

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING  
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (VIRTUAL)  
Monday February 14, 2022

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: Chris McGinty, assistant director  
Catherine Stollar Peters, assistant director  
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk  
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 5:57pm.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

G. Kirkpatrick shared several written communications:

A patron was unhappy the library was not dropping the mask requirement since the governor has ended the statewide mandate. The writer said the mask requirement creates an undue burden for taxpayers and potential library users who might be denied access to the library for not wearing a mask. The writer urged the board to exercise restraint and end the mask requirement.

Another letter writer asked what authority the library has to mandate masks in a public building when there is no legislative body to enact the requirement.

An anonymous staffer said that as long as the board was still meeting virtually because of COVID concerns that the mask policy should remain in place. They asked if the mask requirement were to be dropped, would staff who were uncomfortable with working in a maskless environment be allowed to work from home.

A Facebook commenter on the board meeting post expressed support for continuing the mask policy and said the library has done a good job with safety through the pandemic.

Former trustee Brian Sweeney wrote that he had been following the fines discussion and commended the board for their thoughtful approach. He said he felt persuaded by the data and the ethical imperative that eliminating fines was the right thing to do.

## MINUTES

L. Scoons suggested a minor edit in the January minutes describing the financial report.

Minutes of the 10 January 2022 board meeting and 3 February 2022 ad-hoc fines committee meeting were approved unanimously on a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by H. Narang.

## FINANCIAL REPORT

### *Treasurer's update*

The board noted S. Whiting's treasurer's report. Additional items:

- M. Walsh asked if the library book sale had been discontinued permanently because the revenue line on the expense report showed 0%. G. Kirkpatrick said that the discontinued books that were previously sold inside the library are now going to the Friends book sales that take place twice a year. The sale generates income, goodwill and new volunteers for the group. C. Wijeyesinghe asked where the money earned at the Friends' sales went. G. Kirkpatrick said it all comes back to the library through the support of programs and potentially a part of a bigger capital project later on.

On a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 January 2022 (Checks disbursed in December 2021 based on pre-approval \$88,822.20; Checks disbursed in December 2021 relating to payroll \$182,275.69; Checks being submitted for approval \$101,353.71; CapProject Fund/Hand-Drawn Checks \$0; Total: \$372,451.60).

## PERSONNEL REPORT

There were no requested actions at this time. The library has received permission from Civil Service to hire a Librarian II and is now interviewing candidates. H. Narang asked if there had been any problems finding candidates for open positions. G. Kirkpatrick said it hasn't been an issue, but the library was being deliberate in filling positions as needed to scale with physical checkouts.

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- G. Kirkpatrick praised the maintenance team for the work they did clearing the snow and ice following a challenging sleet storm. He noted that the Bobcat continues to be helpful removing snow from parking spaces.
- The library continues to investigate automated systems that might help assess the collection in terms of diversity. M. Walsh asked what the library planned to do with the information gathered. G. Kirkpatrick said the items are being tagged in encore to make them more searchable, but there are no plans to create any new genres or change the way the items are shelved.
- G. Kirkpatrick said that program numbers in general are up. He noted that the state report has modified the definitions for asynchronous and outreach programs, so those numbers might appear different. C. Wijeyesinghe asked how often numbers were reported to the state. G. Kirkpatrick said that the main state report is filed once a year but that the library reports a variety of stats throughout the year.

- One of the major drops in physical circulation has been seen in DVDs, which could be due to a couple of factors so it is too soon to tell if it will bounce back.
- Electricity use has been stable but costs are high right now.
- M. Walsh asked how people were notified of automatic renewals. G. Kirkpatrick said patrons receive a notice telling them which items have been automatically renewed and another one telling them if there are items that can't be renewed.

## UHLS REPORT

L. Scoons said the board had discussed doing the racial equity training as a group as well as what some individual libraries might be planning on their own. She said it was probably a topic for the BPL board to discuss at a future meeting. L. Scoons said she also wanted to recognize the work that C. Wijeyesinghe had done in assisting Upper Hudson with their diversity training development. She also noted that Lobby Day was scheduled for March 2 and would be virtual. She said the East Greenbush Library had done some programming to support the Libby app, along with some videos, that have been popular with the public.

G. Kirkpatrick noted that redistricting has changed who will be representing the library in the Assembly in the future.

## NEW BUSINESS

### *Personnel Committee recommendation*

C. Wijeyesinghe noted that the personnel committee has met with administration and identified and outlined two additional library staff positions: a volunteer and supported employment coordinator, and an M/C administrative assistant. M. Kissinger noted the library had been talking about a volunteer coordinator for some time and have included it in the Long Range Plan. G. Kirkpatrick said that most libraries our size have an administrative assistant, and the role would become increasingly important as the library potential gears up for a construction project. M. Kissinger asked if there were civil service titles already available for both. G. Kirkpatrick said there wasn't a title yet for the volunteer coordinator, but the library could work with civil service to have one created. M. Kissinger said he didn't want that process to delay bringing in someone for the position. The board agreed to continue the discussion in conjunction with the draft budget, which includes the funding for those positions.

### *Fines Committee report*

M. Kissinger said that during a recent ad hoc fines committee discussion, there was a difference of opinion despite a thoughtful and robust back and forth. C. Wijeyesinghe asked about the next steps in the absence of a committee recommendation. M. Kissinger said the agenda was open for a motion. He noted that the board has been discussing the topic of going fine free for more than a year, and it's not likely there will be any change of mind at this point.

M. Walsh said she views the issue differently than her fellow board members and opposes going fine free for the following reasons:

- She doesn't believe that fines restrict access because it was easier than ever to return books these days, with due date reminders, automatic renewals, night drop spots and the ability to return materials to any library in the Upper Hudson system.
- There is still a cost to housing the collection and employing staff. She said she can't in good faith as a steward of taxpayer money forgo revenue.
- She noted that every person, regardless of their financial situation, already has access to library's catalog, programs and services.

- She said that in 2018-2019 fine revenue was over \$35,000 and the library should consider not making any big policy changes while the area is still feeling the effects of the pandemic.

H. Narang said there are also costs involved in the handling of cash paid for fines. He said that with automatic renewals and other loan changes, the fine revenue would never likely return to the pre-pandemic amount.

M. Kissinger said he was not in favor of eliminating fines and doesn't believe it is an access issue. He said it would be pushing costs onto taxpayers.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board voted 4-3 to eliminate fines for overdue materials and have the process in place no later than Dec. 31, 2022.

In favor: L. Scoons, H. Narang, C. Brancatella and C. Wijeyesinghe

Opposed: M. Kissinger, M. Walsh and M. Redmond

L. Scoons said the board should begin discussion right away about what implementation would look like, including how long before items would be considered lost and billed. C. Wijeyesinghe said she would like the board to discuss the timeframe for implementation at March meeting. C. Brancatella said there should be significant effort made to communicate the change to the public, including a possible letter to the editor for The Spotlight and talking points. G. Kirkpatrick said there are a lot of examples out there from libraries that have previously gone fine-free.

M. Kissinger requested and M. Walsh agreed that the library should maintain data on access and revenue, and report on the effects of going fine free at regular intervals.

#### *2022-23 Draft budget presentation*

S. Whiting said the draft budget includes in the salaries line the two new positions discussed earlier, salary increases based on the contract negotiated last year, and an increase in minimum wage for pages, with a conservative 3.5% turnover allowance, which takes into account vacancies in positions throughout the year.

M. Redmond asked for clarification about health insurance reimbursements for retirees. T. Choppy said those expenses are part of the health insurance line and amounts to about \$85,000 per year. She said about 6 people receive some percentage of reimbursement for their Medicare Part B and 15 retirees not yet eligible for Medicare receive some or all of their insurance premium paid, depending on what was in the contract when they retired.

The \$40,000 increase in the e-collection line is in recognition that it's the area with the biggest circulation growth. It also includes a 5% bump in the UHLS consortium fee. M. Redmond noted that some e-resources like Kanopy and Hoopla are available to BPL cardholders exclusively, and additional OverDrive purchases go to BPL holds first. G. Kirkpatrick said that Hoopla and Kanopy are pay-per-use models, but monthly costs remain fairly stable. M. Kissinger asked how close the materials line was to the library's goal of 15% of the total budget. S. Whiting said it was at 13.6%. M. Kissinger asked if she could provide a chart detailing that increase over the past couple of years.

The budget also allocates an additional \$15,000 in the gas and electric line to cover rising costs.

H. Narang asked about the decrease in the budget line for the Library of Things items. At this time, the library isn't adding a lot of new things to the collection, but there are still some replacement costs.

The board discussed the contingency line. S. Whiting said that a contingency set at ¾% to 1% is a good rule of thumb. M. Redmond said the library also has a surplus to work with in the event of an unforeseen catastrophe. C. Wijeyesinghe asked that budget information presented to the public explain why the levy appears to be higher than 2% despite being under the tax cap. This is because the library did not ask for an increase last year. M. Kissinger noted that the messaging should also mention that the budget supports a full staff and reasonable allocation for materials that promote a robust library moving forward.

C. Wijeyesinghe asked the board to consider whether the income line for fines should be eliminated in the proposed budget in light of the fine free vote. The board will vote on the final draft of the budget at the March meeting.

#### *NYS Annual Report Public Libraries - 2021*

G. Kirkpatrick said the emergence from the pandemic is not reflected in the report because it covers the July-June fiscal year of 2020-21. He said there have been some category changes and COVID-specific questions about hours.

On a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by H. Narang, the board unanimously approved the numbers to be submitted in the New York State Annual Report.

#### *Emergency Patron Conduct Policy - updates*

G. Kirkpatrick said the library has had some mild pushback about the continued mask policy, but people generally end up putting a mask on. He said staff in general were in favor of continuing the mask policy at this time. G. Kirkpatrick said he was recommending that patrons be allowed to remove their masks inside the study rooms and studio space with the door closed. Air filters are currently in place in these areas.

G. Kirkpatrick asked the board if they were still comfortable with the staff contacting police if there is a person resisting the mask policy to the point of disruption. The board said they were in favor of bringing in police as a final resort and that generally by the time it escalates to that point, there are usually other issues at play that go against the patron conduct policy.

The board discussed which events might trigger the lifting of a mask policy. G. Kirkpatrick said he is watching the community spread in the area, which is still high, but other factors might come into play, including whether the policy gets lifted at the school district level. Board members said they would like signage to communicate these variables to the public, as well as the need to keep staff healthy in order to keep the doors open.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Redmond, the board unanimously approved the updates to the Emergency Patron Conduct Policy.

#### OLD BUSINESS

##### *Long range plan - recommendation*

On a MOTION by H. Narang with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved the Long Range Services Plan for 2022-2024.

*Building committee update*

G. Kirkpatrick and the team met with an architect and have two more to interview before the board decides who they would like to handle the construct design. C. Wijeyesinghe noted that a willingness and ability of the selected architect to shepherd the process through the construction grant and SED process would be a bonus.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Borthwick Avenue resident Anne Moore commented via email that it is her impression from the information shared that charging fines does not change behavior and is therefore unnecessary.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

On a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board adjourned to executive session at 7:55pm to discuss topics related to contract negotiations pursuant to Article Fourteen of the Civil Service Law.

On a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board adjourned executive session at 8:34pm; no action was taken.

**ADJOURNMENT**

On a MOTION by H. Narang with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board adjourned the regular meeting at 8:34pm.

Prepared by  
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by  
M. Kissinger, board president