

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

December 15, 2010

6:30 PM

MINUTES

Millie Burns who presided called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

President Burns announced that Arlene Roberts Grant had notified the board that she had a conflict and would arrive late, everyone else was expected and she presumed that those not present at 6:30 were unavoidably delayed, with the expectation that there would eventually be a quorum and out of respect for the staff in attendance, Ms. Burns chose to start the meeting.

Present were: Julie Mills Worthey, Arlene Roberts Grant and Danna Wood Webb, Trustees.

Also present: Mary Ellen Forte, WLS Trustee; Ruth Shire, President, Friends of the Mount Vernon Public Library; Gary Newman, CSEA Unit President; Arnold Linhardt, Strategic Services; Reverend Lawrence Clayton, Mt. Calvary CME Church; Ernie Garcia, Journal News; Elias Gootzeit, Attorney; Tamara Stewart, Rev. Arlinda Derrick and Clara Grant, patrons; Rachel Primavera, Toba Lumbantobing, Girl Scouts of Larchmont; Val Barden, Cheryl Berent, Debra Bracey Harris, Leroy Lea, Kevin Robinson, Cheryl Thomas, library staff; Opal Brown Lindsay, Director; Patricia Hansen, Interim Business Manager and Mary Harper, Administrative Assistant.

PERIOD OF PUBLIC EXPRESSION:

Gary Newman stated that this was the Board's most serious meeting and only 2 board members had arrived. Where are we, how did we get here in such a short period of time. This is the worst political mess.

Mr. Newman said that he had been talking to the Mayor about the library situation. People are angry about the poor fiscal administration of the library. Everyone on the Common Council made a point of expressing dissatisfaction with the library administration.

There is also anger about the library becoming a school district public library. He said that city hall feels that the library has turned into an ungrateful stepchild.

Gary Newman said that the Mayor believes there is no need to lay off anyone.

The library has not lived up to its commitment and at the 11th hour, the city is hearing nothing from the library. The Mayor does not see the library making any effort.

The stress over antagonism between the library staff and the administration was evident at last night's meeting.

There is a possibility of more money for the library, but a greater possibility there is not.

Gary Newman said that it is the union's recommendation that the library push the date of the vote on the school district public library to April.

He suggested that the administration ask the State for a variance, so that the library would not have to be open 55 hours per week.

Tamara Stewart said that at least a dozen people have asked her why the library would have to close on December 31, 2010 when they have money.

Ms. Stewart said that she has had a lot of conversations with people in the community. There is a lot of support for the library, but a lack of confidence in the library leadership.

Elias Gootzeit said that closing the library in a community of this size could be throwing down the gauntlet. The rest of the world hopes we beat each other up, so we don't have time for them

Mr. Gootzeit said that he is inviting the leadership to figure out how to save the building. Take this crisis and use it. Stand up.

Ruth Shire said that she had met with Opal Brown Lindsay and offered to help.

Cheryl Thomas said that these are critical times for everyone, whether they are working or not. Every year city hall gave less and less.

She said that it is sad to see people laid off, while other people are being brought in.

These are critical times and only two board members are at the table. Nothing can be solved if everyone is not here and not being truthful.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT:

Millie Burns said at the meeting on December 22, 2010, the comptroller and the city council spoke about the history of alternate financial regulations stemming from the library's hybrid status.

Ms. Burns said that she has only been on the board one year and does not have the history of the Mount Vernon Public library. From prior minutes there seemed to be a creative way of managing money that was sanctioned by the comptroller.

Danna Wood Webb said that all checks submitted to the library are also signed by the comptroller.

Millie Burns said that the library is operating above board and is approved and sanctioned by the city.

There is a lot of misinformation and lack of information.

Ms. Burns said that she had a meeting with the Mayor and he made it clear that he gets how important the library is. The mayor said that he would arrange for a meeting with the comptroller, the city council and himself. He said that the city council should not have given the response they did.

The Mayor said that the meeting would take place before the Board of Estimate meeting. The meeting has not yet been held. Ms. Burns is trying, but has not yet gotten a commitment.

Millie Burns said that she attended the Mayors Chat held at Allen Memorial Church of God in Christ on December 8th where he made stinging comments about the library.

Ms. Burns said that she will meet with the Friends of the Mount Vernon Public Library and the Mount Vernon Public library Foundation for review.

Millie Burns said that information is not getting out in a timely fashion. She is committed to getting information on the library website.

Ms. Burns said that she joined ALA to avail herself of advocacy.

The library is forced to follow its charter. The Regents will revoke it if it is not followed.

Millie Burns said that the more meetings she goes to, she feels the information they are getting is incorrect. With confusion and animosity, no one is going to vote for the library

Gary Newman said that there is total alienation between the city and the library, it does not matter how it happened. The point is moot. The Board voted on a school district public library.

Mr. Newman said that the institution is a place of poison.

The only thing important to the administration in three years is to show the staff who is in control. The bitter irony is that the library has never been less in control.

Gary Newman continued that the Mayor picked up on the animosity between the staff and the director. People are being made sick by this woman.

Mr. Newman said lets go to the voters to vote for the budget to save jobs. Every employee is worried about their job. The director is not worried.

The library wanted to go to the voters, so let's go.

Millie Burns said that the library is going to do this after we have educated the public.

Gary Newman said that there is going to be all kinds of education going on.

Mr. Newman suggested that the director was afraid to take the budget out to vote. He said that he suspected that Mrs. Lindsay was a bully and like most bullies she was a coward. She would not take the budget out to vote until she paid the consultant \$50, 000.

Ms. Burns reiterated that the budget would be taken out to vote after educating the public.

At the WLS Executive meeting on November 30th, Chris Hansen was accepted as the new WLS Trustee to represent Mount Vernon. Current Mount Vernon WLS Trustee Mary Ellen Forte's term has expired.

Trustees, Millie Burns and Julie Mills Worthey, along with director, Lindsay had a meeting with the CSEA Executive Board. They are getting close to resolving the grievances.

They are hopeful the information will be sent to the union by December 16th.

Tamara Stewart said that she appreciated the information that Millie Burns had shared.

Ms. Stewart said that with specific reference to the email about the library closing on December 31, 2010; with 3.5 million dollars, she is not clear why the library would close on that date.

Patricia Hansen said that the Budget of 3.5 million dollars is really a budget of 3.15 million when the deficit for 2010 is accrued.

The library would have to layoff 8 people by December 31, 2010 and the library would fall below the minimum amount of hours.

One scenario discussed was to either go three months into the year and close or close immediately. The library can operate through May 31st, but there will be 2.2 million in expenditures whether the library is open or not. Unless the city comes in and helps, there will be salaries for only 20 people.

Tamara Stewart asked isn't May 31, 2011 better than December 31, 2010.

Mrs. Hansen said that unless the city comes in and helps, there are only salaries for 20 people.

Opal Lindsay said that the library cannot legally function with only 20 full time staff.

Mrs. Lindsay said that the procedure is to balance the budget and return it by January. We must act on the amount we are given. If we cannot balance the budget, the staff would be gone and there would be no one to run the building.

Gary Newman said, in 2010 if the library had only spent the money it was given, they would not have a deficit. Maybe the library should have acted in 2010.

Patricia Hansen said that the library was not informed until 2010 that the retro monies would be coming out of the 2010 budget

She said that six retirement jobs would be eliminated by December 31, 2010.

Gary Newman said that there is still a deficit.

Rev. Clayton said that this was his first board meeting and he did not know how the library got to the point of closing on December 31, 2010.

Opal Lindsay said that the library is not closing, but trying to stay open longer than the monies would allow.

Reverend Clayton said that there is a huge gap in funding. There should be some kind of group to secure money. He asked if there were a grant writing group.

He asked how the library got such a high deficit, where they are cutting families and services. He said that he is hearing a lot of back and forth.

Rev. Clayton said he is trying to figure out what the board and the director are doing.

Opal Lindsay said that when she came on board, the library had a huge deficit. She sat with the finance department and asked for debt forgiveness.

The library moved on into negotiations with the staff and raises were put aside in a contingency fund for 2 years.

Every year the city gets a line item budget. Every decision regarding finances is passed through the director.

In 2009 the library was informed if they did not use the retro money they would lose it.

Negotiations were closed in 2009 and the budget was walked over to city hall.

There was a cut in the budget in 2009 for 2010.

Patricia Hansen said that the library was left with the impression that the retro active money would be there in 2010.

Opal Lindsay said that the library included the funds for the retro active salaries in the 2010 budget. The library was told that the retro payments were covered. On November 9, 2010 the library was informed that the 2009 retro pay would be coming out of the 2010 budget.

Rev. Clayton asked what is being spent that should not have been spent. Were there any new hires in 2009. Patricia Hansen said that she was a new hire. Rev. Clayton asked was her position necessary. The Board said yes.

He said that it looks like the library is ready to cut services. He asked if there is a grant writing staff.

Mary Ellen Forte said that the problem with money that comes from grants is that it is targeted for specific things. The library cannot look for grants to bolster the budget completely.

Millie Burns said that general operating support is typically very difficult to get. Donors want something special that aligns with their interest. She said that she has spoken to the WLS President about alternative funds.

The Mayor has offered to work with her on alternative funding.

Danna Wood Webb said that in the past, there was a grant writer for the city who could target specific grants for the library. The Mayor talked about targeting grants specifically for the library, but was not successful.

She questioned if hiring a grant writer was the best use of funds.

Millie Burns said that she wants to educate people about what the library does; to change the paucity of information.

She said that she does not use the library because she has access to academic libraries. Even she does not have the information she should have, but she supports the library.

If she does not have the information then imagine the public.

Its charter will be revoked if the library does not follow the state mandate.

WLS TRUSTEE REPORT

Mary Ellen Forte said that four full time employees at WLS have had lost their positions.

She said that WLS receives money from the state; the money is not always forthcoming.

The bookmobile is no longer running and a number of services are being cut. In the economy as a whole, every level of service is being cut. The budget from the county is being cut.

FOUNDATION REPORT:

Mrs. Lindsay said that she spoke to the foundation president. A meeting is planned for January 10, 2011 with the foundation, the library board president and the director.

STRATEGIC SERVICES:

Lobbyist Arnie Linhardt discussed his work with several municipalities to get government grants and earmarks. He said that he is a former resident of Mount Vernon and has used the library extensively.

He initially worked with the library to get funding for Westlaw.

Mr. Linhardt stated that he would like to work with the library through the foundation. In the past he has secured grants from state politicians for repairs to the library.

He said that Congressman Eliot Engle already knows about the library.

Julie Mills Worthey asked Mr. Linhardt's opinion on how the pending governance issue and the need to raise funds for the library would mesh. The goal is to prepare the voting public to have a favorable result.

Mr. Linhardt said though not an expert in Public Relations, he thinks that everything would mesh together if the library is moving ahead.

When New Rochelle Public Library moved to a School District Public Library the funding actually opened up.

Mrs. Mills Worthey questioned whether the efforts would be impacted because the library is not yet in that system of government. Mr. Linhardt said that they shouldn't as long as the money is funded through a non-profit.

Mr. Linhardt said that he will send a proposal to the director.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Opal Lindsay said that when the new administration came in the library had a bad relationship with the city.

Her directive was to mend the relationships with the city and with WLS, which the library had no relationship with.

Her first step was to go to speak to the comptroller's office, to get a clear understanding of where we were with the budget.

2010 is the only time any questions came up. She said that there were other issues where the staff could have been laid off and other things were tried. This year was much different. She said that she believed that everything was cleared up in 2007 and only found out in November 2010 it wasn't.

Mrs. Lindsay said that she wanted the public to know what was going on. The library needs to present a balanced budget.

Mrs. Lindsay said that she wanted the city to know what was going on. She said that they are not planning to close the library, but wanted the community to know the potential.

Millie Burns said that they wanted the community to know there is the potential to close the library. They are not crying wolf.

Tamara Stewart said that at the Mayor's chat, the Mayor felt that it was presumptuous of the library to say it was shutting its doors if they were receiving money. The Mayor felt that the library should remain open while it is seeking additional funds.

Ms. Burns said that she wants Tamara Stewart to have the information to speak as clearly as possible. The entire story has to be told.

Julie Mills Worthey said that there had not been a meeting leading up to the contract closure where the library was not told that funds were available. The library was encouraged to settle the contract or the city would take the funds.

Patricia Hansen said that the 2008 and 2009 surplus was taken by the city. The library was under the impression that the money was being reserved by the city.

Gary Newman suggested that the library knew about its budget problems at the beginning of the year, but was hoping they would get money from the city.

He heard instead the director went to civil service and attempted to make all employees part-time. This statement was denied by the Board of Trustees and the Director.

Cheryl Thomas said that she attends the civil service meetings each month and this was mentioned.

FINANCIAL REPORT:

Patricia Hansen said that no bills were being paid tonight. The library can meet its payroll that is all it can do.

Gary Newman questioned why the library has exceeded its electronic budget by \$26,000.

There were questions regarding expenditures in the maintenance department.

OLD BUSINESS:

There were questions about the timeline for the through the years grant. Mrs. Lindsay said that they would not meet until after the holidays.

Opal Brown Lindsay has requested a list of names for participation in the Food Bank of Westchester program.

Opal Lindsay said that estimates have been sent to the city for completion of the capital projects at the library. The city says that they are reviewing them.

NEW BUSINESS:

Rachel Primavera a Girl Scout from Troop 2522 of Larchmont gave a presentation to the Board about a landscaping project she wishes to do at the library in order to complete her Gold Award.

The project involves planting and landscaping on the 1st avenue side of the library.

The project should begin in the spring of 2011.

Ms. Primavera will do the fundraising and a landscape architect will assist her with the plans. The company that assists with the fundraising and the Girl Scout Council will be in charge of distributing the money and supplies for this project.

The board requested a proposal with a time line for start and completion of the project as well as illustrations.

Rachel Primavera said that another scout from the same troop is interested in doing a theme room in the library. Several other members of the troop are also interested in doing projects.

Tamara Stewart asked if the proposed budget does not change will the library be open on January 3, 2011. Millie Burns said that she could not answer right now. Maybe the city will find more money and the 3.5 million dollars will not be an issue. Stay tuned and be optimistic.

Gary Newman said if the library closes it's because it chooses to close. There are all kinds of tactics that could be used.

MINUTES:

Julie Mills Worthey moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of November 17, 2010 as amended. The motion was seconded by Danna Wood Webb. The motion carried unanimously.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

The Board entered Executive Session at 8:50 pm.

The Board returned to Public Session at 10:50 pm. No decisions were recorded.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 10:51 pm.

Respectfully submitted

Secretary