

**Minutes of the November 13, 2023
Montclair Public Library Board of Trustees Meeting**

The 2184th meeting of the Montclair Public Library Board of Trustees was held on Monday, November 13, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. in accordance with New Jersey Law.

The meeting was called to order by President JoAnn McCullough at 7:07 pm.

Open Meetings Act:

President JoAnn McCullough announced that the meeting was in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. Notice of this meeting was posted on the Library website, in the Library, at the Municipal Building and advertised in the Star Ledger. Notice of the change of venue to an Hybrid meeting was posted on the library website.

Roll Call:

Board Members Present: JoAnn McCullough, Presiding, Theodore Graham, Diana Lunin, Andrew Silver, Geoffrey Borshof, Brian Clarkson and Lilian Ferguson

Board Members Absent:

Library Staff Present: Director Janet Torsney, Assistant Director Selwa Shamy, Recording Secretary Linda Welch

Approval of Minutes:

The Minutes of the October 16, 2023 meeting stood approved. Brian Clarkson made the motion and Andrew Silver seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Presidents' Report:

JoAnn McCullough reported that:

- The Finance Committee met on November 3 to review the Budget.
- The Executive Committee met on November 6 to discuss the Agenda for the Board meeting.
- The Building Committee met November 9
 - The ADA bathrooms work is completed and has passed inspection.
 - The Bellevue Avenue Branch water infiltration study should be completed in December.
 - The HVAC Audit for the Bellevue Avenue Branch and the Main Library
 - The Library is working on a Solar Proposal.
- The Nominating Committee will present under old business
- There are 2 open seats on the Board.
 - Board members are invited to share input on what characteristics and skills new Board members should have.

Treasurer's Report:

Brian Clarkson presented the Treasurer's Report:

Brian Clarkson moved for the Resolution #23-48 Approving the Bills and Payables between the October 16, 2023 and November 13, 2023 Board of Trustees Meetings be approved and the itemized summary be made part of the minutes and Diana Lunin seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Brian Clarkson moved for the adoption of Resolution #23-49 Pre-Approving Bills and Payables Due Between the November 13, 2023 and January 8, 2024 Board of Trustees Meetings be approved and the itemized summary be made part of the minutes and Diana Lunin seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Geoffrey Borshoff moved for the adoption of Resolution #23-50 Approving the October 2023 Bank Reconciliation Statement and Brian Clarkson seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Reports from Support Organizations:

Report from The MPL Foundation - Gina Chung Fortt

It has been a busy fall for the Foundation, and already the Annual Appeal season is underway. The Annual Appeal has been the Foundation's largest, most consistent source of funding over its 20-year history.

2023 Grants - Pending and Awarded (\$108,000 to date)

Awarded:

- Arts Midwest Big Read - \$7,500 (1:1 match) for 2024
- Investors Foundation - \$500 for Social Services office furniture or equipment
- Partners for Health Foundation - \$100K (\$50K for 2-years of Social Worker p/t salary)

Pending:

- Blue Foundry Charitable Foundation - \$5K for 2024 Social Services budget
- Citizens Philanthropic Foundation – LOI in for \$5K for Adult School finance classes
- Essex County Local Arts - \$10K for 2024 Classical Music concert series
- New Jersey State Council on the Arts - \$10K for 2024 Creative Aging Initiative
- Nissan Foundation - LOI in for \$10K for Adult School History & Culture lectures
- Terhune Foundation - \$1,200 children's books
- Whitehill Foundation - \$5K for loan-able Children's STEM kits

Donor Stewardship

A wonderful appreciation event was held for donors at the home of Emily and Matt Hagen earlier this month. With about 20 people in attendance, it felt very special and intimate. Alice Elliott Dark and Dionne Ford were the featured guests and gave everyone in attendance a glimpse inside the life of a writer. We were lucky to have a few of our largest donors in attendance so that we could celebrate their generosity and impact on the library.

On November 16, we will be holding a small ribbon-cutting and dedication with Josh Weston and his family in front of the Main Library. Josh has supported beautification efforts by replacing the benches in the courtyard and sponsoring the installation of a flagpole.

Community Events

Two successful community events in which the Foundation played a key role – the Little Read and Sweet & Spooky Halloween – took place in October.

The 15th Annual Little Read served 524 children and families. We had dozens of volunteer guest readers, and raised more than \$15,000 in support of children’s programs and materials in the coming year..

Sweet & Spooky Halloween had 290 people in attendance, garnered lots of new additions to the Foundation mailing list through raffle entries, and was a feel-good event to lead us into the Annual Appeal.

Annual Appeal

Our annual appeal mailing goes out this week to 7,500 households (via the mail house) and approximately 750 VIPs on our in-house mailing list. Our email solicitation will reach 6,780 people. I would like to see a return to 2021 levels this year in terms of the number of donors (more than 650) and amount raised (more than \$200k).

A social media campaign is in development and we are exploring additional ways to boost visibility including targeted online advertising (which we piloted last year with the help of Library Trustee Geoffrey Borshof) and lawn signs featuring the “Montclair is a Library Town” logo.

Montclair may have a population of over 40,000 but it is still a “small town” in many ways. Don’t underestimate the importance of one-on-one conversations, social media posts encouraging participation, and reminding people to include the library in their year-end giving. These small interactions make a big difference!

Montclair Library Friends: Ed Robins

- Erin Roll led a guided tour of the Main library on October 20.
- On November 18 the Friends steering committee will volunteer at the Open Book/Open Mind event featuring Journalist Lisa Belkin. She will discuss “Genealogy of a Murder,” a true crime account of the murder of a police officer, with bestselling novelist Christina Baker Kline.
- Ariel Zeitlin has asked the Friends to volunteer at a January 2024 Open Book/Open Mind event.

Friends of Bellevue Avenue Library, Inc.: Ilmar Vanderer

- Kristen has proposed that the Friends hold an December 14-30 indoor book sale.
- There will be a Murder on Baker Street - An Adult Murder Mystery Party for adults at the Bellevue Avenue Branch on Saturday, December 02
- Is looking forward to the Bellevue Avenue Plaza design project.

Library Report:

Assistant Director Report: Selwa Shamy

Building & Safety

- The ADA Bathroom project has been completed and the first floor bathrooms are open.
- Accessible handles with a lock will be installed, at the library's expense, on the third floor bathroom doors. For security purposes, these bathrooms traditionally have remained locked until someone requests a key.
- A staff training session took place on Fri, Nov 10 with Captain Romito of the Montclair
- Police Dept. and Ben Hymson of Montclair Ambulance Unit. The session focused on services both organizations offer the community and their interactions with library patrons, staff also had the opportunity to ask questions.
- New furniture has been ordered for the Teen Room at the Main Library and Kid's Place at the Bellevue Ave. Branch.
- The carpets were cleaned at the Main Library.

Programming

- The annual Kwanzaa celebration is scheduled for Sat., Dec. 16. Libations will take place from 12-12:30 p.m., Maati Cultural Arts Community Drummers will provide a family workshop from 1-2 p.m., and a Kora player will perform from 2:30-3:30 p.m. from 2-4 p.m. upstairs in the Children's Room, there will be balloon twisting and card tricks with ISLANDMAGIC and a Kwanzaa art activity with Mansa Musa.

Schools

- The Little Read took place from October 18-20. The Main Library hosted six schools in seven sessions with a total of 322 people. The Branch host four schools in four sessions with a total of 112 people. The Branch also hosted four community reads with an attendance of 88.

Staff

- Guitry Banks, who has been with the Borrower Services Dept. part time since August of 2022, has been hired as a full-time Library Assistant with the Adult Services Dept. He is currently in graduate school working toward his library degree. His first day is November 20.

- Matilda Williams, who was an MPL staff member from 2000 to 2020, has been rehired as a part-time Library Assistant in the Youth and Teen Services Dept, her first day is November 15.
- Margaret Higgins, who has been a member of the Borrower Services team through the NJ Dept. of Labor's Senior Community Service Employment Program / WorkForce 55+ program, has been hired as a permanent MPL staff member to fill Guitry Banks' vacancy.
- Staff are taking a popular training, which has been made free for the week of November 6 only, on interacting with those that are unhoused. I found the training to be practical and very informative.
- Selwa resigned from the Executive Board of the NJ Library Association to make more time for my duties at MPL.

Library Director Janet Torsney:

Behind The Stats

- The number of visits increased 2.5 times overall. Visits to the Branch increased 8 times!
- Program participation more than doubled.
- Circulation increased 44%; children's circulation doubled.

Incidents

- On October 18, Michael D. Byrne (running for State Senate) and others gathered in front of the Library to protest the Teen Drag Bingo program that was taking place in the auditorium. Staff did an excellent job of ensuring the teens were safe and able to enjoy the program.
- ○ There was much community response in favor of the Library.
 - § Our thank you- post had very high likes on Instagram (222) and Facebook (334). Many positive comments included, "We loved the MPL before, but after the other night we fell more in love with our library staff! Thank you for being your awesome selves."
 - § A parent who was there with her child made a contribution of \$250 that night in support of the Library.
- Denise Miele was banned for 6 months for spitting on another patron
- Parent with an adult autistic child was asked to move to the second floor. We are clarifying our policy with staff.
- Working on simpler, clearer standards about code of conduct violations. Put code of conduct signs in all meeting rooms

Buildings

- BAB water-remediation project, new window film for Youth Services, MSU study of café space continue apace.
- New proposal, including roof and solar, submitted by Geosolar.
- Working with RMC on HVAC replacement savings
- Energy audit site visit on 10/31.
- Site surveys are being done so we can get estimates on generators for both buildings.

- Working with Ed Robin on BAB courtyard and other capital projects (sustainability plan, security cameras and new auditorium chairs)
- The benches in front of the Main Library, which were donated by Josh Weston, will be officially dedicated to Judy Weston on 11/16

Programs and Services

- Big Read is coming together. Wide variety of events planned for February through April. *Save the date for the Community Leader Breakfast on January 5 at the Library.* It's been great to have Wil Atkins and Lois Whipple on the Advisory Committee.
- Little Read was great for us and the kids. Foundation met their goal. We're hoping to get lots of new library cardholders among the students and teachers.
- OBOM working on 1/18 program featuring Lisa Belkin and xx. Working on 2024 program, which is looking great

Township, Mayor, Council

- Working with Township IT staff to coordinate new server and ensure we meet cybersecurity and liability standards.
- Met with CFO and Deputy Manager about capital requests, building issues and the parking lot.
- Budget meeting with CFO and Interim Township Manager set for 11/14.

Technology

- Replacing admin copier on its last legs with new leased copier. We will save \$70/month, better customer service, the same company as our other copiers and brand-new, modern machine.
- The e-rate funded network install will begin next month. We're planning to apply for consultants to monitor the server for the next cycle.

Other

- Checked with NJ State Library and NJLA about trustee trainings. They are both on hold right now. I'll check back in January.
- 2024 budget passed at October BCCLS System Council meeting
- Met with Finance and Program Committees
- Attended MPLF Board meeting
- Dance on the Lawn, which closed in October, is in the process of adding their old site to the local history part of our website.
- Changed biweekly leadership meetings to more of a brainstorming format.
- Gearing up for hiring in January. Planning to become more efficient so we do not lose hires in a lengthy process.
- Poor West Orange Library! The floor of their new space will not hold all their books; they have to weed drastically before they can open. We are helping them by renewing and signing up West Orange patrons for their cards.

- Met with ADP to learn more about the HR and other services they provide. In the absence of an HR professional and in light of the reasonable cost, we would like to give it a test drive for 2024.
- Met with MPLF and Scholastic to talk partnerships

Youth and Teen Services Department - Jodi Silverman

- Jodi Silverman, head of youth and teen services, discussed the department's 2024 overarching goals themed around authoritative cultural & heritage programming, emerging language literacy skills, and social emotional learning.

Old Business:

Nominating Committee Report

Diana Lunin presented the proposed slate for 2023-24, Executive Board, which is a one year term.

- JoAnn McCullough, President
- Theodore Graham, Vice President
- Brian Clarkson, Treasurer
- Diana Lunin, Secretary

In accordance with the By-Laws of the Board of Trustees, the Election will take place at the January meeting of the Board.

Bellevue Avenue Branch Library Landscaping Presentation

Edward Robin presented an overview of the renovations to the Bellevue Avenue Branch Library plaza, removal of two trees, which represent a trip hazard, planting two new trees elsewhere on Library property, boxwood hedges and two benches.

Ed asked that the Board fill out and file the Application Certificate of Appropriateness required to be submitted to the Montclair Historic Preservation Commission with the scope of work prior to December 7, 2023. It goes to Janice Talley, Montclair Township planner with a copy to Kathleen Bennett.

New Business:

Resolution #23-51 Approving The 2024 Budget

Whereas, the equalized assessed property tax values for 2024 as certified by the Director of the Division of Taxation in the Department of the Treasury have been provided; and

Whereas, the sum equal to one-third of a mil of the equalized assessed property tax values for the maintenance of the free public library in accordance with NJSA 40:54-8 is \$3,572,977 for the year ending December 31, 2024; and

Whereas, the Library has requested an additional appropriation of \$432,850 from the Township of Montclair to provide additional staff, programs, materials and hours of operation at both locations; and

Whereas, The Library Director has prepared a balanced budget for FY24 and presented it to the Board of Trustees for adoption; and

Whereas, the Budget and Finance Committee of the Board have reviewed and approved the budget.

Therefore Be It Now Resolved that the Board of Trustees authorizes and approves the attached budget for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2024.

Brian Clarkson moved to accept Resolution #23-51 Approving The 2024 Budget Theodore Graham seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Resolution #23-52 Designating The Montclair Public Library To Be A Book Sanctuary

Whereas, the Montclair Public Library celebrates and serves our diverse, dynamic, literate, library card-carrying town. We affirm the following democratic principles, adapted from the American Library Association's historic Freedom to Read statement (1953); and

Whereas, the role of the Montclair Public Library is to provide access to ideas and information to foster growth of the mind. These include ideas that may be provocative or controversial. We provide that access without endorsing or agreeing with every idea in circulation; and

Whereas, reading is a foundational skill, essential for critical thinking, future learning and exercising democratic freedom; and

Whereas, books and other materials are tools for understanding complex issues; libraries provide access to books and other materials that offer lessons to readers of all ages and expand our understanding of people with different backgrounds, ideas, and beliefs; and

Whereas, all people, including young people, deserve to see themselves reflected in a library's collection; and

Whereas, librarians are professionals trained to not impose their own thoughts and opinions on which ideas are right, but to make knowledge and ideas available so that people have the freedom to choose what to read; and

Whereas, removing and banning books and other materials from public libraries represent a loss of liberty, a step toward government censorship, and the erosion of our state's and

our nation's commitment to freedom of expression; and

Therefore, Be It Resolved That the Trustees of the Montclair Public Library endorse the following statement:

“Individuals should be trusted to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. Further, people should not be making decisions for other people about what they read.”

Therefore, Be It Further Resolved That we as Montclair Public Library Trustees act to protect the rights of everyone to access a variety of books and other materials, in libraries, bookstores, online and in other venues; and

Therefore, Be It Further Resolved That, the Board of Trustees of the Montclair Public Library hereby designates the Montclair Public Library as a book sanctuary.

Andrew Silver moved to accept Resolution #23-52 Designating The Montclair Public Library To Be A Book Sanctuary Lilian Ferguson seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Public Comment:

Aya - A Montclair Resident - expressed her concerns about the Jewish Voices for Peace event.

Lani Sommer-Padilla - A Montclair resident - expressed her concerns about the Jewish Voices for Peace event.

Adjournment:

At 8:50 p.m. Theodore Graham moved to adjourn the Board of Trustees meeting and Diana Lunin seconded. The motion was carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned.