

**CITY OF NORWALK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
APRIL 8, 2021
VIA ZOOM**

ATTENDANCE: Alex Knopp, President; Sharon Baanante; Ralph Bloom;
Patsy Brescia; Mary Mann; Moina Noor; Janine Williams

STAFF: Sherelle Harris, Acting Director

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Knopp called the meeting to order at 7:22 p.m. and called the Roll. A Quorum was present.

2. ADDITIONS TO AGENDA:

There were none this evening.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS

No members of the public wished to comment this evening.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MARCH 11, 2021

Mr. Knopp noted that Ms. Brescia attempted to attend the March 11th meeting; however, she was unable to do so because she experienced technical difficulties with Zoom.

The following addition was made to the minutes:

** MR. KNOPP MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 8:30 P.M.
** MR. BLOOM SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

** **MR. BLOOM MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS AMENDED**
** **MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MS. BRESCIA)**

Ms. Brescia indicated that she abstained because she was unable to make the Zoom connection to attend the meeting.

6. OLD BUSINESS

A. Request of Mr. Mohinder Kalsi re Sikh books

Mr. Knopp said he wanted to give Mr. Kalsi an opportunity to address the Library Board with his concerns and added that the Board had other topics to discuss tonight. Mr. Kalsi introduced himself and said he was a resident of Norwalk and associated with a Sikh institution in Norwalk, A Place of Worship. He said that he became a member of the Library when he moved to Norwalk.

Mr. Kalsi explained that when he visited the Library, on the right side, there were special books on various faiths, including his own, but there was a book and it was on their Guru. He noted that the Sikh faith is the fifth largest in the world, established in 1469. Their Scripture requires them to read and run their life to be a good citizen. He said that one book caught his attention and he took it out and read it. He said content is content, the book was derogatory and objectionable and depicted their Guru as cartoonish.

Mr. Kalsi said he wrote to Ms. Bradley and asked for a meeting, but then Covid started. He said he had a phone conversation with Ms. Bradley.

Mr. Kalsi said he did not want to be a troublemaker; he is a part of the Library and pays his taxes, but he asked to have the book removed from the Library. He said he can substitute the book with other. He offered to send his testimony dated January 2020 that he sent to Ms. Bradley explaining his position. He said he humbly requested that the book be removed; it is objectionable and derogatory.

Mr. Kalsi referred to a situation that took place in France where the Prophet Mohammad was portrayed as a cartoon and a lot of blood was shed. He said they are peace loving people and will not go to that level. He said they will work with the Library Board to provide any information they need on the Sikh faith.

Mr. Knopp thanked Mr. Kalsi for his presentation and asked if anyone had any questions. Mr. Kalsi shared that they are building a place of Worship on Richards Avenue and has had good support from Planning and Zoning. He added that he hoped he would have the same support from the Library Board.

Mr. Knopp said he looked at the material last year and it struck him that the book in question was written in the form of a graphic novel/book, which are drawn often for young people, and that it did not appear to be a “cartoon” in the sense of a drawing intended to satirize or mock its subject. Mr. Kalsi said that this depiction is an insult to his Sikh faith.

Ms. Brescia said this is a serious issue and asked for the Library Board to make a measured and sincere response. She said they need more guidance on this – it is not an

Library Board of Directors

April 8, 2021

Page 2

Via Zoom

easily resolved issue. Mr. Kalsi explained that in India there are many faiths and people are being forced to only practice the Hindu faith and saying that people of the Sikh faith are terrorists. He said the book in cartoon form is derogatory to their faith.

Mr. Knopp said that due to the transition of the Executive Director he asked Mr. Kalsi to resubmit information to the Library Board. Mr. Kalsi said he shared all the correspondence with Ms. Harris and Cindy has the books.

Mr. Knopp thanked Mr. Kalsi for his presentation. He told him that the Board would not be making a decision tonight, but will get back to him. Mr. Kalsi asked Mr. Knopp how he could become a member of the Library Board.

Ms. Harris said she has guidance from the ALA and will send that to the board. Ms. Brescia asked if they had legal counsel on this. Mr. Knopp said that as far as he knew they did not.

Mr. Knopp said that this is an issue the Board will take up when they meet in person. In the meantime, they will see what the ALA has determined. Ms. Brescia asked if it was possible to provide a copy of the book to the Board members. She asked Mr. Knopp to investigate any legal advice from the City as a starting point for the discussion. Mr. Knopp said he will circulate a copy of the book and the rest of the information provided relative to the issue.

8. PRESIDENT'S REPORT

A. Update on NPL FY 21-22 Capital Budget requests

Mr. Knopp reported that two programs will go before the Common Council next Tuesday. He said he asked Mayor Rilling to restore \$38,000 for The Norwalk Hour digitalizing.

B. Discussion on Adoption of New or Revised NPL Policies (as per prior practice, the Board will discuss these policies but not act on them until the next Board meeting):

1. Material Gifts and Donations

Ms. Harris reviewed the item and said it is a clear, concise policy on how to handle donations to the Library. Ms. Brescia suggested clarifying where the donations go; the clearer it is to the doner, the better it is.

Mr. Bloom said he Chaired the Book Sale for the last 20 years and described the donation process. He said a decision has to be made whether or not there will be any more book sales. A discussion followed.

Ms. Harris explained that the policy creates a system for people who want to donate books to the Library. A discussion took place about the Book Sale.

Mr. Knopp said that based on prior discussions, the Library is not going to open for a month and the current policy is that they will not accept book donations. The Board members held a lengthy discussion on the following items and suggested revisions. Ms. Harris will make the revisions as discussed and the Board will vote on these items next month; however, item 5 may need further discussion.

2. Proposed Addenda to the Current Code of Conduct

3. Proposed Change to the Current Code of Conduct

4. Proposed Laptop Vending Machine Use Agreement

5. Proposed Laptop/Internet Acceptable Use Policy

5. **ADMINISTRATION REPORT**— Sherelle Harris

A. Announcements

B. Update on Capital Budget

Ms. Harris will send her report to the Library Board members.

7. **NEW BUSINESS**

C. ACTION:

Mr. Knopp explained that he had a discussion with the Corporation Counsel about forming a Selection Committee for the Executive Director's position.

**** MR. KNOPP MOVED TO APPROVE THE APPOINTMENT OF NPL ED INTERVIEW AND SELECTION COMMITTEE: EIGHT NPL BOARD MEMBERS; ALICE KNAPP, ED OF THE FERGUSON PUBLIC LIBRARY IN STAMFORD; LAMOND DANIELS, NORWALK COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION; RAY BURNEY, NORWALK PERSONNEL AND LABOR DIRECTOR**
**** MS. BRESCIA SECONDED**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

D. ACTION:

**** MS. BRESCIA MOVED TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSE:**

PURSUANT TO C.G.S. SECT. 1-200(6)(A), DISCUSSION REGARDING CANDIDATES FOR THE VACANT NORWALK PUBLIC LIBRARY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR POSITION.

**** NOOR SECONDED**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The Board members went into Executive Session at 9:11 p.m. and Ms. Harris and the public were excused.

9. ADJOURNMENT OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Back in public session, Mr. Knopp said no votes had been taken in executive session and moved to adjourn at 9:xxpm, approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services