

Annual Board Meeting Croton Free Library April 24, 2025

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Croton Free Library, held on Thursday, April 24, 2025 at The Croton Free Library, Ottinger Room, 171 Cleveland Drive, Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520.

PRESENT

Library Board of Trustees:

Susan Ranis, *President* (29)
Justin Johnson, *Vice-President* (28)
Barry Feinberg, *Treasurer* (28)
Bethany Basile (27)
Adam Decker (28)
Leslie Ellis (29)
Kate Fabian (28)
Mayla Hsu (26)
Laura Jaeger (26)
Margaret Mahoney (26)
Marianne Merola (27)

Library Director: Jesse Bourdon

CALL TO ORDER (Susan Ranis)

The meeting was called to order at 7:03pm.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT (Susan Ranis)

This is the time of year when we reflect on what we've accomplished as a library. And in chaotic times like these, it's even more important to pause, take a deep breath, and remind ourselves who we are, what we stand for, and where we left our keys (probably under the stack of overdue books).

The library continues to offer the same beloved services and programs that the community has come to expect. Jesse and his team make it all look so effortless, it's like watching Ginger Rogers dance backwards in heels—they juggle every day events like rampaging toddler story time, a cranky printer, and the forever green, "I know the cover is blue but I don't know the author or title" with grace and the determined mission that no request is too small and everyone who walks through the doors are treated with respect and dignity.

We're endlessly grateful that our community continues to answer our annual appeal and shows up for our book and bake sales like it's a Marvel movie premiere. In a world online and screen-saturated, the library offers a rare and precious thing: real, face-to-face community... with no ads and less buffering.

We're also stretching on the board—and I don't mean yoga on the lawn—even though that's been done. But big picture bold idea stretching. As we launch our plans to renovate and renew the library (renew—see what I did there?) we formed a new committee that includes real live community members, and hired an outside

fundraiser (letting go of the dream that Laura and Justin could bake cookies until we reached \$7 million—given the price of vanilla) We had rubrics. We had interviews. We had enough thoughtful questions to rival a precocious toddler.

As an organization that serves the community, we've had to think long and hard about renovating during times of rising costs, uncertain grants, and a general sense of "what fresh chaos is this?" But to quote every nautical movie ever made—we can't change the wind, but we can adjust our sails. We'll adjust, pivot, and even bedazzle those sails as needed.

This board is made up of dedicated community members, and the library reflects that heart. The library is our home base, our village square.. A building is only as good as the people inside it—and we want to make sure those people keep coming in, smiling, learning, and buying a cupcake (or two! No judging!).

Thanks as always to Jesse—he's the guardian of best practices, the voice of reason—while balancing public needs, staff sanity, and the board's existential questions with grace, clarity, and a marvelously reliable supply of G2 pens.

To our board—thank you. You share your prodigious talents with generosity, integrity, and a deep love of our library. I learn from all of you constantly.

In the words of Mel Brooks—hope for the best, expect the worst. Whatever comes our way—chaos or cupcakes—we've got each other—and a mission worth showing up for—which I'll paraphrase: to encourage the exploration of ideas and serve as a gathering and learning center for Croton residents. Books still change lives and people still need places of connection. And there is no app, no algorithm, that beats a welcoming smile. And a cupcake.

Here's to the next year.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Renovation Advisory Committee (Justin Johnson)

In May 2024, the Croton Free Library Board voted to create an ad hoc advisory committee that could change, as needs were assessed. The fluid nature of the committee would allow the renovation advisory committee to focus on detail work to free the board from having to devote meetings to these. The ad hoc committee would change in membership as different skill sets were needed during the beginning of the exploration of renovation.

The ad hoc committee initially would be created with 2 board members and 3 community members as well as the ex officio members of the board president and library director. During the summer and fall of 2024, this initial committee created a renovation timeline, helped articulate future needs such as offsite storage or individuals who would need to be hired, and discussed a renovation process to share with the board. This initial committee ended its work in the Winter of 2025.

A second committee was formed of all board members with the goal of screening fundraising candidates to help us create a fundraising plan. The second committee consisting of 4 board members created two rubrics to be used during the screening and interviewing processes, questions to be asked for potential candidates, and a series of screening interviews narrowing the candidate pool to 2 potential candidates to be shared with the library director and president. This work was completed in January of 2025 as Changing Our World became our consultant.

The team will continue as needed throughout the renovation process.

Team Members Phase 1 were- Justin, Mayla, Meredith, Melanie, and Ethan.
Phase 2 were- Bethany, Kate, Mayla, and Justin.

Long Range Planning Committee (Adam Decker)

The Long Range Planning Committee is responsible for thinking about the library's long term goals, for working on the official long range plan and for our libraries documents and policies.

In the past year, our Committee has really worked hard at all three of these responsibilities. We completed four new policies to add to our growing list of library policies, we amended the by-laws to better reflect our current and future operations, we reviewed and modified our long range plan as we do every year and we are currently working on a new Financial Policy which will put in one place a comprehensive document asserting our financial policies from purchasing to credit cards to our audit process.

I want to thank all of our committee members for their work and their insights in the past year. There are two things I love about our committee that continue on when we bring things to the Board, the first is the hard work we all do to think about what works in the library and what we can improve and what will change as we go forward, and second is the spirit of collaboration and respect that we as a team bring to these documents and which I believe shows through in our finalized policies and in the library itself.

Fundraising Committee (Laura Jaeger)

Our fundraising efforts raised over \$46,000 this year for our library!

Annual Appeal letter

- Annual appeal letter went out in Fall 2024
- Artwork was graciously provided by Emily Bicht.
- We raised a little over \$28k from the appeal, which is the most we've ever made.
 - There were 255 donations, which included approximately 10 matching donations (Benevity).
 - The Benevity donations alone totalled almost \$4k.
 - Donations made via Paypal continue to rise, with 32% of donors giving electronically (vs. check).

Book & Bake Sale Fundraisers

- Two Book & Bake sales were held in 2024 after our last Annual meeting (May and November). Total we raised \$18,034.66 from both sales.
 - The May 2024 sale generated \$8,934.66, which was about \$1,700 less than the previous year.
 - The November 2024 sale generated \$9,100, which was about \$1,100 less than the previous year.
 - Please note, we had much less inventory for the November sale, given Art

Almeida's surgery, and our inability to collect book donations for a lengthy period of time.

We have our May 2025 sale coming up May 17-18, 2025.

Thanks for the many volunteers that assist with these efforts, particularly Art Almeida, our tireless curator.

Thanks to *Baked By Susan*, who continues to donate Baked Goods for each Book & Bake Sale.

Thank you to Jesse, Gwen, and the entire library staff for working with us so seamlessly and providing guidance and support as we planned and executed our fundraising activities. And thank you to the whole fundraising committee – Bethany, Kate, Mayla and Susan, and the board members who tirelessly worked on our fundraising efforts.

TREASURER'S REPORT - STATUS OF FINANCIALS (Barry Feinberg)

To date, the finances of the library have been stable during the current fiscal year – 2024 -2025. We are not anticipating any change as we come to the end of the fiscal year in June.

Finance Committee (Barry Feinberg)

During the year the Treasurer and the Finance Committee met before each monthly Board meeting with two basic tasks.

The first is to review the check register to ensure that all payments to vendors and suppliers to the library are legitimate. This includes direct deposit payments and those made by paper check. The register is also checked to ensure that there are no missing checks, and they are in numerical order.

The second task is to review the financial reports for the month. Each budget line item is compared to the budgeted income and expense goal through the current month to note budget items that are on target, under or over budget.

Over the year, most line items are usually close to the target. In the income category, however, since our tax levy revenue is paid only twice a year, and not monthly, the goal is not met until the second payment is made. But once paid, our income goal is met. We also note fundraising income, donations and grants.

On the expense side, under or over budget items are noted and mentioned at the board meetings for the Director to offer explanations as to why this is the case and what changes, if any are suggested. For example, during the current fiscal year, it has been noted that expenses associated with employee insurance, retirement, utilities, and maintenance have been greater than projected. The director will be taking this into account in the next fiscal year's budget.

One addition has been made to the reporting format of the monthly financials. At the

suggestion of Bethany Basile, a member of the finance committee and a board member, all reports now carry last fiscal year's year to date figures. This can provide a comparison of budget performance this year compared to last year for many line items.

There were two other tasks. The first was the review of the audit for the library. The Treasurer reviewed the draft audit and pointed out to the finance committee and board several corrections that were needed in the document. Subsequently a meeting was held with the auditor, director and treasurer and the corrections were discussed. A revised version was sent back, reviewed, and presented to the finance committee and board for approval, which was done.

Second, the director presented a draft version of the coming fiscal year's budget to the finance committee and the board. The draft was reviewed and discussed in detail, suggestions made. The director has since made changes and recently sent a revised version to everyone. The revision will be reviewed at the upcoming finance and board meetings in early May. It is anticipated that it will be approved then. No major changes in the library's finances are anticipated during the balance of the fiscal year ending at the end of June.

And finally, Bethany Basile has agreed to be Treasurer beginning in the next fiscal year in July. Thank you, Bethany! Barry Feinberg, current treasurer, and who has been so for several years, will stay on the finance committee.

Building and Grounds Committee (Leslie Ellis)

Lighting in the Ottinger Room

The main item on the Building and Ground's agenda this year has been the need to fix the lighting in the Ottinger Room. Margaret, Art Committee chair, met with the committee in December and suggested that Jayne Whitman, a lighting consultant, might be able to advise us. Jayne worked with Margaret and Jesse and discussed versions of LED lighting and mountings. Jesse has been in touch with the electrician and is waiting to hear about pricing. There is a possibility that we can mount the lights and paint the Ottinger Room at the same time.

Lawyers

I looked into three law firms: Whiteman, Osterman and Hanna, Girvin and Ferlazzo, and Randy L. Braun Esq. I spoke to Casey Wayman at Whiteman, Osterman and Hanna. She pairs lawyers with clients. She will be a good person to follow up with should we need a lawyer familiar with libraries and construction projects.

Art Committee (Margaret Mahoney)

The Art Committee of the Board of Trustees of the Croton Free Library coordinates the art exhibits in the Ottinger Room. We offer local artists the opportunity to showcase their work, and we provide the community with the opportunity to experience art in person, on a regular basis, enhancing the community's appreciation and understanding of art in its various forms. Six artists are selected to exhibit for a two month period each year.

This year's schedule of artists:

- May - June 2024: Stephanie Marcus, paintings
- July - August 2024: Kelly Schulze, *Quench: Abstract Images in the Natural World*, photographs
- September - October 2024: Beth DeWit, paintings
- November - December 2024: Emily Bicht, *Dream Homes*, paintings
- January - February 2025: Jim Maciel, *Barns*, watercolors
- March - April 2025: Kendra Shedenhelm, *Before After Between Collage Portraits*, collage and drawing

The work of the Art Committee continued as usual in 2024-2025. I am happy to report that four of the six artists sold work and donated 20% of their sales to the Library, a total of \$300. The money is deposited in the Fundraising account. In my thank yous to the artists, I emphasize the fact that their donations help fund passes to art museums.

Last summer, I worked with Laura Jaeger, chair of the Fundraising Committee, to coordinate the Annual Appeal art with the artist exhibiting in the Ottinger Room in November and December, the period when the Appeal is out in the community. This was a positive experience for the Library and the artist. As a result, we've asked the November - December 2025 artist, Lauren Davis, to create or donate art for the 2025 Annual Appeal.

This year I reached out to the Croton-Harmon High School Advanced Placement Art & Design teacher, Jodi Berger, to coordinate an exhibit of her students' work in the Ottinger Room in June. I am excited by this because it is a terrific opportunity to showcase the work of young artists to the greater Croton community, but it is proving to be a challenge, as they are students without the funds to properly frame their work and communication through a third party makes it difficult to gauge the students' enthusiasm for the exhibition. We shall see how this year goes and perhaps try to make it an annual event.

The LED lighting of the walls on which the art is displayed has been dimming and is beginning to fail completely. Jesse Bourdon, Library Director, the Buildings & Grounds Committee, and I have been working on a replacement solution, but it is proving to be a slow process. Hopefully there will be new (if not improved) lighting by this time next year. The exhibiting artists have been very understanding.

Applications to exhibit continue to come in through the website, through recommendations from current exhibitors and community members, and by outreach by Art Committee members. Lists of these artists are maintained on the shared drive. The committee attempts to schedule artists about a year in advance, but considering the anticipated renovation project, the future exhibition schedule is a little hazy.

Ad Hoc Committee: Google Drive Project (Kate Fabian)

This year an Ad Hoc committee was formed to implement the Google suite of products to support Board Trustees. This included the activation of Gmail accounts, creation and outfitting of a shared board Google calendar, and the building of a robust Google Drive system.

After the structure was put in place, training was provided to all Board Trustees on these products.

Trustees have been instructed to use this Google suite for all board-related business, including

using their new trustee Gmail as their (only) board-communications email address, and to actively update and reference the board Google calendar for all related meetings and activities.

A folder structure in Google Drive was created using Shared Drives so that it is easy to navigate and will allow all documentation to be available to future Board Trustees. Drive folders are to be used not only for the creation and storing of new materials, but also for the uploading of historic content. All board members have been asked to locate past board-related materials from their personal computer drives, and to move them to this shared Board Google Drive so we may maintain this history for future generations of library trustees.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT (Jesse Bourdon)

Good evening and thank you all for being here tonight.

Since November, we've seen a sharp rise in challenges to intellectual freedom, efforts to limit access to information, and increasing pressures placed on library staff and institutions. These are sobering developments that remind us all how vital our work is.

But I'm proud to say that here in Croton, we continue to stand strong. We are fortunate to have a community that not only values its library but shows up for it by checking out material, attending events, volunteering, and donating funds and support. Support that has allowed us to move forward through this ever shifting landscape.

This past year, we continued to focus on access, engagement, and innovation. We deepened our programming, sustained and finalized our fine-free policy, expanded language and literacy support for groups in need, and engaged patrons of all ages.

As we look toward the 2025–2026 fiscal year, I must say that this is the tightest budget we've assembled in recent memory. Despite the constraints, we have crafted a forward-thinking plan that protects our core services while ensuring long-term stability, especially with a potential renovation on the horizon.

One of the most important changes is the inclusion of funding for a full-time Head of Reference Services. This is part of our strategic staffing shift of placing highly skilled professionals in departmental leadership roles. We've already seen the benefits of this approach with our Heads of Collection Development and User Engagement and Head of Circulation Services. This latest addition will continue to enhance our public service and outreach capabilities.

Looking ahead, we plan to create a similar role for Children's Services, which remains a key priority. We've been lucky to have strong staff support in this area, but a dedicated leader will be crucial... particularly as we approach any future renovations.

To balance this budget without exceeding the tax cap, we made difficult decisions like eliminating our education and travel budget, so shifting support for professional development to our fundraising committee on a case-by-case basis. We are slightly reducing our collection budget in anticipation of the renovation since it makes little sense to increase acquisitions if items may end up in storage. And we made targeted reductions to programming, ensuring many changes were backed by alternative funding in one way or another... Mainly by allocating additional support from our fundraising reserves. Don't forget to vote on the Library and school district budget on Tuesday, May 20 from 6-9 at the High School.

Now onto our potential renovation. We recently completed the first phase of our planning process with Butler, Rowland and Mays Architectural Firm, and for the first time, we now have a conceptual design to work from. These designs are inspiring. They speak to a future in which our building better supports the way we work, gather, and learn.

We've also begun working with Cassandra Thayer from Changing Our World to shape a comprehensive fundraising campaign. Her guidance will be critical as we map out what's possible, what's needed, and how we can get there together.

We're reminded every day of this building's deep value... and also of its very real limitations. Leaks. Failing systems. Inflexible (and loud) spaces. We don't know yet exactly what this renovation will look like or how soon we can make it happen. But we do know that we have a board and community behind us, and that gives us the strength and clarity to keep moving forward.

One of the most exciting projects launching on June 1st (fingers crossed) is our new Library of Things.

This initiative, led by Gwen Glazer and funded through a grant secured with the help of Assemblywoman Dana Levenberg, will allow Croton Free Library cardholders to borrow items beyond just books and movies... things like a sewing machine, an air quality monitor, jumper cables, an infrared thermometer, a bike repair kit, and more.

It's about promoting creativity, sustainability, and shared access... offering tools that empower people to try new skills or solve everyday problems, without having to make a purchase.

We believe this service will be transformative for many patrons and set a precedent for what modern libraries can provide.

The next year will bring challenges, no doubt. But it will also bring new ideas, new partnerships, and new experiences for our community. Thank you all for being a part of it.

***PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Members of the public may address the Board of Trustees only during the Public Comment portion of the board meeting and must identify themselves by name when they begin to speak. Comments are limited to no more than three minutes per person. The number of public comments per board meeting may be limited due to time constraints.*

There were no public comments.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, upon motion duly made, seconded, and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned at 7:28pm.

Laura Jaeger, Secretary