

OSSINING PUBLIC LIBRARY
Director's Report

Karen LaRocca-Fels, Library Director

We are looking forward to National Library Week (April 19th through 25th) and National Library Workers Day (April 21st). This year's theme, "Find Your Joy," is particularly inspiring. Our community looks to the Ossining Public Library every day to find their joy. For more information about National Library Week and this year's theme, please see the dedicated page on the American Library's Association's website: [National Library Week | ALA](#)

A big "thank you" to all who helped put together this year's Volunteer Luncheon! I was sorry to miss it and heard it was lovely. We love and appreciate our volunteers.

Meghan Huppuch and I had the opportunity to travel together to the Public Library Association Conference in Minneapolis in early April. It was an inspiring conference, and I'll be sharing notes separately. Some highlights: The workshop that we led, along with Shannon Crawford Barniskis, was well attended and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Ours was the only session specifically for trustees and most of the 60 or so attendees were, in fact, trustees. In addition to our program, we also attended a reception for the PLA President Dr. Brandy McNeil, where we were also treated to a behind the scenes tour of the Central Branch of the Hennepin County Public Library (they have Sears and JC Penney's catalogs from several decades, including my childhood years – I could spend hours with that collection!). We attended several excellent workshops, heard inspiring keynote speeches by Bryan Stevenson, Executive Director of the [Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery Alabama](#), and Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University, Dr. Ruha Benjamin. We were also thanked and welcomed by Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, who mentioned that we were the first group to travel to Minneapolis for a conference since the difficult events that occurred over the winter. The welcome we received by all was warm and sincere and I was happy to spend some time amongst "Minnesota nice." And I found a great coffee shop, too!

Board and Committee Work

The committees are moving through their various meetings and projects. Buildings and Grounds work will be outlined below.

The Policy/Personnel/Bylaws Committee is working through a few new policies, including a new Programs Policy and Public Relations Policy. They are also planning work on the new required (by New York State) policies, including a financial policy (we have components already), a disaster preparedness policy (PULISDO – Public Library System Directors Association -- is working on a template), and an employee handbook (again, we already have many components and are working on a comprehensive handbook).

The Outreach and Engagement Committee is full of ideas and inspiration. We continue to work to support their efforts.

The Finance Committee is moving through its work as well.

Budget Planning and Budget Vote/Trustee Election

The proposed 2026/2027 budget was presented to both the Finance Committee and the Board of Trustees and will be approved at the April 20th Regular Meeting, which is also the Public Hearing on the Budget. Mallory Marinaro and I are now working on finishing up the information for the public, which includes the website information, the one-pager, and the postcard. Mallory is also planning eblasts and social media posts.

Building and Grounds

We continue to attempt to coordinate use agreements with our neighbors. We are still working with the Moose Lodge and 50 North Highland Ave. to coordinate agreements. We are in contact with both parties and we hope to be able to finalize agreements soon.

With the help of Calgi and the attorneys, Steve Hamilton and I arranged for the legal notices to be published in order to start the bidding process for Phase 1. Notices were published and we had a bid walk-through on April 15.

The construction for the installation of RTU-6 has been proceeding largely on schedule. We have been informed that there will be a week delay in the delivery of RTU-6 and so we are looking at installation in mid-May rather than early May. Fingers crossed that the hot weather holds off until we can deal with it.

We continue to have weekly schedule/progress meetings for the large construction project, run by Calgi, with Lothrop, OLA, and SGH. Things are proceeding on schedule.

We continue to review both the project designs and estimates for phase 2 of our building renovation project. Molly Robbins is preparing written comments to provide to Lothrop and Phil Rice has sent along his comments. We are also working, along with Allison Robbins, with Lothrop and CMTA to plan for security and AV possibilities in our renovated building.

We continue to work with our realtors to pursue both parking alternatives and offsite alternatives for our staff and patrons while both phase 1 and phase 2 of our project proceed. We hope to finalize one agreement for parking relatively soon. Molly saw several possible relocation sites and I was able to join her for two. I'm hoping to see another that she was hopeful about. We look forward to sharing information with the Board of further discussion.

SGH proceeded with a variety of investigations to solve the mystery of "where are the electrical lines?" Of course, they are not where they are supposed to be on our site drawings. This IS the OPL, after all...

Grants and Donations

I have some follow up work to do on our \$100,000 DASNY grant that was secured for us by Assemblywoman Dana Leveberg now that our bond vote has passed, building permit is in place, and BAN is nearly closed. I'll wrap this up as soon as I can.

I will be working on some additional grant requests over the next few months.

Personnel

Steve Hamilton has received the civil service list for our Technical Support Specialist position and will start the canvass shortly.

We will be posting our Superintendent of Building position very soon and hope to start interviews by the end of April. There is no list for this position, so this would be a provisional appointment until such time that a list is established.

Earlier this year, Molly Robbins and I met with the union president to discuss the upcoming building projects and potential impacts on staff. In addition to this, we have weekly meetings with the Leadership Team and ask LT members to help us disseminate timely information and updates throughout the departments. At the union's request, we then had a meeting with CSEA Labor Relations Specialist Kirk Shocker and library attorney Craig Olivo to further discuss possible impacts. Luckily, the library administration and library board have committed to prioritize providing services to our community during our project. While disruption will be inevitable and patience from all will be begged, I'm glad that we are able to assure the union that services will continue to be provided to our community and the staff's work will continue (even though it may change). Change is difficult at all times and is especially challenging when we don't have all the answers yet.

Projects, etc.

The new annual report reporting software is up and running and we have been provided with our credentials. Steve Hamilton has started inputting our data. We are still awaiting Westchester Library System's review of our report, but they encouraged us to enter our data into the portal in the meantime.

I had a fun experience at the O.N.E. Chamber non-profit event at Grace Church on March 29th. While I was technically representing the Rotary Club of Ossining, I fielded a good number of questions about our library's parking lot and project. A big "thank you" to Trish Sabini and Rachel Murphy for **actually** representing the library. While turnout from the public was light, it was nice to chat with our colleagues from other Ossining non-profits.

News from the Public Library Directors Association and the Westchester Library System

As I write this, the next PLDA meeting in "in the future" on my calendar.

Some Meetings, Trainings, Programs I attended (Leadership Team Meetings are mostly every week):

March 27: Finance Committee Meeting
March 27: Policy/Personnel/Bylaws Committee Meeting
March 30: Board of Trustees Regular Meeting
March 31-April 3: Public Library Association Conference, Minneapolis, MN
April 6: Building and Grounds Committee Meeting
April 8: RTU-6 Meeting
April 8: Building Project Progress Meeting
April 8: Real Estate Showings

April 9: Meeting with Labor Relations Specialist
April 9: Board of Trustees Work Session
April 10: Call with Lothrop and CMTA
April 13: Assemblywoman Dava Levenberg/LiveOn NY Flag Raising
April 15: Phase 1 Bid Walkthrough
April 15: Building Project Progress Meeting

Molly Robbins, Assistant Director

Building & Grounds Department

The month of March is traditionally one of the busiest times in the year of a public library. I no longer know if this is true, but it certainly felt busy. The longer daylight hours, milder weather, and greater school demands on students seemed to bring more people into the library.

In addition to routine assignments, B&G department staff completed 47 special work requests.

Additional thanks go to Steve Garrett and Steven Washburn for their assistance to our contractors who are scheduled for early morning arrivals. Steve and Steven are always available to share their knowledge of the facility, keep me informed with daily briefings, and support on site contractors. Steve has also been taking extensive documentary photographs while the work is ongoing. The photos help us share progress on the library's construction webpage.

One of our vending machine owners, Healthy Vending, has been struggling to keep their machine adequately stocked. In the past few months, after repeated attempts to reach the owners by telephone and email, I unplugged the empty machine and put signage on it to inform the public about the status. The problem is currently resolved, but I am tracking it carefully. Hopefully this will not be an issue going forward.

I currently supervise a great team of 5 in the Building and Grounds department. Their dedication and initiative are invaluable during the increasing workload generated by the building project. I am doing my best to schedule additional time for training and feedback for them. They deserve my undivided attention a few times a month if not more.

RTU-6 & Phase One Construction Projects

I attended the weekly RTU - 6 installation and oversight meetings on March 4, 11 and 25. I continue to review ongoing work on the mezzanine. I meet regularly with Prentice Lattinville of Clean Air Quality Services and other times with Dorian De Laurentis to answer questions and provide feedback from the library regarding the ongoing work. I attended the weekly phase one construction progress and coordination meetings with Calgi, Lothrop, and SGH on March 4, 11, and 25.

On Wednesday, March 4 Allison, Mallory and I had a detailed meeting with CMTA our firm for AV and security design in collaboration with Lothrop. This was a lengthy and detailed meeting that was instructive for both sides. We came away with a better understanding of our options and how these services are integrated with the building design. Pricing and affordability are the next key considerations.

On Wednesday, March 11 Karen and I decided to walk over to the property at 50 North Highland to see how work there was progressing and try again to contact someone on the property. We were in luck and met with the owner Mohit Sood. He was keen to understand more about our retaining wall work. We put Mr. Sood in touch with Nataniel Smith of SGH to learn more about the specifics of the upcoming construction. We remain in regular contact with Mr. Sood.

On Thursday, March 12 I met with Annie of the Cat Protection Council to discuss the feral cat colony currently located at our neighboring property 37 Hudson St. Annie's last contact with anyone official about 37 Croton Ave. was about 10 years ago. She was in contact with Moose International and they gave her permission to maintain the colony at the back of the parking lot. She was adamant about the colony not being moved and repeatedly assured me the cats would hide when any work was being done. I shared this information with Karen and Sarah Spencer our attorney, regarding this property. I stay in touch with, and respond to, questions from the real estate team from Rand Commercial regarding upcoming parking needs and the need for a location or locations for library services during phase two construction.

I spend as much time as possible reading over the detailed documents coming from Calgi, Lothrop, CMTA, CAQS and other firms we work with. Finding quiet time to concentrate on this reading and study is challenging, but it is also one of my favorite parts of the job.

Administrative Support

While it is not required of me to maintain my professional library certification in NYS, I like to work in as much ongoing training as possible. This month I took two LILRC (Long Island Library Resources Council) webinars. March 6 *Recent Developments in Labor and Employment Law* (2 contact hours), and March 13 *Guide to Crafting and Promulgating the Library Employee Handbook* (2 contact hours). On March 26 I attended a zoom session offered by WLS to learn more about options for micro learning via weekly mini lessons offered by NovareFocus. Allison was able to listen in on the session *Transform Your Staff Development* as she was in the office with me. We both liked what we heard. Microlearning and mini lessons seem like a good fit for these busy times.

I attended administrative coordination meetings with Karen on March 3, 6, 13, 17, and 27. On March 10, I joined Karen and Mallory for a tour of the Scarsdale Library. We met with the Director, Beth Bermel, to review the challenges, lessons, and success of Scarsdale's extensive remodeling project. Her experienced insights were valuable, and she will be a great resource for us as we move through the phases of our project.

I attended Leadership Team meetings on March 11, 18, and 25.
I attend the BOT B&G Committee Meeting on Monday, March 2.
I attended the BOT planning session on March 5.
I attended the Board of Trustees meeting on Monday, March 30.

Diana Lennon, Adult Services

We celebrated Irish Heritage this month with a well-attended Brain Conway and Brendan Dolan concert on March 8, and by showing the film “Angela’s Ashes” on March 17. Our book display—besides being very green—presented everything from travel and history to fiction by Irish authors. Have you read Irish author [Claire Keegan](#)’s novels? She has won prestigious awards, and her stories have been adapted to film. I highly recommend her stories!

The Girl Scouts and the Westchester Photographic Society showed their artwork this month, which brought in a lot of visitors of all ages to enjoy. With the building renovation and parking challenges, we are winding down the art displays as we are usually booked out almost two years in advance. A group of us also are revisiting the art collection we have had in storage or rotating so that we can make decisions about all these lovely pieces when we move out of the building. A huge task...

By the end of March, all the Tax Aide appointments were taken, and we have seen a steady stream of filers coming in...looking more and more anxious unfortunately! We have sent them to other libraries and resources while fielding a lot of inquiries.

Much less stressful, the two “Weaving the Future” programs in March, showed very patient teachers and students learning to hand spin yarn from wool and to do felting. It was a fabulous community-based series highlighting traditional Ecuadorian culture and textiles. Participants were thrilled with everything they learned. (See photos.)

The Multicultural Film Series ended in March with a screening of “Shoplifters” by Hirokazu Kore-Eda. “A leading voice in contemporary Japanese cinema, Kore-eda is known for his deeply humanistic films that explore family, memory, and the complexity of human relationships.” ([American Cinematheque, 2026](#))

We also are planning the Bonnie Katz Film Series, and plans are going well to present the films with Bethany Arts this summer. The relationship we have built with them has given us this new option for a co-host, as well as have a location with ample parking for our program. We appreciate their enthusiastic response to our request for this partnership. Other partnerships I am working on include one with the Ossining Food Pantry, and our continuing work with the Ossining Farmers Market—it’s almost that time of year!

Iqnayra Lopez, Children’s Services

March was a lively and productive month in the children's department. With spring just around the corner, our young patrons and the families who visit alongside them brought renewed energy to the library, and our staff rose to meet it with an exciting lineup of programming, collections work, and community outreach.

We held another Little Critics Book club in the afternoon of March 20th to celebrate Women’s History Month. While we read about several fascinating women, the children especially loved the story of Nan Songer, The Spider Lady, as well as the story of Wanda Diaz Merced, Puerto Rican astronomer who hears the stars due to her blindness. I had a well-attended

Baby and Me Cricut session on the morning of March 20th. The nanny community is eager to have opportunities to socialize amongst each other while their little ones also mingle. As we plan our programming, I'll be sure to keep that in mind.

Spring Break was a very busy week for us. We had Jessica Colon from For the People and Kids Inc. host a Little Gardeners series. Children had the opportunity to explore the colors, shapes, and textures of plants and gardens while expressing themselves through art. We also hosted another Jewelry Making workshop with Blanca from Medibeads. She taught the children how to make clasp bracelets.

We held our March Madness new picture book edition. Each children's team member chose 3-4 of their favorite new picture books. The children's room patrons then had a chance to vote each week for their favorites until it came down to 2 books, *A Quick Trip to the Store* by Sam Wedelich, and *Everything's Wrong!* by Jory John. Drum Roll please- *Brrrrrrrrrr!* The winner was *A Quick Trip to the Store* by Sam Wedelich. All the books competing were displayed, a great way to highlight the new picture books and get families reading them.

I visited OCC on March 10 and 17 to host Storytime to babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Our partnership has grown over the years with OCC. They connected us with Standard Communities, the company that runs and operates the Snowden House Apartments. A great opportunity to reach residents in the community who may not visit OPL or know the resources we have available. Suzy and I will attend the Snowden House Apartments Community Day on April 8 to share all OPL has to offer. In addition, I visited Park School on March 5, 12, 26 to pop into their Kindergarten classes to share a lesson on Fairytales.

I'm looking forward to Green Ossining's Earth Day Festival on April 25th where we will host our Puzzle Swap. After 3 years of hosting, we are changing the way we swap due to the limited space in the 5000. Patrons are now being asked to bring their puzzle directly to the festival to swap for another. Hopefully, it all works out! I'm also looking forward to start recruiting for OPL's children's Battle of the Books team. I have a few interested members so it'll be exciting to have new team members.

Mallory Marinaro, Patron Services

One of the (many!) things I appreciate about my job is how truly and wildly varied it is: one morning in March, I both put up a display at the Front Desk that celebrated both Mr. Rogers and Harry Styles (because of cardigans, but you already knew that) and then spent time researching expansion tanks which, up until that exact moment in time, I did not know existed. Patron Services is a lot of tonal shifts, especially at the Front Desk, when you can be called on to explain the bond, recommend a book, choose your favorite member of Paw Patrol and talk about March Madness (go Wolverines!) in the course of a morning.

At the very least, it's never, ever dull.

On the contrary, March was a very busy and active month. In addition to the usual slate of meetings (holding strong at 25!), there was a lot going on.

Programs

Our department programming this month was nothing short of fantastic.

At the start of March, I welcomed Vanessa Diaz and Petra Rivera-Rideau to discuss their book *P FKN R: How Bad Bunny Became the Global Voice of Puerto Rican Resistance*, in a conversation moderated by CNN podcaster Sofia Sanchez. I was so excited to be a part of the cultural moment with such a timely conversation following Bad Bunny's record-breaking Super Bowl Halftime Performance and was, frankly, gobsmacked to see the Ossining Public Library on the list of their book tour stops along with Harvard, Brown University, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, and University of Southern California. How fantastic is that? Quite nearly as fantastic as seeing the Budarz Theater full on a Friday night with people from Ossining, Westchester, NYC and Connecticut who traveled to be a part of this moment. The demographics of attendees was truly amazing—from a class full of OHS students to retirees and everyone in between. It was a really fantastic evening and people were so thankful to the library for hosting.

I had an especially meaningful conversation at the end of the night with a guest who told me that when she was growing up in New York as a girl from Puerto Rico, it was something she was made to feel ashamed of, so to see her public library celebrating Puerto Rican culture so loudly and proudly brought tears to her eyes, and that she could never thank us enough for that moment.

Sheena and Raquel ended the month with the first session of their Poetry Games series and I couldn't be prouder of them. This was the first program they have facilitated and from concept to execution, they took their job so diligently—and had fun with it. They learned the...let's say *quirks* of using the Shop Rite card and worked with Jenny on program marketing and materials. I'm beyond thrilled to share that the first session had a packed room—to the point that we've needed to move future sessions to the theater! Sheena and Raquel saw a void in our poetry programming and created an inclusive, welcoming environment for the community to share their love of poetry and it was a huge success. I can't wait to see what this pair does in the future!

Planning for April

April has three constants: thousands of questions about Tax-Aide, planning for National Library week, and work on the OPL budget.

I enjoy one of these things very much!

This year, Molly and I decided it was time for a refresh of our National Library Week materials, so I designed new banners for the building's exterior, as well as interior retractable banners for Library Workers Day. I also got special tote bags for patrons for the week in honor of this year's theme of Library Joy. Swag makes me happy.

The budget makes me less so. It is, not to be a downer, not a particularly enjoyable task to work on (and I don't even have the worst of it! Sorry, Karen and Bob!). There are a lot of moving parts to promoting the budget and, thankfully, Karen and I have it down to a science, so it all comes together pretty quickly.

Bookmarks

It tickles me to see how popular the bespoke OPL bookmarks are—Jenny and I have a ton of fun designing them every month, and I get a thrill every time I need to replenish them. For March, I made a set of bookmarks for the Bad Bunny program, a series that tied into the new Harry Styles album, as well as some general spring and pet related bookmarks.

Allison Robbins, Technology and Training

Computers in Libraries Conference: Jenny Meudt and I were able to attend the Computers in Libraries Conference (CILC) in March. I attended this conference once before, in 2023. As in 2023, I found the conference to be beneficial through both information and inspiration! This was also Jenny's first time attending a conference and I'm very glad that she enjoyed it. She and I will both be writing post-conference reports to recap and share our experiences. We are grateful to the library for supporting our professional development and look forward to using what we learned in our work.

CMTA: We have continued working with CMTA as they have developed plans for security systems, AV systems, and connectivity as a part of the larger building project.

Patron Services Programs: I have continued working with Patron Services staff as they develop their ideas for programs. In March, Sheena Glanville and Raquel Avila's three-part Poetry Games program series kicked off with great success! There were so many attendees that we had to find a larger space for the following session. It was wonderful to see both staff and patrons enjoy themselves so fully in this program. Christina Mariani is preparing for a zine creation workshop, and we have been gathering up unused, extra crating supplies from around the building, as well as discarded magazines in preparation.

Technical Support Specialist: In March, I worked with Karen and Steve Hamilton to finish what we needed to call for the Technical Support Specialist list and post for the position at the library. I am so very thankful that we were able to add this position at OPL! I enjoy my work, including the areas in which a Technical Support Specialist will be working in, however, I admit at times I feel spread thin. Having additional staff in this area will both increase the "coverage" in tech aspects at the library and enable me to continue expanding our technology related programming, outreach, community collaboration, and anything else that has been put on the back burner. I look forward to next steps in the process of adding this staff member.

Concise progress updates/statuses on some other projects:

- New session management and patron print software: **March update:** I spoke with the company at CILC and the cloud session management solution is up and running but is being refined. I will be in contact with the team over the next few months and keep in touch with the refinement process, doing a demo, and getting pricing when it looks like we are closer to a point where I would be comfortable recommending the adoption of this software.

Circulation Statistics:

- Patrons Added: 113

- Interlibrary Loans
 - Received at Ossining: 2,098
 - Supplied to Other WLS Libraries: 767
- Total Checkouts (including eBooks): 18,987
- Mobile App Checkouts: 0 (Mobile checkout currently inoperable)
- OverDrive Total Checkouts (including shared, consortium items): 6,378
- Ossining Advantage Title Checkouts:
- Museum Pass Checkouts: 58
- Explorer Bags Checkouts: 0

Tech Statistics:

- Items Added: 504
- Items Deleted: 638

Suzy Zavarella, Teen Services

This month's job readiness programming featured several guest speakers. Jeanette Gerber spoke about college preparation, Omar Lopez discussed local government, and Don Giuseppe presented on financial literacy.

We hosted our final laser tag event of the season. Louis, James, and Julian do an amazing job running this event. Teens have expressed strong interest in continuing the program into the spring and summer months, even though it won't be dark in the library. One teen even suggested covering the windows with sheets—an idea that would require a *lot* of sheets and really tall ladders.

Our movie showing of *Zootopia 2* drew a large audience. The volunteers did a great job keeping up with the demand for popcorn. Going forward, we will need at least one additional staff member to help with monitoring the audience.

Fifteen members of the Project Lit Club visited Claremont School, where they read to students across 30 classrooms. It was a great opportunity to read with and connect with students in the school.

There has been renewed interest in chess, and as a result, James will begin offering chess instruction on Wednesdays from 5:00–6:00 PM.

Planning continues for Battle of the Books 2026, and I'm happy to report that the teen book selections have been finalized.

Foodie Fun featured Shamrock Shakes for St. Patrick's Day and Hakka noodles—which coincidentally fell on the same day as our department meeting—so Neera made extra for us to enjoy.

For Women's History Month, Tiffany led participants in creating art through "Inspired by Her" mini art stations, featuring projects based on artists such as Frida Kahlo (self-portrait collage) and Georgia O'Keeffe (watercolor flowers). In collaboration with the OYB, we hosted a Women's History Month brunch for high school students. The program included visits from

Liz Feldman, Dana Levenberg, Sue Donnelly, and Joyce Cole, who also led one of her popular Jeopardy-style programs, which participants thoroughly enjoyed.

Additionally, I attended a webinar led by Charles Fox, Director of Diversity & Development for the Legal Aid Society of Suffolk. The session focused on understanding and addressing microaggressions, including strategies for recognizing and responding to them in interactions with both colleagues and patrons. I also had a productive virtual meeting with a representative from Applerouth, an educational company offering academic tutoring, test preparation, and executive functioning coaching. We are exploring bringing free full length practice SAT exams to Ossining and are excited to offer this service to our community. We discussed key dates and are developing a plan to offer them throughout the school year and summer. The representative also shared a range of free resources available through Applerouth.