

Watchung Library Advisory Board Minutes, March 17, 2021 – FINAL

Mission statement: The mission of the Watchung Library Advisory Board is to advise, support, and promote the interests of the Watchung Borough Free Public Library.

The meeting of the WLAB was held through this link (<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/913760517>--an audio and video call), as all gatherings of ten or more people are prohibited due to the coronavirus pandemic.

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.

In attendance:

Tamara Benc, President  
Margaret Ellis, Vice President  
Stella Couchells, Treasurer  
Virginia Hartmann, Secretary  
Amy Fiorilla  
Maureen Hemsworth  
Bradford Leigh  
Daryl Eisenberg Knegten, Borough Council member  
Patricia Keane, Valley View Librarian

Minutes of the January 2021 meeting were e-mailed to members in advance of the meeting for review. Vice President Ellis made a motion to accept the minutes; the motion was seconded by President Benc. The LAB agreed to the motion and approved the minutes.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Couchells renewed the LAB's registration for tax exempt status with the IRS. The question was asked, "Are donations tax deductible?" Ms. Couchells confirmed that the answer is, "No." Her January 2021 treasurer report was accepted.

For March 2021, the LAB's beginning balance was \$11,060.87. Fish donations were \$2.17. February and March aquarium maintenance was \$160.00. Our current balance is **\$10,903.00**. A small check for \$6.87 from the SCLS will be deposited in the WLAB account.

Friends of the Watchung Library Report: Vice President Ellis reported that the Friends replaced the sign holder that the library displays near the entrance. They also purchased four decorative flags and repaired the flag pole. They refreshed the Friends bulletin board to reflect the new season, Spring.

Hannah Kerwin, Watchung Library Branch Manager, sent in her report, which stated that the new refrigerator was delivered. The old refrigerator was removed by the Public Works Department.

Old Business:

Round Two applications for a grant from the State of New Jersey are due June 4, 2021.

Vice President Ellis reported that a subcommittee met seven times to determine how our application could be improved. The committee was incredulous that Watchung had received low scores for community support since we have had demonstrations, marches, fund raising, etc. The committee decided that our efforts had not been clearly stated in our first application.

There was a section referred to as “Degree of Community Support/Partners” that the subcommittee decided could be improved. Therefore, they are collecting letters from various community groups that state their support of a new library. President Benc requested that the letters be ready for the April Borough Council meeting. She wants the letters to emphasize how wonderful a new library could be. She thanked the subcommittee members for all their work.

Mr. Leigh found a grant that was not exactly applicable to our needs but it gave the subcommittee the idea that they should also search for grants other than the one from the State of New Jersey that can help the Watchung Library. For example, we might qualify for ADA grants since the current library is not ADA compliant.

The committee also recommends that the architectural plans for the new library be displayed in the library. Ms. Fiorilla said that Staples can print a big copy of the plans for a few dollars. The latest plans are quite beautiful, and Ms. Kerwin has in the past said that she has ideas of where the display should be. When we find out if Watchung Library has been awarded the State grant, we will pursue this idea.

President Benc reported that the Mayor and Chris Korenowsky of the Somerset County Library System (SCLS) will meet to discuss the Round 2 application and then the library ad hoc committee will meet.

Mr. Leigh declared that more needs to be done because it is unlikely that we will get a lot of money from the State. President Benc stated that we will look into doing more if it turns out we are unsuccessful with the State grant. Mr. Leigh asked, “Who will definitely write the Round 2 grant application?” The answer is Chris Korenowsky. Mr. Leigh wants the grant writer to look into Watchung’s digital divide. President Benc stated that the LAB should see the application before it is submitted to the State.

#### New Business:

Lindsay Goodloe, Borough Council Member, was not present but reported moss on the Library roof. Also, the Borough snow plow knocked down the Library split rail fence. It has since been repaired.

The SCLS has suggested that library fines be eliminated. There is some evidence that some people do not come to a library for fear of incurring fines. Our issue is, where would we get replacement funds? The Borough receives about \$6,700 annually. Mr. Auger of the SCLS says that decisions about paying for and funding items usually purchased by Labs will now be made by SCLS. He says the SCLS could buy furniture, fish food and program needs. However, no definition of needs vs. wants was detailed.

President Benc suggested that a statement to the Library Commission should be written with our concerns of loss of revenue to our Library and our Borough. We could suggest amnesty weeks rather than the complete cessation of fines.

Mr. Leigh suggested that no fines mean equal access for all regardless of income. If we insist on fines, it could hurt our Round 2 application. Treasurer Couchells believes that what might be good for

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one LAB might not be workable for another. Also, she observed that all the statistics were slanted toward a fine free library.

President Benc reminded the LAB that virtual tours are available of other libraries in the SCLS. The LAB has to follow up to see if Borough Councilwoman Goodloe received answers from the Borough on how to have petty cash for the Library.

Mr. Leigh suggested that perhaps the LAB should meet in the evening instead of the late afternoon to make it more convenient for residents to attend. However, our LAB members cannot all meet at night. Of course, all meetings are now recorded and any resident can watch a meeting on video.

The next meeting will be held May 19, 2021. The meeting was adjourned at 5:35 PM.

Virginia Hartmann  
Secretary, Watchung Library Advisory Board