

DEARBORN PUBLIC LIBRARY
LIBRARY COMMISSION MEETING
Henry Ford Centennial Library – Auditorium
Wednesday, June 10, 2026
Proposed

Commissioners:

- Chairperson Dr. Cheryl Hawkins – Present
- Vice Chair Ali Dagher – Present
- Secretary/Treasurer Jihan Jawad – Absent
- Adam Abusalah – Present
- Amira Haidar – Present
- Dr. Ryan Lazar – Excused

Library Administration:

- Interim Director Patty Podzikowski – Present
- Assistant Director of Technical Services Mark Hancock – Present
- Assistant Director of Programs & Services Rebecca Hermen – Present
- Office Assistant III Daniel Smith – Present

Historical Museum:

- Deputy Chief Curator Matthew Graff – Present

Department of Public Works:

- Director Tim Hawkins – Present

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:03PM. A roll call confirmed the commissioners in attendance. Chairperson Hawkins outlined the process for public comment, including a three-minute time limit, and opened the floor for discussion.

II. Public Comment

A comment from K. Holland was read, regarding the status of the proposed Snow Branch book locker. Interim Director Podzikowski clarified that the locker was a promise from the former director that had no official funding. Vice Chair Dagher noted that installation and electronic tracking of the lockers can cost up to \$100,000.

Library staffperson Meghan Strapec presented a petition with 872 signatures asking to rescind the part-time staff layoffs. She argued that the justification given at the May 19 City Council meeting was false, citing the successful absorption of branch staff to Henry Ford Centennial. She highlighted the discrepancy between staff displaced by the branch closures and the number of layoffs. She criticized the Library administration for asking full-time staff to take on a ~240% increase in duties while justifying the layoffs for lack of work.

Dearborn resident and former Library staffperson Kathryn Takach discussed common issues concerning libraries and their staff nationwide, including compassion fatigue,

underfunding, safety concerns, and career stagnation. She shared that in her experience with the Library, the staff have been overextended for years. She noted that the annual reports from 2022 to 2024 state that the Library has budgeted for 70 part-time staff; however, there are rarely more than 55 due to hiring difficulties and turnover. She questioned reassurances from the Library administration that services would not be interrupted by the layoffs. She expressed concerns about the impact of the layoffs on career well-being, and the long-term effects on Library operations.

Dearborn resident and Library staffperson Asher Andrews discussed the impact of the layoffs on programs and services, stating they defied the goals laid out in the Library strategic plan. He argued the layoffs would reduce the quantity and quality of labor, and affect community connection and visibility. He highlighted the part-time staff's role in outreach and facility maintenance. He emphasized that the layoffs will contract services rather than expand them, and the community as a whole would be negatively impacted.

Library staffperson Ashley Jones advocated for the part-time staff, emphasizing their dedication and the impact of their work on the library community. She highlighted the importance of the part-time staff in fostering a sense of community, and providing memorable interactions with patrons. She called for the recognition and appreciation of part-time staff, and emphasized their value to the library.

Library staffperson Brenda Wyatt expressed concerns about the timing of the layoffs, given the current economic struggles of staff members. She argued that the layoffs are a poor decision, as the staff are already struggling with high costs of living. She called for a team approach, where the Commission looks out for both the staff and the community. She suggested that the renovations be delayed to better economic times to ensure the well-being of the staff.

Chairperson Hawkins explained the decision-making process in the layoffs, and emphasized the partnership between the Commission and HR. She stated that there were around 40 open positions throughout the City, and to date six staff members applied for these alternative positions. Interim Director Podzikowski added that affected staff were given instructions from HR for applying.

Comments from Dearborn resident Cathy Belair were read. She suggested delaying the Bryant garden project, and using the funds to keep part-time employees employed during the building renovations. She raised concerns about the impact of a failed millage renewal on the Library's budget and operations. She suggested that part-time employees could conduct story time and craft projects at local parks to maintain community engagement. She stressed the importance of maintaining services, and the need for a robust budget to support the Library's mission.

Dearborn resident Jeff Andrews questioned the number of available temp jobs and expressed concerns about the impact on full-time staff. He highlighted the importance of

the library as a second home for many, and the potential negative impact of reduced services. He called for clarity on the decision-making process and the reasons behind the layoffs. He emphasized the need for the Library Commission to consider the broader impact of their decisions on the community.

Chairperson Hawkins explained that the Library is currently funded on its own millage, plus a portion of the City general fund. She explained that if the millage renewal fails in August, the Library would be fully dependent on the City general fund by the 2027-2028 budget, and would have to fight for every dollar to keep operations running. Interim Director Podzikowski added that the millage renewal failure would also change the Library's status with the State and affect other funding sources. Chairperson Hawkins stated that the Commission will work hard to ensure the public has accurate information about the millage renewal.

Chairperson Hawkins clarified why the Commission is focused on the branch renovations, citing declining usage statistics, and to keep up with evolving patron needs for a third space. She added that Esper had become unsafe in its current state, with frequent issues with water damage, mold, and other hazards.

She further clarified that the positions affected by the layoffs are still on the books, and none were permanently eliminated. She added that more staff may need to be added after the renovations to support expanded services, citing communications with the Mayor's Chief of Staff. She reiterated that the layoffs are temporary to reallocate funding to finish the building projects.

Vice Chair Dagher made a motion to discuss old business ahead of the other agenda items. Commissioner Haidar supported. Alteration accepted.

III. Old Business

A. Bryant and Esper Renovation Updates

Public Works Director Hawkins gave some background information, and an update to the renovation projects. He stated that the projects were stalled when he was brought in to lead. He noted that Esper had multiple issues within the facility, including water damage, rotting soffits, and leaking windows. He added that the first step was a full remediation of asbestos and lead, per state law. With that process complete, renovations can begin.

He stated that Bryant Branch has been closed as of June 1, and the building has been cleared of unusable items and debris. He noted that movers are scheduled to remove the books and freestanding shelves on June 14, and asbestos abatement should begin on June 16. He added that construction materials for both branches are expected to arrive July 6, at which point build-outs will begin for both libraries.

Hawkins stated that he expects the projects to take about nine months to complete, accounting for contingencies. He expects Bryant will show visible progress faster and open before Esper, as the project is primarily restorative; Esper will be an extensive rebuild from roof to floor.

Vice Chair Dagher expressed his appreciation for the speakers. He noted that the Commission are volunteers, and work the best they can with what they have. He reiterated that ultimately, the City directs matters of employment. He expressed optimism in the long-term vision for the Library and asked for patience.

IV. Conflict of Interest Disclosure

No conflicts of interest to disclose.

V. Approval of Minutes - May 13, 2026 regular meeting

A motion to approve was made by Vice Chair Dagher, seconded by Commissioner Abusalah. Minutes approved as submitted.

VI. Approval of Agenda

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Vice Chair Dagher, supported by Commissioner Haidar. Agenda approved, with the exception of discussing old business items earlier in the meeting.

VII. Consent Agenda

A. Historical Museum Report

B. Director's Report

A motion to approve the consent agenda was made by Vice Chair Dagher, supported by Commissioner Haidar. Consent agenda approved as submitted.

VIII. Financial Report

Interim Director Podzikowski reported that the administration is in the process of closing out the fiscal year. She added that there were some delays due to the rollout of new accounting software.

IX. New Business

A. Election of Officers

Ballots were distributed to the four commissioners present to select the Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary/Treasurer. The results were counted and reported:

- Chairperson: Dr. Cheryl Hawkins (4 votes)
- Vice Chairperson: Ali Dagher (4 votes)
- Secretary/Treasurer: Jihan Jawad (4 votes)

A motion to accept the results was made by Commissioner Abusalah, seconded by Vice Chair Dagher. Motion carried.

B. New Collection: Yoto Cards

Interim Director Podzikowski announced the addition of Yoto Cards to the Library collection. They are physical cards preloaded with stories and paired with a mobile device. She noted their popularity at other libraries and relayed the staff's excitement for their addition.

C. 2027 Holiday Dates

Interim Director Podzikowski presented the Library closure dates for 2027. She noted they were mostly traditional government holidays, and building closures to accommodate staff training were removed. She added that the Commission's approval was required in line with City requirements.

A motion to approve the 2027 holiday schedule was made by Vice Chair Dagher, supported by Chairperson Hawkins. Motion carried.

X. Additional Comments

Dearborn resident and active Library patron Marziya Albayatia argued that the Commission was only seeing numbers on a balance sheet in regard to the staff layoffs, and not the people behind them. She noted that programming had become more robust since 2021, largely due to the efforts of part-time staff. She provided a breakdown of positions that were being cut, and stated that Henry Ford Centennial could not realistically function with 28 full-time, and five part-time staff. She compared staffing levels at peer Class 6 libraries, including Canton, Livonia, and Troy, and concluded that they recognized part-time staff as an operational backbone. She stated that cutting the part-time staff is unstable and unsafe, especially for families.

Library staffperson Hassan Elhellani questioned the "lack of work" rationale for the layoffs. He noted that Esper has been closed for almost a year, and Bryant employed about seven staff, yet 39 total staff will be laid off. He asked what work was being eliminated versus shifted to full-time staff. He criticized the City's support for relocation, stating that affected employees were given a general email link to job postings, with a vague promise of prioritization.

Library staffperson Abigail Smith stated that staff are doubtful that they can deliver the same quality in programming, noting that many were planned before the layoffs were announced. She asked if the Commissioners knew the theme for the 2026 Summer Reading Challenge, highlighting how deeply the part-time staff are engaged in program details and execution. She asked for clarification on who made the decision to lay off the part-time staff, citing conflicting messages from City Council and the Library Commission. She asked what the Commission would do to support staff, and relayed their lack of optimism despite the long-term vision for the Library.

Chairperson Hawkins reiterated that the Library Commission has no control over staffing, with the exception of selecting the Library Director. She clarified that the Commission has a more fiduciary role over the Library. She explained the gap in funding for the projects arose with project delays, and a significant increase in materials and construction costs. As an example, she noted that the Bryant landscaping has been an issue since 2018, and costs have continued to increase. She added that to fill the gap, City Council resolved to increase the amount they are allowed to levy to a full 1 mil of the general fund, while the Mayor's Office cut reserve levels. In turn, the Commission reviewed the Library budget and returned unspent funds, but fell short. She emphasized that the layoffs were a decision between the City administration and the Library Commission, within tight constraints and after projects have been stalled for years.

Chairperson Hawkins expressed regret for the layoffs and project delays. She acknowledged that prior meetings should have been held with staff, but felt it could not be done until budgets were approved. She expressed disappointment at the lack of available positions within other City departments, and apologized for the gaps in communication.

She promised that the Commission would remain alert to declines in quality of programming, cleanliness, and safety, and reengage with City leadership if necessary.

XI. Next Meeting - July 8, 2026

XII. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Vice Chair Dagher, supported by Commissioner Haidar. The meeting adjourned at 6:07PM, followed by a closed session.