

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY
Monday February 8, 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
Tracey McShane, personnel administrator

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

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 6pm.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

There was no public participation.

MINUTES

Minutes of the 11 January 2021 board meeting were approved unanimously on a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by M. Walsh.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

S. Whiting presented her report and noted that the board would be discussing the 2021-22 budget draft later in the meeting. M. Redmond had a question about the percent increase in the revenue lines for the prior year budget. S. Whiting said she would review the numbers and get back to her. In response to a comment by C. Wijeyesinghe, T. Choppy noted that the instance on the check warrant where Bethlehem Public Library was the recipient of a check was when the library was transferring money from TD Bank to Key Bank. She noted that it was done this way because an electronic transfer would come with a \$35 fee.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Redmond, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 January 2020 (Manual Disbursements \$65,995.24; Cash Disbursements/Accounts Payable \$108,550.81; Trust & Agency Disbursements/Salaries \$187,135.89; CapProject Fund/Hand-Drawn Checks \$0; Total: \$361,681.94).

PERSONNEL REPORT

There were no requested personnel actions.

G. Kirkpatrick noted that two of the open page positions had been filled. With the remaining approved open positions, the library is either actively trying to fill them or holding off until business increases, depending on staffing needs.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- G. Kirkpatrick said he wanted to bring attention to all of the work that has gone into the Kindness Matters project. He said the effort spans the library's social media and physical services and features surprise gifts and personalized notes included in Book Bundles and Books to People, as well as Kindness Kits for Kids and Teen Book Boxes. He said it was a good time to remind people that the library cares and that the library has been seeing some of that effort come back to them with flowers and thank you notes. He noted that the Friends have sponsored this program.
- M. Walsh asked how patrons using OverDrive were able to request new materials. G. Kirkpatrick said there was a box that could be checked in the OverDrive application, and staffers were continually monitoring those requests. In response to a question by M. Redmond, G. Kirkpatrick said OverDrive Advantage purchases go to meet the requests of Bethlehem cardholders first in order to reduce wait times for patrons. M. Kissinger asked if there was a minimum amount the library was expected to purchase of OverDrive materials for the entire library system. G. Kirkpatrick said there was, and the library meets that amount before making additional purchases to reduce wait times for Bethlehem patrons.
- G. Kirkpatrick noted the huge effort of staff and volunteers that has gone into the digitization of Bethlehem Central yearbooks – a project that has spanned almost a decade. He said the library continues to digitize important local history materials, such as the Tri-Village directory, which are useful to people doing genealogical research.
- Work on implementing a texting service for curbside pickup is moving ahead.
- M. Kissinger asked what might be responsible for the 20 percent increase in requested materials through UHLS. G. Kirkpatrick said it was likely because people are making more overall requests for curbside pickup with in-person browsing limited or not available.
- H. Narang asked what the average cost of an e-book was for the library. G. Kirkpatrick said it varies wildly based on a number of factors but it breaks down to roughly \$2 per circulation.
- M. Walsh said a recent conversation on a neighborhood social media page revolved around where to print, and some responses were that it could be done at the library while others mentioned other local options. She asked if there were any plans to address that need. G. Kirkpatrick said the library has recently purchased a photocopier that will be set up in the hallway vestibule for people to use during curbside hours. Although it does not handle printing, the library does have a number of remote printing options for patrons that can be picked up curbside and the library will continue to push that information out to the public.

UPPER HUDSON LIBRARY SYSTEM REPORT

L. Scoons said the board will be meeting on Wednesday. She will have some Advocacy Day information to pass along shortly but wanted to coordinate with G. Kirkpatrick and M. Kissinger soon.

NEW BUSINESS

Draft budget discussion

G. Kirkpatrick said the board could vote on the budget draft at the March meeting in order for it to meet the school district's deadline obligation. The expectation is the election and budget vote will take place on its scheduled day in May, but in a pandemic, things could change.

S. Whiting presented the draft and noted that it includes a zero percent tax levy increase. The salaries line takes into account turnover allowance to arrive at the estimate. Some funds from the capital expenditures lines have been reallocated to a new budget line for contingencies, which would go toward unexpected expenses or emergencies. She noted that the expected revenue from fines and interest rates are expected to be lower, so those estimates are conservative based on the uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

M. Kissinger also noted that the salaries line presumes a turnover margin but no layoffs. C. Wijeyesinghe ask if the salaries estimate presumed full employment. G. Kirkpatrick said it did. C. Wijeyesinghe also noted that the program budget had been reduced and asked if the library expected it to return to normal levels in a post-COVID environment. G. Kirkpatrick said the library is assuming there will be a time when that line returns to normal, but it has been adjusted down a bit because it is expected that larger programs will not be happening in the beginning part of the fiscal year.

S. Whiting discussed the fund balance and noted that it was approximately \$3.3. million with \$1.4 million of that set aside to cover operating expenses from the end of the fiscal year in June until tax payment receipts in the fall. She said the remaining balance is a cushion for anything that could come up in the future. M. Redmond said that part of the board's responsibility is to decide a long-term plan for the fund balance. She noted that a few years ago, when the library had its OSC audit, the board provided a list of plans for the balance at that time. C. Wijeyesinghe asked how the fund balance could be made more visible to the public and suggested it be part of the budget presented to the public every year.

H. Narang noted that the estimate for the retirement line is up 11 percent. G. Kirkpatrick said the number is based on investment return from the state and local retirement system, which has been impacted by the pandemic. He said this number is usually bigger during more difficult economic times.

H. Narang asked if the library had considered increasing the materials line rather than keeping it flat in light of increasing demand for e-materials. G. Kirkpatrick said the library has moved money between some of the material lines to meet demand and would continue to do so as needed. H. Narang said he would be in favor of considering an increase in that line.

M. Kissinger said that the draft represents a zero growth budget, even though the library could go higher. He said the board needs to consider if that is what they want to pursue philosophically, as there are positives and negatives to both. He encouraged the board to think about these concepts in the coming month.

M. Redmond asked if the board was going to receive a final report soon from architect Paul Mays regarding long-term planning for the building. H. Narang said there was a meeting scheduled for later in the month. M. Redmond asked if there was a sense that the plan would involve a capital expenditure. G. Kirkpatrick said that, prior to COVID, any plans for building changes would have felt more immediate than they do at this time, but he is pleased that the board is still thinking about and planning for the future. He said the pandemic has fundamentally changed the approach to smaller scale plans in the near future and potentially bigger scale later on. H. Narang said the timing of the plans is the last piece to put in place once the board has their concepts in hand. C. Wijeyesinghe encouraged the board to allow extra time to get feedback and involvement from the public about concepts and costs once they decide to move forward. H. Narang agreed.

C. Wijeyesinghe also asked if the board was going to look at going permanently fine free in the future as the revenue estimate from that had decreased and the library still had the funds to cover it. M. Kissinger said the fines discussion has always been more philosophical than financial and it would be good to revisit it. M. Walsh said she believes that fines do have a financial impact, and there are points to be made on both sides.

M. Walsh asked if the library has ever put forth a zero growth budget in G. Kirkpatrick's tenure. He said there were two years related to the recession in 2009 where it did. He noted that the levy automatically stays the same every year and only needs to be voted on if the board would like to raise or lower it. However, it has been the library's longstanding policy to put the budget before the public every year in the interest of transparency.

Phased reopening plan discussion

G. Kirkpatrick said the library will continue to monitor infection rates and he would expect there to be a more in-depth discussion at the March meeting about re-opening if the numbers in the area continue to move in a positive direction.

NYS annual report

The annual report is being filled out right now. The board will vote on it at the March meeting before it is sent to Upper Hudson.

Other new business

There was no other new business.

OLD BUSINESS

Long range plan steering committee - update

The next Long Range Planning meeting is scheduled to take place February 19 at 9 a.m.

Other old business

There was no other old business.

FUTURE BUSINESS

Committee meetings – frequency

M. Kissinger said he was hoping to re-energize the board committee structure and said he would like to recirculate the current committee list so people could consider where they would like to help out. He said his goal was for every committee to meet at least once a quarter.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a MOTION by H. Narang with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board adjourned to executive session at 7:16pm to discuss contract negotiations pursuant to Article Fourteen of the Civil Service Law

On a MOTION by H. Narang with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board adjourned executive session at 8:11pm; no action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by H. Narang with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board adjourned the regular meeting at 8:12pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president