

March 27, 2025

To the Fellowes Athenaeum Trust Fund Advisory Committee:

My name is John Kordalewski. I am the leader of the Makanda Project jazz orchestra that has been performing at the Roxbury Branch since 2008. We are more than extremely grateful for the support of the Fellowes Fund over this period of time.

Our concerts have developed a strong following in the community. Attendance continues to increase. At our most recent concert, on March 8, we were joined by jazz legend Charles Tolliver and 270 people attended. As usual, there were people there who have been coming to the concerts since they first began, and also a significant number who were attending for the first time. We've been doing two separate shows in an evening in order to accommodate everyone.

I have been told that as of now we are longer able to present Saturday evening concerts at the Library. The situation is not totally clear to me though. I have not received written communication about this, nor an explanation as to why. I have been told that there was an email sent to all the branches last summer, saying there could be no more after-hours events at any of the branches. I have also seen an email sent from a BPL administrator to a member of the South End Branch Friends group this past November, stating that the policy for after-hours events hasn't changed and that such events "are reviewed on a case by case basis." I have made some attempts to contact BPL administrators, and the most response I have gotten was an email from Mr. David Leonard saying that this is "an active matter of discussion." That was in November.

One question that has come up is whether we could do the concerts in an afternoon, or early Monday evening. That does not work for us.

There are other locations in the community where the concerts could take place, but we very much want to be able to continue them at the Library. I have discussed this with many community members and believe I am speaking for those who attend the concerts, as well, when I say this. Here are some of the reasons.

These concerts have developed a reputation as an important part of the community's cultural landscape. What makes them unique is the combination of the music and the community setting in which they take place. And, there is something about the Library that brings out this aspect more than any other location. The Library is a central space for everyone to access and share cultural information. One of our attendees refers to it as "the people's house." The bake sales organized by the Friends of the Library also have added a wonderful touch to the "home" environment while also serving a community-centered purpose.

In addition, I feel like over the years we have been part of an effort to develop the Roxbury Branch into a place that serves the community in a certain way. I was quite close with Mimi Jones, who was very much involved in the early days of these concerts. She used to call me on Sunday mornings after the concerts, still "up" from the night before, and we would talk about all that happened: who was there, the various responses and interactions she saw, etc. The

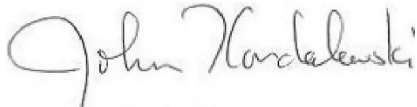
word “community” was always part of the conversation. These conversations helped me develop my understanding of how cultural events can serve a community-building function. I have over the years felt connected to many people who, like Mimi, have invested a lot of themselves into making the Roxbury Branch a place where these kinds of things happen. I think it’s accurate for me to say that the Makanda Project concerts have become widely viewed as a part of that effort.

One of the most common remarks I hear when I talk about the current situation with community members is, “Why would they take this away from us?”

I am hoping it is possible for light to be shed on the following questions:

- What exactly is the policy regarding after-hours events?
- If the policy is such that we can not do the after-hours concerts, what is the reason?
- Is the policy different for the Roxbury Branch than for other branches?
- Ultimately, will an application to the Fellowes Fund for Saturday evening concerts in 2025-26 be considered eligible?

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Kordalewski". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

John Kordalewski