

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (COMMUNITY ROOM)
Wednesday July 12, 2023

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Mark Kissinger
Lisa Scoons
Michelle Walsh
Charmaine Wijeyesinghe

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director

EXCUSED: Sarah Patterson

GUESTS: Fran Royo and guest

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

CONSIDERATION OF APPEAL TO RECONSIDERATION OF RESOURCES DECISION

M Kissinger noted that there was an active appeal before the board about a program being held at the library. The question was whether to overturn G. Kirkpatrick's decision to deny the request to reconsider the drag story hour scheduled for the following day. C. Wijeyesinghe asked which policies were involved with making the decision. G. Kirkpatrick said it cover the collection development policy and programming policy.

G. Kirkpatrick said he has a reasonable time to respond to a request, and his decision can be appealed. While trustees have 60 days to review the appeal, G. Kirkpatrick thanked them for expediting the process in the interest of a timely decision.

M. Kissinger explained what the board would be voting on, and what a yay or nay vote would mean.

C. Brancatella emphasized that the board did not have to consider an untimely appeal but chose to do so in the interest of transparency. She said she would be voting in favor of denying the appeal for the following reasons:

- The program was requested by the community and has been a success at other libraries locally and nationally.
- Many of those who expressed anger about the program did so based on Christian beliefs, and while she respects those beliefs, she doesn't believe decisions about library programming should be made violation of the establishment clause of the constitution.
- She said the board has upheld the free speech clause by allowing ample opportunities for the public to share their views and respecting an individual's decision to attend or not to attend.

- She has heard from some people who have said the program provides visibility and representation of them and their families.
- She said she personally supports the LGBTQ+ community and hopes the library continues to incorporate more queer concerns in its programming and collection.

C. Wijeyesinghe said she has experience in evaluating appeals and judges them mainly in three areas:

- Did the director and staff plan the program in accordance with the library's stated goals and policies? C. Wijeyesinghe said she believes they did and that it is not the role of the board to direct programming or put those up for public vote but instead to rely on professional expertise of staff.
- Did the director follow establish procedures. Yes he did.
- There was no new evidence or data presented in the appeal, thus she finds no merit to the appeal.

She said the community has shared that the program in question does fill a need, and people can choose not to attend. She added that she hopes the program is successful and attendees enjoy themselves and conduct themselves appropriately.

She noted that board members signed an ethics statement on Monday that says trustees have the utmost responsibility to support director and staff to uphold uncensored access to programs and materials.

M. Walsh's written statement, which was read at the meeting, is below.

I want to recognize the large amount of public input we received against this program but that we received only one official request for an appeal, which we are voting on tonight.

I happen to agree with parts of this appeal that the library is courting controversy with this program. My concern is that very young children may be exposed to very angry adults, on both sides of this issue.

It is my opinion there are myriad ways the library could have promoted diversity and acceptance without involving our very youngest patrons.

I do not believe a toddler is going to glean diversity training from this exercise as proponents suggest. Nor do I believe a toddler is going to be sexualized by seeing a person in a costume. Drag Story Hour is theater that happens to have its roots in gay culture.

My concern for toddlers and picket lines is very real. The library could have chosen a different program to support diversity. That said, our library's collection—for years now— has included LGBTQ+ content and materials. Each patron decides which materials they would like to check out. If a patron does not want their child exposed to Drag Story Hour, they make the choice not to attend.

So while I disagree with this program being the one selected to encourage diversity, I don't believe we should prevent those who want to participate from doing so. I vote to deny the appeal but I strongly encourage the library to ensure this program proceeds safely.

M. Kissinger thanked the public for coming to Monday's meeting and said he would love to see the same level of interest in library happenings moving forward. He thanked the staff for bringing the program to the library and said it was brave of them. He asked the community to be respectful on the day of the program, and he urged library staff to continue to think of ways future programs can support diversity and acceptance within the community.

L. Scoons said she agreed with what had been expressed already by the board. She said she supports the independence and autonomy of library staff when it comes to programming. She believes that the program support the library's Long Range Planning goals as well as the summer reading theme. She said future program highlighting diversity is something the library needs to pay more attention to.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board voted unanimously to deny the appeal to G. Kirkpatrick's decision on the Request for Reconsideration of Drag Story Hour on July 13, 2023.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board adjourned the regular meeting at 6:20pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president