

# Annual Board Meeting Croton Free Library April 25, 2024

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Croton Free Library, held on Thursday, April 25, 2024 at The Croton Free Library, Ottinger Room, 171 Cleveland Drive, Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520.

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## **PRESENT**

### Library Board of Trustees:

Susan Ranis, *President* (24)  
Marianne Merola, *Vice-President* (27)  
Barry Feinberg, *Treasurer* (28)  
Lynn Kauderer, *Secretary* (28)  
Jane Beller (27)  
Adam Decker (28)  
Leslie Ellis (24)  
Mayla Hsu (26)  
Laura Jaeger (26)  
Justin Johnson (28)  
Margaret Mahoney (26)

Library Director: Jesse Bourdon

Community Members: Robert Reardon

New Board Members: Bethany Basile, Kate Fabian

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## **CALL TO ORDER** (Susan Ranis)

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

## **APPROVAL OF 2023 ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES** (Susan Ranis)

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting held on April 27, 2023, having been distributed in advance of the meeting and their reading having been dispensed with, were unanimously approved.

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## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT** (Susan Ranis)

As we look back on the year lived, we'll notice that the library's activities never exist just in the past—they always point the way to the future. The book and bake sales, Croton Reads, Battle of the Books, monthly blood drives—all ways that the library engages the community—and the programs may change or grow or morph but the idea of engagement will not.

The annual appeal remained steady, but we tweaked the mailing and discovered that spending a little more on the list will reach more people. I think I learned that it's always important to ask questions, and not just do what has worked before. Our annual appeal will hopefully provide a jumping place for future fundraising and connections to the community.

We all got new emails! While there has been a learning curve, it's been great to have everyone on the same system, and sharing documents on our Google Drive. That will only get better—and will help us create the archive of our old documents and manage the new ones.

The Library engaged with Banned Book week with members of our school board, Superintendent and asst. Superintendent participating in reading aloud banned or challenged books. And Banned Books are not history, they are now—and we will continue to recognize and face the difficulties that libraries have with an uptick in the challenges to books in collections.

A year ago, after a thoughtful and thorough search process we signed a contract with the architect Butler Rowland Mays to create a master plan for a building renovation. One year ago already! So the past—but a very large step into the future.

We will continue our work on the renovation project, hopefully finalizing plans with the architect. As part of our leap into the unknown, we are forming a new group, the Library Renovation Advisory Committee. This group will be formed of board members, the director, and members of the community as we look to hire the professionals we need and outline the schedule that will make renovation real.

I want to thank everyone for being such ethical, decent and talented colleagues. We are all volunteers, and it is the rare group that consistently rows in the same direction. I am truly grateful to be with a group of people that all have the same goal—to oversee a library that does the best for its community.

And as always, a huge declaration of thanks to Jesse. There are 11 of us, and one of them, which should be remembered as we ask for his time and attention. Jesse always conducts himself as a professional, and he has a true philosophy and belief of what a library should offer to the public—openness, as little friction as possible, and the services that do the most within the budget he oversees.

Thank you, and here's to our new year.

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

As we approach the end of the fiscal year, our income and expenditures are in line with our budget estimates. Due to the prudent handling of expenditures against budget by our director Jesse, we will finish the fiscal year in good financial shape.

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT** (Jesse Bourdon)

In the past year, we've accomplished significant milestones while embracing changes that reflect our commitment to serving our community better.

One of our major decisions was to officially go fine-free. We recognize that fines can be a barrier to access for many in our community, and by eliminating them, we've made our library more inclusive and welcoming to all. While technically we have not been collecting or enforcing fines since the pandemic, this makes the practice official and these changes will now be reflected at the point of checkout.

Following up to my focus last year on enhancing safety within our library, we recently replaced our camera monitoring system. This upgrade not only helps in ensuring the security of our patrons and staff but also contributes to creating a safer and more comfortable environment for everyone who walks through our doors. It also... finally... gives us eyes in some much needed places in the building, like both entrances and our programming areas. Another vital safety initiative we undertook over the past year was offering Narcan training to all our patrons and staff. Thanks to a partnership with Senator Harckham and the Office of Addiction Services and Support, we were able to provide this life-saving training, empowering our community to respond effectively to opioid overdoses. This initiative underscores our commitment to being not just a repository of knowledge but a hub of support and safety for our community.

Now let me take a moment to briefly reflect on some of the highlights from 2023. We saw a remarkable 6% increase in circulation, a 13% increase in visitors, and a 22% increase in reference transactions. Additionally, our programs flourished with a 30% increase in programs offered and a staggering 77% increase in program attendance. These numbers are a testament to the growing importance of our library in our community.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the incredible dedication of our staff and volunteers. A big kudos to our amazing staff for their exceptional dedication and professionalism. Dealing with patrons, (especially when they're unhappy), can be challenging, but our team handles it with grace, empathy, and efficiency. Their commitment to facilitating the needs of our patrons in a helpful and polite manner truly sets them apart. As for our volunteers...words cannot express the gratitude I have for their tireless efforts. From arranging and organizing shelves to leading community groups and workshops, tutoring elementary-school students, restocking our Seed Exchange, our volunteers are the lifeblood of our library. They've contributed countless hours of their time and talents to make our library a better place for everyone. I'm standing in front of several of them right now. We deeply appreciate everyone's unwavering commitment and selflessness to the Library and the community.

Along those lines, I'd like to take a moment to extend a heartfelt thank you and bid farewell to two outgoing board members, Lynn Kauderer and Jane Beller. We appreciate both their dedication to their positions and their passion for the Library. Lynn and Jane, your contributions have been invaluable, and you will be greatly missed. We wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

Looking ahead to the upcoming year, we are excited about the possibilities that lie before us. After years of meetings and discussions, we've finally started the beginning phases of designing and reimagining our future library. We have listened carefully to the feedback of our patrons, and we're

incorporating their ideas and suggestions into our plans. We have a long list of needs, many of which were pointed out by our patrons in a recent survey, but also a list of wants that will carry us long into the future.

Some of these upgrades would include green initiatives as we strive to make the library more environmentally friendly and sustainable. We aim to expand our meeting spaces to accommodate the growing demand for community gatherings and events and we envision a more open layout, creating a welcoming and flexible space for learning, collaboration, and discovery.

May is always an important month for us because we have the book and bake sale AND budget vote, usually within the same week. So mark your calendars for the two-day sale on May 18 and 19 and the Library and School Budget vote on Tuesday, May 21 from 6-9 at the high school. Regarding our budget for 2024-25, we are asking for an increase of \$24,400 or 2.6%, which still falls within the tax cap requirement. As usual, the largest portion of this increase will go towards staff salaries and benefits. However, this year, we are excited to announce that we are able to offer an additional managerial role should the vote pass. This new role will help us further streamline our operations and better serve our community.

Lastly, saving the best for last, I'm happy to announce that starting next Wednesday, the Library will begin taking donations again. I've been in talks with Bay State Books, who have taken over Discover Books operations, and currently they intend on taking the same books and volume that we have had previously. Book sale clean-ups may not be as streamlined but at least we can open our doors up again for donations for the foreseeable future.

Thank you all for your continued support, and here's to another year of growth, learning, and community at the Croton Free Library.

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## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Finance Committee (Barry Feinberg)**

We continue to hold monthly financial committee meetings preceding our monthly Board meetings. The committee meetings are set up to review and vet the monthly check register and income/expenditure reports and discuss financial issues that arise.

The revised income/expenditures reporting form that was introduced last year has made it easier to quickly identify line items that are above or below budget estimates and allows more time to seek reasons and any required remedies.

This year we introduced another new form to help track separately individual components of our budget. These include money associated with income and expenditures attributable to capital items, fundraising, grants, operating, and unforeseen income and expenditures.

We continue to expand the direct online payments for recurring bills that the Library pays each month.

We have just about completed our transition from Wells Fargo to Chase as our primary bank.

We set up a new interest paying investment account at Vanguard to hold our tax revenue income. On a monthly basis a certain portion of these funds are transferred into our Chase Operating account to pay for our various expenses coming due.

I'd like to acknowledge the contribution of our Finance Committee members and Sid Franks, our previous Treasurer, and now consultant on the Finance Committee, for their contributions over the year.

Next year we plan to keep the library finances in top shape as we face whatever challenges come up.

### **Buildings and Grounds (Leslie Ellis)**

Much of the focus of the Building and Grounds Committee has been on the proposed library reconfiguration and renovation. We continued our assessment of the Library's needs.

In May 2023, after many years of deliberation and research, we signed a contract with Butler Rowland Mays Architects, LLP.

Over the course of this last year the Board has met with Paul Mays several times, submitted questions to him, and established a spot in Google Workspace to record questions and answers.

- Paul Mays spoke to department heads and staff to gather their input.
- Several committee members attended the Library Book Club's webinar on Library Renovations.
- A subgroup of the committee created a survey that was designed to gather community feedback.
  - The committee is discussing the results of the survey and considering possible building phases.
- Plans were made for a temporary renovation committee, made up of board and community members, tasked to vet lawyers, accountants, etc. We are currently in the process of populating that committee.

The committee also considered developing a policy on how to handle unsolicited donations from patrons that apply to the building and/or grounds.

I would like to thank Marianne Merola, Margaret Mahoney, Laura Stelman-Jaeger, Justin Johnson, Meredith Hertlein, Board president Susan Ranis and our director Jesse Bourdon for their amazing work on this committee.

## **Art** (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 2023: Roya Zarrehparvar, Simple Beauty, photographs
- July - August 2023: Lone Blecher, Reflections on Our Struggling World, paintings
- September - October 2023: Arc of the Viral Universe: A Notebook Project, curated by Carla Rae Johnson, Artists' sketchbooks from 2020
- November - December 2023: Ron Hershey, Morocco: Timeless Beauty, photographs
- January - February 2024: Gabriella Mirabelli, A Condition of Light, paintings
- March - April 2024: Stefano Luigi Guida, paintings

I assumed the leadership of the Art Committee one year ago, upon Mary McFerran's retirement from the Board. Mary eased me into the role and continued to lend a hand and offer advice through the fall of 2023. Lynn Kauderer, long-time Art Committee member, offered assistance as well. Gabriella Mirabelli, a Croton artist who exhibited her paintings from January through February of 2024, was the first artist I handled myself, from scheduling to hanging, reception, and take-down. I am pleased to report that she sold one of her paintings that was on exhibit and donated 20% of that sale to the library.

My predecessor, Mary McFerran, worked with the Library Director, Jesse Bourdon, to create an application to exhibit, found online on the Library's website. This has been a positive development for the Committee, as it has enabled a more diverse group of artists to apply. Given the changes that might occur in an artist's life and the possible physical changes happening here at the library, the committee schedules artists no more than a year in advance. We do have a list of deferred artists ( 6 ) whose applications will be reconsidered as we create a schedule for 2025.

Challenges include hosting artists whose work is interesting and of high quality, and, as always, publicity. The best part is the thanks I receive from the artists. This is often their first opportunity to have a solo exhibit and they are pleased, excited and thankful.

## **Croton Reads** (Jane Beller)

This year's Croton Reads book of choice was *Vigil Harbor* by Julia Glass. The book's themes of small town life and climate change seemed particularly relevant.

The event took the form of an interview with Julia, and it was a wonderful opportunity for our community to interact with the author. Julia was interesting and entertaining and the audience was engaged throughout the interview.

Thank you to the Croton Reads Committee and the Board for all their hard work in making this event possible.

## **Long-Range Planning** (Marianne Merola)

The Long-Range Planning Committee meets monthly to review, update and articulate necessary Library policies and bylaws and to bring clarity and transparency to the rules for governance of our Library.

To that end, during this previous year:

- We have completed work on an Employee Manual and the 2024 Strategic and Long-Range Planning Report.
- Work is approaching completion on Patron Code of Conduct, Unattended Child, and Recording in the Library Policies.
- Work has begun on a Financial Controls and Investments Policy.
- Work will soon begin on revamping the very outdated Croton Free Library Trustee and Association Manual from 2017.

The committee's work is most definitely a group effort and what we accomplish is achieved by the combined talents, skills and efforts of its members. Thank you to all on the committee for your always thoughtful and impressive contributions.

## **Fundraising Committee** (Laura Jaeger)

Our fundraising efforts raised over \$47,000 this year for our library!

### Annual Appeal letter

- Annual appeal letter went out in Fall 2023 – thanks to Mayla for spearheading the efforts
- Artwork was graciously provided by local Croton artist Dylan O'Keefe.
- We made a few changes to the mailing process, and many more people received the appeal this year.
- We raised \$26,817.98 from the appeal, which is the most we've ever made.
  - There were 262 donations, up 132% from last year, matching the highest amount ever, which happened over the pandemic (2020-2021)
  - Amount raised was up 144% from last year, and up 128% from our best year (2020-2021)

### Book & Bake Sale Fundraisers

- Two Book & Bake sales were held in 2023 after our last Annual meeting (May and November). Total we raised \$20,855.25 from both sales.
  - The May 2023 sale generated \$10,655.25. It was the best spring sale since 2018.
    - Comparatively, the May 2022 sale generated \$8,852.21
  - The November 2023 sale generated \$10,200, with 47 early birds (the most ever) and a very successful turnout on Saturday in particular.
    - Comparatively, the November 2022 sale generated \$9,753.00
- Thanks for the many volunteers that assist with these efforts, particularly Art Almeida, our tireless curator.

- Thanks to the local businesses that have donated baked goods between both sales: Baked By Susan, the Dessertist, Hudson Oven, Hudson Valley Sauce Company, Little Star Pastry, Matters Coffee, and Sam Made Sweets.
- We have our May 2024 sale coming up May 18-19, 2024.
  - Two differences for this upcoming sale:
    - We will have a “bag deal” for the entire day on Sunday - fill a bag for \$20
    - Clean-up may be impacted as we work with a new book recycling company.

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 – Adam, Justin, Leslie, Marianne, Mayla, and Susan, and the board members who tirelessly worked on our fundraising efforts.

I look forward to working together as a board and with the fundraising committee and any subcommittees as we tackle larger scale fundraising projects to benefit our building renovation project.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Proposed Bylaws Changes**

#### ARTICLE VII. OFFICERS, EMPLOYEES AND OTHER AGENTS

##### Section 6. President: Power and Duties

##### 4. Attends all committee meetings

On February 12, 2024 upon motion duly made, seconded, and unanimously carried it was moved that Article VII, Section 6, #4 of the Croton Free Library Bylaws should state that (the President of the Croton Free Library) **may attend all committee meetings.**

- It is the duty of the committee chairs to report all relevant information to the Board President
- The Board President is welcome at all committee meetings but should not be required to attend all meetings, given the intense time commitment

**ACTION:** \_\_\_\_\_ will be making an adjustment to the Croton Free Library Bylaws. This updated document will be saved to the Board Google Drive and also sent to the Library Director, who will upload it to the Croton Free Library website.

### **Incoming board members**

We'd like to welcome our new board members, and take a moment to learn a little about them.

Kate Fabian was born and raised in Croton. After graduating from Northwestern University with a degree in Industrial Engineering Kate returned to Croton and began a career in NYC as a consultant in Healthcare Information Technology. Kate is currently employed as the Director of IT Governance at Mount Sinai Health System.



Kate and her husband, Dan (also from Croton), raised their 2 daughters in Croton surrounded by family. Their girls are just finishing their freshman and sophomore years of college. Kate previously served as the President of the Croton Free Library's Association for a few years and has continued to be involved in the semi-annual book and bake sales. Kate has very fond memories of growing up in Croton and looks forward to continuing to serve the Croton community by participating on the board of the Croton Free Library.

Bethany Basile grew up in Boston and has since been back and forth between Boston and New York. She has over 15 years of experience in institutional fundraising in the arts, youth development, and higher education with a focus on economic and racial justice. She was most recently the Deputy Director overseeing fundraising, finance, and governance at a small Boston Jewish Leftist Social Justice organization, Boston Workers Circle. Now having moved to Croton last August with her husband and 2 year old daughter, she is freelance grant writing with organizations across the US. She is a fairweather hiker, lover of sci fi, and theater kid at heart. She joined the Board to meet the community and is also dedicated to supporting accessible third places and preserving access to knowledge.

### **Outgoing board members**

Jane Beller has always been a stalwart champion of this library, wearing different hats through the years. In her time on the Board, she has been a tireless advocate for the library and its staff. Jane fronted the Croton Reads program for several years, finding us authors, and conducting the event. Jane gets on the stage with an author and makes it all seem easy, a conversation being shared. But there is an enormous amount of preparation. Thank you Jane for sharing your time, your warmth, and your large heart with us.

In honor of Jane's service to the library board, we will be placing her name plate within the book *Revolution from Within* by Gloria Steinem.

Lynn Kauderer has come to our board meetings for years with her pencil sharpened and ready to record. Recording minutes is a thankless task, but so utterly critical for both our transparency to the public and our own archives. But while Lynn's pencil is sharp, her intellect is sharper. Lynn always pays close attention to what is happening at the library and in our meetings. Her insights have always been valued for their clarity, experience, and thoughtfulness. We will miss your voice of reason and measure Lynn, thank you.

In honor of Lynn's service to the library board, we will be placing her name plate within the book *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson.

### **Creation of a new committee**

The Croton Free Library is undertaking a large-scale, multi-phase physical reorganization of the library within the framework of the existing library building.

We will be forming a Croton Free Library *Renovation Advisory Committee* to advise the Board of Trustees of the Croton Free Library on critical needs of the Library Renovation project. As advisors this committee will provide informed advice and is not a decision-making body.

This committee will be made up of the Croton Free Library Board of Trustees president, the Library Director, 2 library trustees, and 3-4 community members.

The advisory committee will form and have an organizational meeting beginning in June 2024 when it will determine its regular meeting schedule. It is anticipated that the committee will run for one year.

**\*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.

**ADOURNMENT**

There being no further business, upon motion duly made, seconded, and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned at 7:34p.

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Laura Jaeger  
Secretary