

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND  
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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HELD AT: Remote Hearing

B E F O R E: Jimmy Van Bramer  
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joseph Borelli  
Laurie Cumbo  
Mark Gjonaj  
Francisco Moya

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Linda E. Johnson, President and CEO  
Brooklyn Public Library

Anthony Marx, President and CEO  
New York Public Library

Dennis M. Walcott, President and CEO  
Queens Public Library

Nick Buren, Chief Librarian  
Queens Public Library

Sung Mo Kim  
Queens Public Library



SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Gents, you may begin your recording.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: PC recording has started.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Cloud recording is good.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Backup is rolling.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Sergeant Polite, you may begin with your statement.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Good morning and welcome to the remote hearing on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, And International Intergroup Relations. Well Council members and staff please turn on their video at this time. Once again, will Council members and staff please turn on their video at this time. Thank you. To minimize disruptions, please place all cell phones and electronics to vibrate. You may send in your testimony at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Once again, that is [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Good morning everyone and welcome to today's hearing. I am Council member Jimmy Van Bramer and I am Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and

International Intergroup Relations and not being in the chambers and having a gavel, I will formally gavel us in using this beautiful owl which is from my alma mater, Bryant high school in Queens. So we are formally in session. So, libraries, of course, are the most democratic and one of the most important institutions that we have in this world and the onset of the Covid pandemic has not only revealed the extent to which people rely on libraries, but in this moment where people are desperate for some sense of normalcy, stability, safety, and also creating information. Information about the virus, what's happening in our world, and in their community. And while libraries are not as open physically to Psalm, they continue and have always continued to provide invaluable services in every way they could possibly imagine providing those services. That is part of why we are here today. The libraries over the 11 years that I have been the Chair of this committee have provided testimony on a wide array of issues serving the incarcerated, the senses, budget, technology, but rarely have we had a hearing as consequential as this one. We haven't had a hearing solely dedicated to libraries and library services

since before the pandemic essentially closed the three systems when, in the second week of March, we all understood the severity of the situation. And I want to praise the library system for their concern and caution for their staff members and for the public that they serve in acting quickly and responding to the moment. It was incredibly challenging for everyone. And what we are interested in learning today is what happened and what has been happening since that awful week when we realized the wave that was about to crash over all of us and how of libraries, which are and always have been, brilliant at reinventing themselves and figuring out new and better ways to deliver information and services and programs. Doing that in this particular moment in time. And how are we meeting the needs of the public that is home more, not working as much as they were because so many are unemployed, hungrier than ever because so many are food insecure, or in danger of losing their apartments, and people who are desperate for information about Covid and, of course, the city and its people looking for more and more places to get tested for free in a place that is safe and welcoming and familiar to them. So, I know

because I anticipated in several programs at the Queens Public Library that, while some of it is remote, we are still doing Drag Queen Story Power, we are still having friends of Library Conferences. Library workers are doing all they can and, of course, we have the phase 1 opening with plenty of grab and go and sell mother limited, but important services going on. I also know that there are phase 2 lands and I am anxious to hear from the public libraries about this. Obviously, the recent increase in positivity rates are something that we all have to take seriously and I know that the three present CEOs are doing so, so we are interested to hear how the current moment is impacting that. Those plans to move forward with even more. These are extraordinary times and these are frightening times for many, but it is good to see so many familiar faces. I hope you are all well and all of your families are well, also. I want to recognize that we have been joined by Council member Francisco Moya from Queens and, before we hear from the present CEOs, I want to thank my legislative director, Jack Bernatwitz, my Chief of Staff, Matt Wallace, the committee's finance analyst Aaliyah Ali, our policy analyst, Kristi Dwyer, and

our committee counsel, Brenda McKinney, for all their hard work on all of these things. Lastly, I will just say-- and perhaps the present CEOs will reference this. There was a cut to the libraries budgets in the adopted budget in June and there are some who are wondering just how important libraries are today and whether or not you are still delivering the life enhancing services and programs that you have for well over 100 years. So, clearly, I believe you have and continue to do so and you're needed more than ever. But I'm certainly interested to hear from all. If you about the current situation in the future and what it looks like for you. What you are doing, but also, in some ways, what you are hopeful about and what you are fearful of from the city of New York. The city of New York and the federal government. With that, I will throw it back to the moderator for some very important words of guidance on the hearing and how we are going to proceed.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Chair and Bremer. So, we will start with going over some procedures for the hearing. I am Brenda McKinney, counsel to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup



Relations of the New York City Council and I will be moderating today's hearing and calling on the panelists to testify. Before we begin, I would like to remind everyone that you will be on mute until I call you to testify. After you are called, you will be on muted by the host. The libraries CEO will remain unmuted during the Q&A portion of today's hearing. Council member questions will be limited to five minutes and Council members, please note that this includes both the questions and the witness answers. Please also note that we will not have a second round of questions at today's hearing. Finally, as we have not received any registrations from members of the public, there will be no public testimony portion for today's hearing. So, with that, the Council does not need to administer the oath to the libraries, so I will now call on the following representatives from the libraries to testify in the order that we will call them. First is Linda E. Johnson, president and CEO of the Brooklyn Public Library followed by Anthony Marx, president and CEO of the New York Public Library and, finally, Dennis M. Walcott, president and CEO of the Queens Public Library. Additionally, for the record,

the following representatives from the libraries will also be on hand to testify. Nick Higgins from the Brooklyn public library, Karen Shehan from Brooklyn, and Iris Whitehall from New York public library. We also have Brian banded from the New York Public Library, Shannon Sharp from the New York Public Library, Sung Mo Kim from the Queens Public Library, and Nick Buren from the Queens Public Library. So, Council members, please use the raise hand function in Zoom if you would like to ask questions or speak and, with that, President Johnson, I see that you are ready and you may begin when you are ready.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you so much. It's nice to see all of you. I have to say I miss being flanked by my colleague sitting at the table in those uncomfortable chairs. I even miss those chairs in the portrait of George Washington and his horse, which always makes me smile. Thank you, Chair Van Bramer, for giving us this opportunity to testify. We have been running since March with our hair on fire and organizing our testimony and thinking about all we have accomplished since March is both heartening and heartbreaking and I will explain more. But we deeply appreciate your support in the

opportunity to talk about the work that we have been doing. Certainly, a lot different than the last time we testify. So, thank you, Chairman Van Bramer and members of the committee, Majority Leader Cumbo and our Brooklyn Delegation and the entire city Council for supporting New York City's libraries throughout this extremely challenging year. We deeply appreciate your efforts to ensure that Brooklyn Public Library can continue to deliver services to the 2.6 million residents of our borough. This March, we were reminded for the first time in our history, our 124 year history, we were forced to close our doors. Knowing how many patrons depend on us and how desperately they need the services and the community to serve. With extraordinary speed and solidarity, our librarians, and staff, and in particular, our information technology team transformed Brooklyn Public Library into a largely digital institution. Between mid-March in September, we hosted more than 4000 programs online with the same breath as our in-person programming and the same name. To foster literacy, civic engagement, and social justice. For example, our 28th amendment initiative, which was originally slated to be held in

our branches, as well as schools and senior centers and homeless shelters, pivoted quickly to 32 zoom town halls where hundreds of Brooklynites brainstorm to the next amendment to the Constitution. We created new programs in response to our community's needs. Energized by the Black Lives Matter movement, Brooklyn Public Library has prioritized programs that foster dialogue about race and social equity in the center black and indigenous writers and thinkers. All told, more than 700,000 people have tuned into BPL's virtual programs from Ready Set Kindergarten to Homework Help for remote students, to Know Your Rights workshops, grief support groups, and personalized job assistance for those who have found themselves out-- suddenly unemployed. In the first four months of the pandemic, 146,000 children tuned into our multilingual story times and are free, high quality content featured by Moma and NBC today. They continue to be in high demand. The demand for programming has been matched by the demand for books. Between March and June, e-checkouts for young adult materials increased by 80 percent compared to the previous year and nearly tripled for children's materials. To keep pace, we dramatically expanded

our digital collection, which now contains more than 400,000 e-books, audiobooks, videos, and subscriptions. We also pledged to ensure that our collection, as a whole, reflects more black and indigenous viewpoints. As proud as we are of meeting so many of the need so quickly, we remain painfully aware that we are leaving behind hundreds of thousands of Brooklynites who do not have access to the Internet. The pandemic has widened the digital divide in our city. Before March, Brooklyn Public Library was the largest provider of free Internet service in the borough and even as we closed our doors, we decided to keep the Wi-Fi on at all of our branches throughout the pandemic. With more than 1000 people gathering outside on a single day to try and catch the signal coming through our windows and doors, we became more committed than ever to acting and advocating for more equitable access to broadband. Last month, with the support of several private funders, Brooklyn Public Library launched the Brooklyn Reach Project which will extend free, unlimited Wi-Fi 300 feet from our branches via new rooftop antennas. Antennas have already been installed in neighborhoods with the highest needs.

Brownsville, Bushwick, Coney Island, and Fort Greene, as well as Redhook and Flatbush. Where we have been able to configure outdoor library spaces with furniture loaned from the Department of Transportation. The antennas will ultimately be installed on 44 branch rooftops across the borough, enabling more Brooklynites to submit online job applications, complete their schoolwork, check out library books, and much more. Alongside the dramatic expansion of the library's digital services and Wi-Fi signal. Brooklyn Public Library has begun to gradually reopen our branches. The safety of our patrons and staff are paramount to us and we followed the guidelines and recommendations of leading public health authorities, as well as other urban library systems and our Tri-Li Partners to develop a comprehensive multi-phased reopening plan. In June, our capital planning and facilities management team and custodial staff work together to reconfigure workspaces and implement new cleaning, ventilation, PPE, and workplace distancing protocols. All Brooklyn Public Library locations, apart from those under construction, are now open to our staff so they can perform inventory, collections, and reference

work and produce on site virtual programming. As of this moment, 27 of our libraries, including central, are now open to the public for grab and go lobby service. One individual or family at a time can enter the library to return and pick up box. Since reopening, we have welcomed nearly 200,000 Brooklynites back into our branches and helped patrons check out more than 120,000 books with far more on hold. We have also hosted limited outdoor programming, our open air Ask a Tech sessions provide free tech assistance in multiple languages outside branches which has been especially important as the pandemic has forced so many of us to adapt to new technologies. Our university Open Air offered free classes in Prospect Park and every week in October our Open Streets initiative at Mequon library and Bed-Stuy offered children's programming at a small browsing collection. You will closely monitoring the number of Covid cases in Brooklyn and across our city, we are preparing to open seven branches for further services, including first floor browsing, limited computer and printer use, and reference assistance. In those zones and elsewhere in Brooklyn, the library has partnered with the New York

City Health and Hospitals Test and Trace Corps. A Test and Trace grant has allowed library staff to distribute 270,000 masks and reach more than 19,000 Brooklynites with information about essential resources such as free testing sites and emergency food relief. We have begun to hold weekly virtual health fairs in order to help our patrons navigate the constantly evolving information regarding testing sites, insurance coverage, and more. The Test and Trace Core used are Williamsburg and Borough Park libraries as PPE and information distribution sites and offered outdoor pop-up Covid testing at Patorgette [sp?] and Brighton Beach libraries and we are ready to leverage more of our branches as needed.

Throughout the crisis, the library has endeavored to be a reliable partner to the city. Early in the pandemic, when PPE was scarce, we worked in partnership with Columbia University to print face shields for healthcare workers using 3D printers from our branches. We partnered with the NYC Emergency Management and mobilize staff to offer five branches to act as cooling centers over the summer. On primary day in June and election day in November, 18 of our branches served as safe polling sites for



Brooklynites exercising their right to vote. In partnership with the city's anti-gun violence employment program, Brooklyn Public Library hosted a six-week intensive virtual summer program for 14 to 24-year-olds residing in Brooklyn, specific NYCHA developments. We delivered more than 13,000 summer reading books and activity booklets for children and teens to the Department of Education, as well as schools, homeless shelters, and childcare centers. We recently part of the Department of Corrections to provide incarcerated New Yorkers with the virtual library via tablets and, with the city's Department of Youth and Community Development to host learning labs. At six of our branches, K-8 students will be able to access remote learning and enjoy an enriching environment when they cannot be in school. As you know, the vast majority of our branches sorely need capital improvement. We are extremely grateful to the Council's support on that front and helped make progress as soon as these construction projects are, again, under way. Fortunately, we have managed to forge ahead with a few self-managed projects, including the new Greenpoint Library and environmental education Center, a stunning model for

the libraries we are working to revitalize across Brooklyn and for 21st-century libraries across the country. We also recently launched the Center Brookwood History at Brooklyn Public Library which will allow all New Yorkers free and open access to the most expansive collection of Brooklyn history in the world, as well as former Brooklyn historical Society building in Brooklyn Heights which will soon open for grab and go library services. Despite the period of challenges of the pandemic, I cannot think of a timelier milestone for Brooklyn Public Library. There is a real hunger in our city and our country to better understand our past so that we might build a better future. As we build that future more equitable, more cohesive, more sustainable, libraries stand to play a vital role. After New York City was devastated by Hurricane Sandy, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development launched an initiative called Rebuild By Design to research how cities might better respond and recover from future disasters. Eric Klingenberg, a sociologist at NYU and director of the initiative, identified public libraries as a city resiliency center. Libraries, he writes, are essential to promoting stronger social ties in

communities with stronger social ties are, time and again, proving to be safer, healthier, and more resilient. The Covid 19 pandemic has meant months of unprecedented social isolation for New Yorkers, as well as economic and educational deprivation. It has laid bare and exacerbated so many of our cities and our countries inequities. Public libraries, trusted by every generation in every neighborhood are uniquely suited to help rebuild our social and civic infrastructure and ensure that infrastructure serves all about. At a time when we need our fellow New Yorkers to feel connected to and invested in their communities, we are grateful that this committee, the City Council and the administration, recognize the essential work of libraries. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much, President Johnson, for your testimony. I don't know if you were getting a little emotional at the beginning of your testimony, but I found somebody your testimony to be somewhat emotional because the moment that we are in, what we have all been through and are still going through, but also the remarkable resiliency of the Brooklyn Public Library. And I know we are going to hear what I imagine to be very

similar stories from the other two systems. I want to recognize that we have been joined by Council member Mark Gjonaj, along with Council member Moya who I mentioned before, I believe, Majority Leader Cumbo is also joined the hearing. And, you know, I just want to make sure because I wrote down some of these notes that, even in the heat of-- and Council member Joe Borelli from Staten Island has joined. So, every member of the Committee is now on the hearing. We have 100 percent attendance from the committee members. But, you know, at a time when people sort of thought libraries were closed and maybe not doing things that they could easily see, if I got your numbers right, 700,000 people participated in online programs at the Brooklyn Public Library. 146,000 children tuned in for children's programs. 27 libraries opened for grab and go and about 200,000 Brooklynites have already visited in person and in those libraries. Obviously, we have seven more sites going hopefully to open soon and with some more services offered. And you printed face shields through 3D printers when we needed them and some testing sites. Some libraries used as testing sites and PPE distribution centers. 13,000 children

benefited from summer reading materials and learning labs and the incarcerated virtual libraries. All of that while we were in the midst of a pandemic. And, you know, that made me emotional at various points in listening to you testify and I hope that both the members of the Council and the administration and, of course, the people in the city of New York hear all of this and understand the breadth of activity that is going on at our public libraries even if it looks like your neighborhood branch is an open for public service in the way that it once was before the pandemic. So, I will have more questions , but I did just want to say that is an incredible amount of work that is going on. And, obviously, the staff of the Brooklyn Public Library deserve so much credit for doing that courageous work during the pandemic.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Councilman. I'm glad you mentioned the staff because there been people who are just, you know, as I said, you know, working nonstop hair on fire for all these months and they're doing it because it is painfully clear to was that the pandemic is actually made the most vulnerable among us that much more vulnerable, that much further behind that being on the wrong side

of the digital divide is that much more devastating, as children are able to learn at the same rate with the same resources as more affluent children. And the staff has been extraordinary and they are doing it because they believed so deeply in the work of the library and I am very fortunate to be supported by such a terrific team.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah. Thank you for saying that. The Council about that over to Tony. You know, we also know that Covid has affected disproportionately black and brown communities, immigrant communities, communities with fewer resources and Covid has laid bare for many who were previously aware just how disproportionately affected these communities are. But while some institutions are playing catch up, you know, and all institutions to do better, I feel like libraries have been there to provide some of these services to folks who don't have a lot of money, who may be undocumented long before others discovered in this moment that there were incredible disparities in our society. But libraries have largely always been there. We can always do more, we can always do better, but libraries have been there. So, with that, counsel,

do you want to call on Pres. Marx or does it suffice to say I am calling on Pres. Marx to deliver his testimony?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair, it suffices to say. You can also call on—

PRESIDENT MARX: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and the members of the committee for your support of libraries in the past and today. So, obviously, first thing is first. The pandemic means we have prioritized health and safety of our staff and patrons. That is just, you know, absolutely number one. We will come back to that. In spite of the closures that we have had to all indoor during these times, the physical closures, we have clearly, as you've heard in Brooklyn, as well, of course, maintained our commitment to provide the public with equitable and accessible services. A lot of that is now virtual. So, we saw 45,000 new library card side up through our Simply E app. We have had 2.1 million digital checkouts since closure. 65,000 new users just our own app for e-books, Simply E. Database item requests, close to a million. 25,000 holds. It is just been extraordinary to see my colleagues really, you know, remove all the constraints and

offer everything that we can digitally. That includes wellness, housing, food security information educational programs. For instance, Tech Connect continues to teach coding, website development, Microsoft Office. People tried to bring their businesses back or try to create businesses. We've got career services that include online job training, one-on-one coaching for interviews, templates or resumes. We have also supported distance-learning for parents, caregivers, students, and educators, of course. So, for instance, this summer we distributed 40,000 book kits as part of the summer reading. Research libraries can deliver. You can request any document and we will send it to you. As well as having negotiated, but not yet launched publicly what will be a research e-book collection available to anyone in the world that will be the largest e-book collection ever. Something in the area of three to 4 million volumes. That is already begun to be used. In the meantime, massive increase of our databases-- as I said, close to a million database requests. We have used the research library, as well, to pump out what people are so eager for. So, for instance, when the George Floyd horror and everything that that is



brought to the surface that we all know it was there, but has been brought to the surface, we, working with the Schaumburg, launched the black liberation reading list. We have done more of those around voting, around all the issues that everyone is been confronting and it has just been remarkable. We know, of course, that too many New Yorkers are on the wrong side of the digital divide and I just want to add, you know, I've said this too many times and I just want to add to what Linda said. You know, when we can pump out and bleed from our branches to help some people get connected, but we can do hotspot. That is great. That's great. But I'm sorry. This is 2020. The fact that we live in the information capital, the financial capital of the world and millions of New Yorkers simply can't go to school now, do their schoolwork, do their jobs, apply for jobs because we don't believe that is the minimum basic utility we owe the citizens. So, sorry. Just sidebar listening to Linda., But, you know, we have to solve this problem. This is the fundamental failing of this city at this point to provide the basic services that we need the city to provide for

us to be able to do the work that we need to do.

That could not be more clear how. Sorry.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No. Don't apologize. I think it's--

PRESIDENT MARX: So, we know that because of that, the physical work that we do is all the more important. So, we moved to phase 1 with the grab and go. We are over 50 locations. We, just to bring you up to date, last Monday we moved the research library and 14 locations to what we call phase 2 which was adding browsing and computer use. That actually was going smoothly. We had worked for months for that. By the middle of the week, I became-- towards the end of the week, it became obvious that the numbers in Staten Island were going very much in the wrong direction. We moved to the three phase 2 in Staten Island back to phase 1, so we didn't stop grab and go and, unfortunately, we concluded that the numbers were consistently going in the wrong direction and decided to move all of our phase 2 services, after only a week, back to phase 1 for now while we continue to track the caseload. Again, playing it safe. Very frustrating for all involved. We proved that we can do phase 2. We are

ready to do it again. We are waiting for the numbers to give us the confidence that we can do that. But whatever level of physical services we provide, we are absolutely doing everything we can to ensure the health and safety of our patrons and staff, all--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Tony, can I just under a one second? Just because he mentioned I don't want to lose this point. Do you have a level of positivity number in mind in terms of what would allow you to continue with phase 2? Is that something that is--

PRESIDENT MARX: So we use lots of different metrics. We obviously have been taking a close look at what has been condensed into the yellow, orange, and red notifications. That I yellow is what true-- You know, focused our attention, if you will, in the Staten Island situation and, as we saw other areas, particularly in the Bronx, moving in the same direction. We have said we won't use a single metric. We have lots of experts on this. Air Tech. We will talk to everybody. My view is we should have the expert advice and we should always be, what I call, half a step more conservative than the expert advice. That if we make a mistake on the

side of a hearing on safety, I will live with that. We will live with that. Anyway, but we are doing everything to make sure that everyone is safe. We have had no instances of transmission into, you know, mom the library or from the library. We know, obviously, that the ultimate goal is to have all of our libraries back and fully up and functioning. As we chose the facilities, more than half, to start with in terms of grab and go, of course we looked at ADA accessibility, proximity to other libraries, staff availability where we are making the combination, for instance, for staff who have kids that are at home and not at school. Ability to implement safety protocols, construction, as well as offering our branches for testing and other public needs, learning labs, etc. On the capital front, the crisis resulted in the halt on all capital projects in March, including 62 active capital projects. Since then, 16, one six, of those projects have been restarted. We continue to work with the city's Office of Management and Budget, as well as DDC. We look forward to having all these projects, particularly our Carnegie restoration, back on track just as soon as we can. Look, it has been edited

amazingly difficult and challenging year. The libraries, our colleagues, really, you know, stepped up to the plate. You know, we were the most used physical facility, civic facility, in the city. We are now front and center for what we can do physically and certainly what is happening virtually in terms of helping with learning, helping with information, and accessing these times as Linda has already eloquently said, as, Chairman, you've already said. Nothing could be more important, to ensure opportunity to ensure regrowth, to ensure re-envisioning of where we will go, where we can and must go after we get through these difficult days. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, Tony. You-- I don't know if you have this handy or someone on your team does. Linda had mentioned that 200,000 Brooklynites have visited in person to the 27 locations that were open for grab and go. Do you have that number for the New York Public Library? The 50 locations where you have grab and go during Covid?

PRESIDENT MARX: I do not have it right in front of me. I will get it for you. If I don't

get it-- have it before the end of this session, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay. I mean, that would be helpful, I think, because, you know, it is also incredibly important that you just reported that there been, you know, zero transmissions of the virus amongst the staff and customers while you had that service at 50 locations and, obviously, you have demonstrated that you can provide the services and do that with a level of caution that keeps everyone safe. So, I would love to know that number of how many folks have actually visited the NY PL in person, which just, I think, amplifies the safety measures that you are taking, particularly, as you move to phase 2 and, I think, all three systems looking at maybe different versions of phase 2, but some versions of phase 2 that include a bit more browsing, computer use, and in library time, shall we say. So, hopefully you can get that before we are done with questions, but I would now ask Dennis Walcott, president and CEO of the Queens Public Library to testify. You have to unmute yourself, Dennis.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: There we go. Yep. I'm here. So, first, good morning to you, Chair, and

to all the members of the Council, to the Speaker and let me thank you for all of your support not just this year, but over the years and, just to give you that number from the beginning, it's 278,000 people who have come through our doors for a variety of different services that all go into more detail a little while, but—

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: as with Linda and Tony, I think they captured the true passion of what we've been doing throughout the three systems. In one word I want to add before I give my formal testimony is the word nimble. I think all of us-- and thanks to our great staff-- have been extremely nimble in adapting to the environment, adapting to programs. Really gearing up and providing the protective services that we need for both of our staff and to the public. And I want to say hello real big thank you to all of our teams in all three systems because they have been on the frontline. And, recently, had an all staff gathering virtually, I complemented, I think, the unsung heroes who are a part of the teams. Because a lot of times, you see the people who are in the public, but our custodians

have done an outstanding job and they are the ones that are going constantly to the libraries to make sure they're clean, making sure they are ready for the public. And sometimes I don't necessarily give them enough praise. So, I want to publicly thank our custodians and support staff for all the work they were doing. Right now I'm at Central and we, you know, have central serving as the grab and go type that started yesterday and we opened Flushing as a grab and go site, as well, starting yesterday. In our book preparers are there and everything is just going on. It's just, unfortunately, we can't have the constant flow. So, now I would like to flow into the testimony. And, as you know, the Covid 19 pandemic has impacted every citizen, business, and government in the world and it is change the way we interact with one another and is forced us to reconsider all the things that we take for granted as normal. I, along with my colleagues, had to make the very difficult decision to close our location and shut our doors back a long time ago now on March 16, 2020 to spare the greater good and tried to mitigate the spread of this disease. It was a difficult decision because I know the hundreds of thousands of



people rely on our collections and free programs and services on a daily basis, however, it was a decision that had to be made in order to save lives. As the city began to shut down with schools closing and all nonessential businesses shuttering, we at the Queens Public Library knew that we had to rapidly alter delivery service mechanisms in order to serve a public now confined to their homes and not able to visit our physical locations. Our world-class staff swiftly adapted our in-person programming to fit the virtual world. Within the first two weeks of our closure, Q

PL established an online calendar offering a range of virtual activities, including our instantly popular children's story times, Zumba, and a session with Ralph McDaniels, as well, our hip-hop expert. In addition to that, we have Facebook lives, Ask the Census Bureau sessions, and established all the other types of programs we were doing over a period of time. Over time, our virtual offerings became even more diverse and expansive and allowed our staff to try new and innovative initiatives such as QPL at night, a virtual nightlife hotspot for entertainment, civic engagement, and learning geared

toward millennial audiences. In August, as part of our work towards racial equity, I had a panel discussion, To Be Black in America, conversation with representatives about racism that the Attorney General, Leticia James, and Dr. Wade Riley, president of SUNY downstate Health Sciences University. This vital and necessary conversation addressed racial disparities in regards to Covid 19, but also in the daily lives of black and brown people living in this country. We partnered with Brain Fuse, one of the nation's leading online tutoring providers to provide access to free homework help, including live online tutoring and test prep in the right range of subjects for K-12 students and adult learners. From April through October, QPL hosted over 5700 programs that were attended by over 100,000 customers. Since our closure, our adult learning program hosted over 100 virtual courses serving 1800, while 700 individuals registered for the New Americans programs, ESOL 2020 virtual fall semester. With everyone at home, the library swiftly [inaudible 00:48:22] over 25,000 e-books, E magazines, audiobooks, and videos to our digital platform. Within the first six weeks of our closure, e-books and magazines had a circulation

increase of over 104 percent. As we moved to a more virtual world, however, it laid bare the disparities that have been talked about earlier in regards to the broadband connectivity in the local communities we serve. In certain areas, such as in Southeast Queens, approximately 43 percent of the households are without broadband access. QPL is serving as a critical lifeline for individuals who do not have these services and technology in their homes. Our customers rely on our free Wi-Fi services for a plethora of reasons, such as to stay connected with families and friends, to pay bills, as well, and to make sure that they attend school remotely and satisfy other educational needs. But as Tony and Linda have both pointed out, that is still not acceptable as far as the need out there in the public. In an effort to increase our digital access, QPL has extended our Wi-Fi available at 20 of our locations, allowing anyone, whether they have a library card or not, to access our broadband service using their personal device up to 150 yards from our buildings. The extended Wi-Fi is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the public is taking full advantage of it. During the first quarter of

this fiscal year, we recorded nearly 118,000 Wi-Fi sessions. Last week, QPL launched our newly redesigned mobile app with an improved user-friendly interface allowing customers to navigate with ease. The features include the ability to search or scan books, find nearby locations, and read, watch, and listen to content directly from the app. As all of us have confronted the Covid 19 pandemic and the manifestations of racial injustice across the country and here at home, New York City endured unprecedented heartache, economic hardship, and turmoil. In developing our reopening plan, there was one thing we all knew. The world would now need and demand more from libraries than ever before. This understanding strengthened our mission, delivering critical services and resources remotely and offering everyone, no matter who they are or where they come from, the chance to achieve their full potential. After thoughtfully and carefully formulating a plan for our locations eventual reopening, QPL set that plan into motion with our first branch reopening on July 13. We reopened seven libraries for to go service and returned six days a week at nine locations and fulfillment centers accepting returns

24 hours a day seven days a week. From the outset, the health and safety of the public and our staff have been paramount. We established new protocols based on the latest public health guidance. Before a library is reopened, the building undergoes extensive disinfecting and cleaning and our spaces are reconfigured to promote social distancing and support new service models. All returned materials are quarantined and compliance with the national standards before they are put back into circulation. We require all staff and customers to wear a mask. We provide masks to people who do not have them. We provide all Queens public library staff with masks, hand sanitizer, and other personal protective equipment, as well as making hand sanitizer available to the public at all open bridges. We held virtual training for staff on how to stay safe and provided counseling and support services to promote good mental health. I care deeply about the safety and health of all of our colleagues and everyone here at QPL and ensure that we have the measures in place to face new challenges posed by the Covid 19 world. On August 10th, we opened eight additional libraries for to go services and, on September 28th, we opened

eight more an extended our fines and fees exemptions on all materials through January 2021. Yesterday, on November 16th, we opened our two largest libraries, Central and Flushing, bringing the number of locations reopened since July to the 25 and currently to previously open branches are closed. Sunnyside which is undergoing capital renovations for ADA compliance and Kew Gardens Hill which is an H plus H Covid test site. On November 30th, barring unforeseen circumstances, we will open an additional 12 more branches, as well. While we have been planning to begin offering public computer appointments next week in light of the rising number of Covid 19 cases in and around the city, we will delay the computer services until an appropriate time. As Tony indicated, we will use a variety of measures to determine when we are ready to do that and we are continuously monitoring and assessing internal and external factors and remain nimble, but responsive to the evolving public health situation. While undergoing the arduous task of safely reopening, we have remained engaged with the city and continue our excellent partnership with the administration. We have always been there for the

city as it has needed us and, as stated earlier, we knew we would be needed now more than ever.

Operating under the stress of the pandemic, we successfully conducted early voting at our Jackson Heights location in June and, in November, operated 13 other polling locations on primary and election day and served as cooling centers for the public and we had five of our locations serving as Covid 19 testing sites where we have had over 10,000 people come through our library doors for testing, as well. As you know, with our partners at Brooklyn in New York, we have also done a lot of outreach around census work, as well and had our census teams working in conjunction with the city to make sure that, here in Queens, we contributed to a two percentage point increase in our borough of self-response when compared to the 2010 census. We always stand ready to serve the public and we will continue to do so for as long as we have the capacity and resources. Libraries are trusted entities that we are also working with the city in developing learning labs, as well, which people turn to on a regular basis and we strive towards making sure we continue to be vibrant and form cohesive and working with our staff, as well

as our public to make sure we provide the necessary supports to services and information to make sure people are well informed. And, with that, Mr. Chair, I want to thank you, the members of the Council, and also through our Tri-Li partnership which I can't thank you enough for the teamwork that we do both with Linda, Tony, and I talking on a regular basis, our teams at various levels talking, and having weekly meetings of the Tri-Li and making sure that we are coordinated in our response. Thank you, sir.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, Dennis. And, of course, I know all of this, as the Chair of the Committee, but I think it bears repeating for all of those who are watching and who may see some form of this, that the libraries play a key role in the census drive here in the city of New York and it could not have reached the level of success that it did without our public libraries being crucial partners in that effort. The fact that you were also polling sites, cooling centers, and Covid testing sites at the same time that you were reopening libraries for a form of public service is incredible and I think it demonstrates to the world just how indispensable libraries are. And I hope



that everyone remembers what you have done, what you are doing, and what you will continue doing as we go through further phases of this pandemic and, hopefully, towards an end to it when we do talk about the budget issues of the city of New York as it relates to public libraries. That we need you now more than ever. You have come through for the city of New York more than ever and are, literally, saving lives. Dennis knows this because we talk and, you know, I get tested every three or so weeks because I interact with so many members of the public and I am a caretaker of my nearly 81-year-old mother. And so I have used the Far Rockaway, Kew Gardens Hills and Lefferts libraries as rapid testing sites and it is brilliant to see our public libraries, you know, in that way and, well it is a very different experience going through the library and not seeing what we would normally see, I know I am grateful and certainly they are being used. A lot of people are going through those libraries as testing centers. And just to go back, Linda had 200,000 in person visits. You had almost 300,000 in person visits. You know, New York Public Library has more locations and so I am going to guess that their number is a

robust number and, Tony, if you have that number, feel free to interject. If not, I'm just going to say that you're probably close-- you can unmute yourself.

PRESIDENT MARX: The number we have, as of until through September was 200,000. We do not have the October number yet, so my guess is that will be in the 230-ish thousand.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right.

PRESIDENT MARX: [inaudible 00:59:00]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah. So, I mean, if, in the middle of this pandemic, we've had, you know, 750,000 people in person visit a public library, you know, it just talks about how desperate people are for the information and for that connectivity to a place that they trust so much. And the fact that you been able to do it safely. Tony mentioned that there is been no transmission at the NYPL. I'm hoping that Queens public library at Brooklyn public library have had similar experiences with safety in terms of staff and public?

PRESIDENT WOLCOTT: So, Queens, we had a security guard who had a family member protested, so we put our protocol in place and then moved folks

out of that wall we did a deep cleaning, but we haven't had any positive cases of our staff directly. And, again, I think part of what we been able to do-- and I think this is the part that I think, Council member, you definitely would know. What we have set up is basic pods of staff where we have various teams of staff in place. So, if someone should test positive, that we will move that entire team out, shut down the library, do the cleaning, but that have a second team, in place, which is provided, I think, very more complex, but a more safe system of staffing in dealing with how we staff our libraries now. So, we've been lucky in that regard, as well.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Linda? You are on mute, Linda.

PRESIDENT MARX: Can I just say, while Linda is unmuting, that we had no transmissions. We have had seven staff members test positive for cases that we have used exactly the same protocols that Dennis subscribed to ensure that there would be no transmission. Quarantine, separate shifts, etc.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In Brooklyn-- and sorry about the muting problem. There's always someone who does that. I hate that it was me this

time. But, at Brooklyn, we have had one maintainer that was diagnosed with Covid and he worked at the Central Librarian we immediately put the protocols in place, which meant shutting that library down and-- for 96 hours from the date of the test. And making sure that anybody that had close contact with was advised and quarantined. We also have implemented a system like Queens which is to have teams of workers in every location. So, team A and team B. If there is somebody you get sick team A, it doesn't bring the whole operation to a halt. Once the library-- The branches cleaned, team B can come in and continue to run things there.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: But I'm going to assume-- and all three of you feel free to comment-- that you are working closely with the staff and the local union folks and everyone is collaborating very closely on all of this, particularly as I hope you will be able to do soon. And that is to expand to phase 2 as your various iterations of phase 2 look a little bit different, but, you know, there are variations of it.

PRESIDENT WOLCOTT: So, couple things. In regards to working with the union, yeah, we are

really closely aligned with the union and we talk on a regular basis and they will give us a call, we will give them a call. My chief operating officer and [inaudible 01:03:10] are in constant communication. When necessary, John and I will talk, as well. So, there is definitely a partnership in any time we are thinking of doing something that is the next phase, we make sure that we have communication with them. And even though you know this-- and I don't want to make an assumption because I think, as you know, Council member, just for the record, that we lost a staff member prior to reopening and that was not necessarily through a library contact. And my folks reminded me we also had one staff member who tested positive, but then I was a while ago. So were balancing that. But other than that, we haven't had any indications. I just wanted to clarify that point.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Linda,  
anything odd or--

PRESIDENT WOLCOTT: Just for one  
second-- just add something--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

PRESIDENT WOLCOTT: before you move on to your next phase of the discussion, at Lefferts when he most recently went-- because I wanted you to talk about that because I don't want you to violate your HIPPA--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah.

PRESIDENT WOLCOTT: role, was that-- since it opened six days ago, Lefferts has had 629 people come through its doors to be tested.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Incredible.

PRESIDENT WOLCOTT: In a two week period of time, Ozone Park had 2711 people to be tested. And what is different with Windsor Park, Windsor Park is solely the regular test site whereas Kew Gardens Hills, Ozone Park, and Lefferts have been both regular test, as well as the rapid test and having the support services there, their contact tracing if anyone should test positive in the rapid test and that there is an immediate social worker there, I know, that supports. So, it's really taking a look at how we can partner as all of us have indicated, with the city, whether through learning labs and others not just to what we normally do, but to make sure that we are located in communities that

have higher impact issues that have to be addressed, as well.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah. Thank you for mentioning that, Dennis, and also for allowing me to correct the record because I used Ozone Park once, not Far Rockaway. And that's good to hear about Lefferts because I feel like I was, maybe, the first one to go through their as it was, I think, the first day that they were open. I went right at the beginning and able to, essentially, walk right in before folks started to light up, which was great to see so many people using the service. So, in terms of the budget, and Covid and the staffing, you know, how are we doing? You know, there were some reductions as a result of the budget. Obviously, I didn't support those, but it could have been a lot worse, as we all know. But what impact, if any, have you felt and how are you experiencing staffing? Because, obviously, we know a lot of people have left the city. There are people moving. Just a lot of people transitioning in and out. Obviously, if you have a stable job, you are less likely, probably, to move out of the city, but I'm just wondering about all of that just because these

are such difficult times and a lot of people have decided, you know, they want to try something different in life or the need to get out of the city for various reasons. What is been your experience? So, talk a little bit about the budget because obviously we are looking at a very severe situation in the city with the budget modification that we are looking at and one day we hope for a federal relief package, but, you know, we can't go to the bank with that just yet, nor do we know what libraries will get as a result of that. So, maybe that three of you can talk a little bit about those things.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah. I will take the lead. You know, our workforce has been stable, actually. We have not seen a lot of attrition or resignation. We have also been very open and straightforward with our people. If they have concerns, health concerns or if there are reasons that they can't be reporting to their branches as we started to reopen, we are having everybody operate on the honor code. It because we are not at a full complement yet, we've been able to manage. Of course, with the opening of each additional branch, we have less and less leeway and, because we have



more limited hours, we are also sort of in a position right now where we are not stressed in terms of staffing. And there is really-- when I'm around and talking to people who are working in the branches, the concerns are as much about the commute as with being in the library. I think it is actually more about the commute than actually being at work. I find that staff is actually eager to be back at work and be productive and doing the work that they love to do. I think, as the weather continues to get colder and there's less we can do outdoors, that that will also pose some challenges. But my priority, you know, as I said at the outset, is to keep everybody safe and healthy. That is our staff, as well as our patrons and I think we have demonstrated that priority to our people and that has led to an environment where, on that front, we are trusted, which is great. In terms of the budget, you know, right now we are managing because we are not at full complement of all the libraries. We are very concerned about the future and when we are able to resume full operation and worry that we will have the resources to maintain the schedules that we have been

able to put in place, thanks so much to the city and Councils support in recent years.

PRESIDENT WOLCOTT: Yeah. Just to pick up on Linda's point, it is basically the same with QPL. I think that we have been able to manage fairly well. Obviously, a lot of expense went into the beginning around the purchase of the PPE equipment and outfitting the libraries to make them safe for both the public and staff. So, there was a lot of additional cash outlay in that particular area. And also the utilization of city Council money to help with increasing our e-book any material purchasing, as well, to make sure we had stock available for the public to take advantage of. I noticed some retirement. I'm not sure if they are trending any higher than normal, but, again, I think as Linda articulated, that, you know, with the number of buildings that we have open and serving the public and some of the staffing models we were able to put in place, we were able to balance both the budget and maintaining our staff. And, again, in partnership with the union, we have been able to identify particular needs in trying to respond to that as far as what need they have identified that we need to

address, as well. So, that, from the staffing point of view, has allowed us to have, I think, the richness and diversity in the offerings that we have been able to make for the public, and also the staffing models we have put in place, as well. But, again, with the staff that are operating from home, they are rotated in, as well. We have assigned computers to all of them with a VPN availability to make sure there able to connect with the library. So we been able to do that, I think, balancing act in a way that allows us to continue the services and expand the services. I mean, I'm chomping at the bit for us to go to that next level and, as Tony indicated with his frustration and he sent us a text on his frustration when he had to move back from the browsing, were looking for that next phase. We want to continue to increase our services to the public both through computer services and some ideas we have around printing services and making sure that the public is able to take full advantage of the buildings that we have.

PRESIDENT MARX: And so, in addition to what Dennis and Linda have already said, I mean, look: I think the basic facts are this. We have a

reduced budget. We had got some cuts from the city. We also relied more than our peers on other private sources. So all of those endowment returns, etc., that all gets it at the same time. We have increased costs. So, pandemic related costs, all the security, safety, you know, PPE, facilities work. We also have staff we have to accommodate because they simply can't get to work. For instance if they have caretaker situations that make that impossible. You know, at the same time, we were disciplined. We caught 95 positions. We looked for other savings across the board about them. That means sword about the-- and, by the way, we are investing more in digital than we were before the pandemic and we think that is appropriate and necessary. We haven't reduced our education expenditures, we just shifted them to virtual. We think that is appropriate under the circumstances. If you put that whole package together-- and we haven't had the mass layoffs we all feared. I think we had five full-time positions that we had to stop simply because the work couldn't happen, but we did for allow, in most cases, but we didn't continue over 400 part-timers. And that really hurt. Basically, we are at this sort of

serving the public as much as we can't physically, being safe, massively increase virtual, right? Its increased costs. Basically, we are able to hold that for now, right? But, you know, if there are further- - if big cuts, or further cuts,, were not going to be able to hold all that. It's just, you know, it's a physics problem in the end and that, you know, if more goes, we won't be able to continue at this pace, but I think it is incredible what is been done across the five boroughs under the circumstances.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Tony raises a good point which I should've mentioned, as well, which is where every prioritized and, therefore, shifted spending, especially with respect to digital collections and virtual programming, all of which, of course, is a way to continue to serve our patrons as best as we can.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah. I know Majority Leader Cumbo and, I think, Council member Gjonaj are still with us on the hearing and if either of them have any questions, please feel free to chime in or raise your hand in the zoom. I don't want to keep going if you would like to join in the

questioning of the three presidents and CEOs. And I do see Majority Leader Cumbo. I will ask her to say a few words.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you, Chair Van Bramer and thank you all for the incredible work that you are doing and keeping the city going. I have a completely self-serving question and Linda you know this is coming right to you. How is my Whitman library coming?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You know, all of the DDC projects are on hold right now. We're looking forward to getting things moving again and were working on it. You know, and I have to say that our finance team, led by Karen Shehan has really been dogged about getting to the right people and pressing. We may be seen as pests, but certainly worth being annoying to get these projects back online. The only projects that are currently underway are some of our self-funded projects and I have a couple that, if you give me one second-- that we been able to continue because of the state of play that the projects were in when the pandemic hit.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Uh-hm. And while you are looking, as well, there's another one that I just want to just throw in there--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Sure.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Just in terms of the BAM South project.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yep.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Because I know there was a lot of construction that was beginning and an ending and beginning and ending or stopping and starting again.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah. That one has been restarted just recently.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Okay. That--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah. We were under a lot of pressure on that project because there was a lot of state money in that project which needed to be spent by a certain date and the silver lining-- and there are a few of them-- to the pandemic was that the date was extended, so it looks like we are going to be fine there. There are-- we are in the process, actually, of Walt Whitman of selecting an architect.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Okay. Good to know. Just out of this and, Chair and Bramer may have covered this. This may have been brought up. I'm always curious to find out what practices as a result of the pandemic do you find that you would maintain and keep into the future? So what has been working well? In this is to all of the heads of the different libraries. What has been working well that you feel post-Covid, God willing, that you would want to maintain and keep into the future?

PRESIDENT MARX: All speak. I think the most obvious is the massive expansion and uptake in use of everything digital from--

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Yeah.

PRESIDENT MARX: e-books to--

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Yeah.

PRESIDENT MARX: programs, education programs, author talks. We want to go back to all the physical--

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Right.

PRESIDENT MARX: but we don't want to lose the progress we've made here. And we are also very aware, Majority Leader, that, you know, the very different constituencies. Right? I mean, the truth



is that folks and poor neighborhoods are using e-books at a lower rate than the folks in the richer neighborhoods. So, it's great that we were able to meet the needs with e-books, but we clearly need to do better at reaching out and getting, you know, the students in the poorer neighborhoods to understand this resource and be excited about this resource and for them to feel that it is meeting their needs and then to use it. So, we need to invest-- continue that investment. We also need to be assessing where it is working. Where the demand is. And if we see that it's not working in the areas of the most need, that is what the libraries specialize in. That is what we double down in.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Right.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I just want to add to that I think the virtual world is definitely something that we will be keeping. I think what the virtual world allows us to do is to reach a different type of people to be a part of the information sharing we they don't have to travel to a particular site. We set up the link for people to then connect and reach out. I think it's Tony you said several times and Linda has also said. I mean, I think the

disparity of those who are able to take advantage of that based on the lack of connectivity is something that we have to address and I think that spurs us on to continue the expansion of our Wi-Fi capability, our extended networks, and the ways we try to make sure we provide broadband access to the entire public. The other thing that I think is extremely exciting is the ability to be creative with our programming. I mean, both by force of need, the part--

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: whether the relationship with the city has increased in so many different ways. So, are there multiple things we can use on buildings four, at the same time, maintaining library services, as well? And exploring those options, I think, is something that excites me because we been able to produce the result of that partnership with the city and making sure we increase different types of services, as well. So that is another way of approaching, I think, building on, unfortunately, what we have had to face over the last 9 to 10 months to hopefully where we will be going in the future as far as more in person type of services.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And I would just like to add that there are many things that have improved in the way we operated we don't want to lose them. For example, attendance is way up at a lot of our program because we are not constrained by physical space. So, for example, we have an annual lit film Festival. We have an auditorium that seats 200 people and so that limits, in terms of-- or in the past that was the limit in terms of how many people could attend a film on any given night. This year, of course, we showed the film, you know, via zoom and we had almost 500 people each night watching these films. And so, what we need to do is to be taking the lessons learned from this time and figuring out how we can be both, you know, operating in parallel world so that we can be both present when people want to do that, but also take advantage of what virtual reach has allowed us to do. The other thing that is interesting is the way we are working. And so now that everybody is set up to work remotely, there is some real efficiencies there and we need to make sure that we don't let those advantages slide once we are back in our regular world, hopefully sooner rather than later.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you. Thank you all.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, Majority Leader Cumbo. And if anyone else has any questions, feel free to raise your hand. Dennis, you mentioned 12 more libraries to open. Could you just tell us, again, when that would be ideally? Obviously, anything can happen, obviously. We hope that things don't relative to Covid, but when it is planned and which libraries would be part of that expansion of services in Queens.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Sure. By November 30th is when it should be opening. And I know that Nick is there and Sung can give you the specifics. But, just so you know, one of them includes Hunters Point, as well. So, Hunter's Point will open as a grab and go site by the end of this month and so that is happening and so, just, again, in your particular area, Council member-- Chair, as you know, we opened up Sunnyside and we closed it down because we had the money and approval from OMB to do the ADA work and building a ramp outside. And what side will be going through some interior renovation, as well and then we will be reopening that. So, while Linda also

indicated that a lot of our projects are on hold right now, we have had certain projects that we've got a little bit of money and flexibility to continue. So, Steinway is in process, far rock is in process, as far as capital work is concerned, in Glendale. We are wrapping that up and that will be in the beginning. Well, you know, first quarter or maybe the second quarter of 2021.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. And just to-- While-- If Nick on Sun want to join in, they can. They'll identify themselves first and then give the answer to the rest of the libraries. But Long Island City is still open.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Oh, yes. Very much so.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And has been one of the first. And Broadway in Astoria, is that open?

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: No. Astoria, I think, is slated to open-- and, again, I can stand corrected on that. I'm not sure about Broadway, so I would defer to the experts who know that better than I do.

NICK BUREN: Hello, Chair Van Bramer.

Nick Buren, chief librarian, Queens public library. The store yet is open, as well as, you're correct, [inaudible 01:25:20] City. Dennis gave away the punchline on Hunter's Point, which is great. Just to, for the record, the other libraries that will be opening will be [inaudible 1:25:30], East Flushing, Elmhurst, Glenoaks, Hollis, Hunter's Point was mentioned, Lefrak City, Maspeque, Michell Richmond Hill, Rochdale Village in St. Albans, and once Sunnyside reopens and Kew Garden Hills reopens as a library, as well, that will bring us to seven locations open to the public for to go service. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Terrific.

What is the timeline on the ADA work at Sunnyside?

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Sung?

SUNG MO KIM: That work has our understanding is about 6 to 8 weeks. So we hope that by, you know, no later than January will be able to get the site back. There isn't much work going on inside, so we feel pretty confident that, as soon as we get the turnover, that we will be able to reopen to to go service.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. Thank you for that. And, you know, just to finish up, you know, Tony talked a little bit about this, but given the budget reduction that you did take and given the additional expenses that you have incurred and, obviously, the incredible challenges that no one could have anticipated with all of us going through, you are doing remarkable about for the city of New York and really stretched thin in terms of resources. It's not like anyone is swimming in extra resources at this point. And then, with the budget modification, you know, staring us down and, obviously, you know, we will have another budget completed while we are still confronting Covid, we hope it is the last. You know, you been able to avoid layoffs at this point, but if you were to receive substantial reductions going forward, you would be really hurt in your ability to stave off layoffs could be compromised. And so, you know, maybe just talk a little bit about, you know, what you are confronted with and what you hope happens and what you can't afford to happen.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You know, our budget is largely made up of wages for the people who

work in our libraries and cuts translate hours of service. The other significant port of our service is the collection. And so, you know, the first step would, of course, be to go to the collection budget to avoid having to reduce hours, but that just goes so far. And so, the devastating thing about layoffs is, of course, that they happen in times when people are suffering in, not only are patrons, but our staff, and to cut back hours when you are serving such a vital role in the community and when people need you to be open to need a place to come and to interact with their neighbors as much as with the staff, is really devastating. I think this all sort of came home to us in the aftermath of the George Floyd killing when the applause of the library became the gathering point both before some of the protests, as well as after some of the marches. And it became clear that this language that we have long used as the library is the town hall or the town square is really true. And that people do, in fact, need to come together and that the libraries are perfectly situated to provide that function. It's what we've always done. It's an important part of who we are and every hour that we can't be open is an hour that



we can't provide that service, not only on the literacy, education, civic engagement, all of those important programs, but just in terms of what we do for our neighborhood and providing that town square that every neighborhood needs and that every neighborhood is proud to have.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And just add to that, I mean, we are the anchor. I mean, we are the stable force will. We are the information source. We're the ones who are out there really that people, as you all know, trust us, and trust our word and trust what we do address the information we provided. And any type of cut then cuts into that, as well. And to me, the unique balancing act that we been able to perform, as a result of the support of the city Council and you, Chair, and Majority Leader in the Speaker and also the administration, has allowed us to try to find that safe space and making sure we give the information and are available to the public in a variety of different ways. And as we move into 2021, especially with the onset of the vaccine and what may happen in making us all safe in society, to have libraries not to be available to them or have their doors open or to limit the number of hours, I

think, is a disservice to the public. In the other piece that I think is extremely important as far as what we do is that we get people that information. And so, when you are having a debate taking place around the vaccine, when you have black and brown communities who may not, for rightful reasons, be as trusting of the vaccine, where they going to come to? They're going to come to the library to get information. And that is our role to do that. And then the other thing is going to, you know, what Linda talked about around the staffing issues in the staffing patterns. It will create chaos, quite frankly, because I lived some of this when I was Chancellor and to the whole bumping procedure and seniority and what it means and bumping staff and then all the new type of models we have to put in place that creates the confusion. And we cannot afford to do that. And so, we've been very lucky. We have been very blessed in being able to maintain what we do and keep our doors open to some extent. But that will be challenged as we move forward if there are further cuts or cuts to the budget itself.

PRESIDENT MARX: I just-- Dennis and Linda Hardy set up more eloquently than I can. It's

pretty simple. You know, we put safety first. That costs money. Right? We have prioritized not laid off our full-time staff. We know that we can't provide the same services without our staff, complement. We know from a decade ago that when we have to do layoffs, as the libraries did, that, you know, it takes us a decade to recoup the morale, the expertise, the momentum. We don't want-- No. It isn't that we don't want to have to do that again. We must not do that again. Look, it's real simple. When we are back physically able, is exactly when the city is going to need us the most. Right? If I-- You know, no epidemiologist, but it is pretty obvious that when the city reopens, when the health issues, you know, all of it reopens-- and who knows exactly what the look like and how smooth it will be in exactly when. That is when people are going to be running to the library for, oh, my God. How do I get my kids back up to speed? How to why, you know, supplement what they were doing in school or what they need to. How do I, you know, find a job? How do I get the skills for the job? How do I figure out, as you said, Jimmy, whether to take this vaccine or, you know, who to vote for for the next Mayor of

New York? All that is going to be happening, right? We are the most trusted place. If we get through this awful. Only to find ourselves cratering and our ability just when we're coming out of it, we will double down on the pain, right? You know, that's just-- we can't do that. Please.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. Well, obviously, you know how I feel about this. And before I wrap up, Linda, just wanted to say Dan and I took a rare trip to Brooklyn. You know, we love all three systems equally, but we have a strong preference for the borough of Queens, but we did take a recent trip to Brooklyn and we were standing outside on the Plaza and turned around and saw the giant BLM sign adorning your beautiful Central Library and made me very happy that BPL was so vividly supporting the Black Lives Matters movement and made the trip to Brooklyn, you know, that much better. But we did rush back to Queens, Dennis, to make sure--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Before you broke out in hives you had to run back to the homeland.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And we love New York Public Library, as well. But, you know, in

all seriousness, obviously what you always talked about today, the city of New York should be grateful that millions of people have had the ability to turn to you in this moment when everyone was afraid and everyone was struggling and no one knew exactly from one day to the next how they would be in terms of their health or the people they loved and, yet, just as it has been for over 100 years, our public library systems were there. They were there for the people of the city of New York and in ways that we could never have imagined and, you know, I have been inside plenty of times Ozone Park and Kew Gardens Hills and Lefferts as they existed as libraries. To walk through them as Covid testing sites is a real experience, but I'm grateful that they're there and that those buildings are being used in that way because people trust them. So, first and foremost, I want to lift up the staff of the three public library systems who I have, as Dennis knows, have visited when the libraries in my area have reopened and we've gone. They are heroes, too, and they're doing amazing things. I particularly want to thank Dennis for talking about custodians who, as you know, I was raised by a school custodian. So it is incredibly

important for us to recognize those workers who rarely get seen, right? We often see the product of their work in the form of a clean floor or clean bathroom, but we don't see them and it is incredibly important. So, Dennis, thank you. And, you know, I hope we've demonstrated very clearly just how much work is going on. Just how intensive the services are that you're providing, that you're more essential than ever and that we, as a city, have to protect and enhance public library service now through the end of this pandemic and beyond. So, with that, I just want to say thank you to the three of you, to your staff members, and two, obviously, most importantly, to the frontline staff members in the local libraries.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much and, committee counsel, if there are no other questions or comments, we are adjourned, correct?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Correct. Thank you, Chair Van Bramer.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You just need to grovel out three times with the bright high school owl. One, two, three. Have a good day.

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date December 2, 2020