

Watchung Library Advisory Committee Minutes, November 16, 2022 – **FINAL**

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

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

Please be advised that, pursuant to a Borough policy, all committee meetings will be recorded; at 5:37 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 5:37 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 Tafaro O'Donnell, WLAB member -- present
Wendy Robinson, Borough Council Member, Library Liaison – present
George Alexis, School Superintendent – absent
Hannah Kerwin, Watchung Library Branch Manager – present
Patricia Keane, Valley View Librarian – present
Keith Balla, Mayor, Watchung Borough – absent

Mr. Leigh alerted the WLAB that the videos showing past WALB meetings are not on the Borough website. Ms. Benc will ask Mr. Hance to make sure that our videos are posted.

Minutes of the September 21, 2022 meeting were e-mailed to members in advance of the meeting for review. One addition to the minutes was suggested. The addition was Mr. Auger's comments regarding the inadequacy of the Watchung Library especially in terms of space. Ms. Ellis moved that the minutes with this one correction be approved. Ms. O'Donnell seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

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

The WLAB escrow account totaled \$21,266.04 on September 21, 2022. The Aquarium Fund comprised \$3,948.10 of that total and \$17,317.94 remained in our general funds.

There were no deposits to the account in the last two months.

Two payments totaling \$175.99 were made to REEFCO for aquarium maintenance. There was one charge for \$80.00 on September 30, 2022 for basic cleaning and one payment for \$95.99

withdrawn on October 28, 2022 for cleaning and for Chemipure, a filtration media used to prevent the aquarium from smelling and to keep it crystal clear.

REEFCO notified the Borough that starting November 1, 2022 the new service rate for basic cleaning would be \$100.00 per visit due to increased fuel, equipment, and competitive employee retention costs. We received the identical notification earlier in the year. The increased fee was supposed to begin March 1, 2022 but the Watchung Library continued to be billed \$80.00 in the ensuing months. We will have to wait to see if the increase is applied in future billings.

As of November 16, 2022, the WLAB Escrow Account totals \$21,090.05. Our Aquarium Fund accounts for \$3,772.11 of that total. We still have \$17,317.94 remaining in general funds.

Ms. Robinson asked the Borough finance director, Mr. Hance, about the "Library" account he had discovered and used to pay for a second set of Polywood chairs purchased this past summer for our library. Mr. Hance had no knowledge of the origin of the account. Ms. Robinson explained to him and the Borough Administrator, Mr. Damato, that his fund was the result of an account formed to accept small donations of \$1.30 from residents in support of a new library years ago. Both Borough officers told her that they would do whatever the WLAB decided with these funds.

After some discussion, Ms. Ellis and Dr. Couchells moved that the funds used to pay for the Polywood chairs be restored back into the \$1.30 account and out of the escrow account. It was also moved that Mr. Hance label the donation account with a title that would make it clear to all that the money had to be used for a new library building or renovations to the present library. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Hartmann. The motion was approved.

Mrs. Hartmann asked the treasurer, "Where is the \$40 and the \$87 the WLAB was supposed to receive from Legacy Books?" Dr. Couchells agreed to look into this problem.

Ms. Ellis moved that the treasurer's report be approved. Ms. Keane seconded the motion. The treasurer's report was approved.

Friends of the Watchung Library Report:

The Friends of the Watchung Library met the week of November 16th. They decided they want to sponsor more programs like the one Dr. Ruck presented in the Watchung library about the murders committed by a nurse. They plan to invite him back for more interesting stories in regard to poison control.

Ms. Ellis wants the Friends and the WLAB to host a winter event for children. It would involve artificial snow balls that the children could throw at each other and perhaps some hot chocolate afterwards.

The Friends are sponsoring a drawing for a prize of holiday treats. The winner will be announced on December 21, 2022.

The Friends desire that ADA compliance be at the top of the list of renovations, if and when the current library is renovated.

Watchung Library Branch Manager Report:

Ms. Kerwin reported that she put out a message for the DPW to store our outdoor furniture in the library basement.

She asked Mr. Damato for the third time to please remove excess hanging wires from the Bicentennial Room. He responded that he would come to the library on November 18, 2022 with the DPW manager to resolve this problem.

Ms. Kerwin asked the DPW to provide the library with new door mats. They were almost immediately delivered to the library.

We have a new library technician named Kaitlyn Wilson.

Ms. Kerwin is re-arranging some of the library. The windows will no longer be covered with bookshelves in the periodical room and there will be seating in front of the picture window in the main room. We do not need all the computers in front of the picture window because the library lends Chrome books to anyone who asks.

Our branch manager also suggested that we need a new circulation desk.

Mahjong players now meet in the Bicentennial Room instead of in the basement. They do not like the basement room. Bridge players meet upstairs, and Scouts have been reserving the Bicentennial Room also. Some groups that used to meet in the library have not returned post COVID.

THE SCLS came out to review the collection and usage. This is a quarterly visit.

Physical materials (books, magazines, etc.) have been experiencing an uptick in circulation versus e-books, audio books and CDs.

Borough Council Liaison Report:

Legacy Books have paid the Borough a total of \$40 and \$87 so far.

Ms. Robinson emailed Ms. Concetta Hankowski, administrative assistant to the superintendent, to remind her to encourage parents to sign up their preschoolers for the Soaring into Kindergarten program.

Mr. Leigh strongly suggested that the library needs a line item in the Borough capital budget in the new year. The budget is finalized in March. Ms. Robinson suggested that the best way for this to happen is through our new Borough liaison.

Dr. Couchells wants to know if the WLAB will again be given the refund from the SCLSNJ. Towns with libraries get a small amount of their taxes returned every year to help with the

maintenance of their libraries. Last year the Borough gave the WLAB the use of that money. We will have to ask the library liaison.

The Borough had \$542 available to give the library some holiday lighting.

The variance has been presented to the board of adjustment and it has been approved; yet is still before the county. There will be a public hearing. The date is to be determined. Mr. Leigh wants to know if an elevator will still fit on library property since some of our property was given away to our neighbor. There are potential easement issues (10 feet access). The driveway and pathway will not be restricted use. Again, we must bring this question to the Borough Council.

Mr. Alexis wanted to remind everyone to vote in the special election regarding the school referendum on December 13 at the Firemen's Exempt Hall.

Old Business:

Ms. O'Donnell and Mr. Leigh gave us some information about possible future library plans. If the mayor's plan for a new library was accepted, \$750,000 would be needed to configure the inside of the library space. Or, the Borough could renovate the current library, or the Borough could do nothing.

It is expected that on December 8, 2022 a report on a possible new library will be presented to the Borough Council.

We have plenty of space for a Limited Use Limited Application (LULA) elevator in our current library to solve our ADA compliance problems. It is estimated that a LULA would cost approximately \$65,000 plus \$8,000 for installation. Architect Iovino says he has included in his renovation estimate of \$2,200,000 a standard elevator.

Mr. Leigh suggested we look into grants from organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation and Dolly Parton's grants for literacy. There are grants for ADA compliance as well.

Mr. Leigh advocated that we have an eye towards the future and remain creative in our views as to what can be done with the entire footprint of the library and associated property and work with resources from the county as he has with SCLS. Mr. Leigh discussed the surveys that have been executed by the county as well as the borough. The survey will remain open through the end of the year.

There is a new WLAB article in the latest Borough newsletter which articulated Mr. Balla's view on alternatives for the library.

The Boy Scouts will not be refinishing our picnic table because the Borough will not cover them with insurance while they are on library property.

The library Holiday Party for staff will be held on December 5, 2022. Sandwiches and cookies will be provided by the WLAB at noon.

New Business:

The WLAB expressed their gratitude to Ms. Wendy Robinson. She was an invaluable asset to the WLAB as our liaison to the Borough Council. On so many occasions she supported our goals and helped us to achieve them. We will miss her and hope she attends our future meetings even if only remotely. Thank you, Wendy!

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM. Our next meeting will be on January 18, 2023. It will be our reorganization meeting where we will plan our new schedule and elect new officers.