

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE LIBRARIES & CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON DECEMBER 12, 2013 AT THE RIVERDALE BRANCH LIBRARY

Present

Marvin Goodman
Martin Wolpoff
Sylvia Alexander
Robert Press
Mercedes Zegarra-Soja
Rebecca Brown Barbier
Peter Pamphile

Affiliation

CB8, Committee Chair
CB8, Committee Vice Chair
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Riverdale Branch Library
Van Cortlandt Branch Library

The meeting began at 6:10 PM.

The minutes of the meeting of the November 14, 2013 meeting were approved. The Chair introduced the branch manager of the Riverdale Library.

Rebecca Brown Barbier spoke about the various programs offered, all of which are very popular. The adult programs focus on implementing the three aspects of the library's mission statement: inspire life-long learning, advance knowledge, and strengthen our communities.

The library manager showed our committee members some photos showing the construction of the Riverdale Library. We also looked at archival books of the Riverdale area by Bronx historians Rev. Tieck and Lloyd Ultan. There is a plan to put together an exhibit of the history of the Riverdale Library. The exhibit is tentatively planned for May 2014. It was noted that the library's location was selected because of its proximity to Riverdale Neighborhood House, which was instrumental in getting its construction approved.

The plans of the building originally set for this site were for a residential mansion, not the library. The original plans were modified for a library, but innovative features, such as the peaked roof, were retained. There are some questions as to whether the library actually opened in 1965 or in 1967. The library's archives, and the memory of our community board members, was that it was in 1965, but an official ribbon cutting ceremony took place in 1967.

The committee was taken on a tour of the library and its facilities. There is a large collection of books in Russian and in Spanish, to satisfy the needs of the community residents. The new inter-library loan system enables library users to get books quickly from other branches, when necessary.

The two lion statues outside the library entrance were donated by the Hyatt Regency Hotel, which no longer used them. The library held a contest among Riverdale students to select the names for these two lions, and the winning names were River and Dale.

The Chair gave an update on current activities of the group "Citizens Defending Libraries". The group noted that one of the major trustees of the NYPL is Stephen Schwartzmann, a major real estate developer and hedge fund manager. The central library on 42nd Street is named "The Stephen Schwartzmann Library", five places in this main library are named for him. The NYPL plan is to sell off the mid-Manhattan branch library and the Science, Industry and Business Branch library and to change the stack system of the 42nd Street Library. There will be a hearing of the New York State Assembly Committee on Libraries, chaired by Assemblyman Michael Kellner on December 13 at 250 Broadway, where this NYPL plan will be discussed. Citizens Defending Libraries hopes this plan will be modified.

The Chair also noted that there is another organization which will favor the NYPL's plans, claiming it will improve availability of materials and access to books. They say this NYPL plan will restore the flagship 42nd library to its original mission as a "state of the art research facility and circulating library while preserving, improving and enhancing research services". This group feels that the two branches to be closed can no longer accommodate the heavy usage at these branches, and that the new NYPL plan will be able to do so.

The Chair noted that Citizens Defending Libraries is also stressing two books for youngsters: one by Lynne Rosen, "My Rights Saves the Library" and the other, also by the same author, is a series of letters by Brooklyn children about the importance of libraries.

The branch library manager noted that it was part of their mission to supply all books of diverse opinions, as requested by patrons.

The Chair then asked the library managers what they knew about the involvement of Andrew Carnegie in New York City libraries. It seems he had a personal involvement from about 1907 to 1920 in funding construction of new libraries. The Carnegie Foundation continued the work after that date through the 1930's. The Chair noted that all the Carnegie Library branches are similar in architecture. There is an organization, the New York Historical Association, which wants to introduce legislation in Albany to declare these buildings historic landmarks. This would prohibit the destruction of these library buildings. The Chair quoted Andrew Carnegie; "There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the free public library: This republic of letters, where neither rank, office or wealth receives the slightest consideration", as his reason for this work for total equity.

The meeting adjourned ended at 7:30 PM. The next meeting will be January 9th, 2014 at 6:00 PM at the Spuyten Duyvil branch library.

Respectfully submitted,

Marvin Goodman, Chair
Libraries and Cultural Affairs
Committee

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