

Minutes

Of Bridgeport Public Library Board of Directors Meeting as a Committee of the Whole Wednesday, May 4, 2016- 5:30 p.m.

Held at the Burroughs-Saden Library- 925 Broad Street, Bridgeport, CT

Present: President O'Donnell, Vice-President Baraka, Secretary/Treasurer Errichetti, Directors Holden, Cunningham, Christy and Brown. City Librarian Hughes

Absent: Directors Greenberg and Osborne-Gant

Call to Order: At President O'Donnell called for an Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200 (B) (A) to order discuss the employment, performance, evaluation or dismissal of the City Librarian. Director Baraka objected and City Librarian Hughes requested that any discussion of the agenda items be held in Public Session. In response to Mr. Hughes' request, a **MOTION** for the meeting to be held in public session was made by Director Baraka and unanimously approved.

The public audience was allowed to remain. However, there was no public comment.

Old Business:

President O'Donnell remarked that, while the Board of Directors heeded the supportive comments of many community members during public meetings, there remained serious concerns regarding the job performance of the City Librarian since his last review. As a result of discussion with the City Librarian in 2015, three goals were mutually agreed upon with regard to Mr. Hughes' job performance and that any future salary increases would be dependent upon the progress toward fulfillment of these goals. (*Insertion: 1- improved communication with the Library Board of Directors 2- submission of an application for one million dollar State of Connecticut Library Construction Grant 3- professional development and improved relations between City Librarian and professional staff.*) At the beginning of 2016 as a result of lack of progress in meeting these goals, the City Librarian was put on sixty-day probation with the goal of improved communication between the City Librarian and the Board of Directors.

He reminded the City Librarian that he was unanimously hired by the Board of Directors in 2007 and charged with helping to lead the Bridgeport Public Library into the 21st century and that he had the complete support from the Board of Directors from day one to carry out that mission.

Director Cunningham spoke of how impressed she was by an address given by Mr. Hughes to the students of Central High School on how books can transform lives. She remembered how hopeful everyone was and how disappointed she was that things had come to this. She

expressed concern that “the City Librarian was not doing his job or taking a leadership role. In the initiative to create three new library branches, it was Director Errichetti and Director O’Donnell who used their own personal time to identify and secure appropriate properties with little participation from the City Librarian.

Director Errichetti said that for the first thirty days of the probationary period, the City Librarian made an effort to improve communication with the Board of Directors concerning finance and facilities, but during the past month there had been little communication (i.e. prompt acknowledgement or response to emails and response to inquiries).

Director Holden told the City Librarian that he empathized with the challenges he faced as an African-American male, “but that we were here to discuss your performance or lack of performance based on evidence.” Director Holden emphasized that it was a question of trust. “Whether the Board of Directors can trust the City Librarian to provide them with reliable information so that they can carry out their legal and fiduciary duties to the taxpayers.” He acknowledged Mr. Hughes efforts to reach out to the community, but maintained that his “primary job is to run the library” and that he “had been remiss in that”. As to the grant, he said, “It is not about whether we got the grant (the State of Connecticut Construction Grant) or not. It is about whether we can trust you to give us the information we need in a timely manner. We were not informed of any problems regarding the application process until after the deadline was passed.”

Director Baraka commended City Librarian Hughes for his outreach to the community, for the efforts he made to diversify the library staff, to mentor young librarians and to encourage young people of color to consider library science as a career. She stated that she “felt that Mr. Hughes was being treated differently than previous City Librarians, all white.” She said that the Board of Directors were “micro-managing and asking him (the City Librarian) to do things that they had never asked other City Librarians to do.” She also stated that the members of the Board of Directors were disrespectful to him (the City Librarian) in the way they spoke to him at meetings. She reminded the Board of Directors that “Mr. Hughes faced a unique set of challenges from both the city administration and the staff when he arrived in Bridgeport.” She also suggested that, although the Board of Directors had considered a referendum, “they would have been too timid to introduce it if it had not been for Mr. Hughes and the community support he generated”.

City Librarian Hughes said that he felt like he was “being attacked” and “disrespected”.

Director O’Donnell asked City Librarian Hughes, “Did I not stand shoulder to shoulder to you when you came here? Didn’t this Board support you in everything you did?” City Librarian Hughes said, “Yes”. President O’Donnell asked him, “How have I disrespected you?”

City Librarian Hughes said that he was being disrespected now and that he felt that he was lied to. He said that he was recruited to come to Bridgeport and that he felt that President O'Donnell and Librarian Sweeney had "lied" to him. They told him that they want him to reach out to the community and did not specify the other duties that they expected him to perform. Director O'Donnell read several of the bullet points from the job description of the City Librarian and asked Mr. Hughes "You were not aware of these duties?" Mr. Hughes responded that he thought his job was to engage the community and that, "if he had stayed in New Jersey, he would be able to retire now." Director O'Donnell reminded Mr. Hughes that he had signed the document.

Director Baraka offered a **MOTION** to refer the evaluation of Mr. Hughes performance to the Personnel Committee for further discussion and action. There was no second. President O'Donnell asked if there were any other Motions. Director Cunningham offered a **MOTION** that City Librarian Hughes be dismissed immediately with pay through the end of June. There was no second.

Director Baraka offered a **MOTION** for adjournment. The motion was seconded by Director Errichetti and approved. The Meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Cunningham