

Watchung Library Advisory Committee Minutes, May 18, 2022 – **FINAL**

**Mission Statement:** The mission of the Watchung Library Advisory Committee (WLAC) is to advise, support, and promote the interests of the Watchung Borough Free Public Library.

The meeting of the WLAC was held through an audio and video call. Please go to the Watchung Borough web site to view the video. The meeting was also held in person in the Bicentennial Room of the Watchung Library.

Please be advised that, pursuant to a Borough policy, all committee meetings will be recorded; at 5:30 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 5:30 PM.

**Attendance:**

Tamara Benc, President – present  
Margaret Ellis, Vice President – present  
Stella Couchells, Treasurer – present  
Virginia Hartmann, Secretary – present  
Bradford Leigh, WLAB member – present  
Gail Bennett-Tafaro, WLAB member -- present  
Wendy Robinson, Borough Council Member, Library Liaison – absent  
George Alexis, School Superintendent – absent  
Hannah Kerwin, Watchung Library Branch Manager – present  
Patricia Keane, Valley View Librarian – absent  
Keith Balla, Mayor, Watchung Borough – absent

Minutes of the March 16, 2022 meeting were e-mailed to members in advance of the meeting for review. Ms. Ellis moved that the minutes be approved. Ms. Tafaro seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

**Treasurer's Report:** Dr. Couchells gave the following treasurer's report:

1. The escrow account for the WLAC at our last meeting, on March 16, 2022, showed a total balance of \$26,074.32. The Aquarium Fund comprised \$4,840.00 of the total and general funds amounted to \$21,234.32.
2. Two hundred and forty dollars was paid out in total to REEFCO services for monthly aquarium maintenance for the months of February, March, and April on 3/10, 4/14, and 5/12/2022 respectively. The charge was \$80.00 per service call.
3. One of the goldfish died on or about Monday, May 9th and the other goldfish was looking sickly. I was alerted and I contacted Brian Dunleavy of REEFCO. I asked him to come out to the library, remove the dead fish, test the water, and recommend a heartier replacement. I was still in Florida, so Virginia and Hannah arranged for REEFCO

to make a special trip to see to the aquarium. They sent someone who disposed of both fish, drained, and cleaned the aquarium. They also installed a new Eheim heater. The charges for this visit plus the regular cleaning which took place earlier in May was \$192.99 which was paid out of the Aquarium fund on 5/12/22

4. The expired fish have since been replaced with 8 smaller, more energetic and colorful fish called glofish at a cost of \$12.99 per fish. They can be seen in the aquarium downstairs as you exit the building. That last invoice, for the cost of those fish and the visit has not been paid received or paid as yet, and will be part of the next Treasurer's Report.
5. There were no expenditures other than those related to our aquarium. This leaves a total balance of \$25,641.33 in our Escrow account. The portion of this balance in the Aquarium Fund is now \$4,407.01. Residual or general funds still total \$21, 234.32.

#### **Friends of the Watchung Library Report:**

The Friends book store, located upstairs in the Watchung Library, is still having slower sales than it had pre-Covid.

**Watchung Library Branch Manager Report:** Ms. Benc thanked Ms. Kerwin for her photographs and report on our new Watchung Library roof.

Ms. Kerwin stated that Christine Ead, a Borough Council member, and Ms. Julette, from the Watchung Traffic and Beautification committee, planted some new, small gardens with attractive flowers.

Ms. Kerwin reported that Matt King, the Borough's cleaner, resigned in January. The library was not notified. Garbage is still picked up by the Department of Public Works but cleaning is not taking place. Ms. Kerwin stated that Borough Administrator Jim Damato said that the Borough hired a new cleaning company to start in March. Cleaning has not yet started because of this company's internal problems. He expects the company will resolve its problems and start cleaning Borough buildings.

**Borough Council Liaison Report:** Ms. Ellis made the report for Ms. Robinson. Ms. Robinson said that the Legacy Books book drop will be located near the Firemen's Exempt Hall. She verified that the WLAB will receive any monies raised from Legacy Books – a minimum of \$40 per month once the program begins.

**Ad Hoc Committee Report:** Ms. Tafaro and Mr. Leigh, both members of the WLAB, are also members of the mayor's ad hoc committee that is examining Borough owned facilities. The Committee toured the library from basement to attic and are reported to have been shocked at the disrepair of the library building. Ms. Tafaro and Mr. Leigh stated that a company by the name of Elite Builders has been approached by the mayor and the developer is exploring the idea of a building with three stories of condos (with accommodations for affordable housing units) and one story for the library and Arts Center with parking underground. This would be

located where the current Firemen's Exempt Hall stands. The library/arts center area would measure about 7,500 square feet.

The committee will next examine the current library. Access is a prime consideration. It is the SCLSNJ policy that all library facilities must be ADA compliant for patrons and staff. The WLAB sent to the ad hoc committee a list of our priorities for a refurbished library. Also, we submitted an extensive report written by the WLAB three years ago that outlines all areas of the library and the problems that are present therein.

Ms. Tafaro and Mr. Leigh say that they will voice that the WLAB prefers a plan to renovate the current library rather than building a new library with apartments above.

**New Business:** Ms. Hartmann reported that she contacted The Sign Center in Berkeley Heights in regards to a large sign to be attached to the library that can be viewed from Valley Road and Hillcrest Road. The estimate for a sign was \$4,000. However, she was disappointed with the level of customer service. Ms. Tafaro suggested that Ms. Hartmann contact Quarry Signs on Route 22 in Scotch Plains for another quote. Ms. Hartmann agreed to do so.

Ms. Ellis reported on her efforts to get library activities noted on the Borough calendar. She emailed the mayor and Mr. Hance about the problem and they say they will look into it. Ms. Ellis also emailed Mr. Auger. The Watchung Borough IT manager is working with the Bridgewater Library to study how to get Watchung Library events on the Watchung Borough calendar. Ms. Gil, a Watchung Borough clerk, told Ms. Ellis that her office cannot read the IT instructions yet but they are still trying.

**Public Portion:** Ms. Amy Fiorella suggested that child sized Adirondack chairs be purchased to match the chairs already donated by Mr. and Mrs. Hartmann. Ms. Tafaro moved that two more adult chairs and four children's chairs be purchased by the WLAB. The motion was seconded by Ms. Ellis. Ms. Benc asked for a vote and the motion was carried.

Ms. Tafaro suggested that the WLAB start cleaning out the library basement so that it can be used more effectively for programs. Volunteers will be sought.

The next WLAB meeting will be at 5:30 PM on Wednesday, July 20, 2022 in the Bicentennial Room. The meeting can also be viewed on Zoom.

Ms. Ellis moved to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Couchells seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:30.