

Watchung Library Advisory Committee Minutes, March 15, 2023 – 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 recorded. 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 5:35 PM.

Attendance:

Tamara Benc, President – present
Margaret Ellis, Vice President – present
Virginia Hartmann, Secretary/Treasurer – present
Ann Cruz Koufomihalis – absent
Marianne Candiloros –present
Paul Fischer, Borough Council Member -- present
George Alexis, School Superintendent – absent
Hannah Kerwin, Watchung Library Branch Manager – present
Patricia Keane, Valley View Librarian – present

Minutes of the January 18, 2023 meeting were emailed to members in advance of the meeting for review. Mr. Fischer suggested that the minutes be amended to add that although the WLAB had passed the motion to add outdoor lighting to the new Watchung Library sign, the words “pending approval by the Borough Council” be included. Ms. Ellis moved that the minutes be approved as amended. Ms. Candiloros seconded the motion. The minutes were approved as amended.

Treasurer’s Report: Ms. Hartmann gave the following treasurer’s report:

The WLAB escrow account totaled \$30, 203.15 on January 5, 2023. The Aquarium Fund comprised \$3,592.11 of that total and \$26, 611.04 remained in our general funds.

On January 13, 2023 a \$100.00 payment was made to Reefco Aquarium Service, LLC for aquarium maintenance performed on December 27, 2022. On January 13, 2023 a \$15.99 payment was also made to Reefco for the purchase of 11.74 oz. of Chemi-Pure Elite.

On February 10, 2023 a \$100.00 payment was made to Reefco for aquarium maintenance performed on November 29, 2022. On February 10, 2023 another \$100.00 payment was made to Reefco for aquarium maintenance performed on January 24, 2023.

The part of the Watchung Community Fund designated for the Watchung Library had a balance of \$1,956.61 on December 13, 2022. The Watchung Library received \$54.10 on January 30, 2023 from Legacy Books. On February 28, 2023 another \$65.30 was deposited, also from Legacy Books. As a result of those deposits, on February 28, 2023 the Watchung Library portion of the Community Fund totaled \$2,076.01.

As of March 13, 2023 the WLAB Escrow Account totals \$29,887.16. Our Aquarium Fund accounts for \$3,276.12 of that total with \$26,611.04 remaining in general funds.

Friends of the Watchung Library Report: Ms. Ellis offered the following Friends report:

The book store is not only open, but it is very attractive since the remodeling of the Bicentennial Room. Only the very best books in perfect condition are being offered for sale. The remaining books are deposited in the Legacy Book box or are collected for a school in the Philippines. The Friends have already donated one complete order for the school and are collecting for a second order.

Marino's Restaurant donated \$31.14 for a pi day prize. A child won the drawing. In May, the Friends plan to give away a house plant. Also, a sleep over in the library for children's stuffed animals is planned to take place soon.

Watchung Library Branch Manager Report: Ms. Kerwin gave the following Branch Manager report:

Ms. Kerwin requested a new American flag for the library since the old one was falling apart. Mr. Damato responded very quickly and the library has a new flag.

The Bicentennial Room remodel is complete and is a significant improvement. The periodical room has also been improved. The bookshelves no longer cover any windows. The children's area has been rearranged so that three additional windows are exposed. Now that all the windows are unobstructed the areas are much more sun filled. Windows that are now exposed, and formerly had no blinds, have been fitted with new blinds. The Department of Public Works has been very helpful in these projects. Ms. Kerwin laundered all the drapes so that everything is fresh and clean.

The library hosted Maker Day with a collage project.

Ms. Kerwin suggested that the space at the top of the library stairs be designated an Art Space. She suggests a hanging system for pictures by Watchung artists that does not put a lot of holes in our newly painted walls. She is going to make a request to the SCLSNJ for the hanging system. If they decline to provide the materials, the WLAB will pay for the system. Ms. Ellis moved that up to \$250.00 be given to this project if the SCLSNJ declines. The motion was seconded by Ms. Hartmann.

New Business:

Mr. Fischer informed the WLAB that architects have been visiting the library. He wanted to emphasize that the DPW had added window blinds to the library. He said he would investigate the DPW adding grass seed to the library back lawn.

Ms. Benc suggested that the library host spelling bee preparation. The spelling bees in our area progress to the county level. She reminded the WLAB to look for our news in the Watchung Newsletter. Our president wants to us to continue to suggest new programs for our library through the SCLSNJ or on our own.

Ms. Benc announced that our treasurer resigned. After some discussion, it was decided to have our secretary, Ms. Hartmann, provide the treasurer's report in the future as she did for this meeting. The WLAB also will need a new member because of the resignation. The ideal candidate would be a person who uses the library and is familiar with the history and projects of our library. Ms. Benc shared the email that Mr. Leigh, the former treasurer, had written to President Benc and carbon copied our liaison upon resigning his membership. Part of the email indicated that Mr. Leigh objected to Ms. Benc's leadership style. Ms. Benc told the WLAB that the email indicated that Mr. Leigh believes that the Borough of Watchung did far more for the library than the WLAB had done. In reply to this assertion, and to inform our new members, and new liaison, Ms. Hartmann listed some of the WLAB's accomplishments:

1. The purchase of:
 - a. two leather chairs for comfortable reading
 - b. four children's Adirondack chairs and two adult Adirondack chairs for the lawn
 - c. a new Watchung Library sign
 - d. a smart TV
2. Initiatives:
 - a. Led the effort for a remodeled Bicentennial Room
 - b. Led effort to remove dead trees and re-grade the back lawn
 - c. Led the effort to repair drainage in the front of the library and remove vegetation too close to the building
 - d. Convinced the SCLSNJ to provide the Soaring program to Watchung children
3. Gifts:
 - a. As a result of a plea to the Borough Council to assign Legacy Book funds to the library so that we could support our aquarium, a resident, Mr. Bisignano, donated \$5,000 to the fish fund.
 - b. As a result of our heartfelt thanks to Mr. Bisignano, he admitted that all his attention has been on our schools and not our library. He donated a new roof to the library.
 - c. Four Adirondack adult chairs from the Hartmanns.

At this point, Mr. Fischer expressed his concern as to the length of the recitation of our accomplishments stating that he did not think it was on the agenda. Ms. Hartmann stopped speaking.

4. Ms. Ellis added that all the tables and chairs in the Bicentennial Room were a gift of the WLAB.
5. Our library director, Ms. Kerwin, stated that she has been the librarian at other libraries and has seen more improvements at our library during Ms. Benc's tenure as president than at any other time.

On March 27, 2023, the Watchung Arts Center, in celebration of Women's History Month, will honor Marianne Candiloros as a community advocate.

The WLAB has been assigned a new email address that should be used for our official business. All members were reminded to be careful with the "reply all" function as that could be construed as a meeting.

Ms. Keane reported a message from Mr. Alexis. Summer reading suggestions for all the children in the Borough schools will be coming out soon. These are suggestions, not requirements. The library will do its utmost to have these books available.

The New York Times reported that even amid these times of a lack of money for public services, libraries are still viewed as essential. It is a time when libraries should be fortified, not diminished.

The WLAB discussed the possibility of changing the time when we meet. Ms. Kerwin explained that the SCLSNJ policy is that there must be always two staff members in the building. This means there must be two staff members right up to 8:00 PM on the Wednesdays we meet. She said that with fewer staff members available these days, it is very difficult for her to even meet that requirement. The doors must be locked at 8:00 PM.

It was suggested that we perhaps could meet somewhere else. However, since this is the Library Advisory Board, it was decided that it only makes sense to meet in the library. Another suggestion was to meet every month. But it takes a full two weeks to prepare the agenda, send out the draft minutes and incorporate any additions or corrections that are suggested, and send out the treasurer's report. We would constantly be in a loop that would prove to be more work than was necessary. Ms. Kerwin volunteered to send out the Branch Manager report before the meetings which would save some time. We had originally decided to meet rather early (3:30 PM), so that the Superintendent and the librarian did not have to wait for hours after their day was done to attend the meeting. Last year, we voted to change the meeting time to 5:30 PM. If something comes up that is very time sensitive, we can always

convene a special meeting as we have in the past. Ms. Candiloros moved to change the meeting time to 6:00 PM. It was seconded by Ms. Keane. The new meeting time was approved.

Our future meetings will be May 17, July 19, September 13, and November 15, 2023. Discussion ensued regarding the Borough's decision to no longer require boards and committees to offer Zoom access. Based on the views of the officers who were surveyed about this new policy, Ms. Benc decided to end this option; two officers were in favor of continuing and two stated it was unnecessary. Ms. Candiloros volunteered to take full responsibility for continuing to provide Zoom access and agreed to handle all aspects of this initiative beginning with the May meeting, including obtaining the device from the Borough, establishing, and sharing links, and working with a replacement in the event of her absence amongst other related tasks.

Mr. Fischer wanted to know when he should look for the draft minutes that are sent out before every meeting if he has corrections. He was told that one week before the meeting would be a good time to provide any changes he had. He observed that he did not see the draft minutes sent to him this last time.

Ms. Ellis moved to adjourn. Ms. Keane seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:17 PM.