

**Western Massachusetts Library Advocates (WMLA)**  
**Annual Meeting**  
**Thursday, October 28, 2021, 10am**  
**Via Zoom**  
**DRAFT Minutes**

Board members present: Toni Golinski-Foisy, Lisa Downing, Jan Resnick, Mike Moran, Wendy Pearson, Anna Lawrence, Misha Storm, Natane Halasz, Sharon Sharry, Jan Resnick, Lynn Blair  
Board members absent: Mary Kronholm, Katherine Hand

Honored Guests:

James Lonergan, MBLC  
Karen Traub, MBLC Commissioner  
Senator Eric Lesser  
Sarah Sogigian, MLS

Welcome - Toni introduced board members and thanked everyone for attending.

The minutes of the October 29, 2020 annual meeting were accepted by Wendy and seconded by Mike and approved by consensus.

Treasurer's Report - WMLA Annual Treasurer's Report 2020 - 2021

Balance 10/1/2020 \$6,587.34  
Deposits \$814.92  
Payments -\$670.00  
Balance 9/30/2021 \$6,732.26

Submitted by Wendy Pearson, WMLA Treasurer

Membership Report - Natane Halasz took over as Coordinator in February 2021.

We resumed sending renewal notifications to our membership base in February 2021, after largely pausing solicitations in 2020 as we recognized that 2020 was a difficult year for many. About 2% of mailings were undeliverable due to postal or email address changes. Loss of this nature is always expected, but perhaps people have made even more changes in their personal and professional lives these past two years.

Of approximately 200 members contained in our membership database, only 21 of those are active 2021 members. We welcomed four new members, and seventeen member renewals. We also received several donations. I want to extend my thanks to those members who renewed their memberships, joined WMLA, or made a donation.

Our challenge going forward into 2022 will be to build back the membership and provide opportunities for engagement in this environment that continues to be impacted by the pandemic, especially in-person events which have been severely curtailed.

Submitted by Natane Halasz, Membership Chair

Toni welcomed the following new Board Members:

Beverly Bullock, Meekins Library Director in Williamsburg

Adam Novitt, Lilly Library Director in Florence

Toni thanked the following departing Board members

Nora Blake

Katherine Hand-Umstot

Mary Kronholm, MBLC

Election of New Officers -Toni presented the following slate of officers:

Lisa Downing – President

Misha Storm - Vice-President

Lynn Blair – Secretary

Wendy Pearson – Treasurer

Mike made a motion to accept the slate and Sharon seconded the motion and approved by consensus.

Toni recapped an exciting new partnership that has been formed with Simmons MSLIS students that grew out of a desire to give them professional experience. As a result of this discussion, the board recommends reserving a student seat with the change to the WMLA bylaws as follows:

WMLA Bylaws Article V Board of Directors

SECTION 5.1. The Board shall consist, at minimum, of 9 persons; the 6 officers and three Directors. The maximum number, with the addition of more Directors, shall be no more than 12, (Insert here:) including a seat designated for a MSLIS student.

A motion was made by Nicole Daviau and seconded by Wendy Pearson and approved by consensus.

James Lonergan, Director of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners presented the following report.

**New Commissioners:** The Governor has appointed four Commissioners since last December to replace former Commissioners Madell, Oschenbein, Perille, and Kronholm: Debby Conrad, the former Executive Director of the SAILS network and Vicki Biancolo, the Director of Library Services at the Worcester Academy were both appointed last December; former Commissioner George Comeau, the Marketing and Brand Activation Manager at the Downtown Boston Business Improvement District and a lawyer with a practice in Canton, was appointed in March; and Karen Traub, a former library trustee in Wendell and Shutesbury as well as a former member of our State Advisory Council on Libraries (SACL), was appointed in September.

**Budgets:** While the Commonwealth's FY2021 budget wasn't final until December 2020, months later than usual due to the uncertain revenue situation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, our FY2022 budget was finalized on a more regular timeframe in early July this year.

While we anticipated and prepared for cuts in our FY2021 budget, we were very pleasantly surprised that we received increases in all 7 of our budget lines including our requested 20% increase in our State Aid to Public Libraries line, to \$12 million, and a \$1 million increase to our State Aid to Regional Libraries line (more than we had requested), which funds both the MA Library System and the Library for the Commonwealth at the Boston Public Library. We were also very pleased to receive our requested increase to our agency's administrative line, which was much needed given the significant rent increase for our new office in Boston that we moved into last September.

For FY2022, we requested and received an additional \$1 million increase to our State Aid to Public Libraries budget line and received another \$1 million increase to the State Aid to Regional Libraries line, again more than we had requested.

We appreciated the Governor and the Legislature's support of the Commonwealth's libraries in the FY2021 and FY2022 budgets. We also appreciated the advocacy efforts of the MA library community and the efforts of the leaders of the library legislative caucus: Rep. Natalie Higgins, Rep. Brian Murray and Senator Eric Lesser.

We are focusing on two funding priorities for our FY2023 Legislative Agenda budget request: again State Aid to Public Libraries, for which we are requesting a \$3 million increase, and State Aid to Regional Libraries, for which we are requesting an additional \$1 million. We are asking for 5% increases for most other budget lines except for the Mass. Center for the Book, for which we are requesting a \$100,000 increase.

On the capital side, the Governor signed a bill in August 2020 that included \$115 million for our construction program. This will allow us to fund the 14 remaining projects on our waitlist from our previous grant round. We will seek funding to support our next Construction grant round, for which over 40 municipalities have expressed strong interest in applying, in the future.

Our annual cap for this program is currently \$20 million, however we are seeking to have the cap raised to \$25 million in order to complete the waitlist projects sooner and to help communities avoid higher construction costs, which increase every year they wait to start their projects.

We have two major initiatives that we are supporting with the \$3.5 million we received in **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)** funds: a Wi-Fi Hotspot lending program and direct grants to Communities Hardest Hit by Covid-19 (CHHBC).

We have distributed approximately 3,000 T-Mobile hotspots to over 200 libraries across the Commonwealth. The MBLC will fund the hotspots through the end of September 2022.

Providing digital inclusion/increased connectivity is one of the primary guiding directives for ARPA funding from IMLS.

A second IMLS directive in spending ARPA funds applied to communities that were hard hit by COVID-19. The CHHBC Open Grant program is providing either \$25,000 or \$50,000 to the 20 communities throughout the Commonwealth that were identified by Governor Baker as being significantly hard hit by COVID-19. Library proposals include plans to increase outreach efforts, improve accessibility through technology, enhance outdoor programming and service spaces, and to offer career assistance. Another common theme is facilitating contactless services through pick-up lockers and self-checkout stations. Several communities are putting funds towards outreach vans. All funds are focused on increasing services to underserved populations.

We will also use ARPA funds to continue to support the MLS and LFC in licensing electronic resources for students, job-seekers and adult learners that we first supported using CARES Act funds in FY2021.

We're in the fifth and final year of our current database contracts, so we are preparing for a procurement process which will license products for July 1, 2022 (the start of FY23). We partner with MLS in providing statewide databases. We held a series of listening sessions to let librarians share how the **statewide databases** are working for them and what they want to see from the next procurement. We also conducted a survey of the entire library community and received 659 responses from a variety of library types.

We released: ***Library Space: A Planning Resource for Librarians*** late last year. The guide provides librarians, administrators, space planners, and architects with tools for the planning and design of public library buildings. It takes the user through the step-by-step process of determining what to consider when designing a new library for their community, and includes illustrations of different room types, adjacencies, shelving, and seating that can be considered for a building project. It also includes an addendum on library design considerations for a pandemic.

Our Construction Team also introduced a podcast: “**Building Literacy: Public Library Construction**”, which explores topics relevant to the entire construction process, including discussions about the history of the MPLCP, “Sustainability and Building Performance” and “HVAC and COVID-19,” amongst others.

Sarah Sogigian reminded the audience about the upcoming MLS annual meeting. She talked about a new partnership with the Blue Marble Librarians addressing climate change in Massachusetts that has now expanded to other states. She is very pleased with the work being done and invited interested folks to reach out to her. A switch was made with the statewide summer reading partner to iRead. MLS is expanding partnership with MHEC, the purchasing collaborative, to include looking at new vendors. More information will be coming early in the

new year and members are encouraged to reach out to Sarah if you have products that you wish were included in the contract. MLS has a new online learning platform that has expanded access and partnership while remaining committed to live discussion opportunities. More offerings will be coming in the new year. MLS had a DEI and leadership CE series that were very popular. The Small Library forum is coming. Bibliotemps has been very busy responding to high demand. Sarah encouraged anyone needing staffing assistance or interested in bibliotemps to reach out. She thanked the outgoing commissioners and welcomed Karen and the other new commissioners. Sarah thanked WMLA for the partnership over the past year and looks forward to continuing our work together into the future.

Toni invited attendees to discuss changes and lingering impacts of the pandemic. Participants spoke about the slow return to normal attendance and circulation patterns. There were some changes as a result of the pandemic that allowed us to rethink how we do things including around access, meeting patrons where they are, breaking down barriers, and hybrid programming and meetings. Some services have not yet returned for all libraries including meeting spaces, capacity at meeting spaces, in person/indoor programming. It was noted that getting that back will really help with attendance in the building. It has been hard to track what people want and what they feel comfortable with although they continue to be flexible and responsive. An example of this is the Jones Library that is handing out PCR tests. Some smaller communities don't have the infrastructure for virtual programming and even when there is, the response isn't always robust. There is a hope to be able to continue outdoor programming through the colder months in some communities. It is hard to fulfill our role as a community space during the pandemic although libraries are doing some really creative work to continue to serve this role despite the challenges. Some libraries have had good success with "take and make" kits. It has been terrific to have access to virtual library programming across the state as well as library meetings that often required long commutes.

Senator Lesser extended gratitude to libraries and library staff for the work being done during these difficult times. The work of the library caucus that he chairs has included developing a knowledge base to get a better handle of the school library landscape. This has highlighted the inequities that are there that often track the income levels of the communities. As a result, DESE was made aware of this situation and Senator Lesser is looking forward to continuing the conversation. He illustrated this point by saying that a third of school students in Springfield do not have access to computers at home and acknowledged the critical role libraries fill. The caucus was able to get bump ups in some library state funding. Senator Lesser is fighting to make sure libraries have a seat at the table for the discussion of ARPA funding. He is also working on a bill looking at copyright and ebooks and the unfair charges and arbitrary price increases that are often made by big tech companies that control the industry. He said that we need to update policies to meet the changing landscape to assure that free access through libraries can continue.

Lesser said that it is an exciting time to be in the library space. Hybrid work/remote work has highlighted libraries as co-working spaces and he is working so that there are grant opportunities to allow space configurations and resources to support these changes while

staying true to the mission. He ended by thanking the library community and saying how proud he is of his lifelong connection to libraries.

Toni thanked everyone for participating and thanked the board for how well members worked together and how generous board members have been with offering to pitch in. She wished the new officers much success.

Toni adjourned the meeting at 11:15.