

Kent County Public Library Board of Trustees

Minutes of the February 26, 2024 Meeting

Present: Jay Silcox, President; John Murphy, Vice President; Amy Sine, Treasurer; Erin Counihan, Secretary; Rachel Durso, Trustee; Peggy McKee, Trustee; Arnessa Dowell, Executive Director; Olivia Coleman, Executive Secretary; Chris Walmsley, Director of Office Administration; Ace Loewenstein, Public Services Assistant I.

Mr. Silcox called the meeting to order at 4:31 pm.

Ms. McKee noted that page two of the minutes of the January meeting erroneously denoted Mr. Silcox as “Ms. Silcox”. Ms. Durso moved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting with the aforementioned correction, Mr. Murphy seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Mr. Silcox reviewed the agenda.

Public Comment

The trustees opened for public comment, and there was none.

Officer’s Reports

Treasurer’s Report

Ms. Sine reviewed the current account balances. The Peoples Bank account balance was \$218,977, PNC Checking was \$138,163 and PNC Savings was \$31,242. She also noted that each item covered in the Finance Committee meeting was on the agenda to be covered in other areas of this meeting.

Secretary’s Report

Ms. Counihan reported that she had sent out Google Drive link to the digital binder of important materials for the trustees that she and Ms. Coleman compiled.

Foundation Representative

Mr. Murphy reported that there was not an updated report of the amount of funds raised for the book drop initiative, however the Finance Committee of the Foundation would be meeting the upcoming Thursday and would give an updated figure then.

Friends Representative

Ms. Durso reported that she went to the most recent meeting of the Friends. The organization's funds currently sit just under \$41,000, and they will be making a \$15,000 gift to the library on July 1st. The sale shelves they have set up near the restrooms are netting between \$3,000-\$4,000 a year. The Friends also reported that they currently have 300 members. Their membership is starting to wane, so they would like to do a membership drive. They will also only be having the October book sale this year, on the third weekend of the month. Finally they reported that The Book Plate had reached out to them to contribute money for high school book sales to buy books for kids in need.

Whistleblower Officer

Mr. Silcox asked for volunteers. Ms. Counihan asked if this should be tied to an officer position and Mr. Silcox agreed. Ms. Counihan volunteered, and the role of Whistleblower Officer will become tied to the Secretary officer position pending approval of the change to the position description.

Trustee Education

Executive Director Board Introduction

Ms. Dowell gave a presentation covering the role of the trustee, their relationship with the library, their role as appointed officials of Kent County, the responsibilities of the Director, State law and County policy that affect the library, how to be an effective trustee, and best practices for board meetings, as well as the values and beliefs of the organization.

Maryland Open Meetings Act Presentation

Mr. Murphy started his presentation by explaining that the Maryland Open Meetings Act was established in 1977 under the belief that public business should be open and public knowledge. This applies to the Kent County Public Library's Board of Trustees, as they are a public body. Regulations of the Open Meetings Act apply when there is a quorum, when the Board provides advisory to the Commissioners, and when in consideration of a public business transaction. The Board must comply by giving advance public notice of meetings, providing access to the meeting agenda at least 24 hours before the meeting, taking minutes, retaining records, and

making meeting documents public. The trustees then discussed the qualifications for a closed meeting, and how to have an open session. Mr. Murphy also showed some recent and local violations of the Open Meetings Act. The consequence of violating the Open Meetings Act is that the court may impose a civil penalty on a body; up to \$250 for the first and \$1,000 for each subsequent offense.

The Trustee Education presentation will be stored in the Trustee information online folder.

Committee Reports

Rock Hall Facility Update

There was a meeting on February 20, where it was decided that it was too early to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the project, but the town council will be voting to approve what has been done so far. The Maryland State Library Grant is being filed for \$3.2 million which could be granted for 2026. Ms. Dowell said that she would be talking to Jay Jacobs as delegates can put in for money in 2025 for \$250,000 up to \$2 million. She also explained that she is looking to work with the Board of Education to lower Kent County's match rate from 50-50. This will be presented at the Kent County Council of Government meeting. Ms. McKee reported that the architect working on the Rock Hall library project has spoken with the modular building company, who have estimated that the building would cost \$200-400 per square foot. Additionally, Ms. McKee noted that the organization that might be transferring into a Rock Hall Fundraising Committee did not meet when they were scheduled to the past month because of inclement weather, so it has not been decided whether the organization will be transferring or not. If they do not, another committee will need to be established to handle fundraising for the Rock Hall library initiative. The next meeting for the project will be in April, where they will discuss the fundraising committee and the match, which is currently \$1.6 million. Ms. Dowell added that she has a meeting coming up to discuss grant writing for the project. The Town of Rock Hall has applied for the SEARCH USDA grant, which is designed to cover initial design of engineering aspects that need funding. Ms. McKee asked if the time of people working on the project could be counted towards the match cost. Ms. Dowell said she did not think it did, but that she would check. She added that the state librarian was coming in April to present to the trustees. Ms. Dowell also added that she, Mr. Walmsley, and the grant writer for the project were meeting with another library grant writer on March 5, 2024.

Librarian's Report

Book Drop Replacement Grant Update

Mr. Walmsley reported that he met with the County to discuss putting in a new concrete pad for the Chestertown branch book drop, and they seemed amenable to this idea, and willing and able to do it. This pad will also be used to anchor the book drop. Mr. Walmsley noted that the library is still waiting to hear back from the Foundation for the Kent County Public Library with the final count of funds raised for this project, which Mr. Silcox confirmed may be known by the end of the week.

Maryland Heritage Grant Update

Ms. Dowell highlighted the contract that was received the previous Friday evening. She noted that the principal address needed to be changed on the document. She then reviewed some aspects of the contract. The project end date was December 7, 2025 and the final report on the project would be due January 24, 2026. The project was required to have 29% minority business enterprise (MBE). The trustees also needed to decide on a contact person. Mr. Silcox noted that the item regarding MBE said the project needed to take “best efforts” to meet it, so there may need to be clarification on what this means. Ms. Dowell said she believed the granters want the grantee to go through the process of finding MBE contractors. She also noted the grant called for the best-qualified lowest bid to be selected. Regardless, the grant required no matching on the library’s part, so the full \$200,000 was available. Ms. McKee asked if MBE contractors could be contacted directly, and Ms. Dowell and Mr. Silcox explained that this was allowed, and that there was a public list of MBE contractors. Ms. Sine pointed out to the trustees that this project required the library to pay upfront and then be reimbursed later, so the restricted reserve fund may need to be used for this project, though it was noted that reimbursement can be requested based on contracts before they are paid out. Mr. Silcox asked if county involvement was necessary. Arnessa said that the Memorandum of Understanding with the county should hopefully abate having to go to them with each piece, though it is not yet signed. Ms. Counihan asked what was required of the trustees at this point, and it was determined all they needed to do presently was decide on the contact person. It was agreed by all that Mr. Walmsley would do this.

Sound Dampening Panels Update

The library received a quote from SNAP Wall, a sound panel company based in Maryland. The quote is about \$15,000, which is what was budgeted. Staff selected the colors and patterns for the panels. Ms. Dowell hopes the company can do the installation on the upcoming staff training day. Mr. Silcox and Mr. Murphy suggested that, if the installation had to happen during operating hours, they could do everything besides the installation in the meeting room to reduce noise.

Operational Updates

Ms. Dowell reported that the library is still looking for a new Director of Branch services, however a new Teen Services Clerk and Branch Clerk for the North County Branch had been hired. She also noted that the Privacy and Confidentiality policy would be presented at the next meeting, as she was waiting to hear back from the county about the security cameras as they are county run. Regarding the Employee Handbook, Ms. Dowell explained that the library is looking to add car rental under the travel section, and bus and ferry tickets under ticketing. Meeting room fees were added to the meeting room policy, and it needs to be signed again. Ms. Dowell asked Mr. Loewenstein when the meeting room would be opening for reservations, but this had not yet been determined, though it will be determined soon. Ms. Dowell added that the State Librarian would be coming in April to present to the trustees. She reported that she had attended the Howard County Public Library Gala, which featured local business vendors and local talent, to get ideas for fundraising and programming. The day following the Board of Trustees meeting, she would be going to the Wilmington Public Library, as she was invited by its Executive Director to see Misty Copeland. She was looking forward to speaking to the Executive Director as he is often able to have famous people visit his library, and does so at a low cost. She lastly gave an update on the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which is legislation that has passed that gives additional funding for students through the schools, and hopes to pay teachers more and diversify teaching pool. The Commissioners came to the library to look at the Blueprint, and Ms. Dowell said that she would be looking to the schools, and the Blueprint opens up an avenue for funding through them.

Old Business

Whistleblower Policy Review

Ms. Counihan reported that she will be speaking to Mr. Walmsley about the policy.

New Business

Fiscal Year 2025 Budget and Considerations

Ms. Dowell opened by stating that the library needed \$83,000. This number may change if the reason for the jump in the electricity cost is able to be determined or if the health benefit cost is less than the high end projection of 6%. Mr. Murphy asked about the electricity. Ms. Dowell explained that she had been in contact with Public Works but they will not have an answer until March, and that the health insurance cost will not be known until April. Currently, the asking cost increase is at 11%, but Ms. Dowell hopes that it will come down to 6-7%. The library is asking for about \$23,000 more than the past year. Ms. Sine explained that the fund balance of the library has been used to contribute the past couple of years, but that it is dwindling. The greatest change in the budget needs is the \$17,000 jump in electricity costs, as well as contributions for

staff and insurance. The budget was cut for programming and audio-visual costs, and Mr. Walmsley noted that there is not much room to cut anything else down. Ms. Sine also pointed out that some items which may seem unnecessary, such as staff development, are grant funded. Mr. Silcox asked where the money would come from if only a 6% increase was granted and the electric and health insurance did not change, and Arnessa said that the proposed Human Resources position would have to be cut again. There was discussion among the trustees then about the jump in electric costs and how the library's electric system is set up. It was explained that the library has to pay three electric bills: one to Delmarva Power, one from WGL Energy Services for each county facility, and a bill for solar power. Ms. Dowell opened up the budget for approval, with the hope of future amendments. Mr. Silcox moved to approve the proposed budget as written, anticipating an addendum, which Mr. Murphy seconded. This was approved unanimously.

Mr. Murphy noted that he would be attending the Maryland Library Association Conference.

Ms. Dowell noted that the Team Building Committee was hoping to close from 2pm-4pm for her going away party on April 12, 2024.

Mr. Silcox moved to adjourn, Ms. McKee seconded the motion, and it was agreed upon unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 5:59 pm.