer public service, though a number that low it's unsustainable. Because it places extreme pressure on

those few that are able to be there and it means anyone who wants to take time off for medical reasons personal reasons, they're unable to do so without impacting library operations and that can be a very hard decision for those of us who are very public service minded, as so many of us are. In addition, at my branch, though we have four full time staff, we do not have a municipal guard, so we don't have anyone to provide the required security or custodial duties. Our guard was promoted months ago and it was very well deserved but, even though there was advanced knowledge of his vacancy. He has not been replaced and I'm not sure when he will be replaced so with our current roster we're unable to function on our own. That leaves us to rely on borrowing staff from other locations that are already stretched thin or utilizing the unreliable contracts security services of Scotland Yard who this week we're unable to provide a guard for three days.

Out of the three days that we requested coverage, so they were unable to help us on any day this week that we needed their assistance. So when this happens, kids and teens are unable to utilize our free after school program LEAP, families who are looking to enrich their day are turned away. People who need computer help to access essential services or apply for jobs or do other important tasks are told they need to travel elsewhere. And we need to look up other nearby locations to make sure those libraries are not closed too. So it feels like we're putting band aid over band aid to keep going, and this is leading to low morale and unclean building. Frustrated neighbors and far less quality services that our patrons deserve, so I hope this makes it clear that we need more support. With the current austerity minded bureaucratic structure we aren't getting that support jobs are being left vacant and unfilled and our communities are suffering on our staff are suffering too. Thank you, so this is not the fault of staff it's the fault of those responsible for adequately supplying us the resources to do our work.

I welcome you to personally visit my location and see what we're capable of, and all that we could do with only we were properly equipped. I hope that more focus is given towards staffing and in considering the experiences of frontline staff in the future when making these decisions, thank you.

Linda Colwell-Smith stated the following:

Good morning, I hope everyone can hear me I'm Linda Colwell-Smith[...] or the Friends of the Free Library of Philadelphia. First let's say I want to say goodbye, and thank you to Cynthia [...] a welcome to Kelly Richards we really want to work with and to Jen. We've got a lot of things to do. Next year's looking pretty good. And I must say that we have been working on our agenda as well, we have several issues we are tracking and getting ready to address in our advocacy for the library system. One of them, the number one thing we have on our list is what our previous public comment or seven alluded to, namely the short staffing. It is unkind it is unconscionable all we hear is the frustration and the disappointment from our public who uses our branch libraries. And especially with the after school programs, and in some areas if somebody gets sick in a branch, they have to close down immediately, I have seen people waiting in line at branches. And you know, showing up and expecting to go in and use the use the library facilities, but they can't because the branch had to close suddenly or if a card is short the branches close. I'm happy to hear from Donyale that the city and the library is trying to address the issue by hiring more staff we hope this is done very quickly because, quite honestly. The public is becoming very concerned, we are very concerned and we want to keep the momentum going, especially during this uncertain time with the rising Covid. We want to keep the public with us and we want to generate more support and to answer the first commenter. The Board the board advocates for more money from this city we're right there too, so thank you, I want to we want, on behalf of the board of the Friends of the free library, I

want to wish everyone a happy holiday season and we look forward to working with you next year. Thank you.

X. New Business – F. Olanipekun-Lewis

R. Heim stated with regard to the public comments, the Board should consider forming a small task force to interact with City Council and the Mayor’s Office to discuss the Library’s funding needs and why funding is impacting the neighborhood libraries.

F. Olanipekun-Lewis stated the Library has been working closely with OCF with seeking additional funding including the additional \$700K with the transfer ordinance. The challenge, she stated, is hiring which is a nation-wide struggle due to the Covid-19 pandemic. She shared she is hopeful the Library will return to pre-recession funding, but the challenge is finding talent. The Mayor and City Council, she explained, are in support of more funding and the Library did not have to provide the City with budget reduction scenarios as other City departments did.

C. Figueroa stated the challenge is with hiring and the processes related to Civil Service, but the Mayor’s Office, City Council, and the Budget Office are supportive of the Library receiving more funding. The Mayor’s Office, she shared, asked what exact funding is needed to have the Library provide six-day service.

R. Heim thanked them for the information.

E. Tomlin asked C. Figueroa who would be taking on her position with OCF. C. Figueroa shared more information is to come, but it will be a smooth transition.

P. Dembe stated if the company providing the contract guards for branches is not working well, it needs to be reviewed and solutions need to be investigated.

D. Moore stated the conversation around hiring is poignant noting hiring is a challenge throughout the city currently, and part of advocacy is letting the public know the Library is hiring.

R. Heim mentioned an article on the Library in a recent edition of The Inquirer highlighting all the resources and services the Library provides aside from books.

Without any further business to discuss, F. Olanipekun-Lewis motioned for the meeting to be adjourned. The motion was second and carried.