Russell Library Board of Trustees Regular Meeting  
Tuesday, January 18, 2022, 6:30 p.m.  
Via Zoom

Present: Trustees Atherton, Becker, Berling, Duggan, Fulton, Hadley, Harris, Russell, Skowera, and Wisneski; Library Director Burkey; staff member Ann Smith

Missing: Trustees Nelson, Williams

1. Call to Order: President Wisneski called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.
   a. Review of Community Dialogue Framework: President Wisneski read the section about open and honest communication, active listening, and courtesy.
   b. Mission Moment: Trustee Harris spoke about the rapid advancement from poverty to wealth during the “Age of Enlightenment” from 1500 to the present, but cited the uneven distribution of wealth. He said that libraries can play a role in redistributing wealth.

2. Public Comment: Staff member Ann Smith asked if the trustees@russelllibrary.org email was working, as she had not had a reply from it. She also asked if the administration report was available sooner than 2 or 3 months after it was submitted.

3. Approval of Minutes
   a. MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Harris) and seconded (Trustee Atherton) to approve the minutes of the December 21, 2021 Board Meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Administration Report – Ramona Burkey, Library Director
   a. Director Burkey mentioned that she had seen the “Lawyers in Libraries” event well attended earlier in the day and that it is a well-used and welcome monthly service. She reported that 270 rapid COVID test kits had been received from the Health Department and that they were being handed out to library patrons. Earlier in the day, she attended a meeting of the Digital Equity Partnership and mentioned that 34% of Black and Latino households and 44% of homes of the disabled do not have internet service. Libraries are trusted partners in helping to provide internet service. In response to the questions raised during Public Comment, President Wisneski will check the trustees email regularly. It was noted that on the Library website trustees page there is another way to contact trustees. The Administration report, along with the minutes, is available on request after every board meeting. The full report is attached at the end of the minutes.

5. Committee Reports
   a. Executive Committee: Trustee Wisneski reported that the committee did not meet in January.
   b. Finance Committee: Trustee Becker reported that the committee met on January 13 with representatives from Essex Financial Services whose role is
to predict trends in the financial market and recommend investments for the Russell Library Company endowment. Because Board members had expressed a desire to invest in “green,” or ESG funds, EFS recommended that a sum of about $60,000 be invested in Parnassus, a mutual fund that has no holdings in energy, utilities, or basic building materials. This fund is considered a value rather than a growth fund. There was a discussion of the FY 2023 budget; the City has called for a 0% increase in non-contractual funds, which gives the library $850,000 for non-personnel spending. Over the past 5 years of flat budgets, this represents a considerable loss of purchasing power.

Subscriptions have been cut, while expenses for books and AV materials have been raised to keep Russell Library close to the state per capita library spending on such items. Budgeting for repairs is up as our buildings continue to age. The City has asked for possible “wish list” items; Director Burkey will submit a capital request. It was moved (Trustee Becker) and seconded (Trustee Atherton) to authorize the Executive Committee to prepare and issue a budget advocacy letter. An amendment was moved (Trustee Harris) and seconded (Trustee Becker) that the letter be personally signed by as many trustees as possible; the motion passed with all in favor excepting the abstention of Trustee Duggan; then the original motion as amended passed with all in favor excepting the abstention of Trustee Duggan. Trustee Skowera noted that technology exists to allow for electronically signing such a letter.

c. Governance Committee: Trustee Skowera reported that the committee met on January 5 to discuss a library display policy conversant with first amendment rights and that it approved a slight change in the library policy for Internet use that would allow household access to the internet using Emergency Connectivity Fund dollars. [Trustee Fulton left at 7:10p.m.]

d. Strategic Planning Committee: Trustee Wisneski reported that the committee did not meet in December.

e. Facilities Committee: in the absence of Trustee Nelson, there was no report.

6. Unfinished Business

a. Climate survey: Trustee Hadley gave a brief summary of the survey. The results will be discussed with the Board, then with Director Burkey, with planning to be done on how to move forward; the summary and the plan will be shared with staff.

b. Meeting Format: The format will be determined each month as the COVID situation dictates.

7. New Business

a. MOTION: Update of Internet use policy: It was moved (Trustee Harris) and seconded (Trustee Skowera) to approve the updated Internet use policy. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Announcements: there were no announcements.

9. Open Forum/ General Good and Welfare: Trustee Berlind noted that her neighbor was impressed by the range and creativity of programs offered by the library. Trustee Atherton praised the violence prevention grant; Director Burkey reported that the first installment of the Judicial Branch grant for violence prevention activities has been received and will be used for tabletop gaming materials to provide safe spaces in the library for young people to engage. Quentin Phipps, our representative who helped secure this grant, is an avid gamer and has been invited to participate. President Wisneski spoke about the Riverfront initiative and mentioned that comments can be left on a board in the Main Street Market building. Trustee
Harris spoke about the disturbing effect inflation will have on society and on the library.

10. Executive Session
   a. MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Harris) and seconded (Trustee Becker) to enter Executive Session at 7:50 p.m. to discuss matters related to strategy, personnel, contracts and property. The motion passed unanimously. Director Burkey and Trustee Becker left the meeting at 8:34 p.m. It was moved (Trustee Harris) and seconded (Trustee Atherton) to exit Executive Session at 9:17 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

11. Adjournment: It was moved (Trustee Skowera) and seconded (Trustee Atherton) to adjourn the meeting at 9:18 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

   Next regular board meeting: Tuesday, February 15, 2022, 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy Berlind

Wendy Berlind, Secretary
Library Director's Report

to the Russell Library Board of Trustees
January 18, 2022

Mission: 'We empower people to grow, connect, strive and thrive.'

Foundational Strategy: Practice equity and inclusion, and listen to youth voices.
- I will be submitting a budgetary request for EDI small-group Project READY facilitation in our FY2023 wish list.

Goal 1: Strengthen Community
- Bob Carlson, our Job & Career Coordinator, will be retiring the first week of February. We will miss Bob greatly but we know he'll visit often to show us vacation photos.
- Welcome to our new staff member Jaquell (Jae) Wilson, full-time Clerk!

Goal 2: Create a Safe and Welcoming Destination
- We are now more than a month past our consortium migration, and things are settling down. Our membership in the LCI consortium will now afford us free membership in Collection HQ, a powerful tool for developing, managing and auditing our collections. This would have cost us many thousands of dollars to purchase individually.
- I continue to work on the Building Program.
- The Health Department recently distributed masks and at-home Covid rapid test kits to all library staff, and will be delivering test kits to distribute to the public as well.
- Please take a walk around the library to see the beautiful Middletown prints donated by local artist Janine Janaki. As we finish painting in more areas, we'll hang the rest of this lovely collection.

Goal 3: Foster a Thriving Economic Ecosystem
- The Mayor has again directed departments to submit a flat non-contractual budget increase. This means we will need to make some tough decisions and focus on our most mission-critical services for the time being, seeing as how a flat budget over the course of many years actually ends up amounting to significantly less purchasing power, due to the cumulative rate of inflation.
**Goal 4: Promote Lifelong Love of Learning**

- We were not able to hold our in-person staff PD morning on January 7 due to the snowstorm, so we'll be addressing our educational topics separately during work hours. Our next half-day PD session is scheduled for May 20.

**Dashboard (Selected categories; not comprehensive):**

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<th>Selected Outputs</th>
<th>December 2021</th>
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<td>3800</td>
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<td>Program Attendance</td>
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**Happy Customers/Brag Sheet:**

From a staff member: "When working on Info yesterday a patron approached me to thank us for the "take what you need, give what you can" table. She said she is staying at a shelter and they provide plenty of soap and toothpaste but she was so grateful to find Chapstick in our bin. She wanted to be sure to say thank you."

From another staff member: "There is a woman and her caregiver who come in about once a week to do some faxing. It was a very cold day. Neither had hats with them or at home. They appreciated the" take one" table, and chose matching head gear."

A staff member reported, "I helped a woman at the circ desk yesterday who hadn't been in the library in over three years. She said, "It looks like a whole new library. The colors are amazing. I really love it!"
Common Councilman Phil Pessina read “The Polar Express” on camera for our Facebook and YouTube crowds in the Hubbard Room in late December. We believe!

**Community Connections/Meetings, Professional Development:**
- Common Council - Questions to Directors
- Staff Chats/Office Hours
- Admin Team weekly meetings
- Pod “D” meeting with Mayor and other city directors
- Governance Committee
- Chamber of Commerce Central Business Bureau
- Monthly meeting with Friends President Sandy Becker
- Weekly city-wide coordinated Covid call (reinstated 1/7/22)
- Ellen Paul, new director of CT Library Consortium
- Cathy Lechowicz, Director of Recreation and Community Services
- CT Library Association Legislative Committee
- Middletown “Return to the Riverbend” community workshop
- Middlesex United Way Board of Directors
- Russell Library Leadership Team
- Webinar: “Trauma-Informed Librarianship: Building Communities of Care”
- Finance Committee
- Library Connection, Inc. (LCI) Board of Directors
- Russell Library Equity and Inclusion Team
- CT Digital Equity Discussion

Respectfully Submitted,

**Ramona A. Burkey**
Ramona Burkey
Library Director