



Statement of  
Robert Heim, Chair  
Board of Trustees  
Free Library of Philadelphia  
Presented before City Council Committee of the Whole  
May 5, 2009

Council President Verna and Members of Council: I am Robert Heim, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Free Library of Philadelphia. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you briefly this afternoon on behalf of the Trustees, an independent Board under our City Charter, and the governing body of the Library. We greatly appreciate City Council's support, which allows us to serve so many of your constituents – Philadelphians who visited the Free Library over 6.6 million times last year. Your and their commitment confirms that our services are valued; further, our statistics demonstrate that, like other libraries nationally, usage in these difficult economic times is growing. We look forward to continuing to work with you to meet that demand, while also expanding into the new roles that libraries are playing in our society.

I was honored to be elected Chair of the Board of Trustees last year, and I am pleased to be representing that governing body today. The Trustees are deeply engaged in the work of the library – approving policies, overseeing finances, and monitoring our 54 locations. We also work closely with the Library Foundation Board of Directors, which is responsible for, among other things, raising funds for the much-needed addition to the Parkway Central Library.

Service on the Trustees Board includes regular opportunities to visit the neighborhood branches and to interact with staff. I have personally had the pleasure of spending time at each of the regional libraries and at a large number of the branches, and am continually impressed by the range of activity and the dedication of Free Library employees. Despite operating with 102 fewer positions than just six months ago, staff continue to provide meaningful programming for children, assist job hunters with using a computer and submitting on-line applications, and ensure that our facilities are safe and secure. Simultaneously, we are staying abreast of changing needs, by offering on-line books and videos, materials in non-English languages, and electronic fees payment. We are building the library of the future every day, and are excited about what that future holds.

The Board of Trustees hired Siobhan Reardon to lead this institution less than one year ago. After conducting a nationwide search, we selected Siobhan based on her deep understanding of library issues, firm grounding in finance, and a vision of what the Free Library can be in the coming years. She is only the seventh President and Director that we have had in our 100-plus year history, and she is the first woman to occupy that position. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I want to publicly thank her for her early leadership and tenacity, particularly under some challenging circumstances. I am pleased to turn to Siobhan to discuss with you the Library's future and specifically the fiscal year 2010 budget.

Thank you.



FY2010 Operating Budget Testimony  
Siobhan A. Reardon, President and Director  
Free Library of Philadelphia  
Presented before City Council Committee of the Whole  
May 5, 2009

Council President Verna and Members of Council: I am Siobhan Reardon, President and Director of the Free Library of Philadelphia. I am pleased to be appearing before you for the first time, and thank you for the past support that you have given to the Free Library of Philadelphia. I am here today to discuss the proposed FY 2010 budget for the Free Library.

As you know, I have been with the Free Library just seven months. In this brief time, I have met with many of you, visited library branches in all of your districts, and gotten to know this wonderful city. I am delighted to be here and look forward to working with all of you in the coming months and years. While I have many observations about the Free Library, three stand out: the dedication of the staff; the important role that the central, regional and branch libraries play in the lives of our citizens; and the breadth of services that the library provides. Taken together, these attributes can help lead the city to economic recovery. In 53 neighborhoods we transform lives every single day – through the care and expertise of our staff, programs for job seekers and entrepreneurs, and a breadth of programming for young people that improve school performance and are helping to minimize the city's drop-out rate. We welcome City Council's continuing partnership as we work together to serve the citizens of Philadelphia in meaningful ways.

For fiscal year 2010, the Free Library is budgeted for \$32,968,362 in City General Funds. This compares to the \$40,245,065 initially budgeted for FY09 but, as you know, was reduced during this year. In addition, the Governor's budget calls for \$13,964,131 in Grant Revenue Funds from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The latter funds are for the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, the Mayor's Commission on Literacy, and general operating funds, which support collections and general maintenance of our 54 aging buildings, among other things. This level of funding allows for 628 full-time General Fund positions, plus 55 positions from the State grant. With this level of funding the Free Library will be able to provide days and hours of service comparable to the current schedule, with somewhat more stability. All neighborhood libraries, including the three Regional Libraries – Joseph E. Coleman Northwest, Lucien E. Blackwell West, and Northeast – will be open five days a week.

Before proceeding, I want to publicly thank the employees of the Free Library for their warm welcome and support. I have been continually impressed by their dedication and professionalism, particularly during these difficult times. They have done an extraordinary job of keeping branches open and as many programs as possible operating, despite the fact that we have significantly fewer employees than a year ago.



Personnel costs represent 85 percent of the Free Library's budget. Our people are the linchpin in ensuring that the Library – and thus its customers – thrives. Over the past months, in order to keep open as many locations as possible, we have been redeploying staff on a daily basis. In the month of February, for example, 2,270 staff hours were spent by employees who were moved on a given day from a location to which they were assigned to a different location so that we could keep a branch open. This represents remarkable flexibility and has enabled us to maintain a basic level of service.

As I mentioned, the Free Library is able to offer a wide array of materials and services. While some may think of the library as an institution that simply lends books, we are in fact a multi-disciplinary, cradle-to-grave institution that serves teens, entrepreneurs, older adults, new immigrants, job seekers, young children, and employers, among so many others. And, as the economy declines and unemployment rises, we are seeing increased demand for our services. Two areas – employment support and drop-out prevention – are of particular importance in these times.

Earlier this month, the Free Library sponsored the 12th Annual Job Fair at Parkway Central. In past years, 800 job seekers have attended. This year, nearly 1,300 people crowded the building to meet with representatives from Coca Cola, Applebee's, Citizens Bank, and Horizon House, among others. Similarly, the Northeast Regional Library held its first-ever Job Fair last fall, and drew over 700 job seekers and 12 employers – an impressive turnout for an inaugural effort.

Ongoing employment support is provided by the Job Readiness Center at the Paschalville neighborhood library. More than 100 people visit each month to take advantage of the services offered – creating résumés, printing copies of the finished document, and saving and updating work on flash drives provided free of charge. Job Center staff also assist patrons in setting up email accounts, registering with job-related websites, and entering résumés into a digital format that can be uploaded for online job applications.

Parkway Central houses The Workplace, a job and career information center. It provides Library users with current information on changing careers, job search techniques, and emerging employment fields. Supplementing this is Workplace Wednesdays, a series of six, two-hour classes on job hunting. Enrollees work closely with instructors on all aspects of securing a position, from identifying one's skills to finding the right job fit, preparing an effective resume to practice interviews.

Key to securing a job is educational attainment. The Free Library is committed to drop-out prevention, an effort that has to begin at the youngest ages. Our award-winning Books Aloud program teaches parents and caregivers the importance of literacy and how to use it to prepare children for school. This past year, we expanded the program to four public housing sites – Bartram Village, John Street Community Center at the Richard Allen Homes, Spring Garden, and Wilson Park. Also, we have installed an additional 115 pre-school and children's workstations in our branches that offer programs in both English and Spanish.



The Free Library also partners with the School District to enhance the benefits of our work. Our Wyoming branch is a great example. Staff met with the principals and reading coaches from three area schools – Clara Barton Primary, Feltonville Intermediate, and Feltonville School of Arts and Sciences – and developed a collaborative program. The kindergarten through third grade classes visit the branch for storytimes and to borrow books, and the fourth and fifth graders work on research projects. Librarians visited Feltonville Arts and Sciences to conduct bibliographic instruction workshops. Staff also work with grade-specific reading coaches to provide materials for in-classroom use.

The benefits of these collaborations are manifold – for the branch, which enjoys increased attendance and circulation, and fewer discipline problems; for the schools, which have qualitatively enhanced programming options; and for parents, who are brought to the branch by their children who are excited about all the library has to offer. Perhaps most important, though, are the reports that we have received from the schools: Since we've been getting books into these children's hands on a regular basis, their benchmark reading scores have increased.

The Free Library has put in place a number of efficiencies and cost-saving measures that we hope will make it easier to achieve our goals and keep branches open. Our Materials Management division is the result of the merger of two divisions and resulted in a staff reduction of 30 positions and savings of roughly \$1.26 million. Equally important, this has streamlined the ordering and distribution process and gets materials to the public faster. We have also re-organized the General Information Department, pursuant to a union-supported audit that demonstrated that the Department would be better staffed by non-librarians. The implementation of this recommendation allowed us to move librarians into roles and departments where their skills were in greater demand, while saving \$189,000.

Valuable information technology efficiencies have also been implemented. The Free Library has shifted from purchasing to leasing personal computers, resulting in annual costs dropping from \$658,000 in FY03 to less than \$400,000, projected for FY10. PC upkeep and replacement is now handled in-house, rather than through professional service contracts, saving \$300,000. The Free Library is also an active user of the Federal e-rate program for which the city receives reimbursements of up to 90 percent of expenditures on telecommunications. In FY09 this totaled \$675,840.

Increased use of electronic resources also enables the Library to boost its services in efficient ways. Homework Help OnLine, for example, provides students with real time tutoring from their homes until 11:00 pm. During February 2009, there were more than 1,200 requests for assistance through this service. The largest percentage of inquiries is from students in grades ten through 12, partly a reflection of the 50 percent increase in library card registrations for teens compared to a year ago: Last March we had 73,572 teens registered for a library card, and this March there are 151,290.



We are also seeing an increase in our circulation statistics: eight percent over the same nine month period as last year, nearly 16 percent up from two years ago, and 22.5 percent from three years ago. There are comparable increases in the number of reference questions answered by our staff: a 12 percent increase over the prior year, 17 percent over two years ago, and 22 percent more than three years ago. As reported nationally, we anticipate that this demand for library services will continue to grow.

In this era of economic transformation, the business of public libraries is even more highly valued at the same time that it is being recast. Public demand for and access to digital information and technology is constant. The power of new digital collections, technology, and training position the Free Library to help Philadelphia make the transition to a service, high tech and information economy. Many people entering the workforce rely on the library to get them online. Start-up businesses are tapping into the library's electronic databases to keep competitive and to find new opportunities. Families and caregivers rely on the library to provide essential preschool reading and learning. Library facilities anchor commercial developments in addition to being an attractive neighborhood amenity. We know the public values our services – because they have told you and they have told us, both directly and through increased utilization of our resources. We believe we have responded responsibly with the proposed schedule and our ongoing ability to meet changing needs.

As mentioned earlier, 85 percent of the Free Library's budget is personnel. Consequently, if we had to absorb an additional 10 percent reduction in the budget, 168 full-time equivalent and 86 seasonal employees would be laid off. We would attempt to maintain a schedule that would keep the 49 neighborhood branches open afternoons only, five days a week. This schedule would preserve LEAP, the Library's afterschool program, that serves 80,000 young people annually. We would offer six day service at the three regional libraries, and, as required by law, seven day service at Parkway Central. We would also cut back several contracts, including cleaning, building maintenance, and contract guards; and take a minimal amount from Class 400/Equipment. Materials would be further reduced, an area that has already sustained a significant cut.



Listed below is a breakdown of the Free Library’s contracts and use of MBE and WBE firms. It is important to note that 74 percent (measured in dollars) is Centrally-controlled, sole source, or with non-profit organizations. The second table shows a breakdown with those categories removed.

Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

|   | <b>FY08</b> | <b>FY09</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Number of Contracts</b>                    | 46          | 45          |
| <b>Value of Contracts (\$)</b>                | 5.4 m       | 5.4m        |
| <b>Number of Minority/Women Contracts</b>     | 29          | 15          |
| <b>Value of Minority/Women Contracts (\$)</b> | 279,000     | 243,700     |
| <b>Percentage of Total</b>                    | 5.2%        | 4.5%        |
| <b>Departmental or Citywide Goal</b>          | 20          | 20          |
|   |             |             |
| <b><u>Of Minority/Women Contracts</u></b>     |             |             |
| <b>Number of Prime Contracts</b>              | 29          | 15          |
| <b>Value of Prime Contracts</b>               | 279,000     | 243,700     |
| <b>Number of SubContracts</b>                 | 0           | 0           |
| <b>Value of SubContracts</b>                  | 0           | 0           |

|   | <b>FY08</b> | <b>FY09</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Number of Contracts</b>                    | 31          | 30          |
| <b>Value of Contracts (\$)</b>                | 1.53 m      | 1.4m        |
| <b>Number of Minority/Women Contracts</b>     | 29          | 15          |
| <b>Value of Minority/Women Contracts (\$)</b> | 279,000     | 243,700     |
| <b>Percentage of Total</b>                    | 19%         | 17%         |
| <b>Departmental or Citywide Goal</b>          | 20          | 20          |
|   |             |             |
| <b><u>Of Minority/Women Contracts</u></b>     |             |             |
| <b>Number of Prime Contracts</b>              | 29          | 15          |
| <b>Value of Prime Contracts</b>               | 279,000     | 243,700     |
| <b>Number of SubContracts</b>                 | 0           | 0           |
| <b>Value of SubContracts</b>                  | 0           | 0           |