



HCLS Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

April 15, 2020 ♦ 7 pm
Virtual

Board members present were: Anne Markus, Chair; Robert Mentz, Vice Chair; Andy Dalal, Treasurer; Phillip Dodge; Tom Munns; Bruce Rothschild; and Antonia Watts. Also present were staff members/citizens Steve Lewicky, Counsel to the Board, Dorna Anderson, Lew Belfont, Angela Brade, Stacey Fields, Christie Lassen, Ben Sfanos, Stephanie Shane, and other members of staff and the public who dialed in.

Dr. Markus called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

The Board unanimously approved the January 15, 2020 Board meeting general and executive session minutes.

I introduced discussion of HCLS activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, starting with my serving on the County Executive's Task Force where I report on various HCLS efforts, including the loaning of 3D printers. Members of the HCLS team reported on their department's activities, which are contained in the HCLS "Highlights" document. Sharing her computer screen, Ms. Lassen related the evolution of the COVID-19 reference page on HCLS' web site, the latest HiJinx podcast plus plans for future podcasts, and the transition of the Rube Goldberg Challenge to a video challenge hosted by the national organization. She closed by introducing a new HCLS blog concept to launch around May 1, which would promote everything happening at the library, to include eContent, and recommendations of things to do at home. Lew addressed public service activities, including the training of 40 instructors who have signed up to teach online classes through zoom. The instructors submitted 65 proposals of potential class subjects, of which the intent is to hold two classes a day. Further, research assistance via email, phone and chat is to be up and running by April 27. Staff are also completing professional development training online. Special note was made of the Created While Isolated music and artwork sharing project, an HCLS outlet for staff and community, that is capturing community sentiment during this time. Angela related HiTech classes held over the last few weeks which have drawn 633 participants. The 15 different classes/labs are in the areas of science, math, and technology. Engineering classes are scheduled to start May 1. Staff are currently testing online homework assistance; the ability to field scheduled questions from customers and chat with them. On the Materials Management side, eResources are going fast, particularly Hoopla, Freegal and Overdrive items.

I introduced discussion on solutions devised to address issues experienced in HiTech class registrations. Thanking Andy for bringing it to our attention, we recognized a flaw in the software which we have corrected by putting more descriptive language in the information session, shading the registration page to accentuate where to insert email, and included a link in the registration confirmation email. Angela provided favorable feedback and statistics on class participation, along with the rationale for the length and structure of the classes to ensure optimal engagement between instructors and participants. Discussion ensued on the potential for expanding class sizes/offerings to allow for greater access and participation, especially among Title 1 schools. Suggestions included promoting the HiTech classes through PTAs, at food distribution sites, and working with the school system. Additional discussion recommended providing more information in email blasts, HCLS' position on being free and open without restrictions, and further evaluation on registrations and capacity now that equipment has been handed out by the school system and school has started for middle and high school students. Lew provided an overview of online instruction outside of HiTech, namely that 770 students are engaged in learn and create classes, 500 are involved with distance reading, and there are 10 adult book discussion groups that are drawing 130 participants.

I presented HCLS financials for December 2019 and January 2020, noting that we were on pace prior to closure for the pandemic. I related that spending is frozen except for personnel costs, eResources and other essential costs. Discussion followed on the revenue losses to HCLS generated funding, to include non-collected passport fees and fines. With regards to the FY 21 Operating Budget, I explained that the County Executive's proposal is due April 20, where we will get an idea of the funding hit HCLS will be facing. We will then present several scenarios to the Board depending on the allocation proposed by the County.

I updated the Board on recent activity related to the fine free bill, namely that the Maryland Governor has stated he will likely veto it along with all other bills with financial impacts. Even with this, the current climate is not conducive to reinstate fines given the economic pressure that our customers will be facing due to rising unemployment. I did note that we will be keeping in place fines for special collections, such as the artwork and DIY.

The Board agreed to hold off approving the proposed closings and board meeting for FY 21 depending on whether furloughs will be needed for next year's budget. They then approved no changes to Supplement 3 as well as the nominating committee. Stephanie provided an update on the At-large vacancy related to Bruce Rothschild's rolling off the Board. The proposed candidate has been submitted to the County which is to pass on to the County Council to present and vote on in time for the June 30 deadline. Bruce requested that any funds reserved for his retirement dinner be redirected to the Howard County Food Bank.

Christie and I updated the board on Census promotion activities, to include eblasts pushing out messaging as well as prominent web site information. These marketing efforts have yielded significant results. I will share a link to a report that shows Howard County's statistics in completing the Census as compared to other counties.

Angela summarized the County Executive's proposed FY 21 Capital Budget which contains money to proceed with the planned renovations to Glenwood, plus money in later years for the Downtown Columbia branch. For the latter, we are looking at using previously allocated money to do conceptual planning. Angela then addressed a customer request regarding the Harriet Tubman School, explaining that we did not have a chance to visit the site nor connect with Rec and Parks since the closure. This is planned once HCLS reopens.

Dr. Markus thanked everyone for attending, adjourned the meeting at 8:16 pm, which was unanimously approved to reconvene in Executive Session pursuant to §10-508 of the State Government Article, Annotated Code of Maryland, in order to discuss personnel matters.

The next regular Board meeting is scheduled for 7 pm on **Wed., June 17, 2020** at the East Columbia Branch.

Respectfully submitted,



Tonya Aikens
President & CEO