



PALOS HEIGHTS  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

# DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Palos Heights Public Library Board of Trustees Meeting  
May 20, 2021

## Library News

### Reopening Plans

Before the CDC's surprise announcement about mask-wearing and social distancing on May 13<sup>th</sup>, we were making plans to enter Phase 4 of the Library's Reopening Plan on June 1<sup>st</sup>. I have updated our Reopening Plan document to reflect our anticipated return to regular hours, most of our regular seating, and continued virtual programming. At this point, all staff who want to be vaccinated are fully vaccinated, so we no longer have to worry about our own exposure for the most part. As Summer Reading is upon us, we need to get back to business as usual, so we will resume our regular hours and reopen our seating areas as well.

The CDC's May 13<sup>th</sup> announcement that vaccinated people no longer need to wear masks or social distance came as a surprise to us in the library world. As of this writing (5/15), the governor's office hasn't officially rescinded its state-wide mask mandate. Until it does so and we know what that says, we will continue to require masks by all visitors to the building. CCDPH has also issued some very confusing requirements for businesses, parks, and any other entities that intend to allow mask-less entry. Their guidance seems to say that any business that allows people to enter unmasked must verify vaccination status and must keep a written log of each individual mask-less visitor or risk being held in violation of operating in violation of public health protocols. Until we receive some significant clarification from the state and the county, I don't see how we can move forward with any kind of change.

Even if it does become clear that we can reasonably allow vaccinated people to be in the building without masks, it is unclear if that is the best course of action for us right now. Responses in the library world are as scattered as on any single issue that I can recall in this profession. For the most part people feel that libraries have followed the CDC's guidelines all along, so we should continue to do so going forward and allow vaccinated people to go mask-less. Others intend to continue requiring them until Illinois reaches Phase 5. Some would like to keep the current mandates in place until children can be vaccinated. Nobody is considering checking vaccination cards and allowing those who can prove their status to go mask-less as that is incredibly intrusive, doubly so coming from a government agency. I can see merit in all of these perspectives and continue to study the issue and try to determine the best course of action for our library.

The Temporary Mask Policy that you approved last year states that we will continue to require masks of everyone until Illinois reaches Phase 5, which is expected to happen in mid-June. Of course, that was written well before we knew what reopening would even look like, so we might want to alter that. But I

recommend that we wait until we have a clearer picture of what we are really allowed to do before finalizing any response.

This is another situation that is evolving quickly, and I will have updates for you at the meeting.

## Staff News

**Circulation:** As we prepare to transition back to our regular hours, we have some adjustments to make in terms of staffing. First, Circulation has had an unfilled position sitting vacant for most of the past year. This is the position that was created as we finished transitioning our remaining Pages to Clerks. Those Clerks are actually now working in Technical Services, because that is where their skillsets fit best. They are both doing extremely well in their new roles. But while that filled the vacant position in Technical Services, it has created a gap in hours in Circulation. We were holding off on filling that position until now, so we've posted that job and are in the process of making that new hire.

**Youth & Teen Services:** Also, our Youth & Teen Services Librarian who had a baby a few months back has submitted her resignation. She really tried hard to make it work, and we did our best to work with her. But it just wasn't working for her. Hers was a 28.5 hour position with IMRF benefits. Tina has kept in touch with the YTS Librarian who had a baby and ended up resigning in the middle of the pandemic last year. She is now ready to reenter the work-force on a part-time basis and has agreed to rejoin us at 15 hours per week. So we are still looking to fill the remaining 15 hours per week with a new hire to bring our YTS Staff back up to full strength. It has been quite a year!

**Health Insurance:** Finally, after regrouping with affected staff about the state of our current healthcare plan, the group has expressed almost unanimous frustration with the new Aetna plan that LIMRiCC adopted last year. So I am looking into what options are available for us to return to BCBS. The options to join another pool with BCBS are very limited, and I have been turned away from a couple of other pools because we are too small. They were both looking for a minimum of 100 covered individuals for consideration to join their pools, and we are at 11. I'm still pursuing one more pool that offers a BCBS plan. The plan that they offer is much weaker than our current one, but I think we can get into the pool. I plan to proceed a little farther with them before returning to staff to get their reaction to the potential change in coverage. I'm also pursuing options with a couple of brokers for standalone coverage for us. I'm not optimistic about this because I expect that coverage similar to what we have now will cost double, if not more, what we currently pay. There are other more drastic options that I'm looking into as well. No matter where we end up, I expect that a few people will be pretty unhappy. This is an unfortunate situation with no clear good options for us.

## Building & Grounds

The YTS Renovation Project is off to a good start. Tina and I have met with the architects a few times now, on April 9<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> and on May 12<sup>th</sup>. We have had in-depth discussion about our needs as well as looking

at various conceptual mock-ups and giving our feedback on those. I've included some of the preliminary drawings in this month's packet. At this point, they are working on fleshing out a few of the designs that we like the most, and they will have a presentation for you at our June meeting.

As the we finish thawing out from the winter, a new year of maintenance issues is upon us.

**Alarm System:** In March, I told you about some minor issues with our aging building alarm system. We have since had a new controller and new motion sensors installed. We signed a new contract for services with Quality Alarm, so they made all of these updates at no additional cost. The new controller also allows for remote access, so we will be able to better monitor the building's status when we aren't here as well. Our monthly cost will go up slightly because of the remote monitoring module, but it otherwise remains the same.

**Concrete Repair:** We had a bit of damage to the curb over the winter. Some small portions have gradually broken loose over the years. It's turning out to be a tricky thing to repair. The damage is too large to patch but too small for it to be worthwhile to have someone go to the effort to properly cut and repair it. One solution that has been proposed is to combine with work with repaving the stone circle, which we were talking about doing before the pandemic hit (and still really needs to be done). We got a quote to do both of these things, and it is in line with the quotes that we received before for the stone circle repair alone. I think now is a good time to go ahead and take care of that.

**Trees:** Davey Tree Experts were here on April 29<sup>th</sup> for what has become our annual tree inspection. This year they are recommending a lot, none of which comes as a surprise. The big blue spruce near Francine's Forest is finally succumbing to the needle blight that took the rest of our evergreens. It needs to come down. The alder near the fence has a serious fungal infection and needs to come down. And the four crabapples at the corners of the island in the parking lot all need to come down after years of struggling with leaf disease. That's six trees total that need to come down. We had Smitty's come out as well to give us a competing quote, and they pointed out that the other Alder by the fence is also diseased, something which Davey had missed. So I'm playing it safe and having Homer come out as well, so that we're sure removing what needs to be removed and nothing more. I anticipate that we will take down seven trees in total. I don't anticipate bringing this to you for approval as the cost should be below \$5,000.

I intend to plant new trees to replace all that will be removed. After doing a bit of research on native species of the size, shape, and type that we want, I have settled on a bald cypress to replace the spruce, a river birch to replace the alder(s), and 4 American hornbeams to replace the crabapples. All are native to the area and resistant to most diseases and tolerant of harsh conditions. I think they will all do well for us. The cypress is a larger tree that will complement the other Forest plantings. It has soft, feathery needles that turn a nice red in the fall. The birch is a taller tree that doesn't have a huge canopy, so it will do nicely to provide some privacy for the neighbors. It also has interesting, flaky bark and large, glossy leaves. And the hornbeams are an attractive tree about the size of the current crabapples with leaves that change from dark red to green, to gold and dark orange in the fall.

All of these species are pretty widely available and at a variety of price points. The price really depends on the age and development of the tree. Many of the small saplings that we planted a few years ago are still really struggling to take root and survive. So I recommend that we spend the money on some more mature plantings, like the ones we purchased last fall. I'm very pleased with the stock that we got from iTrees in Morris. Depending on the number of trees we end up needing and the pricing I'm able to get, I might need to come to you for approval of that purchase in June.

## Programming

Our virtual programs continue to be extremely popular. We had over 200 attendees at our Frida Kahlo event and over 100 at the Frank Lloyd Wright program. We also participated in the first multi-library online program with author Marie Benedict, which was attended by almost 500 people. We also continue to have consistent and respectable attendance at our virtual youth programs.

While many libraries are moving toward outdoor in-person programming over the summer, we plan to continue focusing on the virtual events. Most libraries haven't seen the success that we have with virtual programs, so they are eager to try something different. For us, I think the prudent course is to stick with what works.

## Other News

**Osterberg Trust** - I told you in March that we have been notified that we are a beneficiary of the Harold I. and Muriel C. Osterberg Family Trust. I don't have a lot of information right now. The Trust is in the process of liquidating assets including the home, so we won't know the size of this gift for a while yet. Mr. Osterberg was a World War II veteran who used to regularly attend our Veterans Day celebrations. He was also a long-time member of the Palos Sportsman's Club and donated many of the amazing photos of the Club that we now have in our local history collection. He was also interviewed for our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary movie. The Osterbergs were long-time Palos Heights residents and regular library patrons. Mr. Osterberg passed away in January at the age of 98.

**Audit Update** - I had hoped that we would be approving the FY2020 audit this month, but IMRF still has not released their reports yet. We have been notified that those reports are coming between now and June 1<sup>st</sup>, so we will definitely have everything in place in time for our June meeting. Everything else with the audit has been smooth. I have seen drafts, and there is nothing surprising or noteworthy in it, which is always a good thing with an audit. Lauterbach has been wonderful to work with.

**Fine Free Update** - Obviously, the big news from our last meeting was the Fine Free announcement. We got the PR machine going to get the word out as widely as possible. We issued a press release which was published in the regional. I did a PSA on Channel 4 (which wasn't my finest hour but got the message out there). We sent out a special postcard mailer to each household, in addition to our normal newsletter. And of course we have been shouting from the rooftops on social media and talking to people about it in

person. So far, the transition has been very smooth. Staff love that this negative interaction is no longer a part of their script. Patrons are appreciative of the small financial relief, especially right now. There have been no complaints from tax objectors or the like.

**Broadband Upgrade** – We have maxed out our current 100Mbps internet speed. Having the dedicated fiber line has been wonderful in terms of the consistency of our connection. But we regularly max out our current connection speed. This is most noticeable with the phone system, where calls through our VOIP line become garbled or the audio drops out entirely. Our IT consultants have taken measures to try to mitigate this issue, but they are now saying that there isn't much more they can do with our current speed. So I've been in touch with AT&T about upgrading our connection. The next tier up is 250Mbps at a cost that is 33% higher than our current rate. I did get one competing bid which was significantly higher than AT&T, so I still think this is the best way to go for us. This change will take effect on July 1<sup>st</sup> and will take us over our budgeted amount for the year, but we will still be within our amount appropriated for this expense category. Now more than ever, our internet connection is the backbone of everything that we do, so it makes sense that we will need to put more of our resources into it.

## Upcoming Events

Thursday, June 17<sup>th</sup> – Regular Board Meeting, 7pm

## Budget Update

I admit that I was getting nervous toward the end of April about our first-half tax receipts. We were only about 80% paid entering the last week of the month, and typically first-half receipts are done at that point. But this continues to be a strange year, and we did receive several significant disbursements in April and May. We are now 94% paid, and that total is coming close to 100% with the normal prior years' payments that we continue to receive added in. Payments are still trickling in, which is very unusual for May.

## Agenda Items

### Item 1: Donation from the Estate of Francine Zanardo

At this point, I'm working under the assumption that the remainder of Mrs. Zanardo's donation will be put toward our YTS Renovation. I expect that we will end up naming a major piece of our new space in her honor, although that will be up to you of course. The total amount remaining is \$152,534.04.

**Recommendation:** No action needed.

## Item 2: Library's Reopening Plan

As noted above, we are moving forward with our plan to return to regular hours, seating, and most of our regular services on June 1<sup>st</sup>. As with everything related to this pandemic, those plans could change in a heartbeat. But I will be surprised if we get derailed at this point.

With regard to new masking and distancing requirements, I'm not able to say as of this writing what we are actually going to be allowed to do, much less what we should do. I hope that we will have significantly greater clarity at the time of our meeting so that we at least know what our options are.

**Recommendation:** No action needed.

## Item 3: YTS Renovation Project

As discussed above, the YTS Renovation is in the design phase and continues to make excellent progress. There is nothing that specifically requires your attention this month, but this item will remain on the agenda as this project is ongoing.

**Recommendation:** No action needed.

## Item 4: 2021-22 Non-Resident Card Fee

The Library is required by law to offer Non-Resident borrowing privileges to people who live outside of the Library's service area on an annual basis. We typically do this in June of each year, but I think doing it in May is prudent as we will have the audit and the architects' presentation happening in June.

The law stipulates that a Non-Resident must use the Library closest to their residence, so most of our Non-Resident borrowers come from the area of unincorporated Palos Heights (approximately) between Ridgeland Avenue to the west, Central Avenue to the east, College Drive to the north, and 135<sup>th</sup> Street to the South. This service is to be paid for by that non-resident as calculated by one of three methods, although only two of these methods are available to us. Most of what is in this resolution is non-negotiable. The only real issue here is which of these calculations the Library wishes to employ in determining the Non-Resident rate for the next year.

**Option 1:** Historically, the Library has opted to use the "general mathematical formula." This formula takes our property tax revenues from the previous fiscal year, divides that by the total local population (which gives us an average tax dollar per resident value), and multiplies by the average household size (which gives us an average tax dollar per household value). The result is the average amount that was paid per household by residents for the use of the Library in the previous fiscal year.

Advantages of this method:

- it is very simple and straightforward for both staff and patrons
- previous Non-Resident card purchasers are already familiar with this method

Disadvantages of this method:

- It isn't necessarily the fairest method on an individual basis because to use an average value means that the Non-Resident isn't paying the same amount that they would pay if they were a Palos Heights resident. If they live on a less expensive property than the average for Palos Heights, the average household amount is more than they would pay if they lived on that property within the City. If they live on a more expensive property, they would pay less for Library services than if they lived on that same property within the City.

**Option 2:** This option involves calculating a Non-Resident rate for each individual Non-Resident borrower using either the valuation of the property assessment (for homeowners) or a minimum of 15 percent (or a higher value that the Board is free to set) of the monthly rent (for renters).

Advantages of this method:

- It is fairer to each individual Non-Resident as the fee they pay is exactly what they would pay were their property located within the City. Renters and those living on lower-than-average-value properties won't pay a disproportionately high rate and vice versa for those living on higher-value properties.

Disadvantages of this method:

- It is more cumbersome for both staff and patrons. Staff have to make the calculation for each Non-Resident applying for a card. Patrons have to gather and present more documentation than they would otherwise, i.e. a property tax bill, and they might find sharing that information to be invasive. This might be a turnoff for current and past Non-Resident users as they are accustomed to a much simpler process that does not involve the disclosure of personal financial information.
- It is more difficult for the Board as you all will have to decide what rate is fair for renters to pay, i.e. determining what percentage of a person's monthly rent represents a value that is low enough to not be overly burdensome to someone who isn't in a financially strong enough position to own their own home but is high enough to be fair to residents of Palos Heights who are paying an average of \$235.28 per household for the use of Library services.

**Recommendation:** I recommend using **Option 1** because it is the simpler solution due to the following considerations:

- This is the method that we have always used, and it is easier to continue a longstanding previous practice than to change it if there is no compelling reason for making a change.
- Monetarily, the difference to the Library should be close to nothing because the average amount paid using the second option should average out to be the same as the first.

The second method requires a bit more time and effort on the part of Library staff and collecting and bringing in more paperwork on the part of non-resident patrons. It is also more intrusive as it requires

patrons to share sensitive financial information with us. It would also require training staff to accurately make this calculation and having someone check after-the-fact that it was done correctly.

#### Item 5: Concrete Repairs

As discussed above, we need some fairly substantial repair to our curb. We already needed some substantial repairs to the stone circle on the north side of the building. I propose that we combine these two projects as the curb repair is too small by itself to really be worthwhile to most construction companies. I got a strong recommendation on TMO Construction for this kind of work from another director whose judgment I trust a lot. Their quote is in line with those that we got last year when we were pursuing the concrete circle repair on its own.

**Recommendation:** I recommend that we hire TMO Construction to do our concrete repairs at a total cost of \$6,960.00 to be paid out of the Special Reserves Fund.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jesse Blazek  
Library Director