Monmouth County Library Commission Minutes  
October 17, 2023  
Headquarters Library

Present: Chairperson Brian Boms and Library Commissioners Barbara Lovell, Barbara McMorrow, Marcy McMullen, Mary Ann Musich, and Frank Wells; also, present County Commissioner Ross Licitra, Director Judith Tolchin, and Assistant Director Heidi Amici

Absent:

Guests: County Counsel Meghan Bennett. Also present were Daphne Mishkin, Ellen Saines, and Gail Gnesin of the Marlboro Free Public Library Board of Trustees

The meeting was called to order at 09:47 am.

Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

Chairperson Brian Boms opened the meeting of Tuesday, October 17, 2023 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.”

Agenda Approval
A Motion to approve the October 17, 2023 Agenda was made by Barbara McMorrow and seconded by Marcy McMullen. Unanimously approved.

Minutes
Chairperson Brian Boms gave a few minutes for review of the meeting minutes from September 19, 2023. Opportunity was given for additions, corrections, and suggestions.

A Motion to approve the Open Public Meeting minutes of September 19, 2023 was made by Marcy McMullen and seconded by Mary Ann Musich. Barbara Lovell abstained. Motion approved.

A Motion to approve the Closed Executive Session minutes of September 19, 2023 was made by Barbara McMorrow and seconded by Mary Ann Musich. Barbara Lovell abstained. Motion approved.

Library Commission Remarks
Chairperson Brian Boms stated that over the weekend he and Commissioner Mary Ann Musich were contacted by the Election Committee, who were wondering if the Library will be opened for next year’s primary election. There have been numerous delays with the Headquarters renovation project, which everyone wants to see bought to fruition, but Chairperson Boms recognizes the importance of the Headquarters location as the number one polling place in Monmouth County and will work with Director Tolchin to make it work.
Chairperson Boms shared his kudos to all involved in putting together the very successful *Tim McLoon and the Shirleys* concert on Sunday, 10/15. He regrets that he was not able to attend, but wished to thank Commissioner Barbara McMorrow for her remarks during the event.

**September Financial Report**

*September Financials - Detail Budget, Check Writing, Reserve Budget, Capital Budgets, and Grant Budgets*

Director Tolchin submitted the September 2023 Financial Report to the Commission, including the Detail Budget, Check Writing, Reserve Budget, Capital Budgets, and Grant Budgets wherein the 2023 Detail Budget Account charged year to date is $6,627,537.18 posted to the Approved Budget of $17,885,000.00; this total includes encumbered amounts. The Reserve Budget, with remaining 2022 funds reflects $3,002,403.57 remaining in unencumbered funds. The Capital Account for the renovation is $1,497,000.00 remaining unencumbered as of September 30, 2023. These funds are reserved for the completion of the adult library and the lobby. Lobby furniture is now allocated within the Operating Budget.

Director Tolchin noted the difference of $133,422.75 in the Capital Account for renovation from last month’s report. The first Capital Account round was encumbered, and was not cited.

**A Motion to approve the September 2023 Financial Report including the Detail Budget, Check Writing, Reserve Budget, Capital Budgets, and Grant Budgets was made by Barbara McMorrow and seconded by Frank Wells. Unanimously approved.**

**Headquarters Renovation Report**

Director Tolchin stated that a meeting was held with Settembrino Architects on October 13, 2023. The interior designer who works with the architects brought forth several options for accent acoustical tiles, as well as flooring options. She is pleased to say that those selections have been finalized. The contractor has that information, so they are able to proceed with the ordering process to move the project forward.

Additionally, a meeting was held on October 16, 2023 which included Settembrino Architects, Library and Buildings & Grounds staff, as well as the contractor. An update was given on the preliminary schedule. Contractually, the project is supposed to begin by February 28, 2024. Director Tolchin has asked for sufficient notice prior to the start date so that library staff is able to prepare, and not necessitate any further delays. There may be a possible delay to March 19, 2024 in the event that all materials are not on site. With an anticipated 14-week work schedule, the building may be ready in time for the primary election early voting in late May 2024.

Commissioner Marcy McMullen inquired if the Board of Elections has a contingency plan in the event that the project would not be complete in time for voting. Commissioner Musich commented that there are no ideal alternate locations in Manalapan for voting. Varying options for building access were discussed in the event that the Library renovation project is still underway during the upcoming primary election. It was decided that the Board of Elections should begin to develop a contingency plan in case the library is inaccessible.
Projector Proposal/Ocean Township - $14,895.00
Director Tolchin stated that approval was given last month for purchase and installation of a new projector for the Ocean Township Library in the amount of $12,292.37. However, since then the vendor, CSAV Systems LLC, has found that in reviewing the scope of the project, prevailing wage is part of the overall amount and has come forward with a revised quote in the amount of $14,895.00 – about a $2,600 difference.

Chairperson Boms inquired as to why the vendor would not have known the scope of the work before the original quote and subsequent approval were given. Director Tolchin stated that the quote is handled through Monmouth County purchasing, and that this approval was based on a quote, and that this was the final submitted amount, which is still lower than the second lowest bidder.

A Motion to approve the projector purchase revision was made by Frank Wells and seconded by Barbara Lovell. Unanimously approved.

Capira App Renewal - $15,297.00
Director Tolchin stated this was a renewal for the Capira app for the period of October 1st 2023 through September 30th, 2024. Capira app is a customized app designed specifically for our library. Changing to a different app developer would cause hardship to patrons who would be delayed in having an app for their library usage. It would also require significant staff time to develop it, which is not presently available.

A Motion to approve the renewal of the Capira Mobile App in the amount of $15,297.00 authorizing the Library Director to sign the voucher was made by Barbara McMorrow and seconded by Marcy McMullen. Unanimously approved.

2024 Library Budget – Draft
Director Tolchin sent the 2024 Library Budget draft out to members of the Library Commission. She stated that the budget is level to the 2023 Library Budget with the exception of wages and salaries. This includes overtime and the increase in minimum wage. She estimates an increase of $150,000.00 for cost-of-living adjustments which are included in the AFSCME contract for about 97% of library staff. Also included in the $6,400,000.00 wage and salary line is prorated funding for existing vacancies. All other expenses remain level.

Director Tolchin noted that it is unknown if there will be other charges from the county that will necessitate an increase. Because of this, it was agreed that the Commission will hold off on approving the budget at the time of the meeting until all information is received from the county.

Director’s Report
Director Tolchin stated there have been changes made to the Monmouth County Overtime Policy. She wanted to make sure the Library Commission is aware that the Library does utilize overtime (Sunday hours), which is contractual and is not part of the change in policy. Any overtime, over 40 hours will require Director’s approval on each and every instance. Generally, the only reason overtime is authorized is to be able to staff locations and keep them open. This is
often necessary because of staff shortages due to last minute call outs, and long-term medical leaves. The library is careful with the use of over-time, but it is necessary at times given the lack of adequate staffing.

Chairperson Boms inquired about the status of hiring after the push, back in the Spring, and the number of vacancies which are causing staff shortages. He wanted to know if the library is seeing applications come in, or if they have dropped off.

Director Tolchin stated that applications are coming in, but that there are a number of people retiring at the same time. Bringing on new staff requires training and assigning staff members to locations, which is difficult to facilitate with more than a few new hires at a time. She added that there have been 3 new hire acceptances; 1 PT temporary to permanent; 3 PT temporary accepted; 2 pending PT permanent offers and 3 retirements/resignations

Chairperson Boms inquired about the impact that paying over-time will have on the budget, as opposed to filling vacancies. Director Tolchin stated that the intention is to be fully staffed, and to have employees at branches where they are comfortable and that the communities can invest in. We are fortunate that in being a county-wide library system, staff can step into any library and perform their jobs if needed and to keep branches open, but that filling staff vacancies is the goal.

Commissioner Lovell inquired about the state of staff morale, when those last-minute coverage needs arise. She noted that in previous meetings, it has been mentioned that it can be difficult to find staff to volunteer to travel from location to location and work extended hours. Director Tolchin stated that the library has a great staff who fill in willingly, although not happily sometimes. The library does offer over-time pay and reimbursement of travel between branch locations on a given day and we do our best to consider employee satisfaction in addition to the operational needs of the library.

The Civil Service exams for Librarian 2 and Librarian 3 were administered, and that there is a preliminary list for each. We are awaiting the certification list so that jobs can be re-posted for those who have previously received a provisional promotion, and so that those on the list can apply for a higher position, if they choose to do so.

The Library is working in partnership with the Monmouth County Health Department to bring the AIDS Quilt to be displayed at the Headquarters location in observance of AIDS Awareness Month, on October 19th and 20th. The Buildings and Grounds staff worked to install the 12-foot by 12-foot portion of quilt, next to the reference desk. In addition, the Monmouth County Health Department will staff a table in the lobby and will be available for private consultation, if needed.

There will be 2 concerts in the coming weeks; Strictly 60’s on November 17th, and Sentimental Journey Big Band on December 3rd. Half of the December 3rd program is grant-funded and the other half is paid for by the library. Additional pop-up concerts may be scheduled in the coming months, once more information is known about the start date of the renovation project.
Additionally, we will continue to provide virtual programming as well as programming at the branches.

The County Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) has been revised and submitted to the County. This provides information for who is responsible for the continuing operations of the library in an emergency situation. This was exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic when the library remained open for all but 2 or 3 days, and provided services virtually during that entire time.

Director Tolchin has completed and verified information in the new budget app. Still to be updated are all of the vacancies within the library.

**Assistant Director’s Report**
Assistant Director Heidi Amici followed up with Buildings and Grounds on the status of the fire suppression system in the Extension after it malfunctioned on 8/24/23. The concern was that no notification was sent out when the fire suppression system was engaged. Jonas June from Monmouth County Buildings and Grounds stated that “All of the flow sensors were tested after the leak and found that all sensors were working properly. The reason that the alarm did not sound was because there was no enough movement to trip the sensors, which are designed to be triggered when a sprinkler head goes off, or there is a big pipe burst. There was not enough water in this instance to trip the sensors.”

County Counsel Bennett stated that she will follow up on this matter as the amount of water was enough to cause significant damage, to about 800 books, totaling roughly $17,000.00 and should have triggered the alarm.

**Commissioner Comments**
Commissioner McMorrow noted that the Tim McLoone and the Shirleys concert of 10/15 was fantastic and it was great to see everyone out and together enjoying the music with everything going on in world. They played for nearly 2 hours to a crowd of 500-600 attendees.

Commissioner Ross Licitra arrived at 10:42.

County Counsel Bennett filled in Commissioner Licitra on the report from Buildings and Grounds regarding the malfunctioning fire suppression system.

Additionally, Director Tolchin updated Commissioner Licitra on the status of the Library Budget draft for 2024.

Commissioner Wells commended the library’s access to wonderful services like Ancestry.com and LinkedIn Learning. These services are costly to the individual user, and should promoted more as something valuable that’s available to you for free with your Monmouth County Library Card.
Public Comments
A Motion to open the meeting to public comment was made by Frank Wells and seconded by Barbara McMorrow. Unanimously approved.

Daphne Mishkin, Chair of the Marlboro Free Public Library Board of Trustees was joined by Ellen Saines, Treasurer and Gail Gnesin, Recording Secretary to share their dissatisfaction over the inadequate staffing levels at the Marlboro branch. This has been going on since February of 2020 and is only worsening. She recognized that staffing has been an issue throughout numerous industries in current times but that this has negatively impacted library programming and services. At the Marlboro branch traditionally there has been one full-time Children’s Librarian, one full-time Branch Librarian, and one full-time second Branch Librarian. February 2020 was the last time that there was a dedicated second Branch Librarian assigned to Marlboro, with substitutes being sent to cover the branch in the absence of the Branch Manager or Children’s Librarian. Due to this staff shortage, the Marlboro Library has not been able to return to the full slate of adult and children’s programming it once enjoyed.

In addition to the shortage of reference staff, circulation is also down from 4 full time Library Assistants to 1. The influx of substitute staff who are unfamiliar with the library and its community is not optimal and is not a permanent solution. Marlboro provides an estimated $1.4 million dollars in tax to the Monmouth County Library, and the community is not being well-served.

Ellen Saines, reiterated Ms. Mishkin’s point that the issue of inadequate staffing has touched all levels and industries, but that the Board is aware that other branches of the Monmouth County Library have been provided more permanent staff, while Marlboro has not. She added that Marlboro is a very active and involved community in their library, and that it is difficult to plan programming when there is not the staff to oversee them.

Gail Gnesin shared that while the community is very active and involved in Marlboro, they are becoming less engaged due to the lack in programming and staffing. In particular, the youngest patrons who should be fostering a love of reading and the library are being impacted the most.

Commissioner Musich inquired if any of the candidates on the Civil Service Eligibility list would be suited to fill any of the vacancies at Marlboro. Director Tolchin explained that the vacancy that exists for a second Branch Librarian is traditionally a Librarian I, which is considered a non-competitive position.

Commissioner Licitra expressed that the concerns bought forward were heard and will be addressed. He stated that he will bring this issue to the County Commissioners in addition to asking Monmouth County Buildings and Grounds to place an electronic sign in front of the library to advertise about the vacant positions.

Commissioner Lovell added that the reason she and the other members of the Library Commission participate on a voluntary basis is to support the work Friends groups, such as the Marlboro Free Public Library Board of Trustees and thanked them for what they do.
A Motion to close the meeting to public comment was made by Marcy McMullen and seconded by Barbara McMorrow. Unanimously approved.

Next Meeting
The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 21, 2023 at the Monmouth County Library Eastern Branch location at 9:30 am.

Scheduling of Closed Executive Session at Next Meeting
A Motion to schedule a Closed Executive Session at the next meeting on Tuesday, November 21st, 2023 was made by Marcy McMullen and seconded by Barbara Lovell. Unanimously approved.

Adjournment
A Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Marcy McMullen and seconded by Barbara McMorrow. Unanimously approved.

The public meeting concluded at 11:13 am.

Submitted by Katie Kenny