MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS

Date: March 19, 2020

Time: 2:00 P.M.

Place: Conference Call

Commissioners: Roland A. Ochsenbein, Chair; Mary Ann Cluggish, Vice Chair; Mary Kronholm, Secretary; Deb Abraham; Les Ball; Stacy DeBole; Philip Madell, Esq.; Gina Perille; N. Janeen Resnick

**Staff Participants:**

James Lonergan, Director; Liz Babbitt, State Aid Specialist; Andrea Bunker, Library Building Specialist; Kate Butler, Electronic Services, Specialist; Maura Deedy, Library Advisory Specialist; Tracey Dimant, Head of Operations and Budget; Rob Favini, Head of Library Advisory and Development; Paul Kissman, Library Information Systems Specialist; Evan Knight, Preservation Specialist; Rachel Masse, Assistant to the Director; Matthew Perry, Outreach Coordinator; Mary Rose Quinn, Head of State Programs/ Government Liaison; Lauren Stara, Library Building Specialist

**Observers Participants:**

Will Adamczyk, Director, Milton Public Library; Callan Bignoli, Library Director, Olin College of Engineering; Kristi Bryant, Senior West Branch Librarian, Peabody Institute Library, Peabody; Rosie Heidkamp, Library Director, Wendell Free Library; Phil McNulty, Executive Director, Minuteman Library Network; Joe Mule, Library Director, Thayer Memorial Library, Lancaster; Sondra Murphy, Library Director, Leominster Public Library; Melissa Rickson, Adult Programming, Hubbard Memorial Library, Ludlow; Sharon Shaloo, Executive Director, Massachusetts Center for the Book (MCB); David Slater, Executive Director, Old Colony Library Network (OCLN); Sarah Sogigian, Executive Director, Massachusetts Library System (MLS); Dorothy Stanley- Ballard, Library Director, James White Memorial Library, Freetown; Karen Stinchfield, Librarian, Cushman Library, Bernardston

**Meeting Called to Order by Chair Ochsenbein**

Chairman Ochsenbein called the meeting to order at 2:00 P.M.

I am now calling this emergency meeting of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners meeting to order on Thursday, March 19, 2020 at 2 p.m. These are difficult, challenging times and I appreciate the quick response in setting up this meeting.

We are in an unusual environment in many ways and today, for the first time ever, we are meeting remotely via teleconference. With that in mind I propose a few ground rules:

1. We are on a traditional conference line that does not include technology that sequences speakers, etc.—so first of all please have your phone muted unless you are about to speak, to minimize background noise inference;
2. as with in-person board meetings, this is primarily a discussion between and among the Commissioners and Director Lonergan. I will make it a point to pause the discussion from time to time to allow ample opportunity for staff and others on the call to speak, just to keep things orderly;
3. Because we are a public body and especially because we are in an emergency session—please keep the discussion focused on the single agenda item before us today; and finally
4. I’d like to have everyone identify themselves on the call and unlike our usual practice I’d like to do a roll call starting with Commissioners— Abraham, Ball, Cluggish, DeBole, Kronholm, Madell, Ochsenbein, Perille, Resnick.

As you know, the state and the nation are currently under a declared state of emergency in an effort to contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The governor has ordered a number of actions in Massachusetts, including the closing of public and private K-12 schools, prohibiting large gatherings, prohibiting on-premises consumption of food and drink at bars and restaurants, restricting hospital and nursing home visits, etc. In addition, we are being urged to work from home, stay at home, not congregate or meet in any numbers beyond 10, wash our hands, etc., in order to contain the spread of the virus. But apart from school libraries and the generalized recommendations about gatherings, there has been no official guidance or specific order related to the closing of libraries. We have heard from a number in the library community in recent days on this point. And I think what we have heard breaks down into 3 categories in summary:

1. the need to close all libraries—public, school, academic, special;
2. The need to suspend any kind of library service where physical items are being transmitted to and from the public (I’ve heard of curbside pickup services, book drops being open and available as usual, etc.), and related to this is that a number of libraries have reported that while closed, staff are being asked to report as normal; and
3. staff pay should not be interrupted during this time. We have received queries asking whether the MBLC can urge the governor to explicitly order the closing of libraries or to include libraries in the order to close schools, or asking whether the governor can intervene on any of these points. So that is the basis for why we are meeting today—to craft a response and strategy with regard to library closures and associated guidance. With that I’d like to turn the “microphone” over to Director Lonergan for further discussion.

**DRAFT LETTER FOR LIBRARY COMMUNITY**

Director Lonergan stated that this is an unprecedented time, and the Commissioners, and the entire staff at the MBLC are working hard to determine the way forward for library services while also looking out for the safety and health of all librarians and residents in the Commonwealth.

Director Lonergan discussed his statement from March 16, included here in full for reference:

The MBLC Executive Committee met this morning to discuss guidance for public libraries regarding the coronavirus. Our concern first and foremost is the health, safety and security of library staff and the public.

We want to acknowledge that we have been hearing from library staff and trustees who are worried about the health of staff and the public if libraries continue to stay open; are closed to the public but offering limited curbside or delivery services; or are closed but requiring staff to report in-person to work. We have also heard from others who think it is important that libraries stay open, even with limited services, in order to serve their communities during this challenging time.

On Friday, March 13, the Guidance Regarding the Order By the Governor Prohibiting Assemblages of More than 250 People stated that the order prohibiting gatherings did not apply to libraries: (<https://www.mass.gov/doc/guidance-regarding-the-order-by-the-governor-prohibiting-assemblages-of-more-than-250-people/download>)

The Governor’s subsequent guidance from Sunday, March 15, Order Prohibiting Gatherings of More than 25 People and On-Premises Consumption of Food or Drink, does not specifically mention libraries: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/march-15-2020-large-gatherings-25-and-restaurants-order/download>

We have contacted the Governor’s Office for further clarification on the most recent guidance for libraries. In the meantime, the decision as to whether a public library remains open, limits services, or closes is for now a local decision.

For those libraries that remain open, we recommend that they limit access to the public to ensure social distancing, for example, by instituting curbside service if the logistics are workable. We also recommend that staff who have underlying health issues or in high-risk groups be allowed to work remotely if possible.

We also contacted the Massachusetts Department of Public Health requesting guidance relating to the safe handling of books and best practices around delivery services. We specifically asked for any information relating to the life expectancy of the coronavirus on paper or plastic surfaces. Here’s is a portion of the response we received:

I have not seen anything specific to handling of books, but wanted to share CDC’s guidance on disinfecting & cleaning (this link is specific to Community and Faith-based Organizations – which I think is the most applicable CDC guidance for your stakeholders) [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__www.cdc.gov_coronavirus_2019-2Dncov_community_organizations_cleaning-2Ddisinfection.html&d=DwMFAg&c=lDF7oMaPKXpkYvev9V-fVahWL0QWnGCCAfCDz1Bns_w&r=QROF_iUZdcOx02rZffWMlMpQY2MFiGQEvA8bM6LgA50&m=L1wPUwB_-n3MPppGG_1nvXGb2PuEvnnwUOc8TFZgbKQ&s=XGJRAaCt9xrgE-jSB3ZGHLlZE1QWF7L-qP2aPRVWd44&e=)

The DPH website also has guidance and information for various sectors (public and private) which you might find helpful as well. <https://mass.gov/covid19>

Both the CDC and DPH are constantly updating our guidance, and thus websites, so we encourage you to review them frequently

As previously noted, MLS, in collaboration with the MBLC, has posted the [Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Massachusetts Libraries](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__guides.masslibsystem.org_COVID19&d=DwMGaQ&c=lDF7oMaPKXpkYvev9V-fVahWL0QWnGCCAfCDz1Bns_w&r=Kr2lHgpbm0FRhXaB0nrlzJ7zaao_EJHhHjhONHMO1z8&m=bry44Z5NLYkevQ7cozQxEn7DxI_W341XWu7AlGjHDAY&s=jUs-GAqy4GqJnWPiE52cH3HQ2eP6BnAnse3kldVqD24&e=) guide. Here you will find the latest recommendations from national and state agencies that are on the front lines of this crisis. This will be an evolving resource that will be a repository for coronavirus information for libraries.

Finally, MBLC staff will primarily be working remotely for the foreseeable future. The best way to reach us will be by email, but we will also be checking our phone messages and will respond to both as soon as possible.

**Commissioner Ochsenbein opened the discussion up to everyone but requested that the Commissioners go first.**

Commissioner Cluggish stated that while the MBLC was consistent with what other states were doing, she believed that Massachusetts could once again show leadership. The health of library staff and public has to be our number one concern, and because people could be asymptomatic and shed virus without knowing it, that we should take a strong stand. The draft letter we received via email today does not go far enough, that any communication must include paying staff. Finally I am concerned that since librarians are so dedicated and such troopers that I am particularly concerned that they will return to work too soon.

Commissioner Abraham believes a strong statement from the Board would be useful now and in the future. She stated that part time employees should also be paid.

Commissioner DeBole is seeing that even though library doors are closed, libraries are still finding ways to communicate with their residents about all the online resources; either with updating their social media or updating their websites. Libraries have to do a deep cleaning just the same as schools.

Commissioner Madell suggested that a statement be sent to the Governor. Then another letter goes to directors and trustees talking about what we sent to the Governor.

Commissioner Ball said all closures are negative. What positive can we shine light on?

Director Lonergan stated that the Communications Team was contacted by First Lady of the Commonwealth, Lauren Baker to do a “celebrity” reading to children and we would post on the MBLC website.

Commissioner Resnick suggested that we have instruction about how to use the online resources.

Director Lonergan said that the Department of Public Health and local boards of health have wide authority and we should be careful not to interpret their guidance or supersede their authority or that of the Governor.

Mary Rose Quinn gave an update of current library services. She stated that some libraries have decided to offer curbside pickup options. She stated that delivery has been stopped due to fear of the virus being on materials not knowing the actual length of time they remain active on materials. By closing schools the natural place to go would be the library. In some cases it is the mayors and town administrators who are telling the library they most stay open but in some cases it is the library trustees.

Liz Babbitt said that they sent out a survey but ONLY asked people to respond if they were closed. She is sure that there are libraries that are closed that haven’t contacted the MBLC.

Karen Stinchfield, Librarian, Cushman Library, Bernardston said that some the select board are simply not listening. Ms. Stinchfield said that staff should not be in the building and they are holding meetings with about twenty people and staff are expected to go. She believes that something official from the Board is the only thing that will help.

Callan Bignoli, Library Director, Olin College of Engineering stated that she works with an epidemiologist, Dr. Joanne Pratt, who remotely debriefed her campus (Olin College of Engineering) today on the extreme dangers of COVID-19 transmission. She not only underscored the current observation that it is possible that surfaces/objects can transmit the virus for up to 72 hours; she also told us that it is critically important to note that many carriers of the virus will show no symptoms and therefore not have any idea when they should be staying at home because they aren't feeling well. With these things in mind, libraries should suspend curbside pickup and delivery immediately. These "emergency services" are recklessly endangering communities as they negate the effects of social distancing and there is no feasible way to sanitize materials exchanged back and forth between library staff and the public.

All of this in combination with the fact that it is still extremely difficult to obtain testing in the US, plus the unprecedented closure of restaurants, bars, and retail stores, plus the closure of schools and college campuses, plus the impossible logistics of preventing library patrons from coming into buildings more than 10 at a time, plus the closure of one festival and conference and parade after another should be more than enough of a signal that all libraries must close to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Joe Mule, Library Director, Thayer Memorial Library, Lancaster stated his concern with authority. Clear direction complicates things when we aren’t the experts. We haven’t been asked yet in our state to shelter in place. When making a statement about public health, we really need to know who is an authority.

Sarah Sogigian was asked about the decision to stop delivery. Ms. Sogigian stated that the reason delivery stopped was because Optima couldn’t keep up with all the libraries closing and the warehouses were getting too full.

Commissioner Cluggish moved and Commissioner Ball seconded that the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners empowers the Executive Board to prepare 2 or more statements to both the Governor and the Library Community regarding the consensus of this emergency meeting, Thursday, March 19, 2020 regarding COVID- 19 for libraries and library staff.

**Board voted unanimous approval.**

Director Lonergan noted that the statements would be issued by the end of the day or first thing Friday morning. He also noted that the next Board Meeting would be Thursday, April 2, 2020.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

**OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Commissioner Ball moved and Commissioner Perille seconded to adjourn the March 19, 2020 emergency business meeting of the Board of Library Commissioners at 3:00 PM.



Mary Kronholm

Secretary