Russell Library Board of Trustees Regular Meeting  
Tuesday, February 15, 2022, 6:30 p.m.  
Via Zoom

Present: Trustees Atherton, Becker, Berlind, Carnegie-Hargreaves, Duggan (at 7:30), Fulton, Hadley, Harris, Nelson, Russell, and Wisneski; Library Director Burkey; staff members Ann Smith, Jae Wilson, and Ray Green.

Missing: Trustee Williams

1. Call to Order: President Wisneski called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.
   a. President Wisneski welcomed new Trustee Faraneh Carnegie-Hargreaves, who introduced herself by telling a story about her arrival as a student at Wesleyan; after she checked into her dorm, she sought out Russell Library to obtain a library card. Since graduating, she has worked in development at the university, become a chiropractor, and makes use of the virtual and in-person offerings of Russell Library. Trustees gave brief introductions of themselves to Trustee Carnegie-Hargreaves and new staff members Jae Wilson (clerk) and Ray Green (security).
   b. Review of Community Dialogue Framework: President Wisneski read the section about open and honest communication, with active, careful and respectful listening.
   c. Mission Moment: Trustee Atherton spoke about Anne Spencer, poet and librarian from Virginia, who was considered a poet of the Harlem Renaissance. She began her schooling at age 11 and finished college six years later; she helped to establish the Lynchburg VA chapter of the NAACP. Trustee Atherton shared one of Spencer’s poems with the group.
   d. Public Comment: Staff member Ann Smith asked who sees the emails sent to trustees@russelllibrary.org and said that she would like every board member to see the email she sent in December to that address.

2. Approval of Minutes
   a. MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Harris) and seconded (Trustee Fulton) to approve the minutes of the January 18, 2022 Board Meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Administration Report – Ramona Burkey, Library Director
   a. Director Burkey reported that she is waiting for the Board of Education decision on mask mandates in the schools after February 28 because, if mandates are dropped for schools and for City Hall, it will be difficult to enforce a mandate for the library. 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.

4. Committee Reports
a. Executive Committee: Trustee Wisneski reported that the committee met on February 2 and that the City had formally re-appointed those City Trustees whose terms had lapsed. Also, Trustee Carnegie-Hargreaves has been sworn in. The Facilities Committee will become more active as a building program is developed.

b. Finance Committee: Trustee Becker reported that the committee met on February 10 with Marc Perliroth and Chris Sansone of Donald Perliroth and Associates accounting firm. A copy of the audit has been included in the packet distributed to Board members. The audit was “clean,” with no problems noted; the auditors praised Assistant Director of Administrative Services Doyle, Director of Finance Harlow, and Director Burkey and Executive Assistant Tsahalis for their help in providing information for the audit. The committee reviewed the proposed FY 22-23 City operating budget and voted to recommend it to the Board for approval. A letter written and signed by trustees in favor of increases to the flat budget requested will go to City Hall when Director Burkey presents the budget.

c. Governance Committee: Trustee Skowera has resigned from the Board; many trustees expressed thanks for his service and his knowledge of meeting and City procedures. Trustee Hadley reported that the committee had reviewed the display and public posting policy and wanted staff to view it before making it final. The policy was drafted by Assistant Director of Administrative Services Doyle, and suggestions were added by Trustee Harris. The committee also discussed how best to receive comments from staff and the public; the discussion will continue at the committee’s next meeting.

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

e. Facilities Committee: Trustee Nelson reported that the committee will shift its focus from facilities assessment to defining a future building and will make a five-year timeline for a new building. The committee plans to meet on the first Thursday of each month at 5:00 p.m. Members interested in joining are Trustees Nelson, Wisneski, Atherton, Becker, Hadley and Carnegie-Hargreaves.

5. Unfinished Business

a. Climate survey: Trustee Berlind reported that the survey group met twice earlier in February, and that a summary of the results had been shared with Director Burkey. Trustee Hadley said that the summary is still a draft and that there were positive comments as well as those that point a way to go forward. Trustee Atherton commented that he was heartened by the feedback and thoughtful process of conducting the survey to ensure staff privacy. Trustee Nelson thanked the group for designing and executing the survey, a sensitive process.

b. Meeting Format: The format will be determined each month as the COVID situation dictates. Most Board members prefer virtual meeting at this time.

6. New Business

a. MOTION: Display and public posting policy: This vote was postponed.

b. MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Becker) and seconded (Trustee Berlind) to accept the FY 21 audit. The motion passed unanimously.

c. MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Becker) and seconded (Trustee Atherton) to accept the FY 22-23 City operating budget. The motion passed unanimously.

d. Trustee Burkey asked that Board members become familiar with the resource selection policy.
7. **Announcements**: Trustee Berlind announced that due to a recent donation from the Wesleyan bookstore of used texts and course books, the Friends had earned $480 selling online, and that, for the past week, earnings from the Book Nook were close to $200.

8. **Open Forum/ General Good and Welfare**: There were no comments.

9. **Executive Session**
   a. **MOTION**: It was moved (Trustee Becker) and seconded (Trustee Hadley) to enter Executive Session at 7:50 p.m. to discuss matters related to strategy, personnel, contracts and property. The motion passed unanimously. It was moved (Trustee Harris) and seconded (Trustee Becker) to exit Executive Session at 8:31 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

10. **Adjournment**: It was moved (Trustee Harris) and seconded (Trustee Atherton) to adjourn the meeting at 8:32 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy Berlind

Wendy Berlind, Secretary
Library Director's Report
to the Russell Library Board of Trustees
February 15, 2022

"We empower people to grow, connect, strive and thrive."

Foundational Strategy: Practice equity and inclusion, and listen to youth voices.
- I attended a Hunt Institute webinar on "Using Libraries to Affirm Racial Identity and Advance Equity" on 1/25. I was invited to the webinar by State Rep. Quentin Williams (formerly Phipps), who is a Hunt Institute fellow. I shared the slides with the staff Equity and Inclusion Team.
- The Russell Library Leadership Team (Admin plus department heads) attended a webinar on “Dismantling Racial Inequity in the Workplace and Diversity in Collection Development” on Wednesday 2/9. When possible, webinar archives are shared with staff.

Goal 1: Strengthen Community
- Congratulations to Cathy Ahern, Head of Information Services and Adult Learning, who is retiring after 32 wonderful years of service to the library and to Middletown. We will miss you, Cathy!
- Welcome to Mahrang Danish, our newest part-time Clerk.
- Depending on how you define the word “established,” the Russell Library is turning 150 years old between 2024 and 2026. Some documents show the library as having been founded in 1874, but we didn’t open “as a library” until 1876. In any case, it looks like we have some festivities to begin planning.
- The “Lawyers in Libraries” program continues to fill up quickly each month, offering free initial consultations on a full range of legal topics.
- We received and have begun distributing the federal Emergency Connectivity Fund hotspots for Middletown students: https://www.middletownpress.com/middletown/article/Russell-Library-offers-free-Wi-Fi-hotspots-to-16825774.php
I submitted an $250,000 grant request to the Middletown ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Task Force. If successful, the grant would fund ADA and restroom/code improvements, as well as a modest remodel project (carpeting, portable furniture, etc.), in the lobby; we could also use it as local matching funds for an additional $250k Connecticut State Library Category 2 Construction Grant, for a total project cost of $500,000. I will present to the ARPA Task Force in early March. Should we receive the grant funding, I look forward to meeting with staff who have expressed an interest in contributing ideas (there are currently 17 staff members on the “Lobby Team” Slack channel).

**Goal 2: Create a Safe and Welcoming Destination**
- Many thanks to Trustee Skowera for providing technical guidance as we work towards robust cybersecurity policies and procedures (and insurance). We will be working with the Governance Committee to draft/update policies accordingly.
- I continue to work on the Russell Library Building Program as time permits.
- We have partnered with the Middletown Health Department to distribute COVID test kits and masks when available.

**Goal 3: Foster a Thriving Economic Ecosystem**
- The Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Operating Budget request and “wish list” are due to the Mayor’s Office on 2/18. I’ll also be submitting a spreadsheet and narrative of our 5-year capital budget funding needs at that time.
- Assurance Wireless, a federal Lifeline Assistance program, will be coming to the library to sign eligible people up for free mobile phones.
- I have again been asked by the American Library Association, along with State Librarian Deborah Schander, to represent Connecticut’s public, academic, school and special libraries at funding discussions with key federal legislators in early March. The discussions will be held virtually again this year.

**Goal 4: Promote Lifelong Love of Learning**
- As you no doubt have seen in our weekly newsletter, we have debuted our “Book a Librarian” service: patrons can book time with a staff member to help with research, technology, or other topics. We do not offer medical, legal or tax advice.
- Several staff members attended the virtual LibLearnX conference hosted by the American Library Association in January.
• I will be taking an online course in March and April titled “Cultivating Civility, Resilience and Reflection in the Library Workplace,” offered nationwide by the American Library Association.
• Five library staff members, including myself, will be attending the Public Library Association’s biannual conference in late March; this year the conference is being held in Portland, Oregon.
• The American Library Association’s Office of Intellectual Freedom provides useful information on protecting the right to read: https://www.ala.org/advocacy/fight-censorship. All Trustees should take the time to review these and other resources, along with our policies and procedures.

Dashboard (Selected categories; not comprehensive):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Outputs:</th>
<th>Jan '22</th>
<th>Jan '21</th>
<th>Jan '20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Book Circ.</td>
<td>5236</td>
<td>1412</td>
<td>4205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen Book Circ.</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Book Circ.</td>
<td>4845</td>
<td>2134</td>
<td>4415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downloadable/Streaming</td>
<td>3409</td>
<td>3982</td>
<td>3274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Items Circ.</td>
<td>17,387</td>
<td>11,318</td>
<td>27,409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits</td>
<td>7252</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patron Assistance</td>
<td>2531</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>5247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Attendance</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>891</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Happy Customers/Brag Sheet:
Email from a parent:
"You have made [my daughter’s] DAY! She has COVID and can’t go to school so getting a surprise like this was so so cool. We walked down to the library and back to our house for a COVID safe outing. She said ‘I’ve never been so excited to get home.’ And when she saw the books: ‘Mom, they know me so well.’ The house is completely silent right now. Thank you!!!!"
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 a staff member: "A patron complimented YFL librarians for a great job on inclusive books for the collection."

"Signing Santa" greets a youngster in Meeting Room 2 in December. The Connecticut Family Support Network posted on Facebook: "Our Signing Santa event in December was a magical experience for our Deaf/HOH [hard of hearing] friends. Thank you to Russell Library and all of our sponsors for contributing to make sure ALL had access to the holiday magic."

**Community Connections/Meetings, Professional Development:**

- Webinar: “Library Violence Prevention and De-Escalation”
- Admin Team weekly meetings
- Webinar: “Making Each Other Look Good: The Library Board and the Library Director”
- Cyber insurance discussion with city and library staff
- ARPA grant application planning meetings
- Budget planning meetings
• Middletown driving tour with new employee
• Shawonda Swain, new Executive Director of Middlesex United Way
• Weekly+ staff chat office hours in staff room/basement
• Meeting with Mayor Florsheim
• Webinar: “Race and Education: Using Libraries to Affirm Racial Identity and Advance Equity”
• Semi-monthly Leadership Team meetings
• Citywide coordinated COVID calls
• Executive Committee
• Chamber of Commerce Central Business Bureau
• Monthly “Pod” meeting with Mayor and City directors
• Monthly meeting with Friends of the Library President
• Programming and events coordination meeting
• Common Council - Questions to Directors
• United Way Board of Directors
• e-Rate workshop
• Finance Committee
• Equity and Inclusion Team meeting
• LCI Board
• CT Library Association Legislative Committee State Budget Advocacy Planning Meeting
• CT Libraries and Partners for Digital Equity

Respectfully Submitted,

Ramona A. Burkey

Ramona Burkey
Library Director