



Memorandum

DATE: 11/6/24

TO: RAILS Advocacy Committee

FROM: Kate Hall, Executive Director

RE: Northbrook Library Room Booking

I have written up a summary of what has been going on at the Northbrook Public Library since September 4, 2024. I look forward to coming and talking with the RAILS Advocacy Committee to share some of the key takeaways, talk about the challenges we encountered, and provide information on some of the partners we worked with.

Background

The Village of Northbrook is located in northern Cook County and serves a community of 35,222.

- Northbrook's population is 40% Jewish
- About 20% of the population are immigrants.
- 73% of the population has a college degree
- Northbrook has the highest median age in the Northshore and 25% of the population is over 65
- Median household income is \$150,000.

The Northbrook Public Library is a village library with a 7-member elected board in a home rule community with a budget of \$10 million. We see about 1,200 visitors a day and circulate just under 1 million items a year. We have 18 study rooms which see about 15,000 reservations each year and have four public meeting rooms and one 225 person auditorium that see about 750 library sponsored programs and 300+ outside room bookings annually.

What happened

In August 2024 and again in September 2024, a Northbrook cardholder made a room booking request to reserve our large meeting room to show the film *Israelism* first on September 18 and then on November 7. The room booker ended up canceling each booking.

In both cases the public became aware of the events and there was concern raised in the community. The library received over 8,000 emails and hundreds of phone calls telling us that showing the film was deeply problematic because of the recent murders of Hamas hostages. There were also many emails claiming that by allowing the booking the library was being antisemitic.

A smaller but also vocal group demanded that we move forward with the booking, citing that we were not adhering to the 1st Amendment if we were not making this totally free to the room booker. At our September 19 board meeting, several members of the public attended and spoke similarly that we should not be constraining free speech by requiring anything from the room booker.

What we did

Communication

We started monitoring emails and social media on September 4 and put out a statement on September 5: <https://northbrook.info/keep-in-touch/news/statement-northbrook-public-library-executive-director>

We talked with the room booker to determine if they had public performance rights and to learn more about the expected turnout. After speaking several times to determine how to safely move forward with the room booking, the room booker decided to not move forward with their event. Here is the statement we released on September 11 stating that the September 18 booking would not be happening: <https://northbrook.info/keep-in-touch/news/important-update-re-september-18-film-screening>

We received another room booking and again entered into talks with the room booker to determine expected turnout and talk through our policy and determine what safety needs there might be. They also decided to cancel. We did not receive as many emails or phone calls as previously and had a statement we shared with anyone that reached out:
After receiving a request from a Northbrook cardholder to book a room at the library to screen the film "Israelism" on Thursday, November 7, the Northbrook Public Library engaged in our regular room-booking approval process.

We met with the room booker to discuss questions and requests we had before the booking could be approved. In light of the increase in antisemitic incidents in Northbrook, and in

consultation with the Northbrook Police Department and the Library's security consultant, we determined the need for licensed, bonded, and insured security guards.

The room booker chose to cancel their room booking request after refusing to comply with the necessary security requirements we put in place to ensure the safety of our patrons, staff, and event attendees. As a result of their decision, we have processed the cancellation of the room booking request as they asked us to do.

We recognize that the request to screen this film in Northbrook has stirred up pain and outrage for many of our community members as a result of the recent antisemitic incidents in Northbrook and the ongoing conflict in the Middle East with a heartbreaking loss of life. Please know that we do understand that this situation has been extremely challenging. The library is here to serve all members of the community and will be exploring ways we can come together to support each other.

Throughout the last two months, staff were provided talking points, there were multiple all staff meetings around this issue, and regular written updates were provided to staff. I was also in daily communication with the board including our board president who ended up coming on site for several days to help navigate through this. I communicated frequently with the Village, Police, our local state and federal legislators, local religious leaders, and library connections like RAILS and the Illinois State Library.

Legal

We recognize that as a public, government institution, the Library is bound by the laws of our country, including the U.S. Constitution and the protections guaranteed by the First Amendment, which guarantees individuals' right to express their views, free from government interference, even when those views may challenge or provoke. When we started getting emails, we conferred with our municipal attorney and confirmed that we are legally bound to support the 1st amendment. We reinforced this with staff.

As additional messages came in, we worked closely with our attorney to determine if there were any issues from a legal perspective.

Safety & Security

With the strong community response, we started thinking of what we might need to do to make the library as safe as possible. We reached out to local police who initially provided us recommendations. Ultimately, the police told us that they could not provide us with a recommendation or guidance and that we would have to determine what was in the best interests of the library in terms of what security to have for the day of the booking.

We contracted with Joffe Emergency Services to help us determine what we needed to do to prepare for these bookings from a safety perspective after the police told us they could not offer any guidance. We moved forward with hiring an outside security firm for each booking, which we ended up not having since the room booker canceled. We also hired

additional security for an author fair on October 19 to add a layer to our regular security practices.

In Northbrook over the past two months, we have witnessed multiple antisemitic incidents. As a community with a significant Jewish population and a growing Palestinian population, including Jewish and Palestinian staff members, we wanted to ensure they felt safe and supported. HR and managers were asked to regularly check in with all staff to address any concerns they may have. A social worker was on site in September to offer support to staff and we brought in a therapy dog who traveled around the library visiting staff. We also shared information on community and library resources for helping staff from a mental health perspective.

What's Next

We are doing a debrief with staff, the board, and library leadership in the coming weeks and will also be looking for ways to bring the community together.

Additional Information

This is an article about the 9/18 room booking from the Chicago Tribune:

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2024/09/21/film-on-american-jews-time-in-israel-canceled-after-northbrook-library-receives-8000-emails/>

There are also a number of social media posts on the library's and other social media that reference the booking.

The library board packet from October provides examples of letters and comment that the library received in September:

[Packet](#) - pg. 17-20 and 31-37