

**PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY**  
**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**Minutes of Meeting**  
**June 5, 2023**

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The meeting was called to order by President Kate O'Brien at 6:35pm, with PATV confirming presence at 6:33pm and quorum having been reached by 6:30pm. The meeting was held in the Tech Lab at the Peabody Institute Library, on Zoom, and broadcast live on PATV's television station. President O'Brien cited open meeting laws, mentioning in particular the extended provisions.

The roll call was taken:

**Present**

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

**Absent**

Frances Bisazza-Gallugi  
Stephanie Dallaire

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**Public Comments**

None.

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

There was a **MOTION** to approve the minutes of the previous meeting as amended by Trustee Shruhan. The motion was seconded by Trustee Najjar.

All in Favor: Yes      Any Opposed: No

Trustee Quinn had supplied edits to Library Director Merlin, who adjusted the draft accordingly.

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**Receipt of Communications**

None.

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## **Director's Report**

### **Staffing**

Long time Public Services Librarian Sharon Janus retired at the end of May. Creativity Lab Librarian Mike Ahearn has accepted the position of NOBLE PC Support Specialist, a position with the NOBLE consortium that will involve traveling between NOBLE libraries to provide on-site and remote technology support. The PIL will be forever grateful for his almost 10 years of service leading the Creativity Lab, and more recently also working in Public Services. He is an incredible teacher and librarian, and Director Merlin wishes him the best of luck!

This summer, the Library welcomes two college Summer Interns, Kristina Derrivan and Arrianna Servideo, who will work regular shifts at all 3 locations to provide coverage and backup during summer vacations. They will begin this coming Monday, June 12th, and be with us until Labor Day.

The PIL will also be welcoming four teenage Summer Interns through the annual First Jobs program with the Northshore Workforce Board. These teens will work with the Teen and Children's departments to set up and lead the free Summer Lunch program, and this year, one intern will work at the West Branch assisting with Summer Reading activities. First Jobs intern salaries are paid for as part of the Library's personnel budget, and those salaries are then reimbursed by the North Shore Workforce Board after the program ends.

As a reminder, this Thursday is the staff Active Shooter training. The vast majority of staff have expressed interest in attending the training, so the training will be held at the Main Library, which will have a late 1pm opening to accommodate the training. Trustee Shruhan will attend the training, and send all pertinent information to the Board. There is also an all-staff de-escalation training coming up on Tuesday, June 20th.

Interviews for the open Aide position begin on Wednesday, and Director Merlin hopes to fill this position as quickly as possible.

Congratulations are in order for Senior Teen Librarian Allison Bridgewater, who was elected Chair of the Mass Library Association's Youth Services Section for a two year term, and to Senior Children's Librarian Jenny Usovicz who has been named Chair of the 2024 Mass Book Award Early Reader & Picture Book category, after being a category judge for many years.

### **Building**

The South Branch Library LED conversion has been completed, and Director Merlin invites you to visit the SBL to see how bright and welcoming it is, even with the lights on their lowest setting.

The West Branch Library roof continues to leak, despite many repairs and patches. Trustee Gallugi has volunteered to advocate for a complete roof replacement.

The Main Library HVAC has needed repairs recently, including a chiller repair, and the replacement of the condenser for the separate Sutton Room system. After coordinating with the City Facilities department, it was decided that these repairs would be done by the company that the Library has an annual contract with, instead of done by in-house staff.

Director Merlin is submitting work orders for the following work- painting the Main Library old building window frames, wooden doors, and wooden sign; adding additional electrical and internet connections throughout the Main Library; and getting a quote for the conversion of WBL lights to LEDs. A work order has been submitted for pothole repairs in both the Main and WBL parking lots.

Director Merlin received a quote from the current alarm monitoring company, Instant Alarm, regarding the security system here at the Main Library (upgrading the alarm panels and adding remote monitoring to our existing system, plus installing a new system of cameras), and adding entirely new systems at the Branches. Trustee Shruhan has a copy to review, and Director Merlin spoke to the Head of Facilities and the City Purchasing manager. Once Trustee Shruhan has reviewed the proposal, Director Merlin plans on going forward with the current Main Library upgrades to the alarm panels and adding remote monitoring, and adding the systems at the Branches as quickly as possible (using State Aid funds), and asking for the Main Library cameras as a City Capital request.

### **Programs & Initiatives**

Children's Department:

This summer is the Library's 15th serving as an open lunch site for the state-wide Project Bread Summer Eats program, and the Library is excited to be again partnering with the Peabody School Department to provide free lunches for kids and teens at the Main Library on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 9 weeks. The lunch program runs from Tuesday, June 27th through Tuesday, August 22nd, and will also include free Library programs and activities each day. The Teen & Children's departments coordinate this program with the help of First Jobs teen interns.

The Summer Reading Kick Off Ice Cream Party is June 28th (Wednesday) at 2:00pm. Summer Reading will involve online tracking of minutes read and prizes.

Haven from Hunger has requested the donation of weeded books for their new Little Free Libraries, and the Children's Department is happy to help. The catalog computer has been made more accessible by setting up a large key keyboard that is better for the visually impaired and for children who do not yet know how to type but are able to read letters/type letter by letter to

search for books and materials.

A Storywalk has been set up in the Main Library Courtyard of *Don't Let The Pigeon Stay Up Late!* By Mo Willems. Senior Children's Librarian Jenny Usovicz reached out to the publisher of the book, and was pleased that Disney publishing gave the Library permission to bend the rules of their copyright policy to offer this free fun program for the community since it is not monetized and will be up for a temporary installation.

The Children's Library will have six classes from the Welch School visit the Library and receive their library cards (next week). Senior Librarian Usovicz picked up the applications today from the Welch School and has started processing the applications so that the kids can start checking out books when they come the day of the field trip. Creativity Lab Librarian Mike Ahearn also helped to create a large version of the library card so that kids can take a photo with it when they get their library card. Senior Librarian Usovicz and Senior Teen Librarian Bridgwater participated in the Immigrant Families Outreach event at Higgins Middle School, where they helped to translate into Spanish Library programs, flyers, and events, and register families for library cards.

In June there will be an edible plant program with the mass horticultural society with their Plant Mobile on a Saturday. In July there will be a Ukulele Program for Children fitting the "find your voice theme" a musical program for Children. An alpaca educational program is booked in August with the Harvard Alpaca Farm for a fun end of Summer program. On July and August Monday mornings, we will have Reading to Therapy Dogs with two different therapy dogs from B.O.N.E.S.

Teen Department:

Senior Teen Librarian reports that daily events will be every Monday through Thursday from 2:00 - 4:00, and each week will focus on a different topic related to the theme of "find your voice," such as creative writing, photography, music, etc. The summer will end with an open mic night, scheduled for August 22.

Three June Teen Pride events are scheduled: movie night with a PG-13 movie based on one of the most popular YA books of all time, "Simon. vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda", game night with games like Pride-themed Scattergories and Trivial Pursuit, and an online "Dishing Out Drag" Q&A with a drag queen, about the makeup and costume process, and how performing makes the presenter feel more confident. The online program is sponsored by the Haverhill, Wilmington, and Rowley Public Libraries. Over 25 other MA Libraries (including the PIL) are partnering by sharing sign-up information with their own patrons, but are not actually financially sponsoring the event itself. The event is online via a Zoom webinar, only the presenter and moderators will be visible to all attendees, and questions and comments will only be visible to the moderators.

Other Library-wide initiatives include Pride book/media displays, rainbow-themed crafts for all ages, an online adult informational “The LGBTQ+ History of Massachusetts” webinar, and a Pride Trivia night run by Senior Librarian Toth, Creativity Lab Librarian Ahearn, and staff from the Beverly Public Library.

#### Adult Services:

Senior Librarian Gabriela Toth reports that the Spring concert series ends tonight with Sean Gaskell. The other concerts have been very well attended, especially Aine Minogue and Stephanie James. Harvard Professor Theo Theoharis led a six week lecture and discussion on Shakespeare and had a full house. He will be back in the fall to talk about Black American literature.

Senior Librarian Toth and Senior Local History Librarian Catherine Badal have partnered to write Mass Humanities “Reading Frederick Douglass” grant, to fund a community reading of Frederick Douglass’s “What to a Slave is the 4th of July”. The reading will take place on Thursday, December 14th, which is two days before the 150th anniversary of Mr. Douglass speaking in the PIL athenaeum lecture hall in December of 1873. Two local professors, from Salem State University and Tufts University, will partner with the Library on this reading, followed by a panel discussion of the work and its legacy today.

#### Technology:

Due to the demand for circulation (vs. in-house use) of Chromebooks at the Main Library, and requests for circulating Chromebooks at the Branches, Senior Technology Yunan Guo has converted nearly all of the in-house Chromebooks to circulating ones. Senior Librarian Guo also replaced Main Library Adult PC #4 with the new BookScan Station, and connected the old flatbed scanner to Adult PC #2- now the library has two scanners available for the public. Many of the Main and South Branch public computers need to be replaced (they are all at least five years old), which will be done in FY24. Director Merlin will be analyzing the need for a full 12 desktop PCs at the Main Library, given the shift to personal technology that still utilized Library wifi but does not need our computers, and Director Merlin is considering only replacing 8 and leaving the remaining 4 study carrels for laptop and study use.

#### South Branch:

Senior South Branch Librarian Amy Titus reports that the South Branch Library has hosted several adult programs, including a gardening program by former Tillie's staff member Linda Sessa, and an introduction to birdwatching by local birder Dave Williams. Genealogy Office Hours presented by genealogist Jennifer Smith will continue once a month throughout the summer.

Outreach with the elementary schools is going well. The South Branch has coordinated visits from every 1st grade class and one 3rd grade class from the Brown school. They received a tour of the library and learned about the summer reading program. In June, every class K-4 from the South school will be visiting to learn about summer reading. Senior Librarian Titus visited one 3rd grade class from the Brown school, and participated in the South school's Literacy Night in May.

The South Branch has many summer programs planned for children, including pajama storytimes, family bingo, family legos, family movie nights and craft kits. Toddler storytime has been well attended since its inception in March and will continue throughout the summer.

West Branch:

This past month, Senior West Branch Librarian Amory Thomas has been working on planning for Summer programming. There are many programs planned for Adults and Teens, such as wood burning bird houses and an introduction crochet lead by Senior Librarian Thomas. A new Cook Book Club met for the first time this past month, and it's garnered a lot of interest and participation. Book clubs are our most popular programs, with 20 people attending the last Fiction Book Club meeting. The new Teen computers will hopefully be installed in the next few weeks.

### **Budget**

Director Merlin included the current budget for your review.

Collective bargaining has ended and a new contract between the City of Peabody and Peabody Federation of Teachers Unit E (Library staff) has been ratified. This new contract runs from September 1, 2023, through August 31, 2025. The contract includes annual raises for all staff, added a 15 and a 25 year step for long-term staff, increases in longevity amounts, and some additional benefits. Staff received their raises in the last pay period and expect to receive their retroactive salaries (back to 9/1/23) in the next few pay periods. These increases were anticipated, and figured into the FY24 budget request.

A reminder that the City Council budget hearing for City-side departments is next Thursday, June 15th, at 6pm. Director Merlin will inform the Board of the outcome of the meeting, and the public is welcome to attend in person or via zoom.

### **Policy**

This evening, there are three policies that Director Merlin requested be discussed and voted on during New Business. These policies were sent to you with the Agenda, and Director Merlin has printed copies available for anyone who would like one:

- Teen Room Use policy

- Programming Policy & Request for Reconsideration of Library Programs form
- Update to Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials form

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

Trustee Shruhan asked what the term “weeded books” meant and Director Merlin replied that it refers to books that are removed from the collection. Any book that is deemed no longer needed due to age, condition, information, etc. Every section has its own guidelines, and books that have not been checked out in a given amount of time also qualify. Periodic weeding refreshes the collection. Since most books can’t be recycled due to the binding glue, the Library donates them to Better World Books.

Trustee Quinn asked what a Story Walk was and how it pertained to Disney copyrights. Director Merlin replied that a Story Walk is when one reformats a print book, “campaign-sign”-style, and sets them at intervals in an open space, allowing people to walk through and follow the story on the signs. Families can experience the book together in a new setting. Copyright is relevant in that, while the book itself is destroyed, it is still being shared and “read”. While this is not the intended use of the book, publishers generally do not disapprove. Trustee O’Brien mentioned that Story Walks have been installed on City bike paths in the past and Trustee Vassallo mentioned that the Town of Wilmington has a Story Walk around a lake.

Trustee Quinn asked about the June events for teens and asked who is sponsoring them. Director Merlin replied that the towns of Haverhill, Wilmington, and Rowley are doing so, explaining that out-of-network libraries are happy to sponsor such events because it brings traffic to the libraries. The events will be online, for accessibility purposes, and twenty-seven libraries are participating.

Trustee Quinn asked if Trustee Smith still held genealogy sessions at the branches; Trustee Smith replied in the affirmative, stating that, while the most recent session had been canceled due to no one signing up, the program regularly garners interest.

Trustee Pappas asked about state aid funds and whether the city capital request would be turned down. Director Merlin replied that that was possible. She has put in a general request for Fiscal Year 2024 (hereafter referred to as FY24). The total for the Main Library is around \$47,000. Director Merlin will update the numbers to the City finance director. Meetings regarding FY24 are taking place currently. Meetings specifically regarding the Library will take place in the fall. New alarm systems are a priority, particularly one Director Merlin can disarm remotely from her phone if, say, Secretary Boçi breaks into the building an hour before her shift.





## New Business

### **Programming Policy and Request for Reconsideration for Programming**

The Library has a Request for Reconsideration process in place for materials in the collection because patrons have a right to question our materials. The Library acknowledges that people may also take exception to programs the PIL holds. The Library accepts programs based on criteria, which explain what patrons can expect from the program, registration, promotion, event management, etc. Request for Reconsideration for materials is a long, detailed process. This policy states that patrons must submit a written form completed at least two weeks before the event. While the event is under review, it will not be canceled. Director Merlin will respond to the request at least two days before the program. Unlike Request for Reconsideration of materials, programs are time-sensitive so there is only one step. Patrons can always appeal to the Trustees, but often at that point the program has already happened. The form is the same as the one for materials, but with different language.

Trustee Quinn had an issue with items five and six; particularly, the use of the words “feel” and “believe”. Trustee Quinn asserted that it is difficult to refute someone’s feelings or beliefs as they are not fact. When Director Merlin asked for an alternative, Trustee Pappas suggested “think” because it is still personal. Director Merlin explained that this process is a way for someone to put their feelings in writing and that it is meant to be subjective, because questioning itself is based on personal beliefs. Trustee Najjar suggested the form read “what is your understanding of [program/material]”. Trustee Pappas stated that, while it is hard to argue against feeling, thoughts can yield an intellectual exchange. It is important to accommodate both the concerned patron and the rights of the Library. Trustee Quinn commented on item eleven (suggesting alternatives), stating that one who questions a program may not be in the right frame of mind to suggest an alternative. Trustee Shruhan stated that the Library may decline an alternative. Director Merlin asserted that this is a serious matter tantamount to challenging a book and it is therefore appropriate to ask people to perform that thought exercise. This process must be formal so that all parties understand the seriousness, time, and consideration. It is for the good of the community and therefore must be more than an email or phone call to the Director. Trustee Pappas expressed that it is productive to give the patron an opportunity to provide contrast and alternatives. Director Merlin replied that, while the Library does not have to accommodate the alternative, the patron may still express their ideas.

Trustee Quinn asked about drag queen story hours and whether Director Merlin had been approached on such terms. Director Merlin replied no. The Library has not held drag queen story hours before and is not doing so now. Instead, there will be an online drag queen Q&A because many of our teen patrons have submitted requests for more

information and representation. There will be an all-ages family-friendly Halloween-themed drag bingo in the fall. The individual not only grew up in Peabody, but currently lives and works here. There are no plans to hold drag queen story hours and there have been no requests.

Trustee Titelbaum asked about item seven and Director Merlin acknowledged the awkward language. Reasonably, presenters will not have formal reviews but will have expertise in the area. Director Merlin suggested the language “are you aware of any expertise that this presenter has on this theme”. Trustee Smith mentioned that some presenters may have formal reviews, which are worth including in the language. Trustee Quinn questioned the phrase “are you aware of the judgment of the presenter or the judgment of the professional critics” and Trustee Smith explained that it meant to ask if the patron had read anything about the presenter by professional critics. Director Merlin acknowledged that these questions are easier to ask regarding books because sometimes presenters are individuals from the community who have no formal reviews. Trustee McAllister asked if the word “professional” should be included in questions about reviews and Director Merlin agreed on the basis that a “review” could simply be a comment posted on social media.

### **Teen Room Use Policy**

Many teens use the Teen Room, but many adults do, too, which can be inappropriate. The Teen Room must be exclusively for teens to spend any significant time, since the presence of adults or younger kids hinders the use of the space, which is intended for students in grades 6 through 12. Of course, adults and children can peruse the space briefly for materials, but the space is primarily for teens.

### **Bylaws regarding dates of Trustees meetings**

Director Merlin proposed changing the monthly Board meeting from Monday to Tuesday starting in September. This will allow more time for Trustees to read relevant meeting materials. Trustee Najjar asked if there has ever been such a shift for religious holidays and President O’Brien replied that holidays have not presented a conflict recently. Director Merlin stated that current bylaws state that any meeting that would fall on a Monday holiday will take place the following Monday. President O’Brien asked if Trustees would prefer to change the dates for September through November and then revisit the new schedule in December; Trustees felt a permanent change was acceptable.

### **Email Addresses**

Currently, Trustees use their personal emails to conduct Trustee business. Director Merlin proposes that Trustees be given a City email address and account for the purpose of conducting Trustee Business and suggests that Trustees bring the matter to City Hall.

These addresses would be listed on the About section of the Library website so that constituents may contact Trustees with a City email.

### **Trustees and Collection Development**

Trustee Quinn joined the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners presentation on collection development and intellectual freedom on May 31. There were 35 attendees. Trustee Quinn wants to know how Trustees get involved with collection development and preservation of intellectual freedom. Presenters stated that the role of the Trustee was to approve policies and support the Library director. Director Merlin stated that the Trustees make final and binding decisions on material matters and offered to send webinars she has attended about intellectual freedom. She suggests that all Trustees become familiar with the collection development policy.

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There was a **MOTION** to accept programming policy and requests for reconsideration as amended by Trustee Quinn. The motion was seconded by Trustee McAllister.

All in Favor: Yes      Any Opposed: No.

The motion was carried unanimously.

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There was a **MOTION** to update the request for reconsideration form for library materials by Trustee Najjar. The motion was seconded by Trustee McAllister.

All in Favor: Yes      Any Opposed: No.

The motion was carried unanimously.

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There was a **MOTION** to update Teen Room use policy by Trustee Pappas. The motion was seconded by Trustee Shruhan.

All in Favor: Yes      Any Opposed: No.

The motion was carried unanimously.

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There was a **MOTION** to update Article III, Section IV of the bylaws to change the monthly meeting date from Monday to Tuesday by Trustee Shruhan. The motion was seconded by Trustee Quinn.

All in Favor: Yes      Any Opposed: No

The motion was carried unanimously.

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There was a **MOTION** to suspend Board of Trustees meetings for the months of July and August, to restart in September, by Trustee Pappas. The motion was seconded by Trustee McAllister.

All in Favor: Yes      Any Opposed: No

The motion was carried unanimously.

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## **Unfinished Business**

### **City Charter**

Trustee Pappas asked about the status of the city charter. A meeting had been canceled. President O'Brien posited that the pending budget has become less of a priority. Trustee Quinn stated that the discussion about the charter has been happening since before the pandemic.

### **Flowers for Sharon Janus**

Flowers have not yet been sent to Sharon Janus to mark her retirement.

### **Trustee Fund surplus**

Trustee Shruhan asked what would be done with remaining Trustee funds. Director Merlin explained that unused monies are reabsorbed into City funds at the end of the year. She has requested the full thousand dollars for next fiscal year.

### **George Peabody Medal**

Uncertainty remains over which institution will pay for the medal. The Library has not received a bill in 2023 or 2022; it is likely that the high school paid for the medal to eliminate complications. Trustee Najjar wants to honor the donor family and follow their wishes. President O'Brien and Director Merlin are starting a flowchart of items for which the Trustee President is responsible and will include the George Peabody medal.

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The next meeting will be held on September 5, 2023 at 6:30pm.

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

All in Favor: Yes      Any Opposed: No

The motion was carried unanimously.

Submitted by,  
Sarah Boçi  
Recording Secretary.