

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY
Monday January 11, 2021

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Mark Kissinger
Harmeet Narang
Mary Redmond
Lisa Scoons
Michelle Walsh
Charmaine Wijeyesinghe
Sharon Whiting, library treasurer

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

EXCUSED:

GUESTS: Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk
Catherine Stollar Peters, assistant director
Chris McGinty, assistant director

*All present via Zoom broadcast live on YouTube and the library website.

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 5:57pm.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

G. Kirkpatrick shared an email received in response to the Thursday e-newsletter that contained links shared by the school district about how to talk to children about the violence at the capital. The email writer said they were unhappy with what they considered a biased message.

The board noted the public comment for the record.

MINUTES

Minutes of the 14 December 2020 board meeting and the 17 December 2020 Long Range Planning Committee meeting were approved unanimously on a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

S. Whiting said the library was tracking at about 3 percent under budget, and as of last month had received about 73 percent of expected state aid. She noted that included in the financial report was a more detailed line of expenditures.

She said interest income was considerably under budget as interest rates are at a historic low because of the pandemic. She noted the finance committee plans to discuss that further and determine if any changes are needed to the investment policy. M. Redmond said it would be a good opportunity to get all the needed tools in place that will be used moving forward.

M. Kissinger asked about the retirement expense line and how that might be impacted by an expected jump in contribution costs. G. Kirkpatrick said those costs will be reflected in next year's budget and are part of ongoing budget discussions. He noted that it is a once-a-year expense, and the Comptroller's office provides an estimate for budgeting purposes. The estimate for the coming fiscal year reflects an approximate 11 percent increase.

C. Wijeyesinghe asked about the frequency of the EBSCO services charge. G. Kirkpatrick said it is an annual charge that is currently much lower than in years past as the library discontinued some physical magazines during the pandemic.

M. Kissinger asked if there is any correlation in reduced service hours and the budget. S. Whiting said the biggest impact has been the decreases in the salary line with many positions being held open.

M. Redmond asked to draw the board's attention to the final HVAC financial report that details the total cost and the net cost of the project. She thanked S. Whiting, G. Kirkpatrick and T. Choppy for wrapping up everything nicely on one page.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Redmond, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 December 2020 (Manual Disbursements \$31,623.98; Cash Disbursements/Accounts Payable \$46,391.67; Trust & Agency Disbursements/Salaries \$205,416.82; CapProject Fund/Hand-Drawn Checks \$0; Total: \$283,432.47).

PERSONNEL REPORT

There were no requested personnel actions.

M. Redmond asked if the additional part-time librarian positions the board had discussed earlier have been filled. G. Kirkpatrick said those temporary positions were quickly filled and have been very helpful in covering where there are staff shortages. He noted that both of the new hires had previously worked at the library so they were able to get up to speed quickly.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The board noted the director's report. Additional items:

- G. Kirkpatrick updated the board on the library's plan to transition to a new official Facebook page following a loss of admin access to the original page.
- The library has been partnering with the school district to use the Sora app to allow access to the library's e-book collection to BCSD students, leading to about 650 new checkouts. C. Wijeyesinghe asked if that was the reason the YA audiobooks circulation saw a jump. G. Kirkpatrick said that part of it was, and part of it was related to a general increase in e-material use over the pandemic, as well as new and more accurate ways of categorizing the content.

- The library's Kindness Matters campaign is kicking off and will highlight acts of kindness in the community and to one another. There will be random gifts and surprises added to some Book Bundles to show the community that the library is thinking about them. G. Kirkpatrick invited board members to share their own messages for the kindness notecards. The Friends are sponsoring this campaign.
- The library has turned on bill notices for long overdue items and has found it to be an effective way to encourage people to return those items. At this time, items returned do not incur any charges. The board discussed the method of delivery for these notices. C. Stollar Peters said that e-mail reminders go out, but the paper bills are the most effective way to reach all of the patrons with long overdue items.
- Included in the packet were comparison charts showing combined e-book and physical checkouts, as well as just physical checkouts. G. Kirkpatrick said that the small bump in physical checkouts from September-December represent any increases from in-person browsing. He noted that the bulk of physical checkouts remain through curbside. He praised the circulation department for everything they have done to make that a success.
- Overall circulation is at about 75 percent of what is normal for this time of year. G. Kirkpatrick said that although the library is not able to serve people in all the ways it normally can, he was proud to be able to get to 75 percent under very difficult conditions.
- E-book and e-audiobook checkouts are seeing huge gains, as well as streaming video. Those massive increases started in the early days of the pandemic but remain high and will be something to look at in the budget planning process.

UPPER HUDSON LIBRARY SYSTEM REPORT

L. Scoons said the board didn't meet in December but had approved the central library budget in November. She said that since then there has been a change in OverDrive pricing that put about \$10,000 back into play, which will be used to purchase additional non-fiction e-content with the remainder going to Albany Public Library as the system's central library.

NEW BUSINESS

Budget process update

G. Kirkpatrick said that he and S. Whiting have met to begin crafting an outline budget draft. He said the school district has already provided the numbers and deadlines the library needs to move forward. The finance committee is expected to meet mid to late January to further discuss the budget outline and prepare a draft for the board to review prior to the February meeting. The board will have a chance to discuss and vote on the draft at the February meeting with the option of voting on it in March if they needed more time. S. Whiting will present the budget to the public at the May board meeting.

G. Kirkpatrick said there are still some unknowns about how the election will take place, but the library will have one seat, currently held by H. Narang, up for vote.

M. Redmond told board members to email the finance committee if they had budget topics they wanted to be part of the committee discussion. C. Wijeyesinghe said she appreciates any extra time to preview the draft before the meeting as this is her first round of budget planning with the library.

H. Narang asked if it was possible to put this year's surplus toward e-content spending now while people are stuck at home. G. Kirkpatrick said the library has been upping its digital purchases as much as possible for that reason.

The board discussed boiler replacement logistics. S. Whiting said that the funding exists to pay for the project without bonding it. The board noted that the replacement process was likely to take many months as it would require a design, SED approval and some site work. They agreed that the process should begin in the next couple of months.

Phase reopening plan discussion

G. Kirkpatrick shared with the board a survey of the services that other libraries in the area were currently offering. He noted that some, like Bethlehem, are offering curbside only or reducing services as virus infection rates in the area continue to climb.

The board discussed what indicators they would be considering that would trigger a move from Phase 2-curbside only to Phase 3-limited in-person services. In response to a question about staffing needs to carry out either phase, G. Kirkpatrick said the library needs a minimum of 15 to run curbside-only, with an additional 5 to add in-person use. He said staffing levels on a day-to-day basis fluctuate unexpectedly during this phase of the pandemic, making it hard to guarantee the number of staffers needed to run Phase 3 efficiently. For those reasons, he recommended staying at curbside-only at this time.

C. Brancatella said that in addition to concerns about staffing levels, the health and safety of staff and the community were important considerations. G. Kirkpatrick said there had been some, but not many, patron complaints about the loss of in-person services at the end of December. He said the library has not had to go back to two teams because the number of people working from home for a variety of reasons keeps staff in the building down. C. Brancatella said in light of current infection levels, she was comfortable with remaining curbside-only. C. Wijeyesinghe agreed and said that it was important considering that the library is a place where people would normally gather. M. Kissinger also agreed and said he thinks it could be many months before that would change. M. Walsh said she is aware that the library normally provides services people are used to using and that they may be wondering why the building is closed. She said she would prefer the library continue in-person browsing until the area reaches the state's Orange designation. H. Narang said that he felt it would be better to take the necessary precautions now so that the library could continue to successfully provide curbside service. C. Wijeyesinghe commended the curbside staff for how quickly and professionally they were able to move through the line of cars waiting for pickup on a recent visit. M. Redmond said she understands the importance of being responsible to taxpayers, but she leans toward maintaining community and employee safety by remaining curbside only.

The board talked about what they would consider a phase initiator switch to return to in-person browsing. They agreed that they would continue to re-evaluate the decision to remain curbside at their monthly meetings and based on whether infection rates continue to climb or stabilize, along with other factors, including staffing needs.

G. Kirkpatrick thanked the board for sharing their thoughts and those of the community members they represent.

Other new business

C. Wijeyesinghe asked if there would be an opportunity to participate in Library Advocacy Day on Feb. 26. G. Kirkpatrick said board members are always invited to participate and that this year it would be digital. He said he would share information about how to join in once he knows the details.

OLD BUSINESS

Long range plan steering committee - update

H. Narang said the committee met with library architect Paul Mays on Dec. 17 to discuss some of the schemes and rough cost estimates. The addition of a larger auditorium off the plaza was one of the ideas that floated to the top, but the committee is waiting for another round of drawings that include a permanent curbside solution as well as address the parallel hallways that weren't providing a needed function. Once those drawings are ready, the committee will get back together and decide what fits with their Long Range Planning vision.

M. Redmond suggested the board also look now at the different types of financing options that would be available to them or could impact any long-range decisions given that there are so many steps between planning a project and bonding it.

Other old business

G. Kirkpatrick said that he would be looking to see which policies were next in line for a board review.

The board briefly discussed upcoming contract negotiations and the length of time a typical contract covered. C. Brancatella said that as a member of the negotiating committee, she was in favor of a shorter length of time this round since there is no way of knowing what things will look in the next couple of years.

FUTURE BUSINESS

There was no future business discussed at this time.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by C. Wijesinghe, the board adjourned the regular meeting at 7:32pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president