

# **SOMERVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY**

## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING, Sept. 11, 2024**

### *Minutes*

#### **ATTENDING**

TRUSTEES: Kate Van Sleet, April Kuehnhoff, Mark Sternman, Janaki Perera, Mike Smith, Carla Lillvik, Anandavalli Thiagarajan, Ami Feldman

GUESTS: members of the public and library staff - attending both in person and virtually

DIRECTOR: Cathy Piantigini

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

President Van Sleet called the meeting of the Library Board of Trustees to order at 6:04 pm.

#### **MINUTES**

April Kuehnhoff motioned to approve the minutes from the June, July, and August minutes. Janaki Perera seconded and the minutes were unanimously adopted.

#### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

1. Provided a summary of the safety issues at the library with a month-by-month overview of incident reports, information about any police presence, efforts by the library to mitigate the safety and behavioral concerns, and ongoing discussions with the City of Somerville and Somerville Public Schools. Started report in October 2023 and continued through September 2024. Director has never experienced teen behavior like what she has seen over the past year. Other Massachusetts libraries are also experiencing problems with teen behavior.
2. Security cameras were installed on the first floor and exterior of the Central Branch. It is not clear if they are currently operational.
3. Library union has filed a grievance due to safety issues.
4. In fiscal year 2024, the Director was given approval to hire a social worker and was finally able to post the position in April 2024. The first round of interviews was in late-June/July. The second round of interviews will be finished this week. Intent of the role is to have a public social worker that will be very visible to support patrons who may be in need of social services. Other Massachusetts libraries, including Cambridge, Boston, and Worcester, have social workers now. More large, urban libraries are now hiring social workers.
5. At one point (approximately 1990s), the Somerville Public Library had a security guard at the Central Branch. At this time, the Director's memory is that this was not a positive experience. The security guard could only do very limited things and had some negative interactions with patrons. Director reached out to the Worcester library regarding their experience with security guards. Worcester had negative public experiences at first but then were able to hire a security guard on staff and then later hired a second.
6. Director discussed ideas to engage the space around the outside of the library by offering fun, engaging, all-ages programming to bring more people to the library in the afternoons. Meeting with other people in the City to try to move some programming to the Central Branch. The

Director is working to try to expedite the City permitting process for events on the lawn around the library.

7. Director is not getting notified when police are present at the high school and is not currently notifying the high school when police are called at the library. Working to improve communications between the high school and library. Director now has the name of someone that she can call at the high school if she needs to communicate directly. Director reached out to see if community engagement specialists at the high school might want to work at the library in the afternoon, but there does not appear to be interest.
8. There is a discussion regarding changes to the physical space. May have one door for entry and one door for exit. The City is looking at possible ways to implement this. Considering changes to the circulation desk to change visibility in the front of the library.
9. Director would like to have the cameras operational before reopening and would also like to see some sort of safety presence at least in the immediate weeks after reopening. Director would also like to have a safety plan in place with the Somerville Police Department. There is no specific timeframe for reopening.

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

1. Friends of the Somerville Public Library received a large donation. They are working on local fundraisers that will be upcoming. They are looking for volunteers. Little Free Library in Ball Square is being renovated by the Friends. Looking to expand their newsletter to new people.
2. Somerville Public Library Foundation voted to provide lunch to the librarians in all of the library branches. Working with SomerBabies to send out books and literacy information to babies. Instead of an end of the year appeal they will do a spring appeal.

## **COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

1. Ron Newman - Understand better what the problems are now. Concerned that this is punishing other people who want to be here in the afternoon. Interested in understanding why this is happening in Somerville and not Cambridge, which has a similar setup with the main library right next to the high school. Suggests talking to other libraries with similar situations with high schools and libraries right next to each other. He noted that he saw a police officer present outside of the Cambridge main branch library.
2. Kate Auspitz - This is an outrage. I am planning to go to the City Council tomorrow. Library is a sacred space. Librarians are not supposed to be cops. We are overthinking this. Supports programming and mental health. Suggests asking to meet with the chief of police who is starting on Monday to bring a law enforcement presence to the Central Branch. I hope that there will be many people at the City Council meeting tomorrow to express their horror.
3. [no name given] - Asked the Director what her understanding is of the agenda at the City Council meeting tomorrow. Director responded that she has not been asked to speak but will be present.
4. Debbie Leopold - Have you tried to coordinate with the Out of School Time Coordinator?

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business and no objection, the President declared the meeting adjourned at 7:37 pm.

NEXT MEETING: The next regular meeting of the Trustees will be held in October 9, 2024 at 6:00 pm. The open meeting will take place in the Director's Office at the Central Branch Library.

April Kuehnhoff, Secretary