

Watchung Library Advisory Board Minutes, January 19, 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 through an audio and video call. Please go to the Watchung Borough web site to view the video. The meeting was also held in person in the Bicentennial Room of the Watchung Library.

Please be advised that, pursuant to a Borough policy, all committee meetings will be recorded; at 5:36 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 5:36 PM.

Attendance:

Tamara Benc, President – present  
Margaret Ellis, Vice President – present  
Stella Couchells, Treasurer – absent  
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 – absent  
Hannah Kerwin, Watchung Library Branch Manager – present  
Patricia Keane, Valley View Librarian – present  
Keith Balla, Mayor, Watchung Borough – present

President Benc welcomed the Mayor of Watchung, our new council liaison, Wendy Robinson, and our new member, Gail Bennett-Tafaro to the meeting. Ms. Benc also thanked Barbara Steinfeld for her past service to the WLAB.

Minutes of the November 17, 2021 meeting were e-mailed to members in advance of the meeting for review. Mr. Leigh moved that the minutes be approved. Ms. Benc seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

**Treasurer's Report:** In the absence of Dr. Couchells, Secretary Hartmann provided the report of the treasurer.

Ms. Hartmann, our secretary, expressed concern about the ongoing depletion of WLAB funds due to the Somerset County Library System of New Jersey's (SCLSNJ's) permanent cessation of fines for Somerset County libraries and the effect this would have on the monthly maintenance of our library's aquarium. The WLAB has historically supported the aquarium financially. Ms. Hartmann initiated a small fund raiser and sold Christmas ornaments which bore a picture of Watchung's library. The sale netted \$311.00. Ms. Hartmann gave the \$311.00 to Dr. Couchells in cash. Dr. Couchells in turn gave the cash to Mr. Hance which he deposited into the escrow account as a "Fish Donation".

The WLAB hosted a holiday party for Library staff and volunteers on December 15, 2021. The WLAB ordered food for the party from Marino's and Trevi. The WLAB paid \$110.00 to Marino's and \$80.00 to Trevi to cover the cost of the food platters. Each vendor provided us with a 10% discount for these local orders. An additional \$18.00 was paid out for paper goods and decorations.

\$80.00 was paid to REEFCO Aquarium Services on December 8, 2021 and again on January 11, 2022 for aquarium cleaning resulting in a current balance of \$10,158.32.

Ms. Hartmann moved to approve the treasurer's report. Ms. Benc seconded the motion. The treasurer's report was approved.

**Friends of the Watchung Library Report:** Ms. Ellis welcomed Gail Bennett-Tafaro to the WLAB. Ms. Ellis stated that the book store has reopened. Sales started out slowly after the pandemic shut-down of the store, but they are picking up now. She reminded everyone that there is a "teaser" display on the first floor to entice buyers to look further at the offerings upstairs.

**Watchung Library Branch Manager Report:** Ms. Kerwin reported that mask wearing is now optional for staff but they are usually worn when dealing with patrons.

The Watchung Library started having in person programs in September but now that there has been another surge in COVID infections, some programs are virtual again. The SCLSNJ libraries follow the New Jersey Governor's directives in regards to COVID safety. Patrons continue to check out their own books. The Watchung Library reopened, after the COVID shut down, on July 4, 2020. But some libraries are still closed. Smaller numbers of children are attending in person programs. For example, not as many children attended Ms. Donna's music program as usual.

Ms. Kerwin stated that it was nice to have a Christmas party. Staff, volunteers, some Borough Council members and the mayor attended.

On Friday, January 21, 2022 there will be an in-person branch manager meeting.

Mr. Leigh wanted to know **why** there were fewer children attending programs. Ms. Kerwin was not sure but perhaps one reason is that children under the age of five cannot be vaccinated.

There are no longer children's craft events held in the library. The children can pick up a paper bag that has all the materials and directions for a craft. Then they can complete the craft at home.

Librarians no longer go into nursing homes and other places to deliver books due to COVID. Therefore, the SCLSNJ has started a pilot program to deliver books by USPS to those who cannot easily get to their local library.

The mayor wanted statistics on attendance and cost comparisons from 2019, 2020 and 2021 on library programs. Ms. Kerwin will try to get that information from the headquarters of the SCLSNJ and forward it to the mayor. Also, Mr. Balla wanted to know if Microsoft Word, Excel, videography and other similar programs are taught in the Watchung Library. Ms. Kerwin replied that these programs are taught in other libraries in the SCLSNJ but not at the Watchung branch. The mayor had other questions about how one could find out about all the programs that are offered in Watchung. Ms. Kerwin went downstairs and produced booklets listing all the programs in SCLSNJ, and pamphlets describing passport

services, home delivering of library materials for the infirm, free cultural passes etc. She said that all this information was available in the library and on the library website.

Secretary Hartmann stated that the SCLSNJ has an ironclad rule that all marketing must be centralized and that local branches may not do any advertising. Ms. Hartmann stated that she always thought this was a counterproductive idea. Not every Somerset County library has the same mix of patrons by age or interest. For example, Watchung has a large number of senior citizens. And while some of our older residents use computers and consult websites, a great many prefer paper. But how would they know that all the professionally produced booklets and pamphlets were even available if they did not frequent the library? It is for that very reason that the SCLSNJ has started the pilot program of delivering library materials to older residents by mail. They frequently cannot come physically to the library. The members of the WLAB were well aware of the many services that the library offers because they are in the library frequently and make sure they are educated about all aspects of the library. But even the Mayor of Watchung did not know about many library services.

President Benc suggested that the mayor's spring newsletter highlight at least some of these valuable services. We want the newsletter to highlight the home borrowing service, the passport service, the cultural adventure passes and other programs.

**Old Business:** The New Jersey Library Construction Bond Act: Watchung's application for grant money was denied. For more information about the grant application go to <https://watchungnj.gov/boards/library>.

President Benc thanked Dr. Couchells and Ms. Hartmann for their work on the staff/volunteer luncheon.

**New Business:** Mayor Balla plans to appoint members to an ad hoc facilities committee to devise library options since the grant money did not come through. Other borough buildings will be examined also. Volunteers should submit their resumes to the mayor before the second Borough Council meeting on February 17, 2022. The mayor and Ms. Robinson encouraged WLAB members to attend the next Borough Council meeting in person to promote a walking route that does not infringe on the "Valley Furniture" property.

Some of the items that the WLAB believes need to be addressed in regards to the present library building are: install a new roof, check out the HVAC system, check the wiring, have the Best Lake sidewalk extend to the library, fix the garage adjacent to the library, and explore the idea of building a large deck in the rear of the library overlooking Best Lake.

Chris Korenowsky of SCLSNJ sent out an email that should be read: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eIUEFCvnlAfFCdntnqRYWzrK82qLtnbEK6eFkeuEpgQ/edit?usp=sharing>

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 16, 2022 at 5:30 PM in the library Bicentennial Room or by Zoom.

**Public Comments:** There were no public comments.

**Election of Officers:** Ms. Hartmann nominated Tamara Benc for President, Margaret Ellis for Vice President, Virginia Hartmann for Secretary and Stella Couchells for Treasurer. Gail Tafaro seconded these nominations. The slate was approved. The new officers and members of the WLAB were sworn in by the mayor.

Wendy Robinson will research the rules and regulations governing the WLAB meetings so that the members will know if they are allowed to meet before March 16, 2022.

Mr. Leigh moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Tafaro seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:06 PM.