

**FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING
NOVEMBER 4, 2020**

The Frederick County Public Libraries Board of Trustees Meeting convened at 7:00 p.m. on November 4, 2020 via a virtual meeting.

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

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: County Liaison, Jerry Donald.

STAFF PRESENT: J. Kelly, Director; S. McDuff, Associate Director; C. Hall, Associate Director; D. Frank-Rice, IT Coordinator; B. McDermott, Finance Manager; Rorie Cox-Steib, Children’s Supervisor – C. Burr Artz Library; M. Thom, Accounting Director – Finance Division/Frederick County Government; R. Inskeep, Team Lead – Finance Division/Frederick County Government; L. Taft, Administrative Specialist; and L. Tibbs, Recording Secretary.

CITIZEN REMARKS: None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: C. Smith made a motion to approve the Minutes of October 7, 2020; seconded by J. D’Agostino. No further discussion. VOTE: Unanimous

CHAIR’S REPORT: Mr. O’Leary noted that things are probably going to continue like this for several months and it is very important to maintain a vibrant virtual presence. He added that he is happy to see that folks are looking into new things that may look favorable as the circumstances change.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT:

a. FCPL – Update: Mr. Kelly welcomed everyone to the last Board Meeting of 2020. We will meet again in January, 2021.

He advised that the Citizens for Maryland Libraries Conference took place virtually on October 17, 2020, and some of you had an opportunity to attend. For those of you who did not attend, FCPL’s own Levi Branson was recognized as recipient of CML’s 2020 Outstanding Employee Award.

Another highlight of the day was the keynote speaker from Librarian of Congress, Dr. Carla Hayden. Dr. Hayden noted that in 2020, a year marked by multiple societal challenges, libraries must “continue to be safe spaces to talk about difficult issues, hear other voices and discover engaging programming.” That we “must be part of the solution – just as we have been in the past in the wake of storms and social unrest.” She went on to say that “Libraries are that safe place in the communities they serve and that, even as our service models are evolving in the time of

COVID, this is when we kick into high gear.” Mr. Kelly noted that this is certainly true in Frederick County.

Mr. Kelly advised that tonight you will hear about our Learning from Home initiatives. He added that he hopes everyone had an opportunity to attend the recent Frederick Reads program with Board Member, Shemica Sheppard, in dialogue with author, Wes Moore, about his new book, Five Days: The Fiery Reckoning of an American City. Mr. Kelly stated that these are just two examples, and there are many others happening every day across the system, of the vital role FCPL plays in our community. The CML Annual Conference was indeed inspiring for library administrators and trustees alike.

Moving on, Mr. Kelly advised of a few of FCPL’s recent media mentions: 1) WMAR Baltimore, WDVM and The Frederick News-Post covered our recent Curbside in Costume Service which took place at library branches across the county last week. Additionally, CBA Branch Administrator, Beth Heltebridle, and her team were profiled in an article on organization culture that appeared in the Harvard Business Review last week. Mr. Kelly noted that each of these mentions reflect the hard work of our team and shines a light on that work regionally and nationally.

Thereafter, Mr. Kelly reviewed statistics. Members of the FCPL Board of Trustees received three Dashboards: 1) Quarterly Overview – which specifically highlights e-content use, virtual programming and curbside service. This is a report that is based on figures that the Board Chair was particularly interested in seeing pulled out and it was agreed that we would update the Board on these trends quarterly; 2) COVID Closure Analysis – this report compares month-to-month trends; and 3) Fiscal Year-to-Date – this is a report everyone is used to seeing comparing year-to-year data. Admittedly, the annual comparisons don’t help much during such an unprecedented year but we provide them to you as a point of reference.

Mr. Kelly noted that a lot of data has been provided but he will highlight a few statistics. Virtual visits were up in September and circulation was up as well. The circulation of physical materials accounted for 44% of our monthly total. Curbside service continues to be popular. During the last quarter, FCPL had over 24,000 curbside appointments and circulated 128,000 physical items. Almost 700 customers used our Personalized Picks service during this time. E-content continued to climb over the last quarter and the total digital check-outs exceeded 300,000 items. Wifi use has gone up every month since April and that trend continued to hold in September with over 8,000 customers using our wifi access even while our doors remain closed. Thereafter, Mr. Kelly noted that in his October report he forecasted that virtual programming numbers would return to normal after the annual August spike that is attributed to Summer Challenge participation and the Dashboard, in fact, bears that out.

Mr. Kelly stated that, as Mick O’Leary noted at our last meeting, even when the library’s doors are closed, it takes the entire team to continue selecting physical and digital materials, pull holds, answer reference questions by phone/chat, running curbside services, develop virtual programming, etc. As these numbers show, the team continues to work very, very hard under

this new service model to ensure that our customers' informational needs are met.

b. CIP/Budget – Update: Mr. Kelly noted that we are five months into this year's budget and, as anticipated, revenues are down. As everyone may remember from our pre-COVID budget discussion in February, we were forecasting \$90,000 in passport revenue this year, however, with our doors closed and the State Department not currently processing applications, none of this revenue is coming in. Additionally, he added that we were optimistically projecting fine revenue in excess of \$150,000.

He noted that in an attempt to deal with this significant decrease in revenues, he instituted a spending freeze in mid-October and we have spent the past two weeks in conversation with our team about strategies for making up this shortfall. Mr. Kelly reminded everyone that the County directly covers staff salaries and provides in-kind support for the maintenance of our facilities so those are not budget lines over which we have direct control. The impact of reduced revenues is most acutely felt in our collections budget and in general operating expenses which includes things like public technology. Sadly, this is not a new problem. It is only a problem that has been made worse by the pandemic. This is why we advocated last year for the two budget appeals which would have stabled per capita funding formulas to directly support library collections and general operating expenses. As everyone may recall, we worked with the County Budget Office to develop those formulas and, during public hearings, these budget appeals enjoyed unprecedented community support. Individuals from across the county, including members of our Board, submitted written testimony to our elected in support of these appeals – then COVID HIT.

It is understood why our budget appeals, along with those submitted by other county agencies, went unfunded. In early spring it was unclear what the implications of the pandemic would be on State revenues and on the overall County budget. We are now making tough choices to overcome this year's revenue shortfall and, as we finalize the draft budget for Fiscal Year 2022 for the Board's review at the February meeting, we will be making conservative revenue projections and resubmitting the two aforementioned appeals for collections and general operating funding formulas. If approved, these funding formulas are the surest way to provide FCPL with the sustainable funding it needs to help us better meet critical and increasing community needs.

He further advised that if the public hearings on the Fiscal year 2022 budget follow the model used during the last budget cycle, they will be held virtually and community members can submit written testimony in advance. Once the details are confirmed, Mr. Kelly noted that the details will be shared with members of the Board. We will again be asking for your strong advocacy of these appeals on behalf of our community.

Mr. Kelly noted that there is no big news to report on the capital side of things since our last meeting. The Middletown design is continuing. Regarding the Fiscal Year 2022 CIP, Mr. Kelly noted previously that staff met with staff from the Department of Public Works. The next step will be that we are called before the County's CIP Committee to answer any questions they might

have about our future projects. That meeting has not yet been scheduled but Mr. Kelly will let everyone know when that happens.

Mr. Kelly advised that the next Board Meeting will be on January 6th at 7:00 p.m. The Board does not meet in December.

Ms. D'Agostino inquired about plans when FCPL will reopen and offer passport services and computer services. Mr. Kelly noted that there is a plan in place, however, even if we would open tomorrow, the State Department is not accepting passport applications but we do have a plan in place for what service looks like as far as computer services. Computer services will be an appointment-based service. Mr. Kelly added that he discussed this with the County Executive and CAO in early October but no date has been set yet for reopening. As noted at our last meeting, they are paying close attention to the projections of an increase of cases and, as we move into the cold weather months, and having large gatherings indoors will not help with those numbers. He further noted that it is a delicate balancing act because we want to provide services and do so safely. We will continue to watch the numbers but for the last five weeks the numbers have continued to increase. Mr. Kelly advised that in his discussions with the County Executive and CAO, they advised that they are not keen on opening any county buildings as long as the numbers continue to increase, including libraries, for public use.

Ms. D'Agostino further inquired whether FCPL has enough staff, once the building is open, to continue with curbside pickup. Mr. Kelly stated that this is our goal. The model for the next phase of opening will include a limited number of things for people to do in the building and the primary way for people to check-out materials will be through curbside.

Ms. White inquired whether there has been an increase in curbside check-outs since FCPL went to that model. Mr. Kelly stated that some of the numbers are included in the Dashboard but he added that we are seeing an increased use of curbside service.

Ms. Greenway inquired whether it is true that when revenue goes down due to COVID that expenses go down as well. Mr. Kelly noted that this is why we instituted a spending freeze and figure out how we can tighten our belts to make up the shortfall. We are looking for ways to decrease spending. Ms. Greenway stated that if the libraries are closed they shouldn't have utility expenses, supply expenses, telephone expenses, etc. and inquired if these are things that are controlled by the County no matter what the usage is. Mr. Kelly stated that facility expenses such as utility expenses are considered in-kind expenses and provided by the County. As far as the library not being open to the public, staff are still working in the building and providing curbside services.

Ms. Greenway further inquired about the salary for the police protection program. Mr. Kelly noted that this is provided by the County. Ms. Greenway noted that she wants to make sure these services are not being paid for and inquired whether FCPL is under contract for those services. Mr. Kelly noted that FCPL works with the County at the beginning of the year and they generously provide funds to cover those services. From week-to-week as those off-duty officers

sign up for those shifts, there are some weeks we get someone and there are other weeks when no one signs up. Since the County provides the money for this service, this is not something where we can save money by not getting that service.

NEW BUSINESS:

a. Audit: R. Inskeep from the County Finance Department reviewed the audit for the year ending June 30, 2020. The overall revenue for Fiscal Year 2020 was about \$78,000 lower than in Fiscal Year 2019 and \$266,000 lower than what was budgeted. Revenues came in at \$5,058,363. Library fines were down about \$88,000. Passport revenue was down about \$34,000 and book sale revenues were down about \$10,000 from Fiscal Year 2019. There was also approximately \$37,000 less received in federal grants, however, there was an increase of \$107,000 from the state operating grant. She provided a chart graph to display the overall sources of revenue. The majority of revenue comes from the County and second to that is the state grant.

Expenditures showed an overall favorable variance to the budget of \$1.13 million. The budget was \$16,641,038 and the actual came in at \$15,508,947. FCPL's expenditures did increase from Fiscal Year 2019 by about \$787,000. She thereafter provide a chart graph to display the various expenditures. Personnel was the largest expenditure at 67.6%.

She thereafter provided a chart that showed a comparison of Fiscal Year 2018, Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020. Revenues went up a little bit in Fiscal Year 2019 and came back down slightly in Fiscal Year 2020. Expenditures are increasing each year along with the transfer from the general fund as well.

Looking at the overall revenue to expenditures, the county appropriation from the general fund and the library fund was \$10.4 million which is an increase of \$236,000 over Fiscal Year 2019. The budgeted use of fund balance in Fiscal year 2020 was \$870,174, which is a decrease of \$106,000 from Fiscal Year 2019. She thereafter displayed a chart reflecting a breakdown of the fund balance.

Thereafter, she reviewed the Statement of Net Position ending June 30, 2020. FCPL's assets have increased approximately \$117,000 and this includes an increase in investments and an increase from the primary government. FCPL's unrestricted fund balance available for Fiscal Year 2022 budget is \$207,866. FCPL's liabilities for Fiscal Year 2020 increased by \$275,000 from Fiscal Year 2019 and this is mostly due to unearned revenue as of June 30, 2020 in the various endowment accounts. As of June 30, 2020, the total endowment account balance totals \$407,227, which is an increase of \$108,000 from June 30, 2019.

She thereafter displayed a chart which reflects a comparison of the budget basis to the GAAP basis. The first column shows the budgetary basis and this is what is used to project numbers for the library's following year budget. As you can see, FCPL has \$730,698 to be used during Fiscal Year 2021 and there is currently a balance of \$207,866 for use in Fiscal Year 2022.

C. Greenway noted that when the fiscal year ends there is an audit of all departments within the county and she inquired if it is a “push” for the finance department to provide this audit by this date in November. R. Inskeep advised that the auditors start coming in in mid-October and they were asked to review the library’s fund as one of the first things they do because library staff want this information as soon as possible not only for budget purposes but to be able to be presented to the Library Board. Unfortunately, Ms. Inskeep noted that she just received the auditor’s blessing to provide this information to everyone so it is definitely a “push”. She received the OK from the auditors last week. C. Greenway further inquired whether there is a reason why they can’t come before October. R. Inskeep noted that there is a lot that goes on with closing out a year-end. The end of year statements from banks, etc. don’t come in until late July or early August along with all of the other journal entries that are being done such as fleet charges, telephone charges, etc. All these entries have to go through various county departments to get funds reconciled in order for the expenses to be posted. Once everything is posted, that is when the analysis can be done for the reports to be provided to the auditor.

C. Greenway asked if there is a reason why we are under the gun to approve this audit, which is very complicated. Is there some time limit by which we have to approve the audit? Ms. Inskeep noted that there is no time limit on her end but it might be on the part of the Board. Mr. Kelly noted that there is nothing in the by-laws that requires that timeline but it is something that we use to put together our next year’s budget because we need that ending fund balance number. He added that if the Board decides not to vote on it tonight, we would need to figure out when that vote is going to happen so that we can include the ending fund balance number in our planning. Ms. Greenway inquired as to when the budget needs to be prepared by. Mr. Kelly stated that we present the budget to members of the Finance Committee of the Board in late January and then the budget is approved in February. Ms. Greenway asked about the push to get everything done by February when the budget doesn’t start until July 1st. Mr. Kelly noted that the County has a deadline in February for the budget to be submitted. Once the budget is approved by the Board in February, the budget goes to the County Executive and she sets priorities for the budget. Ms. Greenway asked if there is a date when the budget has to be submitted to the County Executive. Ms. McDermott noted that the budget has to be input into the budget system by December 18, 2020. This is different than most years. Most years we have had to have the budget entered into the system by October 31st. Thereafter, once there are any changes, we re-enter the changes into the system. Ms. McDermott noted that it is quite a process to go through. Ms. Greenway requested clarification on the fact that the budget is submitted by James Kelly to the County in October and members of the Board don’t see it or vote on it until February. Ms. McDermott stated that last year the budget was submitted on October 31st. This year the budget is due December 18th to the budget department. Ms. McDermott noted that she is actually inputting capital projects right now. Mr. Kelly advised that FCPL is requested to put in preliminary numbers and the county has an understanding that the FCPL Board of Trustees gets to vote on the budget and the budget is voted upon at the February meeting. If there are changes to the draft budget that is submitted, we are given an opportunity to update the figures. Ms. Greenway stated that she has never heard that before. She noted that it seems to her that members of the Board would be able to comment on the budget prior to it being submitted to the

County. Mr. Kelly advised that we are unable to make our final budget until we have approval of the audit. Once we have the figures from the audit and it is accepted by the Board, it can be included as a revenue line and we can begin preparing the budget. Ms. Greenway wants to go on record that she has been on the Board for 10 years and has been on the Finance Committee during most of that time and it has always been push-come-to- shove with no answers to questions we may have. Members of the Finance Committee may only get 24 hours to review the audit and this year we had the audit 24 hours in advance but it was not even correct, when it was received. Members of the Finance Committee are supposed to ask the Board to vote on the audit and this has never been comfortable for her and she does not like it and has never liked it. This is pretty important stuff and we just saw the decline in the ending fund balance which is pretty significant. Ms. Greenway stated that members of the Finance Committee should at least get a correct document before we have the meeting to discuss it. Mr. Kelly agreed that the audit document we received contained errors but they were explained to us. He also noted that members of the FCPL Board of Trustees would need to meet in December in order to have more time to review the audit and approve the audit. The placeholder numbers that we put into the budget can be updated but nothing is official until the Board votes on the proposed budget. Ms. Greenway defers to the Chair of the Finance Committee about that but just wanted to go on record as stating that we go through this every year and she has an accounting background and it is difficult for her to understand and she can't imagine what it is like for new board members to make any sense of this discussion at all.

S. White, as Chair of the Finance Committee, noted that she echoes C. Greenway's sentiments. She would like to have the audit at least two weeks before our meeting to have a chance to review the audit. She stated that she feels like a deer in headlights and noted that she, Shemica and Candy are smart enough people that we could ask some additional questions, if we had more time. She again noted that she agrees with C. Greenway and maybe things can be changed next year. Since we are under the gun this year, there is not much that can be done now. Ms. White added that as Chair of the Finance Committee she is thankful that she was able to meet with James and Brandy a few weeks ago, at her request, but noted that she agrees with Candy that maybe we can find a better timeline for this. Mr. Kelly stated that, as we heard from Robin, the information we receive is driven by the auditors and he knows that everyone just received the document and it contained incorrect data on it. Mr. Kelly noted that if the Board wants more time with the document since the earliest the auditors can provide the document to us is the first week of November, then we could add a December meeting this year for a vote or in the future moving forward. This would be the prerogative of the Board. There is nothing in the by-laws that would prohibit that from being done. J. D'Agostino suggested possibly moving the November meeting to the second Wednesday in November. Mr. Kelly stated that this is a possibility as well. Ms. White stated that she thinks that is a good idea. Mr. Kelly stated that we have the flexibility to do that. If you do not want to add a December meeting but make the November meeting towards the middle of the month or later in the month, that is an option too.

Ms. Inskeep noted that she tried her hardest to get the audit to everyone as soon as possible but with all of the journal entries that need to be entered, it requires other departments to be completely reconciled and can be a very lengthy process. She noted that if the November

meeting would need to be postponed until a later date, she would still try to get the information out to members of the Finance Committee as soon as possible each year. She further noted that she is available to answer any questions anyone may have this evening, or if members of the Finance Committee wish to gather additional questions, they can be sent to her by e-mail or through Brandy McDermott. She noted that she would be glad to meet with them again or provide an answer via e-mail. C. Greenway noted that there was a deficit in Fiscal Year 2020. The expenditures out-weighed our revenue and typically in every audit she has ever been involved with, the auditors make recommendations on changes we should make. There is usually a portion of the audit where statements are declared such as the COVID virus or another reason why there would be a deficit. Members of the Finance Committee never see any commentary like that at all. She inquired whether this is not included in the County audit process. Ms. Inskeep noted that she is to provide the actuals since June 30th but if that is something members of the Finance Committee are looking for this is something she could work with James and Brandy on because she is not a decision maker as far as the library goes. We can work together and look at variances and trends and come up with different things like that, if you would like. Ms. Greenway noted that it is typically the outside audit firm that makes those recommendations and not you or library staff. She stated that the county is paying the audit firm for an audit service and if they see that the library is running at a deficit, they should provide some advice since they are experts. Mr. Kelly stated that whether those remarks would come from the county or the auditors, it is certainly something that we would welcome in helping to put together next year's budget. Ms. Greenway stated that this would be nice. Ms. White stated that this would be very helpful. She further stated that she is fine with what was presented but thinks the process can be improved.

Mr. Kelly inquired as to how the Board wants to proceed tonight. Does a member of the Board want to make a motion and accept the audit tonight or do you want to wait and take a vote later? Ms. White stated she is fine recommending approval of the audit but thinks we are kind of late in the game now. She noted that going forward in the future we should work together to come up with a better process to approve the audit so we feel good with our recommendation. She stated that she recommends approval of the audit.

Mr. O'Leary thanked Robin Inskeep for providing the audit information this evening but the points that members of the Finance Committee made tonight about timing and information delivery are valid and it certainly could be something that the committee could look at a little more thoroughly as far as setting up a different information distribution schedule in the future. If the committee would like to entertain that task, it would be a useful function. There is flexibility to do things differently that would provide members of the Finance Committee in an earlier or more informative or useful way. Ms. White stated that she agrees with the comments that were made and she is open for dialog on changes in the procedures for the future. Ms. White inquired whether C. Greenway and S. Sheppard are ok to move forward with this tonight. S. Sheppard noted that she is fine with moving forward but in the future possibly having the board meeting one week later to allow time for review. Ms. Greenway also noted that it would be beneficial if members of the Finance Committee would meet offline to allow new members such as Shemica to ask questions. Ms. Sheppard stated that she was able to follow everything. Ms. Greenway

stated that if everyone else is comfortable, she will go along with everyone.

S. Sheppard made a motion to approve the audit as presented; seconded by C. Smith. Ms. Greenway inquired whether Shemica is allowed to make the motion, if she is a member of the Finance Committee. Mr. Kelly advised that anyone on the Board is allowed to make the motion. VOTE: Unanimous.

Mr. O'Leary stated that the points that were made by Candy and Suzette are important and legitimate. He inquired of members of the Finance Committee whether they could take a look at the schedule and see what changes may need to be made. S. White, C. Greenway and S. Sheppard agreed that this would be done. Ms. White stated that she would contact Candy and Shemica to take a look at this. Mr. O'Leary stated that we are basically looking at ways to improve the timing of information and there seems to be ways to be able to adapt to that. He added that this should be resolved by summer so we can make changes to our meeting schedule, if needed.

b. Financial Report: B. McDermott reviewed the financial statement for November, 2020 with tentative data as of September 30, 2020. These figures were pulled October 16, 2020. Revenues are at 17%. FCPL received the first quarterly transfer from the county general fund of \$2.6 million and county in-kind revenue of \$43,000. As was stated last month, most county and state funding sources are received quarterly and the fund balance is recorded at the end of the fiscal year. As we move forward to expenditures, FCPL expenditures are at 18%. She pointed out that there has been an increase in library material purchases due to the increased demand for e-content. There was also an increase in contractual services due to the renewal of our hosting and web-based services. Also personnel and telephone expenditures increased as they are posted quarterly.

Ms. Greenway inquired whether FCPL is still paying for sheriff security. Ms. McDermott noted that FCPL has not paid out any expenditures for sheriff security for this fiscal year so far.

Ms. McDermott thereafter noted that grants awarded are at \$315,000. There have been no changes to the grants awarded since the previous month. FCPL has received notice of the Technology Act Grant Award in the amount of \$23,856 and staff is preparing documents for approval by the County Executive. The Technology Act Grant is a system-wide program for teens. The funds will secure mobile devices such as laptops, gaming systems, etc. to be used for teen programming throughout the county library system. Donations increased by \$10,000 from the previous month. All of the donations have been recorded and posted for the Read-A-Book Ball campaign. Other endowment revenue increased by \$151.00 from interest earned on the Churney and Nallin CDs. This brings the total to \$338,031.

Ms. McDermott thanked staff from the County Finance Department for presenting the Fiscal Year 2020 Audit to members of the FCPL Board of Trustees. She noted that they spent a considerable amount of time preparing the data that they presented to everyone this evening and she does appreciate that.

c. Learning From Home Initiatives: Rorie Cox-Steib presented a PowerPoint presentation that was compiled by Deb Spurrier and Rorie Cox-Steib on Learning from Home Initiatives. She noted that Deb Spurrier is unable to attend this evening's meeting. She is on a well-deserved vacation.

Ms. Cox-Steib noted that as soon as FCPS decided to do virtual learning this fall, FCPL went to work on finding new ways to support the community during this unprecedented time. It was important that FCPL continued to be a hub of learning and help families feel more confident with the schooling journey they were traveling through. The idea of learning from home was formed with the goal of providing easy-to-access resources, live opportunities to foster learning and enrichment learning tools to expand the classroom at home. This means that we broke this down into more digestible elements that she will go into further during the presentation. She noted that she will be touching on Brainfuse Now, Smart Start Kits, Greater Connection to Schools, Expanded Programming and Live Chat Service. Most of this initiative was launched at the beginning of October so while we don't have an intense amount of data, what we do have so far is very encouraging and makes us feel further connected with our community. Many of these elements are housed within FCPL's website and social media.

Brainfuse Help Now is an online resource that provides help and study resources for grades K-12. It connects with live tutors, there are videos that can be viewed, you can do practice tests and even play study games with Flashbulb. It has tutoring in English and Spanish from 2:00 – 11:00 p.m. every day. It has a writing lab for expert assistance and feedback. An individual can also get help with FAFSA applications and resume/job coaching. It is a great resource with online help in 11 languages including Italian and Portuguese. This is an awesome resource and she will share some statistics later this evening.

Ms. Cox-Steib noted that in our altered environment, even kindergarteners are learning virtually. When you recognize the importance of hands-on activities for young learners' brain development, we set out to create and circulate Smart Start Kits for pre-K through first grade that offered a hands-on, screen-free approach for early learners in math and literacy. These enrichment activities are made to spark excitement and learning through play, giving children and caretakers all the necessary tools for an afternoon of fun activities. Each kit features a set of manipulatives recommended by early learning professionals, games to reinforce skills and a tip sheet for caregivers. The fun thing about the Smart Start Kits is that they offer screen-free time and an opportunity to practice their motor skills that are so important to pre-K through first grade students. FCPL currently has 13 kits that are being utilized and we were able to use materials that the library already owned so there was no start-up cost for this except for minimal printing. The resources that are included in the kits are things that we would normally have on the floor for kids to interact with but since our buildings are basically closed, this is a way to get the children to interact with those enriching tools. The kits are managed at Thurmont and that is where they go through their quarantine and sanitation process to ensure the safety of the kits that are handed out to the public. She further noted that FCPL has received some great customer feedback about the kits so far.

Ms. Cox-Steib noted that FCPL just increased our connection and interaction with FCPS. We increased check-outs on the Student Success Cards to 10. Tutorial videos were created for the schools. These videos include such things as how to use the student success cards, what is curbside pick-up, how to use Brainfuse, etc. FCPL also provides a system-wide monthly newsletter to the schools which contains clickable links to tutorial videos. FCPL also offers virtual classroom visits which is not only a wonderful way for us to be connected during this strange time but it is also a great opportunity for us to see our customers and interact one-on-one with them. For many years, Youth Services Staff at FCPL have curated relationships with FCPS teachers and administrators. Traditional relationships included classroom visits, handing out FCPL information in-person to students and getting to see students one-on-one.

She thereafter displayed an image of one of the newsletters that was sent out to the schools. Each month there is a new, fun adventure highlighting library resources. Once we started this communication and connection, our virtual visits have really increased. We have been welcomed back to the virtual platform a lot more and based upon some of this communication, we sent out communication to the pre-schools about doing visits and story times for them. It has really been a great growth opportunity for everyone. We are continuing to build those bridges even during this different time.

FCPL has been offering special programming focusing on nature and STEM. A great example is our participation in the Maryland STEM Festival from October 19 – 23, 2020 and the curbside STEM kit giveaway. FCPL purchased 500 pre-packaged Wigglebot STEM kits from Futuremakers to engage pre-K through 12th grade students. Wigglebots is educational, enriching and fun for such a wide variety of students. Each kit contained instructions in both English and Spanish and we were able to give away all of the Wigglebots during that one week period. It was a very successful and engaging program. FCPL received a lot of wonderful feedback about this program. All 500 kits were given out and some branches ran out of kits by Wednesday but, through increased communication, we were able to shift things around throughout the County to make sure that those kits got where they needed to go. FCPL hosted a program at the end of the week on how to make them and encouraging people to share the Wigglebot that they made. FCPL had 25 families log into Zoom for the virtual program and 10 viewers watched along on Facebook LIVE. She displayed various photos of children with the Wigglebots they created.

She noted some of the successes FCPL has had with Learning from Home. FCPL received the October metrics for Brainfuse HelpNow and there were 140 unique visits to HelpNow Student Resources, 50 homework help/skill building visits and 11 unique visits for the JobNow section. The Smart Start Kits had 17 circulations in the first month with a 3-week check-out period. People are using them, engaging them, returning them, and getting more. The Live Chat has had 91 customer engagements. All of this data is only a month old and we have had a 96% customer satisfaction rating with 28% of the customers leaving a rating. FCPL had a pretty big social media boost and post to get the word out about Learn from Home and direct people to the website so they could interact with all of this great material. The Facebook post reached 4,469 people. The Wigglebots post reached 5,200 people and prompted 12 families to share photos of

their children making Wigglebots. Also, during this time period, Deb Spurrier became a media sensation as we had television spots, FNP articles and a radio spot on WFMD. She further noted that the Student Success Cards have increased during this time. The number of check-outs have increased as well. There are currently 1,289 items checked-out on Student Success Cards.

Ms. D'Agostino inquired whether FCPL pays for the Brainfuse HelpNow by user or flat fee. Mr. Kelly advised that FCPL pays a flat fee for the use of the program. Ms. D'Agostino further inquired whether schools are promoting this product because it sounds like a great option for those that may need help at home. Mr. Kelly noted that the newsletter that was created is very helpful in getting the word out but the marketing of this product will be an ongoing thing.

Mr. O'Leary noted that that he noticed that one of the comments was from a homeschooler and inquired whether that is an identifiable service and population for FCPL. Ms. Cox-Steib advised that FCPL has a number of close relationships with homeschool communities and groups and we send out a special newsletter to them too that is focused on the homeschooling Learn from Home. It has a lot of the same information about the resources that are offered. Mr. O'Leary inquired if we know how many home schoolers there are in the county. Rorie stated that she would look into that. Mr. O'Leary stated that it seems these resources would be particularly useful for that group. Ms. Greenway noted that there are a lot of people homeschooling due to COVID.

Ms. Sheppard inquired whether Wigglebots is an ongoing or one-time thing and noted that her boys would love it. Ms. Cox-Steib stated that the Wigglebots she spoke about was a one-time thing but our hope is that we could examine how that worked and look into how we can continue that kind of opportunity. Ms. Sheppard further inquired about the Smart Start Kits and noted that they were managed out of Thurmont. She questioned whether they can be brought to another library, if a patron requests that. Ms. Cox-Steib noted that you can put them on hold from any library.

C. Smith wanted to clarify that FCPL only has 13 Smart Start Kits. She stated that it doesn't sound like much. Ms. Cox-Steib stated that FCPL is just getting started with the Smart Start Kits. It is our hope that after they have been going for about 3 months, we will look at the hold ratio for the number of kits and, hopefully, be able to examine that data and decide from there whether we will need to increase the kits. Ms. Shemica inquired whether all 13 kits are the same. Ms. Cox-Steib stated that all of the kits are different.

BOARD QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS: S. Sheppard inquired whether there is a list of diverse books that can be provided to teachers who may have trouble finding books to utilize in their classroom. Mr. Kelly advised that staff put together some reading lists online and if there are particular titles they are looking for, we can work with the teachers. Each school has Media Specialists onsite and we maintain relationships with the schools as well. FCPL has staff that would be more than happy to put together book lists. He advised Ms. Sheppard that if she is aware of any teacher who is not finding what they need from the book list we provide on the website and want a little bit more one-on-one help, we would be more than happy to provide that. Ms. Sheppard inquired as to who the contact person would be. Mr. Kelly stated that they can get

in touch with him and he will put them in contact with branch staff closest to them. Mr. Kelly added that the Building Bridges book list is on FCPL's website and it includes very up-to-date titles but if there is anything else they need, they should contact him and he will be glad to help.

Ms. D'Agostino noted that she actually used the book list that Mr. Kelly referenced and noted that her kids have been reading all sorts of diverse books.

OTHER CITIZEN REMARKS: None

The next meeting will be held virtually on Wednesday, January 6, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.

S. Sheppard made a motion to adjourn the meeting; seconded by C. Greenway. No further discussion. VOTE: Unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. O'Leary', is written over a horizontal line.

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