The 123rd annual meeting of the Evanston History Center, its first-ever virtual annual meeting, was called to order via Zoom at 7:02 p.m. by Sharon Ephraim, president, with a quorum of members in attendance.

Sharon told members EHC is taking advantage of the history being created in real time by documenting the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement in Evanston. Working with a small budget, the board and staff has done a lot with a little, she said, hiring a new investment manager, AllianceBernstein, LLP, for its endowments; procuring a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan through Wintrust, and doing work virtually and electronically that was never required before. Goals for the coming year are to increase and diversify membership and bolster inclusivity at EHC.

A motion to accept the minutes of the 122nd annual meeting as previously submitted was seconded and unanimously approved by voice vote.

EHC Treasurer Max Grebenschikov reported a decline in operating revenues as a result of programming and event cancellations, House Walk sales declines and other factors related to COVID-19, but said that to meet the already slim $483,000 operating budget, all non-essential spending had been eliminated, salaries had been reduced, and funds from the PPP loan would be used to help narrow the deficit. The capital campaign is still in need of about $550,000 to complete the final phase of improvements to Dawes House. EHC endowments held steady at about $2.2 million.

Executive Director Eden Juron Pearlman told members the past year was perhaps the strangest in EHC history, beginning with a major flood in June, 2019, that most heavily affected the Great Hall, and ending with a virtual annual meeting. EHC responded throughout the year to the historic events of COVID-19 and racial inequity, as well as to structural issues like roof damage. The staff, she said, was reinventing the History Center, with measures such as re-envisioning the annual Mother’s Day House Walk as a House Walk-By; developing educational plans for parents and giving away walking tours as do-it-yourself events, and documenting COVID-19 in Evanston as a collection created while history was being made.

Eden said EHC plans to reopen the research room and resume walking tours in July and later reopen the current “Evanston Women and the Fight for the Vote” exhibit, which was forced to close after only a week due to health restrictions.

Trustee Roger Price presented a proposed amendment to the EHC by-laws to revise and update the committee structure as determined by the Board of Trustees. The question was called and approved by voice vote. Two other proposed amendments to
the by-laws that were previously recommended by the board were delayed because of insufficient notice to the membership.

Trustee Judy Koehler presented a motion to elect six candidates to serve two-year terms on the Board of Trustees: Joshua Aldort, Jill Kushner Bishop, Kathleen Buffington, Elizabeth Randgaard, Michael Sullivan and Aaron Wernick. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved by voice vote. Sharon thanked outgoing trustees Paul Burton, Jack Hinz, Rick Hubbard and Ann Weatherspoon for their service.

Lori Osborne, EHC’s Director of the Evanston Women’s History Project, then presented a talk in conjunction with the current exhibit, about Evanston’s history and legacy in the Women’s Suffrage movement. She noted it was more than three generations between the 1848 adoption of a resolution that women should seek the right to vote and the enactment of the 19th amendment in 1920.

She highlighted notable Evanston women including Elizabeth Harbert, who believed women deserve the right to vote because they are equal and would vote differently as mothers, sisters and wives, and Catharine Waugh McCulloch, who used her legal talents to fight laws biased against women in such matters as inheritance and abuse. McCulloch also wrote a “hidden story in the suffrage movement,” Lori said, by helping to pass a law allowing Illinois women to vote on partial ballots for specific offices, including presidential electors, seven years before the 19th amendment was enacted. Local Black women were active in the suffrage movement through such organizations as the Julia Gaston Club, an Evanston Black women’s group.

Trustee Judy Koehler introduced a motion to elect as officers of newly reconstituted committees Geoff Bonn as chair of the Marketing Committee; Mike Ford as chair of the Facilities and Collections Committee; Kim Hiltwein as chair of the Education and Programs Committee; and Roger Price as chair of the Membership Committee. The motion was seconded and carried in a voice vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Janet Neiman Reed
Secretary