

Monmouth County Library Commission Minutes

November 14, 2017

Eastern Branch Library

Present: Chairperson Renee Swartz, Commissioners Peter Doyle, Frank Wells, Grace Abramov, and James Gray, Director Judi Tolchin, and Assistant Director Heidi Amici.

Absent: Commissioner Don Burden and Freeholder Lillian Burry

Guests: Muriel Smith and Barbara Bateman

The meeting convened at 11:22 am.

Chairperson Renee Swartz opened the meeting of November 14, 2017 with the following statement: “The Library Commission has complied with the regular requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act by giving written notice to the Press and County Clerk’s Office and by posting on the Library web page the date, time, and place of the meeting.” Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

A Motion to approve the open public meeting minutes of October 10, 2017 was made by Frank Wells and seconded by Grace Abramov. James Gray abstained. Motion passed.

James Gray asked if the County Council was consulted regarding the meeting room policy as discussed in October. Judi clarified that it would be discussed at a later time by the Commission.

A Motion to approve the closed executive session meeting minutes of October 10, 2017 was made by Frank Wells and seconded by Peter Doyle. James Gray abstained. Motion passed.

State & National Report

Renee Swartz shared that Freeholder Lillian Burry would not be attending the meeting. She also shared that the Institute of Museum and Library Services in Washington D.C., of which she was a member, had their funding approved, which had been in question. As a result of the approval,

she shared that they would likely be working to provide grants and move the library and museum agenda forward. Grace Abramov asked if the library would be receiving any money from this, and Renee replied that the federal money is often used to fund state library grant programs, and that the commission would have to come up with a plan to apply for one of the grants. Judi Tolchin gave the example of the \$100,000 per year Career Connections grant, for which the library had applied and received from the state. Renee stated that the government supplied the criteria for grant ideas and then the library would apply for the grant if it fit in with their goals. Judi stated that the library may not have enough staff to implement another grant, and that the Freeholders approve grant applications within the county.

Renee Swartz stated that, because the New Jersey Public Library Construction Bond Referendum had been passed for state funds, the process of applying for funds would be less tedious. She shared that the results of the public question for the library bond came to 933,245 yes votes against 630,215 no votes, with the distribution roughly showing that rural and more affluent areas voted no, while urban areas voted yes. She stated how fortunate New Jersey was to have \$125,000,000 available for libraries and how great it was to see that the public endorsed their libraries. Judi thanked Renee and Don Burden (absent) for their efforts in publicizing awareness of the bond referendum. Grace shared her surprise that, while the referendum passed in Monmouth County, it had not passed in Ocean County.

Judi Tolchin stated that, as a part of an ongoing series of events for the Jane Austen 200th anniversary celebration, activities would continue to be held in all branches. She also stated that the Headquarters author signing and radio drama had drawn a large audience for a literary program and theatrical production, despite the fact that some audiences would come only for concerts. Renee Swartz stated that the turnout had been approximately 275 people. Grace Abramov stated that the Colts Neck concert had drawn 300-400 people. Judi stated that the Tim McLoone concert brought in 600-700. Renee stated that, as a result of the comparatively small turnout, the Jane Austen program should not qualify as one of the three large programs that the library committed to per year. Renee suggested a weekend of three events, including a concert on Sunday, and literary events on Friday and Saturday. She suggested a program like the Olympian program from 2016, which had brought in a large audience, or nutrition or history programs,

which tended to bring in a lot of people. She stated that the time frame had been adequate to plan for a larger program. Judi stated that there would be more Jane Austen events in the coming week, including a concert, at Headquarters and other branches. Grace Abramov stated that lower attendance to the Jane Austen program was a matter of people's tastes, and that Jane Austen as a subject may not have appealed to the general public, to which Renee replied that a historic, 200 year celebration of a mainstream author should have drawn a larger audience. Peter Doyle stated that it could not be forgotten that Donna Mansfield was doing great work performing multiple jobs. Grace asked if Renee would recommend that Donna bring her ideas to the commission. Renee agreed and stated that the commission should work in an advisory capacity.

Renee Swartz suggested a week of history programs, perhaps focusing on World War II, including a prominent speaker, a movie, and a concert, perhaps by the military band, and that Tim McLoone should be saved for larger events. She suggested an ongoing history series, with a program once per month, at least 6 or 7 times per year, to which local schools could be invited to participate. Grace Abramov stated that, were they able to foresee some of the more timely events that occurred, they could have added a large program for Veteran's Day. James Gray stated that a Veteran's Day celebration should be planned for every year, which Renee suggested combining with a history program. Renee shared that she had attended a moving Veteran's Day program where veterans in the audience were asked to stand to be honored and share where they were stationed.

Peter Doyle brought up the fact that November 11th, 2018 would be the 100th anniversary of World War I's Armistice Day, and that the history theme of multiple events throughout the year could center around veterans in general and WWI in specific. Judi Tolchin suggested including other wars which would have anniversaries coming up as well, such as the Vietnam War and World War II. Renee agreed and stated that work should begin on these events as soon as possible. Peter stated that the commission should share this objective with library staff in charge of planning.

Renee stated that the entire month of November 2018 would be dedicated to veterans, and that the superintendents of local schools should be contacted for timely, age-appropriate history

lessons, culminating with a large school program in November. She suggested that Veteran's Day was likely a topic that would be covered in schools, as was the constitution, elections, and more, and that library programs could be centered on such topics. She suggested finalizing programming at least 6 months in advance in order to give time to coordinate with the superintendent of schools, and that sending a questionnaire to schools about topics covered in history class may be a good idea. She stated that she believed that New Jersey schools learned about the state's history in fourth grade, and that the library could be a part of that. Heidi Amici stated that there was an essay contest for children. Renee stated that the Monmouth County Library logo had been the result of a competition, and that perhaps the library should sponsor an essay contest in schools. She shared that the New Jersey Center for the Book had developed a serial story which included New Jersey history. The group would be creating a second series that the Association of School Librarians would be introducing to the fourth grade curriculum.

Renee suggested attempting to book the military band for November 2018. Heidi replied that Donna Mansfield had informed her that booking the military band for a certain day was unlikely, and that the band would let you know when they were available. Renee suggested asking as soon as possible what their availabilities for 2018 would be. Judi stated that they may only have availability on weeknights, which Renee agreed would be acceptable. Frank Wells stated that a World War II scholar from Brookdale would be a good speaker to utilize for historical events. Judi stated Professor Zigo participated in library programs often. Grace Abramov suggested a series on Agatha Christie, as the film *Murder on the Orient Express* was making her works popular again. Renee asked if there were any upcoming anniversaries related to Agatha Christie in the coming year.

Renee Swartz thanked Muriel Smith for giving the library a public face over the last year with her extensive coverage. Renee stated that the library had four editorials published, three of which she had written while one was written by Don Burden. She also shared that the Two River Times editor, Christine Johnson, had contacted her after the New Jersey Bond Referendum had passed asking for a statement, and that the Asbury Park Press had printed her editorial about the referendum. She also noted that the Monmouth Journal could be counted on to print library news. Grace Abramov shared her disappointment that there was no equivalent to the Monmouth

Journal or Two River Times for areas like Freehold, Howell, and Manalapan. Muriel stated that this area was hard to get into, press-wise, and that the Freehold Transcript rarely prints library news. Judi Tolchin stated that the Transcript has changed ownership and prioritizes advertisement-based information, with limited opportunities to print library events. Grace suggested inserting a flyer into the Freehold Transcript, which James Gray stated would be a costly endeavor.

Financial Report

Judi Tolchin shared the financial report:

\$468,368.30 had been spent in October in Salary and wages; \$216,163.63 had been spent in October in Other Expenses for a monthly total of \$684,531.93 in October.

The year to date total expended was \$9,670,624.67 with an additional \$87,487.58 encumbered and \$13,408.41 reimbursed from the grant for a total of \$9,744,703.84 charged year to date.

\$1,528,477.48 remains unexpended in the reserve budget. That amount will be transferred to the fund balance unless there are additional unexpected 2016 expenses processed from now until December 31, 2017.

The financial report also included charges posted to the grant budgets.

Judi Tolchin submitted the financial reports into the meeting record to the commission for their approval.

Renee Swartz shared her concerns that the remaining \$1,528,477.48 would be taken away from the library were it not spent, to which Judi replied that it would not, it would return to the fund balance. James Gray asked if the reimbursement from the county form 2016 had been returned yet, to which Renee replied that it had not because it was not distributed yet. Judi asked to which reimbursement James was referring. He stated that the county was planning to perform charge-backs every year. Judi stated that the net charge-backs were in the approximate amount of

\$2,700,000. James asked if the positive balance would be returned to the library. Judi replied that unspent funds are returned to the fund balance.

Renee shared that she believed it did not look good to have a large amount of money left unexpended for two years in a row, and that the excess may be removed from the budget, as they had been criticized for it last year. She suggested finding a way to spend the surplus before the end of the year to minimize risk. Judi stated that the art department printer still needed to be replaced, which would be a large expense. James Gray asked if there was furniture or computers that needed to be purchased, and Judi stated that furniture purchasing would be a part of the capital project. Peter Doyle asked if the surplus had not been spent because it was to go towards staffing and positions that had not yet been filled. Grace Abramov asked if the surplus would be put in a general fund, and if perhaps each branch had a wish list that could be accomplished with the surplus. Judi replied that the branch municipalities were each in charge of their own facilities by agreement, and that the county was responsible for staffing and providing books, materials and technology.

Heidi Amici stated that, going forward, technology software would be more expensive since it would have to be purchased and licensed per machine. Grace asked if the surplus could be designated towards rising technology costs, to which Heidi replied that the funds would be put towards that goal once the technology necessitated replacement. Judi stated that it would not be possible to earmark this year's funds for future purchases, as the money must be used within the designated year. Renee asked if there was a book budget, or if it had been cut back. Heidi replied that more money was being spent on electronic books. Renee asked if there were any needs that would benefit the public that the money could be used for.

Renee stated that if positions were to remain unfilled then the library would be permanently understaffed. James Gray asked if the surplus could be used for staff. Judi Tolchin replied that in the next budget draft - that she would be putting forward in executive session - would fully fund the staff vacancies. Grace Abramov shared her doubt that funds could be spent in one month. Renee stated that orders could be sent out, though not necessarily paid for by January 1st. Judi stated that all orders must go through purchasing, which was a long process. Renee stated that

having orders in the works would be better than nothing, and to have a surplus exceeding \$1,000,000 for two years in a row did not showcase good administration or planning. Judi stated that she had been told to put \$3.8 million into the budget for indirect charges, and that the actual amount had come out to \$2.7 million, thereby accounting for much of the surplus, along with unfilled staff positions. James Gray stated that there was something wrong with the budgeting process if they were being told to do something, then penalized for not using what was budgeted.

Judi stated that recruitment had been going on all year, and that great strides had been made. Renee asked if the job opportunities were posted on career websites. Judi stated that she had looked into it, and that a huge number of applicants- over 250 in the past 4 months- had been reviewed. She stated that both seasonal and permanent employees had been brought in, but staff had also been lost in the interim. Renee stated that she was told by the Freeholders that if positions were left unfilled they would be taken away. Judi stated that she had been told by the County Administration that older positions were the ones in jeopardy, and as long as those were filled first, then new vacant positions would be safe. She stated that old vacancies had been filled to avoid loss, and, even if they were filled in different ways, requisitions were reassigned to fill older vacancies before new ones. She stated that, going into 2018, no 2016 vacancies would remain, only 2017 vacancies. Judi stated that she saw at the Library Journal Summit that other libraries were far better staffed than the Monmouth County Library, which does so much with so little. Grace asked how many positions needed to be filled for 2018. Judi responded that she hoped to have all 19 vacancies filled by June 30th [2018].

Renee Swartz suggested methods to incentivize potential employees in order to entice applicants. Grace Abramov asked what level the vacancies consisted of. Judi Tolchin replied that they were mostly library assistants and librarians. Grace asked how many classifications of jobs there were in the library. Judi replied that, taking into account all of the levels, there were about 20. James Gray agreed the issue needed to be addressed as the library cannot function if understaffed. Judi suggested that the personnel discussion should be held in closed executive session. James said that it could be discussed in open session. He suggested talking to county administrative personnel to see what could be done. Judi stated that a good portion of the shortfall in employment was because the library had not been allowed to hire anyone from 2009 to 2014,

and that, as a result, they were behind the curve, and losing employees to retirement made them fall further behind. Renee stated that the library must be more competitive.

Peter asked if the excess funds that were not spent in 2017 were entered into the fund balance, and if they could be used next year to offset tax increases. Renee stated that there was no guarantee. Peter Doyle asked if the unspent 2017 surplus could go into the fund balance for the following year to offset a 2018 tax increase. He stated that reducing the allocation by \$800,000-\$900,000 was proof of the library doing a great job budgeting. Judi stated that the charge-backs may go up next year or the following year due to the renovation, and that capital projects in the future must be budgeted for.

Renee asked for more information from Craig Marshall for the next meeting, and for Judi to bring the report. Judi asked if she should ask Craig Marshall to attend the December meeting. Renee said yes, and that he should come prepared to talk about the options. She stated that he had been expected to attend meetings four times per year to talk about the budget and had not attended in one year. Grace Abramov asked if Donna could provide a plan for next year's programs for the December meeting. Judi stated that she already had it as a part of her report.

A Motion to approve the Financial Report as stated was made by Frank Wells and seconded by James Gray. Approved unanimously.

Judi Tolchin requested approval for a fringe benefit voucher, since it was over the threshold of signing, at an amount of \$2,352,166.47. Grace Abramov asked if it was possible to refuse. Judi stated that fringe benefits must be paid for entire payroll, even for part time employees.

A Motion to approve the fringe benefit vouchers for quarters 1, 2 and 3 in the amount of \$2,352,166.47 was made by Frank Wells and seconded by Peter Doyle. Grace Abramov voted against. Motion passed.

Judi Tolchin shared that the Headquarters had its first renovation meeting with the core team including Headquarters staff, and individuals from the county including Mike Aravich.

Discussions included the location of the stacks and of the new Young Adult area, the general flow of the library, and collection size. She shared that it had been recommended that there be a 12-15% reduction in books on floor, as the library would be moving in the direction of electronic materials circulation with more public collaboration space. This would mean weeding approximately 40,000 items, which could be collected by the company Better World Books for nominal revenue, approximately \$2,000-\$5,000. Renee Swartz stated that Stewart Fife of Library Interiors would be asked to attend the December commission meeting, as he had stated that he was ready to begin the renovation, and that she wanted to make sure that he would be ready to begin the renovation on January 1, 2018. She stated that Stewart Fife had a very good idea of the library's needs, and that a committee discussion would be necessary in order to begin in January. Judi stated that Stewart Fife would be invited.

Judi Tolchin shared that the tentative, but not definitive, opening date for the new Holmdel branch library in the BellWorks building had been scheduled for December 1st, 2017. She stated that the library must be prepared to add extra staff and increase hours, which would be done slowly until the traffic flow was determined. She stated that November and December were difficult months for the library, as many staff members were using vacation time. Renee Swartz stated that she thought the commission should have had more prominent visibility in ribbon cutting ceremony and soft opening. Grace Abramov suggested that they may have a larger part in the full opening. James Gray shared his disappointment that the library had not been finished in time for the soft opening. Renee agreed. Grace said that the concept for the space was magnificent. Muriel Smith asked if there would be a way for children to get to the BellWorks building from school, to which Grace responded that a sidewalk from the school was being built. Muriel asked if there would be a bathroom in the space. Judi said that there would not be, but there would be a bank of bathrooms just next door. Renee stated that if the full opening did not open on a grand scale, she would ask Muriel to publicize it. Peter Doyle asked if it had already opened, to which Renee replied that it had the ribbon cutting, but it was empty. She shared her hope that the full opening, when the library would be fully operational and functioning for the community, that the commission and library should be part of the celebration. James Gray stated that the BellWorks complex was extremely large, consisting of retail stores, apartments, and town complexes, and that the extra library staffing necessary would put an added strain on the

staff. Judi agreed and stated that it could not be done with less than full employment, as the library staff was already stretched as thin as it could go, especially with more staff retiring at the end of the year. James asked if retired librarians ever worked part time, which Heidi replied that they did, with limited hours [as required by civil service and the pension system].

Director's Report

Judi Tolchin expressed her appreciation to the commission for giving her authorization to attend the Library Journal Directors Summit in Philadelphia. She stated that the Librarian of Congress spoke about the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion. Others spoke about community space, the evolving role of a library director, and that she had brought back some great ideas. Renee Swartz suggested that Judi or Heidi should attend more national programs, as they may be valuable. Judi stated that she spoke with the vendor of Hoopla, a streaming service for which the cost of circulation was calculated per download, from \$1-\$3. She then performed research to see if the library was spending more money for the Overdrive service, but came to the conclusion that Overdrive was less expensive at approximately \$0.82 per download. Heidi stated that Hoopla could not be compared to Overdrive, as Hoopla did not offer the current books that patrons wanted, although it did include music. James Gray suggested using the over \$1,000,000 to try out Hoopla, to which Renee agreed. Judi stated that, instead of Hoopla, she would be more interested in trying Kanopy, a streaming service that included most of the Criterion Collection, in 2018. Heidi stated that trying out services for a short time and then taking them away may displease patrons. Renee stated that they should try them out. Grace Abramov stated that she would like to see a demonstration of both services. Renee stated that these services would be great to offer to patrons.

Judi stated that there may be less money to spend for books if they were to subscribe to the two services, especially once the library was up to full employment, with expansions at Holmdel and Oceanport, and after taking on Atlantic Highlands and Oceanport as branches. James Gray stated that it was important to stay current with available technology. Heidi stated that, if they needed a place to spend the surplus, the Monmouth County Library webpage was in need of a redesign, and that the surplus could also be used for children's programming at member libraries. Heidi

stated that the web design company for the website may have to be approved by county purchasing, and that she would come up with a proposal and estimate for the website. Renee and Judi agreed. Renee suggested a pilot project to find out whether Hoopla or Kanopy was a better fit for the system. Heidi reminded the commission that they had approved the faster internet that would be implemented at Headquarters and Eastern Branch, which would be a larger fee in 2018.

A Motion to approve Hoopla and Kanopy, and Member Library Programming was made by James Gray and seconded by Frank Wells. Approved Unanimously.

Judi Tolchin stated that Tim McLoone would be performing on December 17th, and that an audience of approximately 600 would be anticipated. Muriel Smith stated that most if not all of the large programs were at the Headquarters branch, and asked if they could be spread around the county, as the smaller branch libraries often put forward great programs. Renee stated that the Monmouth County Library system should advocate having a few very thoroughly researched programs in the fields of history, art, or literature for the Monmouth County community. Muriel agreed, and stated that she would like to meet with Donna and Heidi and talk to them about possible themes for each month of 2018 that all branches could follow. She suggested announcing at the beginning of 2018 what the themes of the month would be and allowing each library adhere their programs to those themes, with three large programs at Headquarters. Renee stated that the eclipse may have been a missed opportunity for a large event, though Heidi replied that the eclipse had been a large event. Judi stated that about 600 people had attended at Headquarters and about 200 at Eastern Branch. Renee suggested that they had had an astronomer come and speak for the event, and Heidi responded that someone in the field had come to speak.

Judi Tolchin stated that, for 2018, Donna Mansfield had planned a program commemorating the 100th anniversary of Leonard Bernstein with a classic crossover show, including 12 musicians and a choir. She also stated that on March 18th at 2pm, Chris Panella, a popular local musician, would be performing, and that the Imperial Brass Orchestra, a 26 piece brass ensemble, would be performing music from Broadway and films. Renee suggested combining a literary program with the music programs. Judi stated that combining a literature event with a music event became complicated as each group was only interested in their own event. She stated, for example, that

the literature audience would come to their program first and then leave without seeing the musical event, and that the musical audience would arrive and see the crowd filled with the literature audience and leave. She also stated that it was always difficult to make people stay longer than 2.5 hours for any program, and that, if you were to cut short a musical program, the library would still pay the same amount as it would pay for a full program. Renee stated that she would like to hear from Donna.

James Gray asked whether the Friends of the Library book sale had been doing well. Judi responded that the book sale at Headquarters had gone well, that the friends had recruited members, and that the lobby had been a much better place to display than the meeting room. Grace stated the Friends of the Library, who covered Headquarters, Eastern Branch, West Long Branch, and Holmdel, had paid [in part] for Tim McLoone's recent appearance.

Assistant Director's Report

Heidi Amici stated that the West Long Branch library would be weeding 20% of its collection, which would amount to approximately 10,000 items, and sectioning off part of the back room where the Friends of the Library would be adding laptop seating areas and mobile shelving, which they hoped to have completed with a ribbon cutting in April for National Library Week. So far they have been working tirelessly to weed approximately 2,400 items per week.

Heidi Amici shared that the planning process for the renovation had replaced the idea of iPads at the end of the stacks to thin, all-in-one computers with mini keyboards, which would minimize theft and the need for staff to take the iPads off and charge them. This would allow patrons to use the full website rather than just the app. Heidi also shared that the app would have a new upgrade rolling out in the near future, a multi-card feature wherein families can put all of their cards together on one app. Renee suggested that there should be an article written about the app.

Renee Swartz asked if they should consider a public announcement of the Headquarters renovation or wait until January. Heidi suggested waiting until January. Judi agreed, suggesting

that they wait until the purchases had been made. Renee suggested releasing a teaser about new things coming to the library.

Heidi Amici shared that the Holmdel did not have a C/O and the technology team would be putting in the wiring and Wi-Fi in the coming week.

Heidi Amici stated that negotiations for the new maintenance for the SIRSI system, including extra features, universal SIP license, and allowing to validate peoples library cards without paying extra fees would be effective January 1st. Renee Swartz suggested that Muriel Smith write an article about all of the new library technology. James Gray asked how much the SIRSI renewal would cost, and Heidi replied that it would cost \$150,000 per year for 5 years.

The Commission adjourned to Executive Session at 12:35 pm.

The Commission resumed the regular session at 1:55 pm.

A Motion to approve the 5-year SIRSI technology contract was made by James Gray and seconded by Frank Wells. Unanimously approved.

Renee Swartz suggested a meeting of department heads during the December 12th meeting. She also suggested inviting the Master Gardeners, stating that they had a beautiful wreath made and should be honored, and that the Friends of the Library and the Branch Managers should be invited as well. Renee reiterated her desire to send a Christmas card to the mayors of the towns with Monmouth County libraries. Heidi Amici asked if cards should be sent to all mayors, or only those of towns with branches, as member libraries could be offended by promotion of the county library system instead of their town libraries. Renee suggested using neutral wording about supporting local libraries that would not offend member communities. She also suggested sending cards to the superintendent of schools, and to look into cultivating a closer relationship between the school system and the library in the coming year. Heidi asked if only public schools should be contacted, or if private schools should be contacted as well. Renee suggested that all schools, public and private, be invited to work cooperatively with the library.

A Motion to change the date of the December Commission Meeting from December 5th to December 12th was made by Frank Wells and seconded by Peter Doyle. Unanimously approved.

A Motion to adjourn the meeting of November 14, 2017 was made by Peter Doyle and seconded by Frank Wells. Approved unanimously.