

**Minutes of the November 18, 2024
Montclair Public Library Board of Trustees Meeting**

The 2195th meeting of the Montclair Public Library Board of Trustees was held on Monday, November 18, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in accordance with New Jersey Law.

The meeting was called to order by President JoAnn McCullough at 7:05 p.m.

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, Andrew Silver, Tamar Campbell, Diana Lunin, Brian Clarkson, Geoffrey Borshof and Erika Pierce

Board Members Absent: Lilian Ferguson

Library Staff Present: Director Radwa Ali, Assistant Director Selwa Shamy, Recording Secretary Linda Welch.

Approval of Minutes:

The Minutes of the October 21, 2024 Regular Meeting stood approved Tamar Campbell made the motion and Theodore Graham seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Presidents' Report:

JoAnn McCullough welcomed Erika Pierce to the MPL Board of Trustees and administered her Oath of Office.

She reported that:

- The Building Committee met on November 8
- The Executive Committee met on November 11 to review the agenda.
- The Personnel Committee met on November 13

Treasurer's Report:

Brian Clarkson presented the Treasurer's Report:

Brian Clarkson moved for the adoption of Resolution #24-46 Approving the Bills and Payables Between the October 21, 2024 and November 18, 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.

Diana Lunin moved for the adoption of Resolution #24-47 Pre-Approving the Bills and Payables Due Between the November 18, 2024 and January 20, 2025 Board of Trustees Meetings be approved and the itemized summary be made part of the minutes and Theodore Graham seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Theodore Graham moved for the adoption of Resolution #24-48 Approving the October 2024 Bank Reconciliation Statements and Brian Clarkson seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Reports from Support Organizations:

MPL Foundation – Sheila Boyd

Annual Appeal

The Foundation has raised just over \$24,000 since the launch of the Annual Appeal on November 1st. Solicitation letters went out to over 8,000 households and an email campaign reached approximately 6,000 people with an open rate near 40%. The familiar book o' meters are up in front of each library building to measure our progress. Social media posts will go out at least once a week between now and the end of the year.

Trustees can support the annual appeal by making a gift of their own, encouraging their friends to join them in giving, and liking and sharing the Foundation's content on social media. If you are interested in doing more to contribute to the success of the appeal, I would be happy to meet with you about personal outreach to a list of donors.

Grants

The Foundation and Library were recently awarded the following grants:

- \$1,000 in support of Adult School registration software from Investors Foundation
- \$5,827 in support of Adult School art instructors from Essex County Arts Grant
- \$7,889 in support of document digitization from Essex County History Grant
- \$15,000 in support of A/V upgrade in the Library auditorium from Hyde & Watson Foundation

We are still awaiting notification on more than half a dozen outstanding grant proposals.

The Little Read

Three cheers to the amazing volunteers and library staff who made this year's Little Read such a resounding success! Fourteen schools made visits to the library, and more than 1,057 children sat for a story time either at the library, in a park, or at the YMCA. Turnout was double that of last year! In addition to highlighting the importance of reading aloud to children to facilitate youth literacy, the Foundation raised more than \$11,000 in sponsorships. These funds support programs and materials in the Youth & Teen Services department. Check out the slideshow of pictures on the Foundation [website](#).

There are nearly 70 responses to the "Save the Date" email to request an invitation.

Montclair Library Friends / Friends of the Bellevue Avenue Library: *Ed Robin & Ilmar Vanderer*

The Montclair Library Friends have participated in 2 Open Book / Open Mind events in November

The two Friends Groups would like to have the MPL Foundation submit an application to the New Jersey State Historic Trust for a grant to pay for a portion of the cost of the work on the BAB Plaza.

Ed Robin and Ilmar Vanderer asked if:

- The BAB Elevator would be included in the Capital Needs Assessment
- The BAB Roof replacement is included in the Capital Funding Request.

Ilmar requested that the meeting scheduled on November 30 could be changed to 3pm

Ilmar Vanderer presented a check for \$2,000 to the MPL Foundation from the Friends of the Bellevue Avenue Library in honor of the Annual Appeal.

Library Report:

Assistant Director Report: *Selwa Shamy*

Building & Security

- Heat Pump - still waiting for two more quotes to repair one of three heat pumps. Despite the heat pump for the third floor being out of commission, the floor has been at a comfortable temperature.

Schools

- The 16th annual Little Read took place October 21-25. Attendance and number of classes participating were higher than last year with 14 classes participating. Two schools took advantage of library card registrations, Northeast and Bradford.
- Buzz Aldrin's Study Skills elective students made two visits to the Bellevue Ave Branch with Branch Manager Kristen Comeaux and Youth Services Literacy Specialist Gina Chung Fortt.

Programming

- Senior Fridays in October was held four times with attendance of 77, 91, 110, and 90
- Memory Cafe, a collaboration with LifeLong Montclair held one session with 14 attendees
- Kwanzaa Community Celebration will be held on December 14 from 12-4 p.m., there will be a Marketplace throughout the first floor and a series of events, with featured author Ibi Zoboi (*The People Remember: A Kwanzaa Holiday Book for Kids*), Kora for Kwanzaa with Dance from West Africa, Spoken Word Poetry, Libations and the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa, Children of the Sun Poetry, Maati Cultural Arts Community Drummers and Dancers and remarks from Mayor Baskerville, Radwa Ali, and JoAnn McCullough.

Staffing

- Head of Youth & Teen Services Jodi Silverman will be leaving the Library; her last day is November 27.
- Deivis Garcia, who has been with the Library for over 20 years, has been promoted to Head of Youth & Teen Services. Deivis will start on December 30 -- I will be working more closely with the department during the transition in leadership.
- Kaitlyn Flannagan has been hired as a full-time programming associate with the Adult School Department, her first day is December 2.
- Part-time Youth Services Library Assistant Lynn Ferrara resigned, her last day is November 22.

Library Director Report: Radwa Ali

Operations

- Staff meetings: On 11/13 we had our first all-hands staff meeting since I joined. With such a large staff and all library hours being public hours requiring desk coverage, it would be enormously beneficial to schedule meetings such as this more frequently and in advance since they necessitate the library opening an hour late and so I am requesting that the board authorize this proactively for the 2025 year.

2025 Budget

- 2025 Proposed Budget is in the packet. In order to adequately fund the operation of the library, we are asking for a discretionary figure of \$670,000 on top of the minimum funding of \$3,888,915.
 - Operating Funds would fund
 - Cleaning Service
 - Security
 - Capital Needs Assessment
 - Portable Chiller Rental (4 month)
 - Direct Install Payments (estimating Fall installation)
 - Increased professional development
 - An enlarged general maintenance fund to cover some carpet replacements, stair/stage refinishing, and other small improvements we can make to the buildings
 - An enlarged fund for furniture replacement
 - An enlarged fund for books so we can fulfill demand with multiple copies

2025 (and beyond) Capital

- A list of major capital needs is attached for discussion and review. This list was requested by Councilor D'Amato and specifically requested that we include urgent needs up to approximately \$5 million for a potential dedicated bond ordinance.
 - HVAC: My estimate for the HVAC additional components last month was way off, and I have a more concrete document outlining these expenses which is expected to hit \$1.4 Million.
 - BAB Water Infiltration: \$500,000
 - Main Roof & Solar: \$700,000
 - Windows / Building Envelope Upgrade: \$2,200,000
 - BAB Courtyard: \$200,000
- The Capital Needs Assessment should give us better data on our two facilities so that we can proactively plan and fund replacements and repairs

Community

- Little Read & Spooky Halloween
- Met with Councilors Birmingham and D'Amato informally and discussed both operating and capital concerns
- Attended full Unhoused Commission meeting

Old Business:

Resolution #24-49 Approving The 2025 Budget

Whereas, the equalized assessed property tax values for 2025 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 \$3,888,915 for the year ending December 31, 2025; and

Whereas, the Library has requested an additional appropriation of \$670,000 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 FY25 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, 2025.

Theodore Graham moved to accept the Resolution #24-49 Approving the 2025 Budget and Diana Lunin seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Montclair Public Library Urgent Capital Needs

Library Director Radwa Ali discussed the MPL Urgent Capital Needs:

At the request of township council members, She has compiled a prioritized list of facility improvements that address our most urgent needs. These projects, outlined in order of priority, have been formally approved by the Trustees of the Montclair Public Library and are submitted to the township for consideration. The projects below total \$5,000,000 and would be completed within two years, barring construction delays, of fund availability.

HVAC System Overhaul Location: Main Library Cost: \$1,400,000*

In October 2024, the library entered an agreement with PSEG through the Direct Install state incentive program to replace our chiller and two boilers, with work anticipated to begin in mid-to-late 2025. However, the incentive program covers only emissions-related upgrades, excluding essential HVAC components such as the building control system, air handlers, and VAV boxes. Ideally, these components would be overhauled simultaneously with the chiller and boilers by the same company to ensure system continuity and reduce integration issues.

*The cost of the boilers and chiller is not included in the above figure. This expense will be covered by the library's operating budget, totaling \$500,000 payable over the next five years. In the event the township (or an outside entity) chooses to fully fund the chiller & boilers, then we'd be in a position to pay the full sum which would reduce the long term burden on our operating budget.

Water Infiltration Remediation Location: Bellevue Avenue Branch Cost: \$500,000

The Bellevue Avenue Branch Library has faced significant and persistent water infiltration issues, affecting the roof, walls, and foundation. This infiltration has not only compromised the structure but has also led to considerable internal impacts. To comprehensively address these issues, we need extensive upgrades, including partial roof replacement, masonry repairs, and improvements to storm drainage systems. Key elements, such as brick repointing, repairing cracked masonry, and addressing the aging EPDM roof, are vital for maintaining the building's integrity and preventing further deterioration.

The estimated cost above, combined with the funds available in the township's library capital account, reflects the current projection to complete these critical repairs. Addressing these concerns now will mitigate additional damage, avoid increased repair costs, and ensure the branch remains a safe, dry, and welcoming space for patrons.

Roof Replacement & Solar Project Location: Main Library Cost: \$700,000

The main library's roof has reached the end of its lifespan, creating an urgent need for replacement before minor leaks worsen into significant failures. Since the top floor houses our children's room—a highly active space where safety and comfort are

essential—replacing the roof now is vital to prevent costly issues down the line. This replacement also provides a timely opportunity to achieve our goal of significantly reducing energy consumption and utility costs by installing solar panels, which are not feasible on the current aging structure. Funding for both the roof replacement and solar panel installation would not only protect our facilities and collections but also advance the library’s commitment to sustainability, providing lasting benefits to our community.

Windows / Building Envelope Upgrade Location: Main Library Cost: \$2,200,000

The main library, constructed in 1956, still has its original windows on the first two levels, which have become a major source of energy loss, as confirmed by our recent energy audit. These aging windows, particularly the iconic east-facing span, allow a substantial amount of heat to enter the building, impacting the open floor plan and often making the interior several degrees warmer. Upgrading these windows would significantly reduce energy consumption, lower utility costs, and enhance the comfort and experience of our patrons.

Given the scope of this project, it would also be highly advantageous to explore relocating the main entrance from its current central location to the area near the Isobel Rose Cafe. The existing entrance doors are undersized and in need of replacement, while a relocated entrance would allow for a properly sized lobby directly adjacent to our heavily used auditorium. This redesign would improve both accessibility and functionality, supporting better traffic flow and enhancing the overall patron experience.

Courtyard Restoration Location: Bellevue Avenue Library Cost: \$200,000*

The Bellevue Avenue Branch courtyard restoration is critical for addressing structural and safety concerns, specifically to reduce water infiltration issues that have impacted the building. The project includes regrading and extensive hardscape and landscape work to divert stormwater runoff away from the structure, which should help mitigate ongoing water infiltration problems. Additionally, upgrades will resolve safety hazards, such as tripping risks caused by tree roots and uneven paving.

Alongside these functional improvements, this restoration will maintain the courtyard’s original design with native plantings, granite and concrete pavers, and essential seating elements. These updates are intended to create a safe and welcoming outdoor space for patrons while ensuring that the building’s infrastructure is better protected against future issues.

*The Library Foundation intends to apply for New Jersey State Historic Trust funds for a matching \$200,000. The full cost is projected to be \$400,000.

Nominating Committee Report

Members of the Nominating Committee are Diana Lunin, Theodore Graham and Geoffrey Borshoff.

Diana Lunin presented the proposed slate for the 2025 Executive Board:

- 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.

New Business:

Resolution #24-50 Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for Cleaning of the Montclair Public Library Main and Bellevue Facilities

Whereas, the Montclair Public Library has a need to acquire a facility cleaning service as a non-fair and open contract pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 19:44A-20.5 as appropriate; and

Whereas, the Library Director has determined and certified in writing that the value of the acquisition will exceed \$17,500; and,

Whereas, the anticipated term of this contract is 1 year and may be extended 3 times as approved by this governing body; and

Whereas, Pro-Cleaners Inc has submitted a proposal dated 10/30/2024 indicating they will provide facility cleaning services for both the Main and the Bellevue branches of the Montclair Public Library for the \$3,600 per month; and

Whereas, Pro-Cleaners Inc has completed and submitted a Business Entity Disclosure Certification which certifies that Pro-Cleaners Inc has not made any reportable contributions to a political or candidate committee in the Township of Montclair in the previous one year, and that the contract will prohibit Pro-Cleaners Inc from making any reportable contributions through the term of the contract, and

Whereas, the Director of the Library has certified that funds are available in the Library Operating Budget not to exceed \$43,200 to cover the cost of a full year of cleaning, and

Now Therefore, Be It Resolved that the Board of Trustees of the Montclair Public Library authorizes the Library Director to enter into a contract with Pro-Cleaners Inc as described herein; and,

Be It Further Resolved that the Business Disclosure Entity Certification and the Determination of Value be placed on file with this resolution. and,

Be It Further Resolved that a notice of this action shall be printed once in the official newspaper of the Township of Montclair.

Diana Lunin moved to adopt the Resolution #24-50 Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for Cleaning of the Montclair Public Library Main and Bellevue Facilities and Geoffrey Borshof second. The motion was carried unanimously.

Resolution #24-51 Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for a Capital Needs Assessment

Whereas, the Montclair Public Library has a need to acquire professional services for a Capital Needs Assessment as a non-fair and open contract pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 19:44A-20.5 as appropriate; and,

Whereas, the Library Director has determined and certified in writing that the value of the acquisition will exceed \$17,500; and,

Whereas, Engberg Anderson, Inc. has submitted a proposal dated 10/30/2024 indicating they will provide a comprehensive Capital Needs Assessment for both the Main and Bellevue branches of the Montclair Public Library for a total cost of \$31,300; and

Whereas, Engberg Anderson, Inc has completed and submitted a Business Entity Disclosure Certification which certifies that Engberg Anderson, Inc has not made any reportable contributions to a political or candidate committee in the Township of Montclair in the previous one year, and that the contract will prohibit Engberg Anderson, Inc from making any reportable contributions through the term of the contract, and

Whereas, the Director of the Library has certified that funds are available in the Library Operating Budget not to exceed \$31,300 to cover the cost of the professional services rendered, and

Now Therefore, Be It Resolved that the Board of Trustees of the Montclair Public Library authorizes the Library Director to enter into an agreement with Engberg Anderson, Inc. as described herein; and,

Be It Further Resolved that the Business Disclosure Entity Certification and the Determination of Value be placed on file with this resolution. and,

Be It Further Resolved that a notice of this action shall be printed once in the official newspaper of the Township of Montclair.

Diana Lunin moved to accept the Resolution #24-51 Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for a Capital Needs Assessment and Geoffrey Borshof seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Resolution #24-52 Adoption of 2025 Staff Salary Increase

Whereas, the audit of the library finances performed by Vinci, Lurch, and Higgins in accordance with NJSA 40A:5-4 and accepted by this body with the passage of Resolution #24-39 found no irregularities, improprieties, or deficiencies in the financial management of the library, and

Whereas, the audit recommended the Board of Trustees adopt an individual resolution for a staff salary increase in addition to the adoption of the budget, and

Whereas, the Board of Trustees are committed to transparent finances, and

Whereas, the funds were budgeted and are available.

Therefore Be It Now Resolved by the Board of Trustees of the Free Public Library of Montclair that a salary increase of **3%** for all Montclair Public Library staff starting with the payroll period beginning December 30, 2024.

Theodore Graham moved to accept the Resolution #24-52 Adoption of 2025 Staff Salary Increase Thamar Campbell seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Resolution #24-53 Authorizing Delayed Openings to Accommodate Staff Meetings & Professional Development

Whereas the Administration of the Montclair Public Library recognizes the need for monthly staff meetings to promote wellbeing for the staff, and

Whereas, the staff of the Montclair Public Library is a close knit group of people who strive to make the Library a welcoming place to all, and

Whereas, staff meetings will allow the library director, managers and staff to communicate, and

Whereas, staff meetings will allow us to review projects and ensure that everything is going to plan, talk through blockers and air any concerns, and

Whereas, staff meetings will allow us to solve problems, make decisions, share information, and collaborate as a group, and

Whereas, staff meetings will allow MPL staff regular opportunities for staff-wide training and professional development.

Therefore, Be It Resolved that the Montclair Public Library will hold monthly all staff meetings in 2025 from 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM, opening the library at 11 AM.

- Tuesday, Jan 14th
- Wednesday, Feb 12th
- Thursday, Mar 13th
- Tuesday, Apr 8th
- Wednesday, May 14th
- Thursday, June 12th
- Tuesday, Sept 9th
- Wednesday, Oct 8th
- Thursday, Nov 13th

- Tuesday, Dec 9th

Theodore Graham moved to accept the Resolution #24-53 Authorizing Delayed Openings to Accommodate Staff Meetings & Professional Development and Tamar Campbell seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

Public Comment:

Ilmar Vanderer expressed appreciation to Radwa Ali and Jill DeMarco for the Sarah Karloff event.

He expressed his delight at the Murder Mystery events at the Bellevue Avenue Branch Library.

He suggested that the library survey other libraries for funding, criteria and content of their library of things program.

Kristen Comeaux thanked Ilmar for his kind comments about the programs at the Branch. She assured the Board that the Library of Things committee has reviewed other libraries policies, and worked with the Library's attorney on insurance and liability.

Library patron, Crystal N. expressed her interest in reading the Board meeting minutes from this year's meeting.

Move into Executive Session – Personnel

At 8:45 Tamar Campbell made a motion to go into Executive Session and Theodore Graham seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.

The Board of Trustees returned to Public Session at 9:30 p.m.

Adjournment:

At 9:30 p.m. JoAnn McCullough moved to adjourn the Board of Trustees meeting and Theodore Graham seconded. The motion was carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned.