

Watchung Library Advisory Board Minutes, May 19, 2021 – 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, as all gatherings of ten or more people are prohibited due to the coronavirus pandemic. Please go to the Watchung Borough web site to view the video.

Please be advised that, pursuant to a new Borough policy, all committee meetings will be recorded; at 4:04 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 4:04 PM.

Attendance:

Tamara Benc, President – present
Margaret Ellis, Vice President – present
Stella Couchells, Treasurer – present
Virginia Hartmann – present
Bradford Leigh – present
Barbara Steinfeld – absent
Lindsay Goodloe, Council Member – present
George Alexis, School Superintendent – present (late)
Hannah Kerwin, Watchung Library Branch Manager – present
Amy Fiorilla, Watchung resident – present

Minutes of the March 17, 2021 meeting were e-mailed to members in advance of the meeting for review. Treasurer Couchells made a motion to accept the minutes; the motion was seconded by Vice President Ellis. The WLAB agreed to the motion and approved the minutes.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Couchells reported that the balance at our last meeting was \$10,903.00. We received \$6.87 in residual fines and spent \$181.98 on fish tank maintenance for April and May, resulting in a current balance of \$10,727.89. Her March 2021 treasurer's report was accepted.

Friends of the Watchung Library Report: Vice President Ellis reported that the book store in the library is still closed due to the pandemic. The Friends are in the planning stages of a Story Walk. Children, with a parent, will walk around Watchung and read a page of a book at each station. This project of the Friends will provide a safe, outdoor activity and encourage literacy. The Walk will probably start near the Watchung Library, proceed to Best Lake and circle back. Perhaps the theme will be environmental or focus on nature. If it turns out to be a popular activity, the story will be changed.

Watchung Library Branch Manager Report: Hannah Kerwin reported that the Somerset County Library System of New Jersey (SCLSNJ) bought the Watchung Library a canopy tent. Since there are still no inside events at the library, the canopy will improve outdoor events. There will be a therapy dog event for children where the canopy will be used.

Outside groups still cannot meet in the library. Ms. Kerwin reports that she has no information on when the library will open for meetings. With regards to events, Ms. Kerwin stated that the town cannot help with the advertising as this is a function of the SCLC and as such events cannot be posted on the Borough's electronic sign in the circle. Watchung Library never reached capacity during the pandemic. The library staff still wear masks, but they no longer wear gloves.

Ms. Kerwin stated that cleaning has deteriorated in the library. Therefore, Ms. Kerwin wrote an email to Mr. Damato explaining that the cleaning service is doing a less than acceptable job. Ms. Goodloe stated that the town administrator is aware of the situation and that new bids are being solicited. Ms. Goodloe explained that the cleaners have not been given enough hours to clean all the Borough buildings properly. Ms. Hartmann stated that she would contact a reputable cleaning company that she knows and with which she has had experience and ask that they bid on the new cleaning contract. Ms. Kerwin emphasized that the library staff disinfects during the day and at the end of the day. The library staff is doing its part to keep the library clean. Ms. Kerwin also stated that she would be glad to meet with the cleaners after a new contract is signed to explain what needs to be cleaned in the library.

Council Member Liaison Report: Lindsay Goodloe reported that the Borough of Watchung 2021 budget had a 3% increase. If the Watchung Library is awarded funds from the State of New Jersey, the Borough Council will have to approve matching funds. The Borough is working on improving its website. If the WLAB has any suggestions for the library part of the website, we should submit those suggestions.

Old Business: President Benc reminded the WLAB that the June 4, 2021 deadline to apply for funds from the State of New Jersey is coming up soon. Chris Korenowsky is writing the grant request. The committee discussed but was unaware of the number of libraries that submitted grant applications. The mayor told Ms. Benc and Ms. Hartmann that he believed it was unlikely that new libraries would apply for the grant in the second round.

President Benc and Secretary Hartmann met with Mayor Balla on May 10, 2021 expressing their desire to see the grant request before the deadline. Vice President Ellis stated that she wanted to send an email to Mr. Korenowsky expressing in one sentence the wide range of support the Watchung library has from Borough organizations as expressed in letters that have been gathered by the WLAB. Mayor Balla informed President Benc that he had already written an email requesting to see the grant. He assured us that he was working to achieve this goal. He strongly believed that Mr. Korenowsky was using library centric language that will serve Watchung well in its quest for a grant. However, although Mayor Balla did see the grant proposal before the deadline, no one from the WLAB or other groups that have labored for 21 years for an improved library were permitted to see the document.

President Benc offered a letter for the WLAB to submit to the Somerset County Library Commission about the plan to eliminate library fines. We are concerned about losing funding for our local library. Treasurer Couchells supported this action and emphasized that it is the Borough that will lose funding. The WLAB just advises how to administer these funds in concert with the Borough finance officer, Mr. William Hance. Consequently, the letter was copied to the Watchung Borough Council. Ms. Goodloe and Mr. Leigh suggested that the letter not be sent until after June 4, 2021, so as not to obtrude on the submission of the town's application for the NJ State Library Grant. Ms. Fiorilla suggested that we alert the Borough that the Commission and the Borough will be receiving the letter. It was moved and seconded and the motion passed to send the letter after June 4, 2021.

The next meeting of the WLAB will be July 21, 2021. Ms. Ellis moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Couchells seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 5:04 PM.