FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES BOARD OF TRUSTEES MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING MAY 12, 2021

The Frederick County Public Libraries Board of Trustees Meeting convened at 7:00 p.m. on May 12, 2021 via a virtual meeting.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: J. D'Agostino, C. Greenway, M. O'Leary, S. Sheppard, C. Smith, K. Spertzel, S. White and J. Donald, County Liaison

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: J. Kelly, Director; C. Hall, Associate Director; B. McDermott, Finance Manager; J. Marshall – Systems Manager; D. Frank-Rice, IT Coordinator; K. Baker, Library Associate General – Walkersville Library; N. Bromir, Library Associate Children's – C. Burr Artz Library; K. Chen, Library Associate Children's – Myersville Library; S. Dorsey, Library Technician – Emmitsburg Library; C. Fitz, Library Associate Teens – Walkersville Library; E. Hill, Library Specialist Adult – C. Burr Artz Library; A. Neel , Library Associate General – Point of Rocks Library; S. Pietrzak, Library Associate General – C. Burr Artz Library; C. Stryker, Library Associate Children's – Walkersville Library; C. Ward, Library Associate Children's – Urbana Regional Library; and L. Tibbs, Recording Secretary.

CITIZEN REMARKS: None.

<u>APPROVAL OF MINUTES:</u> C. Smith made a motion to approve the Minutes of April 7, 2021; seconded by S. White. No further discussion. VOTE: Unanimous.

<u>CHAIR'S REPORT</u>: Mr. O'Leary turned the meeting over to J. Kelly for his Director's Report.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

<u>a. FCPL – Update:</u> Mr. Kelly welcomed members of the Board, members of his team who are on the call, and members of the community tuning into the live stream.

He noted that he would start the meeting with the question that is on everyone's mind and that is reopening. He added that, as everyone is aware, the County's top priority has been vaccination and library staff were asked to assist at county clinics. Library staff stepped up in a big way over the past month with library staff from branches across the system helping out at every clinic. Mr. Kelly advised that he learned from the County Executive that the County is transitioning to a new model for staffing vaccine clinics in the coming weeks. This model will rely on the Health Department and recently-hired part-time staff to manage the vaccine effort. There will still be a

need in the near-term for help from County employees, but again the hope is that the need will start to taper off.

Every Director within the County is meeting with County Executive, Jan Gardner, to talk through their reopening plans. Mr. Kelly noted that his meeting with the County Executive is next Tuesday. As a component unit within Frederick County, he stated that we are looking at this meeting as an opportunity to ensure that FCPL's reopening plan aligns with the County's own reopening timeline. It is also a chance to take any new information we might learn and modify our plan based upon it.

He noted that, as his staff can tell you, he tends to take an optimistic view of things. With that in mind, he stated that he is hopeful that he will leave next week's meeting with a better idea of our reopening date and that it will be sometime in June. He advised that he will keep the Board informed of any developments.

Thereafter, Mr. Kelly advised that the Maryland Library Association's Annual Conference was held last week. It was held virtually for the second year in a row. He noted that this year's conference was bittersweet since MLA's Executive Director, Margaret Carty, recently passed away following complications from cancer. Margaret served as Executive Director for over 20 years and was beloved in our community. She was a soft spoken, but strong person. She took time to counsel so many of us in Maryland libraries and he noted that he remembers first meeting her in 2007. She was a great mentor and friend. Many of the conversations at this year's conference touched on Margaret's contributions and how she helped grow the organization and the reputation of Maryland libraries in Annapolis and nationally.

As for the conference itself, Mr. Kelly advised that he had the opportunity to attend three great keynotes by authors Malaka Gharib, R. Eric Thomas, and D. Watkins. Works by each of these authors can be found in FCPL's collection and Mr. Kelly noted that he highly recommends them. Mr. Kelly also noted that he attended many great break-out sessions, but added that FCPL was not there only as attendees. Several members of FCPL's team were invited to speak:

- Bryan Hissong led a session on community engagement
- Heather Hart's session included tips for non-children's staff to deliver story times
- Amy Moser's session was on grant-funding resources and opportunities
- Deb Spurrier and Betsey Brannen had a session on effective outreach to children
- MJ Brown, Yasmin Bromir, and Jillian Bleggi's session was about integrating difficult conversations into children's programming

These programs reflect FCPL's 3 strategic priorities -- to Simplify Access, to Build Bridges, and to Spark Excitement. They are also examples of the great work being done by FCPL's team. As some of you are aware, the collaborative spirit in Maryland Public Libraries is very strong. We are grateful for the annual conference and the opportunity it affords us, not only to share best practices, but also to learn from our colleagues.

Mr. Kelly advised everyone of one final conference note. MLA's Honorary Membership Award was presented this year to our previous Library Director, Darrell Batson, in recognition of a lifetime of significant contributions to libraries and librarianship.

Lastly, Mr. Kelly shared that the Brunswick Library Branch turned 10 years old in April, 2021. FCPL has been providing service in that community since the early 1960s but the team celebrated a decade of service in their current building. Congratulations to our community, to our Friends of the Brunswick Library, and to the Brunswick staff.

Pivoting to statistics, Mr. Kelly noted that in addition to volunteering at vaccine clinics, our team has been hard at work delivering curbside service. In fact, FCPL saw the highest monthly total of curbside appointments – over 8,400 in March. Those 8,400 appointments accounted for over 90,000 physical items checked out, as reflected on the month-over-month dashboard. Curbside remains a popular service and we intend to continue offering it in the next phase of our tiered reopening plan.

Digital circulation remains strong with roughly 864,000 checkouts year-to-date. As we head into the last quarter of the fiscal year, if this trend holds, we will surpass last year's record circulation of e-Content.

Staff have also continued to look for creative ways to deliver programming – whether that is virtual programming like the Read Across America series which contributed to March's increased program attendance or engaging with the public in other ways like displays in our windows and around our buildings or with installations in the wider community like Brunswick's poetry boxes at Othello Park or Thurmont's story walks.

Finally, March is the first full month of data that we have since the grant-funded wifi expansion at our branches was completed. Mr. Kelly noted that, as you can see, wifi use in March exceeded the 3-year average and this is without the usual traffic into our branches. The marketing of this expanded service is clearly starting to reach its intended audience and, as we knew, access to broadband in this county is a challenge for many in our community. The public library is helping meet that critical need by simplifying access with expanded wifi and building bridges to communities in need. Once we fully reopen our branches, this number will only grow.

b. <u>Budget/CIP Update:</u> Mr. Kelly advised that the County Council held their hearings on the County Executive's proposed FY22 budget. He noted that he was asked to appear before them on April 30, 2021. At that meeting, Mr. Kelly explained FCPL's small base budget adjustment to account for state mandated minimum wage increase for our hourly staff and he also answered questions about FCPL's CIP projects and appeals. The Council is working to finalize the budget. Per the County Charter, they may make reductions to proposed non-mandated increases. They have until the end of this month to complete their work and then they will adopt the budget.

On the CIP side of things, Mr. Kelly noted that there are just a few items to report.

Middletown design work is ongoing.

The developer of the Linganore site has proposed a few parcels as possible sites for the planned 25,000 square foot regional library. Mr. Kelly stated that he will be attending a meeting with the County Executive and multiple county partners (DPW, Legal, Planning) next Wednesday to consider the suitability of the parcels in question.

Finally, Mr. Kelly advised that the conversation around the West Frederick City project, while still very early, is ongoing. The most recent news is that the County Executive reached out to Mayor O'Connor to formally share the County's intention and desire to construct a library in the West Frederick area and to start a dialogue about potential building sites.

Mr. Kelly concluded his Director's Report by announcing that the next Board Meeting, the last before the summer break, will be Wednesday, June 2, 2021.

C. Smith noted that on the quarterly dashboard, there was a dramatic drop in e-newspapers from July. She inquired whether FCPL dropped subscriptions to a lot of newspapers. Mr. Kelly stated that he would check into that and get back to everyone.

J. D'Agostino inquired whether the parcels that are being looked at will be given to FCPL for the library. Mr. Kelly advised that the parcels of land that we will be looking at in Linganore will be donated by the developer. As far as the conversation we will be having with Mayor O'Connor next week, we will be exploring whether the City of Frederick has any parcels of land that can be given to the County for a library site.

M. O'Leary noted the extended wifi use, as a result of the extended range, was extremely significant because internet access is almost a utility that is as necessary as electricity and water and because so many people have great difficulty in getting internet, he is happy that the library is extending this to everyone. He added that he wished the library was not the only one to offer internet to those folks who may not have internet. Mr. Kelly stated that one of the sessions he attended last week at MLA was on the question of digital equity and we heard about projects at the state and federal level to reach more folks. He added that, for many, the perception is broadband access should be a public utility. Mr. Kelly noted that FCPL was grateful to find grant funding to provide extended internet access. Mr. O'Leary inquired whether the extended wifi will be permanent even when the library reopens. Mr. Kelly stated that the wifi expansion will continue.

Ms. Greenway asked if each library branch is offering extended wifi. Mr. Kelly stated that the funding received allowed each library branch to provide extended wifi services. Ms. Greenway thereafter inquired whether FCPL provides wifi for the entire downtown Frederick area. Mr. Kelly stated that the extended wifi at the C. Burr Artz Library now extends across Carroll Creek instead of just within a few feet of its walls.

Ms. White asked how the extended wifi works at every library branch. Ms. Hall stated that she will send a map of all the branches and the available wifi to everyone.

NEW BUSINESS:

a. LATI Recognition: Mr. Kelly noted that tonight he has the honor of recognizing the members of our team that have successfully completed the Library Associate Training Institute. As you'll recall, LATI is a 90-hour program that all Library Associates in the State of Maryland must complete. Through this program, staff gain a greater understanding of the principles and value of public libraries and about the profession in general. They learn about print and online resources, the reference interview and excellent customer service. The program involves online learning sessions, independent work, coaching sessions and, in pre-COVID times, face-to-face learning. It is an intense program and they balance this 90-hours of intensive coursework on top of their day-to-day responsibilities.

Mr. Kelly noted that he personally appreciates LATI because one of the first assignments of staff asks participants to meet with their Director. This platform affords a great opportunity for him to get to know newer members of our team and provide background about FCPL, our core values, and the needs of our community.

Mr. Kelly advised that he has worked in libraries across five different states and Maryland has the best public libraries by far. A big part of that is because of the LATI program which ensures that our Library Associates are trained to a high standard statewide. Completing this program is quite an achievement. Mr. Kelly thereafter recognized graduates and, in front of the Board, thanked each of them for their commitment and hard work. The recent graduates that are with us this evening are: Karen Baker, Yasmin Bromir, Kristen Chen, Sheila Dorsey, Carrie Fitz, Eliza Hill, Arinn Neal, Sara Pietrzak, Catherine Stryker, and Courtney Ward.

Mr. Kelly also noted that, in addition, the following graduates were unable to join us this evening: Erin Leyh and Carrie Rathmell.

Mr. Kelly thereafter advised that Certificates of Completion are being mailed to all graduates. He again congratulated all graduates.

Mr. O'Leary thanked everyone as well. He noted that he thinks that these folks are the most important people on the library staff. He stated that James, Sheila and Catie are certainly important, but when you look at the day-to-day interactions, you folks are the ones that do that and that is where connections are made; especially during this last year.

b. Financial Report: B. McDermott presented the Fiscal Year 2021 financial statement for May, 2021. The data is tentative as of March 31, 2021 and was pulled on April 23, 2021. Revenue is at 74%. There was an increase of \$10,000 to miscellaneous operating. This includes reimbursement from the Ausherman Foundation Grant. Library fine revenue increased by \$2,500 and there was an increase to the in-kind county revenue account of \$492,000. There were

also transfers from the County general fund of \$2.6 million and Maryland State Education Grant of \$270,000. As mentioned last month, the total collected for library fines and Maryland State Education Grants is over 100% and that is because the revenue collected is over the proposed budget amount.

Ms. McDermott thereafter reviewed expenditures. She noted that expenditures are at 71%. As far as expenditures are concerned, there have been a few slight changes from the previous month. There was a 6% increase in library material purchases. County finance posted personnel and telephone expenses which reflect the most significant percentage changes for this month. She further noted that the amount noted for office supplies/expenditures is reflected as 101%, which is a 15% increase from the previous month. The percentage increase includes the purchase of general office supplies and bags for curbside pick-ups. She noted that the revenue/expenditures are right where they should be for this time of year as we approach the end of the third quarter.

Ms. McDermott stated that the total grants awarded remain at \$338,000. There were no new grants awarded since last month. Grants submitted are at \$1,000,000. FCPL is awaiting the official notice of a grant award from the Maryland State Department of Education – Division of Library Development and Services for the additional support of \$1,309,000 for the Middletown Library Branch construction. Once this is finalized, the total will be \$2,309,000.

The total for sponsors/donations is at \$77,136. There was a \$2,000 increase in Greatest Needs and a \$2,000 increase to branch donations for a total of \$4,000 from the previous month.

She thereafter reviewed endowment revenue. The endowment revenue total is at \$78,000. There was a \$3,000 increase from the C. Burr Artz Trust. Each year FCPL and the C. Burr Artz Trust develop a budget plan to be used for the sole benefit of the C. Burr Artz Library.

Ms. McDermott noted that this brings the total to \$493,000.

Ms. Greenway inquired what percentage of employees are still working in the library. Mr. Kelly stated that 100% of employees are working. Early in the pandemic, we were able to provide any employee who was not able to work from home all of their hours with administrative leave. He added that early in the pandemic those administrative leave hours were higher than they are now. However, as we have had staff come back into the library branches to work in the library and provide services such as curbside pick-up or provide volunteer opportunities such as food delivery or helping at the vaccine clinics, the number of employees getting administrative leave has decreased tremendously. The total number of hours is approximately 30 hours at this time for a staff of over 200.

Ms. Greenway inquired about the cleaning staff and whether that is still being provided. Mr. Kelly responded that cleaning services is an in-kind service provided by the County and, as we speak, there are cleaning staff at the library this evening.

Ms. White inquired as to what administrative leave is. Mr. Kelly responded that administrative leave is provided by the County and people are paid for their hours, if they are unable to work from home. For an example, if an employee is supposed to work 40 hours per week and only has

work to cover 35 hours per week, the County will provide administrative leave for the remaining five hours so that staff would not feel a loss in pay. He added that most employees are now working.

Ms. Smith noted that 19% of contracted services has been used so far and inquired what is covered by contracted services and will this be an issue when we ramp back up to reopen. Ms. McDermott noted that contracted services includes cleaning by the Scott Key Center. She also added that some services that had been budgeted, such as for Bookmarks, is now being done inhouse. Mr. Kelly noted that there are a lot of services covered under contracted services. When we had to tighten our belts, some of those tasks were done internally and we did not have to pay out money for contracts such as Bookmarks. Ms. Smith was wondering if FCPL would lose the funds that are not used. Mr. Kelly stated that if FCPL has any savings at the end of the budget, they become part of the ending fund balance and those funds would not be lost.

Ms. D'Agostino inquired whether there will be any costs that will be incurred for the reopening that are not reflected in the budget. Mr. Kelly stated that some of the costs have been reimbursed to FCPL by Human Resources. FCPL purchased some plexiglass barriers for the reopening and some of these costs are being reimbursed by other agencies within the county. Mr. Kelly stated that there are no other expenses expected related to the reopening that we have not already incurred. He advised that staff did not know if the reopening would be in three weeks or a year later so we had to be prepared and those expenses have already been incurred. He did note that there is one item that is being looked at by administration and that is a people counter that we can set to a certain percentage so we can check the capacity and it will flash green, yellow or red to let us know if we can accept more people. There are very few additional purchases that we expect to be making.

<u>c. Fine Free Impact</u>: Mr. Donald noted that, before the discussion begins, he wanted to let the Board know there was no negative reaction by the County Council so there will be no negative feedback from the Council on the budget and FCPL is on safe ground.

Mr. Kelly displayed a graphic for discussion. As a reminder, the Board will consider a policy vote later this evening on whether FCPL should become a fine free library system effective June 15, 2021.

Over the last two Board meetings, we discussed the philosophical reasons why libraries are pivoting to fine free -- which hinges primarily on issues around equity and access --- and we also discussed the implications to our budget, if we did away with fines. FCPL budgeted \$5,000 - \$10,000 in revenue for fines. In contrast, FCPL has a \$16million budget and almost \$2 million of which is devoted to Materials. So we are talking about \$5,000 in lost revenue.

Since our last meeting, Mr. Kelly noted that he informed the County Executive and the Chief Administrative Officer that the Board would be considering this vote. In addition, Mr. Kelly added that when he was invited to appear before the County Council on April 30th to discuss FCPL's FY22 proposed budget, Councilmember Donald brought this topic up and Mr. Kelly was able to address the Council's questions and provide them with background information on the topic as well.

Mr. Kelly noted that tonight, your vote is simply on policy – Does FCPL charge fines moving forward or not?

Now, should it be the will of the Board to move in that direction, staff would come to the June meeting with updated policy language to ensure we are in compliance with your decision.

Putting aside that policy vote momentarily, this agenda item on "impact" looks at the operational side of all of this. In other words, if the Board changes policy, how does the library adapt its operations? This operations piece does not require a Board vote, but we agreed to share examples of how FCPL's operation currently functions and how the operational workflow looks in neighboring libraries who have pivoted to a fine free model.

Mr. Kelly thereafter reviewed the displayed graphic.

The top line represents FCPL's current workflow for overdue items.

For ease of comparison, all of these workflows assume that a customer has checked out one book with a replacement cost over \$25 and the patron doesn't return it on time.

At present, FCPL

- Lets the patron know that their item is due three days prior to the due date
- Thereafter on day 1, 7 and 21, after the item is overdue, staff let the patron know that the item is overdue
- Then, at day 45, a customer's account is both blocked and they are billed for the item
- At day 60, the patron receives a final notice

The lines below the FCPL information on the graphic represent the process in neighboring fine-free counties.

As you can see, each county has taken a slightly different approach to the process. Some of these counties are still working out their processes, since their move to fine free happened in the past six months (Baltimore County, Montgomery County and Carroll County). As we discussed, we would develop an operational model and then fine tune it as we learn what works for us and what doesn't.

There are two big takeaways that Mr. Kelly noted that he wanted to highlight for the Board regarding the workflow of these other systems that we could anticipate in forming FCPL's model. First, you'll notice that Frederick currently waits until Day 45 to both block a customer's account and bill the patron. Meanwhile, most fine free libraries have separated these actions. As you'll recall, recent legislation states that juveniles cannot be charged for replacement of an item until after Day 21; however, cards can be blocked much sooner.

Secondly, you'll notice that on Day 22, Loudoun County blocks a customer's account, but there is no \$25 listed there. Everyone else has a block with \$25 in it. The reason is because these other systems are only blocking a card, if the cost of replacing the item exceeds \$25. Loudoun County,

on the other hand, sees an overdue item as an overdue item whether it costs over \$25 to replace or only \$19.99.

Our current thinking is that we would likely use Loudoun County's approach to blocking based on days overdue rather than amount of replacement costs, but we would move that block up more in line with Carroll County's block at Day 10. Finally, we would bill a replacement cost for the item at some date after 21 days in compliance with recent legislation. If this were our model, we would move from our present workflow where folks are blocked and charged on the same day. We would separate these functions, so a customer is blocked sooner than they are charged the replacement fee and the block would be based on the number of days an item is overdue, not based on exceeding a total replacement charge amount.

In review, the Board will just vote tonight on whether FCPL should become a fine free system effective June 15, 2021. This is a philosophical vote. This gives us permission to move forward with revising the Fines & Fees Policy for your adoption in June. Along with voting to amend the Fines & Fees Policy, you will also have an opportunity to review our initial fine free workflow model at the June meeting.

In the fall, we will use our fine-free experience over the summer to make any further policy change recommendations, including the Borrowing Policy, and to share with you how the procedural changes are going. Ms. White noted that there is a wide range of ways that renewals are allowed. She noted that she likes the things that were said. She inquired whether FCPL will be waiting on auto-renewal at this time. Mr. Kelly stated that FCPL would launch a fine free model and an auto-renewal would be considered at a later date once we have learned what needs to be learned from going fine free.

Ms. Spertzel inquired whether there is a way that a patron can determine how much a material item costs if they haven't been billed yet and they know they have lost the material. Mr. Kelly stated that this happens all of the time. Patrons can contact staff at the circulation desk and they can let the patron know the cost of the item.

Ms. Smith inquired if the fine free policy becomes effective June 15th and FCPL staff are still working through some of the fine points, will this be presented to the public as a pilot program? Mr. Kelly advised that this will be presented to the public as a change in policy. He added that if the vote moves forward tonight to go fine free, staff will look at our fines and fees policy and bring the policies to the Board in June, 2021 for adoption by the Board. If we need to make changes to the operation side, it will not change the fine free policy. No decision that is made operationally is set in stone. Ideally, we would take a look at this over the next few months and make whatever changes may be needed.

C. Greenway stated that she has been on hold for five books for two to three months. In our effort to allow patrons four or five renewals, what about those of us who are waiting for materials. Mr. Kelly noted that if there is a hold on an item, the patron cannot renew an item.

Ms. Sheppard inquired as to when FCPL goes fine free, would those patrons who currently have fines still owe the fines on their accounts. Mr. Kelly stated accounts would be cleared. Ms. White asked if there is a difference between a fine on an account and a lost book. Mr. Kelly stated that all accounts would be set to zero.

Mr. Kelly stated that the library systems that have gone fine-free have seen a huge increase in returns. There are some people that are sitting on items and are afraid to return the items because of fees involved.

Ms. Spertzel inquired that if the fine-free policy is approved this evening, could members of the FCPL Board of Trustees receive something at the next meeting about FCPL's communication strategy. Mr. Kelly advised that staff will be working with County Executive Gardner's communications person to make sure she is aware of what FCPL's messaging will be.

Ms. Greenway inquired whether Mr. Kelly is comfortable with the loss of revenue. Mr. Kelly stated that he is. As mentioned earlier, when the budget was submitted for next year, we carried forward the amount of \$5,000 - \$10,000 in fine revenue. He does not anticipate, in a worst case scenario, that this will drop to zero because a certain amount of patrons will be paying for replacement costs. Mr. Kelly added that FCPL can move forward confidently.

Mr. O'Leary thanked Mr. Kelly for sending out the graphic for everyone to review. Mr. O'Leary added that if the fine-free policy is passed this evening, staff will begin working on the initial procedural details. He inquired whether the procedural details could be sent to members of the FCPL Board of Trustees for everyone's review prior to the June meeting. Mr. Kelly stated that there will be an informational item on the agenda that will include the initial operating model and a communication plan. There will also be an item on the June agenda that will be up for a vote and that will be on the updated policy so that we would be in compliance with tonight's vote, should fine-free be passed this evening. Ms. Spertzel added that we need to vote on the fine-free policy and not make assumptions. Once the vote is taken, we can move forward.

<u>d. Fine Free Vote:</u> K. Spertzel made a motion to approve to adopt the fine-free policy as of June 15, 2021; seconded by C. Greenway. No further discussion. VOTE: Unanimous.

Mr. Kelly thanked members of the Library Board for their consideration of going fine-free.

Ms. Smith stated that this is headline news. Ms. White stated that she agrees with C. Smith. This provides increased access and the more people that know about it, it will help get materials back as a secondary.

Ms. Greenway added that everything will go electronic eventually and we might as well get to the front of this.

Ms. Spertzel requested that the roll-out of fines free be multi-lingual. Mr. Kelly advised that FCPL has many community partners that we can work with to get this information out to the public.

Mr. O'Leary inquired whether staff will receive an educational program so they can inform the public of these changes. Mr. Kelly advised that FCPL has a great communications staff and they will be developing talking points for staff.

C. Greenway thanked S. Sheppard for sending out a lot of data to everyone for review. Mr. O'Leary added that the information received was very informative.

BOARD QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS: Ms. White inquired whether the June meeting will be a virtual meeting or possibly in-person. Mr. O'Leary stated that we don't know yet. Mr. Kelly noted that the June meeting will most likely be a virtual meeting since it is in a few weeks.

Ms. Smith stated that she is anxious to hear about the outcome of next Tuesday's meeting with the County Executive about reopening.

Mr. O'Leary thanked FCPL staff for participating so strongly in the COVID program.

OTHER CITIZEN REMARKS: None.

The next meeting will be held virtually on June 2, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.

C. Greenway made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by C. Smith. No further discussion. VOTE: Unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

M. O'Leary, Chair Frederick County Public Libraries Board of Trustees