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Board of Trustees Minutes September 9, 2021

A regular meeting of the Westchester Public Library Board of Trustees was held at the Baugher Center, 100 West Indiana Avenue, Chesterton, Indiana on Thursday, September 9, 2021 at 7:00 PM.

Board members present were: Heather Augustyn, Kathryn Cochran, Michele Corazzo, Nick Tilden, Abbe Trent, and Rondi Wightman.

Board member absent: Will Scharp

Also present at this meeting were Library Director Lisa Stamm, and Library Assistant Director Heather Chaddock acting as Minutes Recorder.

This meeting was called to order by Board President Abbe Trent at 7:01 PM.

Approval of Executive Session Minutes

A motion was made by Nick Tilden to approve the Executive Session Minutes from the August 30, 2021 meeting as presented. Kathryn Cochran seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Heather Augustyn to approve the minutes from the August 12, 2021 regular Board meeting as presented. Kathryn Cochran seconded the motion. All voted in favor, with Michele Corazzo abstaining since she didn't attend the August 12 meeting, and the motion passed.

Financial and Statistical Reports

A motion was made by Michele Corazzo to approve the Financial and Statistical Reports as presented. Nick Tilden seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

Claims and Warrants

A motion was made by Kathryn Cochran to approve the Register of Claims and Warrants for the time period of August 13, 2021 through September 9, 2021 as presented. Heather Augustyn seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Librarian's Report

Service highlights were related from the past month featuring positive feedback and gratitude expressed by patrons regarding their Library experiences.

In the month of August, 16,339 people visited the Library. Staff created eight (8) in-person programs with 139 attendees, and one (1) live virtual program with 10 live virtual attendees. Staff answered 67 reference questions, 105 tech help questions, and registered 101 new library cards. Graphs showing materials circulation statistics were provided.

The work to shift the Friends of the Library operations from the Thomas Branch to the Baugher Center continues. There are many small and time-consuming projects to be completed within this overarching goal, including sorting and organizing filing cabinets full of old paperwork, determining what needs to be kept for the Museum historical collection or for State and County retention schedules, finding keys, moving furniture, selling antiquated audiovisual items on eBay to benefit the Friends, and more.

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The space formerly occupied by the Friends at the Thomas Branch will be reconfigured into a studio for Library programming staff to host live virtual programs this winter.

Library staff conducted several interviews, but ultimately could not find a good match for the recently vacated part-time Collection Development/Programs Assistant position. After much discussion, it was determined that the Thomas Branch Manager could assume the collection development portion of the role, and hours could be added to an existing clerk role to facilitate the programming portion of the role. As with Library catalogers, and any staff spending 50% or more of their time doing professional work, the new programming clerk will be required to be certified with the Indiana State Library and acquire ongoing Library Education Units.

WPL now offers its patrons digital access to *The New York Times*. This and other digital resources are being added to the Library's collection to support patrons in general, and especially looking toward the winter months and potential future Covid spikes keeping people at home.

Director Stamm stated that she is challenged by the idea of reopening meeting rooms at this time, given the extreme uptick in Covid cases caused by the Delta variant, alongside the much higher susceptibility to serious infection for the unvaccinated, particularly children under the age of 12 who cannot be vaccinated yet. On August 27th, 2021, State Health Commissioner Dr. Box gave a press conference, calling this "the darkest time" of the pandemic in Indiana. Dr. Box described hospitals overrun with Covid patients, preventing acute and chronic patients alike from receiving needed care, and the bleak outlook that we may not see reprieve until spring. Director Stamm is weighing these concerns against ongoing public demand for the meeting rooms to be reopened for public use.

Director Stamm had already decided that all WPL programs will be hosted outdoors or virtually through the month of October, and then shift to entirely virtual live programs for the inclement winter months. These types of events proved successful last winter, and they are a conscious attempt to preserve and encourage health and safety for community members and staff.

Reopening the meeting rooms to outside groups invites several concerns, including the potential for unmasked attendees of unknown vaccination status to remain in a single room for prolonged periods; risk for staff who must attend to the rooms; and the amount of potentially infectious particles released in confined spaces for sustained periods on a regular basis. The severity and increased transmissibility of the Delta variant is a core concern. To reopen the meeting rooms now, during this current time of emergency, would actively create conditions to spread the Delta variant. This would be the opposite of everything Director Stamm has done to manage Covid at WPL up to this point.

At this point, Director Stamm requested to open a discussion among the Board members regarding their thoughts about reopening the meeting rooms for public use.

Heather Augustyn stated that she "completely support(s)" keeping the meeting rooms closed at this time, and that it seems logical now that the Duneland School Corporation has gone to a mask mandate for all students and staff. Rondi Wightman acknowledged that variants coming behind Delta are said to be even more contagious. Heather Augustyn said that "there are children who can't be vaccinated, and we have to protect them." Kathryn Cochran spoke about the research about air quality issues and airflow exchange rates she has had to do while preparing to reopen her workplace. Director Stamm

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shared that the same sort of research has been done by the Library's Maintenance Manager, and the Baugher Center HVAC does not have the level of air purification necessary to safely reopen at this time. Abbe Trent asserted that Director Stamm has the Board's complete support in keeping meeting room spaces closed to the public at this time. Rondi Wightman posited that keeping meeting rooms off limits could potentially help the Library itself to stay open to the public by limiting community spread of Covid. Kathryn Cochran said that it boils down to the Library offering what are considered "essential services," and Nick Tilden agreed that it is "a consistent decision" with how the Library has operated so far in the pandemic.

Director Stamm gave an update on donations to the Library in memory of Attorney Terry Hiestand and his service to WPL. The Library has received a total of \$3,080, with donations continuing to come in as recently as this week. WPL continues to be grateful for the outpouring of community kindness in his name.

Staff changes for the month include the hiring of part-time landscaper/cleaner Leo Lesniak and Library page Avery McCurdy, the separation of part-time clerk Bill Steffy, and Tiffany Ezra moving from part-time clerk to part-time programming clerk.

Old Business

Museum Chimney/Bats

On August 14th and August 23rd, Museum staff found live bats inside the Brown Mansion and the exhibit space. After the August 23rd sighting, the Museum was closed for two days while the bat was located and humanely trapped and removed by WPL Maintenance staff. Bat droppings have been found in all three staff offices, and there were obvious disturbances in the attic ceiling, including bits of plaster on the floor.

Prior to 2019, there was only one bat sighting in eight years at the Museum. There has been a significant uptick in bat activity in the last year, for reasons unknown. Director Stamm decided to pause the planned project to install mesh caps over the chimneys at the Museum, for fear of unintentionally trapping bats inside the chimney with no way to escape. Doing so could harm any bats nesting in the chimney, which must be avoided because they are a protected species.

Instead, Maintenance staff have now outfitted all of the 2nd floor interior vents, and the restroom fan, with a fine mesh to prevent possible entry of bats from the attic space into the house. The attic door is being kept closed at all times. There has been no new evidence of bats since the events in August, but staff are certain they remain in the building. The Museum Curator has received permission from the State to utilize an ultrasonic/flashing lights/predator-sounds device to deter bats from entering or roosting in the attic, and that is the next planned step.

After a late-2019 bat sighting at the Museum, the Library contacted Shamrock Wildlife Services, and they returned with a quote for several thousand dollars to patch and caulk the attic and roof, and patch the attic vent covers, which are three-and-a-half stories high. Director Stamm reached out to Duneland School Corporation (DSC), the owners of the Brown Mansion, to discuss cost sharing for this work, and they responded that bats are considered pests, which are the Library's responsibility to mitigate, per the lease agreement. This issue was then put on hold in order to respond to the immediately pressing issues of the pandemic.

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The five-year lease between WPL and DSC for the Museum ends on December 31st, 2021. WPL paid \$20,000 to rent the building in 2021. Director Stamm opened a discussion with the Board to consider reaching out to DSC to negotiate buying the building at a fair cost, given the constant needs and significant issues requiring mediation within the building.

It would be easier for WPL to address issues (such as snow removal) as they arise, without having to consult DSC for assistance and wait for their response. It is an option to vacate the Brown Mansion and install the Museum elsewhere, but Director Stamm recommended against this, as the Brown Mansion is a highlight and a destination of the Duneland community, and a logical place for the Museum to reside. Director Stamm also recommended that the building be assessed for value before reaching out to DSC. One additional item of note is that the Les Pratt Trust, which exists solely to support the Museum, contains \$131,270.64; it could not maintain current or increased rental costs from DSC for very long.

Nick Tilden acknowledged that the idea of purchasing the building has come up before, and asked what the Museum Curator's opinion was. Director Stamm responded that the Museum Curator appreciates the building's history, but is also practical in regards to the potential pitfalls of such an aged location. Kathryn Cochran recommended that a structural needs assessment should be done, to identify the possible risk involved in the purchase. Nick Tilden agreed that an assessment should be done, including a "road map" of the work needed, and potential costs involved. He added that the character and historic value of the building itself must factor into the decision. Additional discussion ensued, with questions posed about where the Museum might move if it left the Brown Mansion; who currently holds liability insurance for the building; and what the cost might be to shift that coverage entirely to WPL. An additional possibility to consider was the potential for grant assistance, since the building is on the National Register for Historic Places.

Ultimately it was determined that Director Stamm would reach out to DSC about a possible 1-year extension of the current lease, to allow time for an assessment to be done (using a certified historic assessor), and to discuss and decide next steps from there.

MCLS Strategic Planning

The WPL Community Survey during the month of August received a 27% higher response rate than the MCLS Coordinator expected. Strategic Planning Committee members also conducted an additional 30+ Community Leader Interviews in August. All WPL staff members also participated in paired interview exercises. The MCLS Coordinator is now crunching the data and feedback collected, and will give guidance at the end of September. The Strategic Planning Committee retreat is slated for October 6th.

Hageman Branch Roof

The work to replace the Hageman roof began on August 17, and went quickly and smoothly. The noise was tolerable, and the crew from Korellis were professional, friendly, and conscientious. On August 27th, they installed a new copper cupola, and finished the rest of the work the following week, including new gutters and downspouts. All in all, the Director, Maintenance Manager, and Hageman Branch Manager found the work done by Korellis to be impressive, timely, and beautiful.

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New Business

2022 Budget Hearing

The 2022 Westchester Public Library budget is available online (www.budgetnotices.in.gov) and the Board President opened the meeting to hear public comment. There were no public comments and the Board President closed the hearing.

Approval of Librarian's Report

A motion was made by Rondi Wightman to approve the Librarian's Report as presented at tonight's meeting of September 9, 2021. Nick Tilden seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Public Comments

There were no public comments at this time.

Other Business.

Director Stamm gave a reminder of the date and time of the upcoming budget adoption meeting on September 23, 2021 at 7:00 PM at the Baugher Center.

The next regular Board of Trustees meeting will be held at 7:00 PM on Thursday, October 14 at the Baugher Center.

Nick Tilden made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:51 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Chaddock, Minutes Recorder for
Will Scharp, Secretary