

**NIAGARA FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
REGULAR LIBRARY BOARD MEETING**

Niagara Falls Public Library 1425 Main Street, Niagara Falls, NY  
Wednesday, August 30, 2023 @ 3.00 p.m

**Meeting minutes**

**CALL TO ORDER.** The regular meeting of the Niagara Falls Public Library Board of Trustees was held in person on Wednesday, August 30, 2023, in the Auditorium (Conference Room not available), 2nd floor, Main Library. The meeting was called to order by Board President Carmen Grant at 3:12 pm.

**ROLL CALL:**

<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent/Excused</u>
Ms. Bailey	Dr. Carter
Dr. Foote	Ms. Glaser
Mr. Grant	
Mr. King	
Dr. Rahman (left 3:32)	

Also present were Ms. Sarah Potwin, Executive Library Director, Mr. Pat Brown, Finance Manager, Mr. James Roscetti, Library Attorney, Ms. Cecilia Driscoll Librarian 1 / union steward, Ms. Marilyn Lojek, President, Mr. Robert DiFrancesco both from the Friends of the Library, and Ms. Sara Capen, Executive Director of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Center (NFNHC).

**OPEN HEARING**

Ms. Sara Capen provided an update on grant funding for the Library's Local History Department digitization project which is the next step as the inventory is complete. The NFNHC has provided funding to the Library over the past few years to complete the inventory process for the local history department. She has been working with the Ralph C. Wilson Foundation and her agency has received approval of \$500,000 in funding for the digitization project noting that funding for such projects is difficult to obtain and not the norm since it isn't a building or property (fixed/infrastructure type of asset) project but Ms. Wilson was impressed with the project and loved the idea that this could help promote/revitalize the City of Niagara Falls. The project is to begin by September 30, 2023 with one year for completion and the digitization work will be completed by one vendor -History Associates, Inc. who is familiar with the items since they completed the inventory portion of the project and were low bidder. A press release will be issued by NFNHC and an organizational meeting with Ms. Capen, Ms. Potwin, Ms. Geerhart will be held in the next couple of weeks for the digitization project. Mr. Brown asked if the funds will flow through the library, Ms. Capen said no all funds (receipts and expenses) will be handled by her agency. Ms. Potwin asked if there is any funding for staffing, Ms. Capen said all funding is strictly for direct vendor digitization expenses and no funding for administration or staffing but NFNHC will provide in-kind services. Dr. Rahman said it was good only one vendor will be involved. Mr. King asked what the library and or board can do to move it along, Ms. Capen said her agency (NFNHC) will be directing the project and it is a collaborative effort with the library. Board members thanked Ms. Capen for her efforts on behalf of the Library and applauded this great news for the local history department in obtaining this funding. Ms. Capen also distributed a copy of the NFNHC Best of '22 Annual Report.

Mr. King asked what is being done in memory of longtime volunteer with the Library Mr. Ralph Guerrucci and his passing. Ms. Potwin said flowers were sent from the library; Ms. Lojek said the Friends of the Library will honor Mr. Guerrucci at the annual membership meeting on Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> at 6:00pm in the library auditorium where his family will be presented with the Community Service Award in his honor posthumously. In addition, the Friends annual scholarship award to a senior at NFHS will be renamed "The Ralph Guerrucci Memorial Scholarship sponsored by the Friends of the Niagara Falls Public Library".



## **ADOPTION OF AGENDA.**

The agenda was adopted upon a motion by Mr. King seconded by Dr. Foote and carried.

## **REVIEW OF MINUTES.**

A review of the July 26, 2023 meeting summary was presented. The minutes were adopted upon a motion by Dr. Rahman seconded by Dr. Foote and carried. It was subsequently noted that Ms. Bailey was present at the July 26<sup>th</sup> meeting but accidentally omitted from the roll call portion of the minutes.

## **FINANCIAL REPORTS**

Mr. Brown explained that everyone has the June 30, 2023 financial summary narrative and detailed financial reports in their packet explaining variances. Without reading the narrative report to everyone he highlighted the following:

- given six months of the year has passed expectations on an evenly incurred budgetary basis would be that actual revenues/expenditures would be 50.0%.
- total revenues are 51.38% of budget or 1.38% higher than expectation and 54.03% or 4.03% higher than expectation after removing unbudgeted grant revenues and adding six months of state/county funding that comes all at once later in the year. So revenues are doing well compared to budget.
- Expenditures are 46.13% of budget or 3.87% below expectation of 50.0% so expenditures are doing well and should be under budget for the year with all major expense lines at or below the 50.0% expectation except for building operation & maintenance which is over due to grant expenses not budgeted of \$27,588. Without unbudgeted grant expenditures and adjusting worker's compensation full year expense to six month's and \$31k furniture, expenditures would be \$1,016,207 or 43.7% of budget (6.3% under expectation). Furniture for conference and flag rooms of approximately \$31k is not reflected in expenditures reports as of June.
- Operating surplus (deficit) is \$40,489 or \$119,791 better than expected budget operating deficit for six months of the year. Taking into account \$31k furniture to be expensed operating surplus would be \$9,583 for six months of \$88,885 better than budget. Expect to operate at a surplus for the year vs. the budgeted operating deficit for 2023 of \$158,604.

Mr. Granto asked if we operate at surplus that means we don't use any of the \$158k fund balance in budget, Mr. Brown said that is correct we would add to fund balance if operate at a surplus. Mr. Granto asked about the total unrestricted fund balance estimate for year end, he expects it to be \$300k-\$400k. Mr. Brown said yes it should be in that range adding for clarification that the unrestricted fund balance referred to is an accumulated amount not the same as annual operating surplus/deficit but includes annual amounts.

## **EXECUTIVE LIBRARY DIRECTOR'S REPORT.**

Mrs. Potwin shared some of the items from her written report as part of the board packet highlighting:

- Upcoming library closures, meetings she has attended noting days she has scheduled off.
- New furniture for the Flag and Conference room (\$31K approx. cost) expected delivery date was August 29 but it did not get delivered which is why we are meeting in the auditorium but it will be in by next board meeting.
- Staff summer BBQ was held August 23 with thanks to security guard Keith for grilling and Carol, Cindy, Tammy and Greg for organizing it. All staff & board members were invited, Mayor Restaino joined us.
- Community Annual Report for 2022 is to the printers and expected to be available soon and the Fall 2023 Newsletter should be available in September.
  - Ms. Bailey suggested there should be an option to receive it electronically
  - Dr. Foote asked who is doing the printing, should we be spending money on printing it and who generally receives it; Ms. Potwin said Compu-Mail handles the set up and printing but will make sure it is available on website and electronically. Mayor, Senator, Assemblyman, donors usually receive a copy.



- DPW building repairs/issues
  - Air Conditioning at the main branch stopped working completely yesterday (August 29<sup>th</sup>) is in need of \$28k in parts and service to get it working. Johnson Controls had sent quote back on July 14, 2023 to DPW to make necessary repairs then to prevent this breakdown; DPW never addressed this according to Johnson Controls so now there is no air conditioning. Library doesn't have the \$28k budgeted for repair and this is a city building so city should pay it.
  - Boiler for heating is unrepairable per the City's HVAC staff and so no heat for coming season if not addressed which Ms. Potwin described as the bigger issue. The City was to have a consultant look at all city owned buildings and evaluate HVAC needs back in the spring. So as of today the Library has no air conditioning or heat. Ms. Potwin advised the board that she will close the Library on days if excessively hot in the building in coming days and weeks. E-mails regarding the HVAC problems have been sent to DPW with copy to City Administrator.
    - Ms. Bailey said the air conditioning and no heat is a very pressing issue suggesting that e-mail be sent to the Mayor and Administrator about the air conditioning and heating problems with a copy all board members as this is a safety and health issue and agrees with closing the Library due to heat if necessary.
    - Mr. Grant asked if the \$28k quote was only for air conditioning and if Johnson controls assessed heating problem, Ms. Potwin said \$28k is only for air conditioning repair and Johnson controls has not assessed heating problem.
      - Mr. Grant said if necessary the Library should just pay the \$28K to get air conditioning working and get reimbursed from the City and have Johnson Controls assess heating issues.
      - Ms. Bailey added that it should be put in writing to administration that the library is going to pay the \$28k to Johnson Controls and city is to reimburse the Library.
  - Mr. King asked about the buckled flooring on the first floor, Ms. Potwin said she is not aware of the status or any plans to repair that as the City was to take care of it with American Rescue funds.
- NYS Library Construction
  - Fiscal year 2023-2024 grant application submitted August 14, 2023 to NIOGA totalling \$155K, 90/10 funding City match of \$15k for replacement of LaSalle circulation counter, Main circulation, flag & staff rooms counters, flooring around Main circulation counter & vestibules.
  - Fiscal year 2022-2023 grant will refurbish LaSalle ADA door opener \$2,700 & Main auditorium \$122K awarded August 2023 with Sept. 2023 planned beginning date of work.
- Budget FY 2024
  - Preliminary budget for Library presented and reviewed with City on August 1, 2023 with request for a 2% increase in city funding which still left a \$37K deficit. Ms. Potwin felt the City didn't think the budget was unrealistic and had a fair understanding of her operations at the library. Subsequent request via e-mail to City Admin. was made to increase city funding and/or eliminate insurance expense on building/property since it is city owned and library is a tenant to cover deficit; to date no response from the City.
  - Ms. Potwin will begin her final course with Long Island University program in facility management (LIS 704) Wed. after Labor Day, ending Nov. 29

There were no questions or comments for the Director.



## PERSONNEL REPORT.

### New hires:

- Remi Nation, PT Library Clerk, begin date August 14, 2023, rate \$14.38/hour, 17 hours/week
- Michael Stevens, PT Library Clerk, begin date August 28, 2023, rate \$14.38/hour, 17 hours/week

### FMLA

- Tom Poehnelt, FT Librarian 1 July 27, 2023-October 19, 2023

### Voluntary Separation

- Hannah Krull, PT Library Trainee last day of employment August 11, 2023

### End of grant funding

- Ezia Capton, PT Library Specialist funded through WNYLRC, last day worked August 18, 2023
- Larissa Spears was funded and paid through Niagara County, last day worked August 18, 2023

Mr. Granto asked what PT, FT and FMLA stand for, Ms. Potwin said Part time, Full time and Family Medical Leave Act respectively. Ms. Bailey referenced the hiring issues/problems for clerks the library experiences suggesting placing/using sign on front lawn of the library to advertise, reaching out to the faith community & neighborhoods around the main library possibly holding job fairs to assist in getting word out and recruiting people from the area around the main library since it seems there are more applicants are from LaSalle area who prefer LaSalle Branch for work vs Main also reaching out to seniors and retired teachers, Dr. Foote added there is a retired teachers association in the city. Ms. Bailey also suggested trying to make arrangements with local colleges/universities which Ms. Potwin said we do presently. Ms. Lojek and Dr. Foote agreed with the colleges/universities idea emphasizing NCCC and NU for students who live in the city, Mr. Granto agreed with the idea of reaching out to the faith community in the areas around the Main library.

The acceptance of the personnel report was adopted as presented upon a motion by Mr. Granto, seconded by Dr. Foote and carried unanimously.

## BOARD PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Mr. Granto discussed the local history department's future now that inventory project is complete and digitization will be completed within a year; the board will have to make decisions regarding the department to make it more visible and bring greater awareness to it since we have the funds, staff and historical items so we have to move on this. One possible location is the conference center on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street owned by USA Niagara to get it exposure in tourist area, it has about 30k sq. feet of space used for storage which he would like to look into leasing or buying it. Dr. Foote wanted it noted that she is on the board of USA Niagara so any vote as library board member may cause conflict; Mr. Granto said she would just have to disclose to each entity when voting that she serves on the other board. Mr. Granto suggested starting out as a storefront with a long run plan of seeking a more historical building for the history department. Ms. Bailey said not all the items in the history department are worth displaying in a museum type setting and they should be audited to determine items to display. Dr. Foote asked who would staff such an operation, Mr. Granto said Friends of the Library who can also sell books for their fundraising and present staff. Ms. Bailey asked if there was free parking around the conference center, Mr. Granto said no there isn't but that could be worked out by validating visitors parking. Ms. Bailey and Dr. Foote suggested the Destination Niagara Visitor's Center for a kiosk or information table. Mr. Granto concluded that Olcott, Wilson, Newfane, Lewiston all have history museums but the City of Niagara Falls doesn't despite its' large collection of historical items.



Long term plan is we have to have a history museum in the City. He wants the approximately 50 video tapes of Mr. King's interviews with various people held by the city school district all at the library.

#### **OLD BUSINESS.**

##### **INCREASE PT LIBRARY CLERK STARTING PAY RATE & JOB DESCRIPTION**

As Mrs. Potwin referred to her director's notes of this and last month's meeting about increasing the hourly hiring rate of part-time (PT) library clerks by \$1/hour more than minimum wage to help retain and attract applicants as it is becoming increasingly difficult to hire. This is a very important position for the library as it generally is the 1<sup>st</sup> and last person patrons have contact with generally. A part-time employee wage chart had been approved for all part-time employees on 1/18/17 which keeps pace with the present rate of minimum wage but this will have to be revised for new minimum rates. Currently, the minimum wage is \$14.50, yet we pay a part-time library clerk \$14.38, on January 1, 2024 this pay rate would be \$15.08. Minimum wages are legislated to be January 1, 2024, \$15.00, January 1, 2025, the minimum wage will be \$15.50, January 1, 2026, the minimum wage will be \$16.00. Mrs. Potwin provided a comparative chart showing the budget line item costs for part-time library clerks starting @ \$16/hr, \$16.50/hr, and \$17/hr in the door. Mrs. Potwin listed a number of entry-level jobs in NF currently available with their rates of pay are all over \$16 currently. It is acknowledged that this small increase will not revolutionize how candidates are attracted to the job, though she feels it is a positive step towards recruiting and retaining quality candidates.

Ms. Bailey thinks the \$16/hour starting rate is reasonable. Mr. King asked if clerks could be paid more if they work at Main vs LaSalle since LaSalle branch seems the preferred branch employees/applicants want, it was determined this was not an option. Mr. Granto asked if it would help the situation if staff was made fulltime or is it an issue of needing more staff and how many clerks are needed, Ms. Potwin said more staff is needed vs fulltime status and ideally there would be a total of 13 clerks, presently we have 10.

The job description for PT Library Clerk was provided as requested at last meeting.

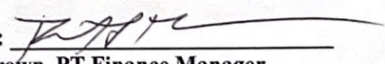
Mr. Granto asked if there were any objections to having a new pay plan prepared with the new hourly rates of \$1/hour over minimum wage for given year as presented and it be worked into the 2024 budget which can be approved at the September meeting or if any union issues with this. There were no objections from board members or the union steward present, decision was to have the new/revised pay plan presented to the board with vote on it at the September meeting.

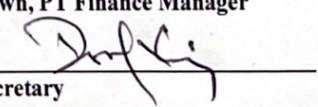
#### **NEW BUSINESS**

NONE

**NEXT MEETING AND ADJOURNMENT.** The next regular meeting of the Library Board is scheduled for 9/27/2023 at 3:00 p.m. in the conference room. The next Dunlap Meeting is scheduled for 10/25/2023 at 2.30 pm in the conference room.

The meeting adjourned at 4:06 pm by Mr. Granto, seconded by Dr. Foote, and carried.

Recorded by:   
Patrick D. Brown, PT Finance Manager

Approved by:   
Don King, Secretary