

Watchung Library Advisory Board Minutes, September 21, 2022 – **FINAL**

**Mission Statement:** The mission of the Watchung Library Advisory Board (WLAB) is to advise, support, and promote the interests of the Watchung Borough Free Public Library.

The meeting of the WLAB was held in person in the Bicentennial Room of the Watchung Library. The meeting was also held through an audio and video call. Please go to the Watchung Borough web site to view the video.

Please be advised that, pursuant to a Borough policy, all committee meetings will be recorded; at 5:35 PM all participants were alerted that recording had begun.

President Tamara Benc posted the agenda (which had been emailed in advance to all members), then opened and called the meeting to order at 5:38 PM.

Attendance:

Tamara Benc, President – present  
Margaret Ellis, Vice President – present  
Stella Couchells, Treasurer – present  
Virginia Hartmann, Secretary – present  
Bradford Leigh, WLAB member – present  
Gail Bennett-Tafaro, WLAB member -- present  
Wendy Robinson, Borough Council Member, Library Liaison – present  
George Alexis, School Superintendent – present  
Hannah Kerwin, Watchung Library Branch Manager – present  
Patricia Keane, Valley View Librarian – absent  
Keith Balla, Mayor, Watchung Borough – absent

Minutes of the July 20, 2022 meeting were e-mailed to members in advance of the meeting for review. Ms. Bennett-Tafaro moved that the minutes be approved. Dr. Couchells seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

**Treasurer's Report:** Dr. Couchells gave the following treasurer's report:

The WLAB escrow account totaled \$25,377.41 on July 20, 2022. The Aquarium Fund comprised \$4,143.09 of that total and \$21,234.32 remained in our general funds.

There was one small deposit of \$4.99 received from the SCLSNJ in residual fees.

We purchased six additional Polywood Chairs for \$1,534.00 for the library's outdoor area.

We ordered a sign to be placed on the outside back wall of the library from Quarry TEX at a total cost of \$3,575.00.

We purchased a Toshiba Smart TV, HDMI connecting cord, and Rolling Stand from Amazon. The TV was \$229.99. The HDMI Cord was \$6.79 and the TV stand cost \$109.59. The Department of

Public Works helped set up the TV. We thank them for their help. Anyone can use the TV if they reserve the room for their group.

The payment for the Polywood Chairs has not been deducted from our escrow account. Our Borough Finance Director, Mr. Hance, informed the WLAB treasurer that instead, he used funds from a separate account containing library donations that he found and wanted to pay down. He took the opportunity to use money in this fund to purchase the chairs. He advised our treasurer that there is now approximately \$1,600 remaining in that account. Vice President Ellis and Secretary Hartmann explained that these are small donations of \$1.30 per week made to the Borough by residents some years ago. This was part of an initiative undertaken to demonstrate that the public was willing to pay that much extra tax each week to build a new library. A discussion ensued about whether it would be appropriate for the WLAB to use these funds to make purchases for our library. The board decided that our Council liaison, Ms. Robinson would talk to Mr. Hance about the origin of that account before our next meeting and that we would make a decision about how to use the funds at that time.

The entire \$3,575.00 for the Quarry TEX sign has been deducted from our total escrow funds. One payment for \$1,800 was made to Quarry TEX for a deposit to begin work on the sign and the remaining \$1,775 is listed as an open charge on our account.

As of today, the WLAB Escrow Account totals \$21,266.04. Our Aquarium Fund accounts for \$3,948.10 of that total. We have \$17,317.94 remaining in general funds.

The Treasurer's Report was displayed on our new smart TV as Dr. Couchells gave the report. There was some discussion of Mr. Hance's using money from a separate account to pay the Polywood Chairs bill. The money in that account was donated by Watchung residents \$1.35 at a time to demonstrate they were willing to pay that much extra tax each week to build a new library. Ms. Robinson will talk to Mr. Hance about that account before our next meeting.

#### **Friends of the Watchung Library Report:**

The Sweet Start program sponsored by the Friends of the Watchung Library and the WLAB was a huge success. At least 150 children and their parents attended. Between 45 and 50 new library cards were issued to both children and adults. The rocks that the children painted are now decorating an area in front of the library.

The next program the Friends will be sponsoring is a talk by Dr. Bruce Ruck from the New Jersey Poison Center. This program will be held in the Bicentennial Room of the library on Monday, October 24, 2022 at 6:30 PM.

#### **Watchung Library Branch Manager Report:**

Ms. Kerwin reported that the summer reading program has concluded. Children are still reading to the visiting therapy dog. Spin the Wheel Wednesdays proved to be very popular. Library staffers June and Katie go to Food Truck Fridays at Bayberry School to promote the

Watchung Library. They will also go to the Harvest Festival to give out crafts and remind everyone of our valuable library.

### **Borough Council Liaison Report:**

Ms. Robinson reported that Legacy Books has issued its first check to Watchung and it should appear on the next finance statement.

Parents can begin to sign up their children in December for the January “Soaring into Kindergarten” program. Ms. Robinson will email Connie Hankowski to ask her to talk to parents to encourage them to attend the program with their preschoolers.

Ms. Robinson reminded the WLAB that we should go to her whenever we need something accomplished by the Borough. Ms. Benc added that Ms. Robinson has been very proactive with library matters and that we should trust her to get results.

### **Old Business:**

The mayor’s ad hoc committee will present its final report on October 20, 2022 at the Borough Council meeting.

A questionnaire was written by former mayor Pote and Mr. Leigh. By answering this questionnaire, the SCLSNJ and Watchung will know what the public wants to have in the library. There is a county survey and another survey that is peculiar to Watchung library needs. The survey is on the library website and everyone will get an alert regarding where to find the survey and to please fill it out.

Ms. Bennett-Tafaro reported that she and Mr. Leigh will give their own report on their ideas for improving the present library as opposed to building a new library. For example, they will explain how the existing library can be made ADA compliant. Mr. Iovino, the architect, will give estimates.

Ms. Bennett-Tafaro also mentioned that perhaps the Boy Scouts will repaint the picnic bench.

Ms. Hartmann and Dr. Couchells gave an update on the new library sign. The sign should be ready to be installed onto the outside of the library in a few weeks. They showed the latest pictures of the sign on the smart TV. The final color was accurately displayed on the TV.

### **New Business:**

Ms. Bennett-Tafaro thanked us for sponsoring the Scarecrow Stroll. She announced that the deadline for signing up to make a scarecrow is September 23. The scarecrows must be installed on October 15 or 16.

Mr. Leigh suggested that two weeks before our next meeting, new agenda items will be welcome. He also suggested that the WLAB should be looking for new furniture for the refurbished library or a new library.

Ms. Keane sent the WLAB an excellent video showing the newest ideas in library construction and programs. We watched the video on the new smart TV.

We had an unexpected guest attend our meeting: Mr. Brian Auger of the SCLSNJ. He spoke about the survey that the SCLSNJ is promoting so that they will know more accurately what library users want. First, residents will be encouraged to fill out the survey. Then, they will collect data from each community and analyze data regarding library usage. There will be Community Conversations with focus groups and facilitators. By speaking with residents from the various communities the SCLSNJ will learn what programs will enhance library users' lives.

Mr. Auger also addressed Watchung's concerns that they are getting the fewest programs in Somerset County. He said that the data collected from the SCLSNJ's website is not accurate because we did not include "passive" programs such as one-to-one research assistance. Ms. Hartmann said that the data was indeed accurate because she did not include "passive" programs in any of the branches, therefore comparing apples to apples. Mr. Auger seemed to agree that the data was consistent across the branches. He suggested that the solution was for our branch manager and her staff to offer more programs. No mention was made of our dwindling number of staff. He did concede that some programs could not be offered at the Watchung library because it lacks certain features needed for their execution, like a community meeting room or ADA compliance.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 PM. Our next meeting will be on November 16, 2022.