

PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Minutes of Meeting  
April 4th, 2022

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The meeting was called to order by President Thomas Pappas at 7:00pm, with Director Merlin having started the webinar at 6:53pm and quorum having been reached. The meeting was held simultaneously on Zoom and in-person, and broadcast live on PATV's television station. President Pappas cited open meeting laws. Viewers were allowed to pose questions or comments to the chair in real-time.

The roll call was taken:

**Present**

Peter Bakula  
Don McAllister  
Stephanie Najjar  
Thomas Pappas  
Anne Quinn  
Richard Shruhan  
Jennifer Smith  
Ruth Titelbaum  
Katrina Vassallo

**Absent**

Stephanie Dallaire  
Frances Gallugi  
Kate O'Brien

**Approval and Discussion of Minutes from Previous Meeting**

There was a **MOTION** to approve the minutes of the previous meeting by Trustee Najjar after the Board paused to review. The motion was seconded by Trustee Shruhan.

All in Favor: Yes      Any Opposed: No

No discussion. The motion carried unanimously.

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**Receipt of Communications**

The Board received a letter from the Peabody Veterans Council inviting them to march in a Memorial Day parade and attend a ceremony at the war memorials in front of City Hall.

There was a **MOTION** to receive the communication by Trustee Vassallo. The motion was seconded by Trustee Najjar.

All in Favor: Yes      Any Opposed: No

Discussion later. The motion carried unanimously.

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## **Director's Report to the Board of Library Trustees**

### **Staffing**

Amory Thomas has accepted the position of Senior West Branch Librarian, leaving her former position as Children's & Teen Assistant Librarian, and began at the West Branch today. Amory will be a dedicated and creative West Branch Librarian, and all are excited to see what she brings to West Peabody! Amory is especially excited to bring more vibrancy and interactive aspects to the Children's and Teen areas, and will be beginning a West Branch teen volunteer program, after doubling the Main Library's existing teen volunteer program.

Since the last meeting, three additional staff members have resigned. Assistant West Branch Librarian Jillian Parsons has moved on to another job, as has Senior Teen Librarian Joanna Corea. Library Aide Jeff Spencer has moved into a full time position at another library. Director Merlin wishes them all the best of luck, and hopes to post these three positions in the next week.

Human Resources assures Director Merlin that they will be posting the full time custodian position, that has now been vacant for one year, this week.

Due to these staffing changes, much is in flux right now, and Director Merlin commends and thanks Library staff for their flexibility and understanding as she strives to fill all vacant positions as quickly as possible.

### **Programs & Initiatives**

Senior South Branch Library Amy Titus and Assistant South Branch Librarian Betsy Reid have started working with the South Memorial Elementary School to register all students for library cards and arrange for classrooms to visit the Library during school hours. Over 140 students have signed up for library cards so far. All three third grade classrooms visited the South Branch for a tour and to check out books in March, and all three kindergarten classes will be visiting in April.

The art of Nancy Munie is on display at the South Branch Library from March 5th to May 7th. Nancy creates wreaths and other items with handmade paper roses. Her work is available for purchase and she is open for commissions as well.

Senior West Branch Librarian Amory Thomas will be hosting a library card sign up event at Higgins Middle school after this month.

The most recent Foundation-funded Spring Concert featured local singer/songwriter Karen Grenier, and Senior Librarian Gabi Toth is still receiving complimentary email and comments a week later. She is scheduling another date with Ms. Grenier for the fall. The New England Chamber Players return for an encore performance on April 11th.

The year-long Community Read program centered around the title “We Share the Same Sky” by Rachael Cerrotti, is in full swing. Upcoming related programs include:

- An in-person reading and signing with Ms. Cerrotti on April 26
- Getting Started with Genealogy at the South Branch Library on April 28th and May 19th
- Professor Theo Theocharis will return for a lecture series in May, to discuss “We Share the Same Sky and “Underground Railroad” by Colson Whitehead.

Book clubs have returned! The West Branch Fiction Book club will meet this coming Thursday. The first meeting in over 2 years of the City Hall Employee Book Club and Council on Aging Book Club will take place this and next week, and both will discuss the current community read “We Share the Same Sky.” A new online LGBTQ+ book club, in partnership with the Ashland Library, will also begin later this month.

### **Budget**

Director Merlin has included the monthly budget for your review. The Supplies item line is nearly spent, due to purchasing so many COVID supplies- any overage will be covered by other line items that are underspent, and by State Aid.

Director Merlin submitted the proposed FY23 budget to the City last month. In order to reach the MAR (municipal appropriations requirement) set by the MBLC for certification, an additional \$15,946 (or around 1% ) needs to be added to the current budget for FY23. Director Merlin requested that those additional funds be put towards the creation of 2 additional part-time Aide positions. Director Merlin expects to have a meeting with the Mayor, Finance Director, and President Pappas some time in the next month or so.

### **Policy**

The patron who requested the reconsideration of a West Branch children's book accepted Director Merlin's decision to retain the book and agreement to not highlight the book in any displays, and sent suggestions for other books to fill out the corresponding collection. Children's staff are looking over those recommendations and will purchase any that meet Collection Development policies.

### **Building & Grounds**

The parking lot lights at the West Branch have been replaced. Additionally, Director Merlin requested that a light be placed on the light pole at the top of the Main Library Children's parking lot, and it was installed last week, so the lot that was previously unlit is now much safer for patrons and staff after dark. The cost to the Library is minimal.

After years of seasonal mouse infestations at the Main Library, Director Merlin has signed an ongoing contract with Bain Pest Control for mouse and insect control throughout the whole building. The cost is low given the size of the building, and will be paid for with our Outside Services budget.

DeMatos Landscape performed their spring cleanup and mulching at all 3 buildings last week, and Director Merlin requested an additional application of mulch at all locations for later this summer.

After meeting with the Historical Commission and learning about the Community Preservation Commission that funds projects that preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities, Director Merlin believes that broadening the scope of the lighting work she had planned for the Courtyard would be in the Library's best interest, given that the CPC has funded previous Library projects such as the restoration of the Sutton Room, George Peabody's portrait, and the 3rd floor. In order to truly transform the Courtyard into a multi-season programming and meeting space, the lighting must be redesigned, at the very least, and Director Merlin envisioned a patio and permanent pergola/covering for events, in addition to electrical outlets and storage.

Director Merlin has reached out to three landscape architect consultants who have or have worked with the City on various projects (the bike path, downtown lighting, James St Eco Campus) to see how they might help with this project, and she has requested the application form from the Peabody Community Preservation Commission. This project is in its very beginning states, and Director Merlin will come to the Board as it moves forward. Director Merlin believes that requesting CPA funds is a perfect way to both preserve our grounds and ensure that they're relevant and useful going forward.

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### **Discussion and Questions for the Director**

President Pappas asked if the custodian position had been open for a year. Director Merlin confirmed that the position opened in April 2021 with a retirement and was posted internally before it was posted publicly. Trustee Najjar asked about the delay in filling the position. Director Merlin explained that there are forty five open City positions that are slowly being posted. President Pappas expressed concern for the delay in hiring a new custodian on the basis of mice in the buildings. Director Merlin explained that presence of vermin is normal given the age of the foundation and season changes; however, mice typically leave buildings in the spring when the temperature increases and current mice have not vacated the building. In addition, there are tent encampments behind the Main Library that attract vermin with food and warmth. A full sweep of the building will be done along with subsequent monthly updates.

President Pappas asked about staffing; particularly, the attrition of several employees since January. Director Merlin replied that employee efflux is twofold in that library jobs are plentiful for the first time since the onset of Covid-19, and many jobs are opening up after having been eliminated during the pandemic. Staff who have left the Peabody Institute Library, including two senior staff members, have accepted higher-paying jobs. Traditionally, the City of Peabody library salaries are lower than those in surrounding cities.

President Pappas asked what could help retain staff. Director Merlin replied that increased salary would help. All Library staff are members of the AFT Union, which includes teachers. Teachers have thirteen pay steps whereas librarians have four. Even staff with advanced degrees max out their pay at the fourth step, while the cost of living increases every year. The City is simply not keeping up with salaries. Union negotiations will begin in the summer; the fourth pay step was added only two years ago.

Trustee Quinn asked how staff salaries tie into the budget proposal. Director Merlin replied that she has no control over the salaries because they are union-based. Unlike private companies, City jobs do not allow for salary negotiations. Director Merlin is requesting two additional Aides to work in all three Library buildings. Aides are a valuable resource in that they are inexpensive but provide extra “front-line” labor by picking up extra shifts.

Trustee Quinn asked about purchasing Covid supplies (masks, tests) and whether the City had imposed restrictions. Director Merlin replied that many of these efforts were reimbursed through federal programs. We are still purchasing masks and tests; the Library gives a few hundred masks each week to patrons.

The supplies budget has also purchased items of smaller capital expense. Buildings have not received appropriate care over the years; fixtures need repairs. Covid-related purchases are hopefully one-time purchases, such as hand sanitizer stands. Director Merlin did not ask for a budget decrease this year because we will spend it on supplies for patrons.

Trustee Najjar asked if the Library will have difficulty filling the recently vacated positions in a timely manner. Director Merlin replied that the West Branch Assistant Librarian position and Teen Librarian position will be posted internally and that she anticipates an internal hire.

Trustee Najjar asked whether Children’s area renovations at the West Branch will resume. Director Merlin replied that we would need to discuss with the Foundation because renovations are paid through Foundation funds. None of that money has been spent as of yet. When Trustee Najjar asked where said monies were, Director Merlin replied that it has not changed hands; it remains in the Foundation coffers. Newly-appointed Senior West Branch Librarian Amory Thomas will revitalize the West branch for younger patrons essentially from the ground up.

Trustee Vassallo asked if the relationship between the South Branch and the local schools will be mirrored in other branches. Director Merlin explained that the local school near the South Branch uses the South Branch as their library, thanks to efforts by Senior South Branch Librarian Amy Titus. As of yet, no similar efforts have been made at other branches with other schools.

Trustee McAllister posited that staffing must have been easier in terms of the pandemic because fewer people were physically using the library. Now that more and more people are using the library in person, how much will the current staff be able to do? If other funding isn’t forthcoming, asked Trustee McAllister, would we consider any reduction in

hours at the branches? Director Merlin replied that the current staffing provides a buffer in that everyone at the Library is required to work desk shifts at the Public Services Desk or Welcome Desk. This poses a challenge in that staff who normally work off-desk are losing such time to assist patrons and have to shuffle their workflows. Tasks may take longer, but they are still done.

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There was a **MOTION** to receive the Director’s Report by Trustee Najjar. The motion was seconded by Trustee Smith.

All in Favor: Yes                      Any Opposed: No

The motion carried unanimously.

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### **Reports of the Committees and Sub-committees**

**Executive Committee:**

Nothing to report.

**Audubon:**

Nothing to report.

Trustee O’Brien is absent.

**Building and Grounds:**

Nothing to report.

**Personnel:**

Nothing to report.

**Policy and Procedures:**

Nothing to report.

**Liaison to the Peabody Institute Library Foundation:**

The Foundation met two weeks prior in an informal meeting where they discussed upcoming events.

- Saturday, May 14th, 2022: Geranium sale
- Sunday, September 11th, 2022: International festival, at which the Library will have a table. Rain date is September 18th, 2022.
- Wednesday, September 28th, 2022: Starry Starry Night. This will take place in late September instead of October to avoid a possible Covid surge. They are approaching restaurants for catering.
- Friday, April 28th, 2023: Birds and Bubbly. This event will take significant planning.
- Their next quarterly meeting will be Tuesday, April 26th at 5:30.

**Liaison to the Peabody Historical Society:**

Trustee Quinn shared that the Historical Society hosted Librarian Catherine Badal at one of their volunteer committee sessions and offered a tea. Since then, Librarian Badal and Nora Bigelow, the Director of the Historical Society, have been in touch. Trustee Quinn believes this is a positive change for the Society and would like to share society information that she receives in the future. Director Merlin shared that she has the appropriate contact sheet and will send it out tomorrow. Trustee Quinn then shared that the Historical Society is planning a muster related to Patriots Day. There will be refreshments afterward.

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There was a **MOTION** to receive the reports of the committees and sub-committees by

Trustee Shruhan.. The motion was seconded by Trustee Vassallo.

All in Favor: Yes                      Any Opposed: No

The motion carried unanimously.

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### **Unfinished Business**

Trustee Najjar discussed the ongoing effort to acquire new George Peabody medals. There will be no new medals this year. The representatives at Josten's provided an exorbitant price for solid gold medals that is unsustainable as the medals will be made every year. Trustee Najjar is starting over. The high school principal is communicating with the City because the City holds the donation from the Rappaport family. Hopefully, there will be new medals for next year's ceremony. Director Merlin said that the Library may have an original George Peabody medal. Trustee Najjar shared that one of the Higgins Middle School teachers brought in his medal and it is too small for current purposes. What is wanted is a substantial medal on a ribbon, since this is more efficient than pins. Trustee Najjar revealed that a 1.5-inch round 14k gold medal would cost \$3800; 10k gold would cost \$2500. When Trustee Shruhan questioned why the medals would need to be made of gold, Trustee Najjar explained that people felt the precious medal was more traditional, although she was in favor of a compromise between appearance and cost.

Trustee Titelbaum asked if the Rappaport family fund, the library trust, and the grant fund for a high school medal were all the same money. Director Merlin replied that she did not know; these trusts have existed for a long time. Trustee Najjar reported that only \$896 is available to us; we used to split the cost with the high school. Trustee Shruhan asked how many medals were needed and Trustee Najjar replied eight.

Trustee Najjar went on to explain that, in previous years, the pinning ceremony took place during graduation, but due to the pandemic the ceremony took place during convocation, a much smaller ceremony. She went on to say that the high school will have the final say on when the pinning ceremony takes place. Convocation will take place on June 2nd, 2022 and is far less of an undertaking to attend than graduation. The 2nd will be a Tuesday night. Trustee Najjar is communicating with principals and administration regarding holding the ceremony in the Sutton Room. The pinning ceremony typically coincides with the high school's spring concert. Director Merlin said she spoke with the high school principal in passing at the art show; he described a "mad rush" for people to get across the city for both events. Trustee Najjar wants to know when the spring concert will take place so that the pinning ceremony can occur on another day. She asked about Wednesday night commitments for the Sutton Room; Director Merlin confirmed that Library concerts are typically on Monday nights.

Trustee McAllister stated that the pinning ceremony was held in the Sutton Room because it was given less priority than it deserved at graduation. He felt that the library setting meant more to the families and students. Trustee Najjar mentioned that, in her emails to school officials, it is exciting and meaningful to host the event in the Sutton Room.

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### **New Business**

Earlier, President Pappas introduced the letter from the Veterans Council about the Memorial Day parade. Trustee Quinn expressed support, saying that it is important for the trustees to have more visibility in the community, but expressed concern regarding whether the Board would be able to handle marching. Trustee Najjar explained that the march is slow-paced and short. Trustee Quinn asked if the Board would need a banner to announce its identity. President Pappas said yes. Trustee Shruhan suggested that the Board wear their name tags; Trustee Smith said they would be unreadable from a distance. President Pappas reiterated that a banner would be useful. Director Merlin said that, although there are banners in the Sutton Room, they are not for use. A simple banner can be made that can be used for many different events if necessary. President Pappas stated that the invitation was an honor. While Trustees Najjar, Smith, Vassallo, and Titelbaum spoke in favor of marching, Trustee McAllister shared that the parade does not typically feature banners.

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### **Resolution**

Trustee Najjar suggested an earlier start time for the next meeting. President Pappas shared that the meetings used to begin at 7:30pm, but were changed to 7:00pm over the years. President Pappas asked the Board their opinion on an earlier time. When the Board unanimously agreed, Director Merlin approved a 6:30pm start time for the next meeting. President Pappas proposed an email vote.

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There was a **MOTION** to adjourn the meeting by Trustee Quinn. The motion was seconded by Trustee McAllister.

All in Favor: Yes

Any Opposed: No

The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:03pm.

Submitted by,  
Sarah Boçi  
Recording Secretary