

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday September 11, 2023

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Laura DiBetta
Mark Kissinger
Sarah Patterson
Lisa Scoons (remote)
Michelle Walsh
Charmaine Wijeyesinghe
Sharon Whiting, library treasurer (remote)

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

EXCUSED:

GUESTS: Jennifer Crawford, confidential secretary
Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of Circulation and Technical Services
Chris McGinty, assistant director
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 5:59pm. He noted that it was the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Those present introduced themselves.

TRUSTEE APPOINTMENT

M. Kissinger administered the oath of office to Laura DiBetta, who will serve as trustee for the remainder of the 2023-34 fiscal year. To remain on the board she must seek election in 2024.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

No public participation at this time.

MINUTES

- On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved minutes from the Monday July 10 regular meeting.
- On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved minutes from the Wednesday July 12 special meeting.
- On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously approved minutes from the Wednesday August 9 special meeting.
- On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously approved minutes from the Monday August 14 informational meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

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

- The Finance Committee will likely meet in October to review draft financial statements before they are presented at the November meeting.
- C. Wijeyensinghe asked that the line in the treasure's report about state aid be reworded so it is clear that it is not referring to the total budget.
- S. Whiting presented an adjusted budget that reflects decisions made through the contract negotiation process. She said the area that has changed is the staff salaries line to reflect the increases approved in the contract. Due to the retirement of a longtime librarian, the net change is \$44,176. S. Whiting said that amount has been offset by reducing the health insurance line to better reflect actual costs and budgeting for an additional \$17,000 in interest income.
- M. Kissinger noted that the public had already approved the amount of the 2023-24 budget in May and these adjustments do not result in increase. The board has full authority to make those changes.
- C. Wijeyesinghe asked to clarify for herself and the public if the library has a tax cap. G. Kirkpatrick said that the library does have a tax cap.

On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously accepted the adjusted budget lines for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 August 2023 (Checks disbursed in August 2023 based on pre-approval \$82,170.54; Checks disbursed in August 2023 relating to payroll \$195,015.86; Checks being submitted for approval \$52,025.78; CapProject Fund/Hand-Drawn Checks \$28,364.00; Total: \$357,576.18).

PERSONNEL REPORT

M. Walsh asked if it felt like there was sufficient staffing at the library. G. Kirkpatrick said that there are some positions that have been challenging to fill, but that is something that all public libraries are currently experiencing. He said Upper Hudson has been investigating ways to get more people into the hiring pipeline, including finding ways to recruit people from Syracuse or downstate schools. The library school at UAlbany tends to produce graduates who are more focused on data science than public libraries. M. Kissinger asked if there would be any impact by raising the lowest wages up to \$15 per hour. T. Choppy said that all of those wages are already scheduled to reach \$15 per hour on Dec. 30, 2023.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously voted on the following actions:

- Library page, part-time, permanent, 6 hours/week, \$14.20/hour or per contract

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- C. McGinty has been focusing on getting the adult volunteer program up and running again as the kids are back in school.
- P. Berardi ran the numbers on patron checkout habits recently. Direct checkout at the desk remains the most popular method, but curbside pickup, self-checkout and the app are also used. G. Kirkpatrick said it is important to think about that during conversations about RFID. There are large segments of the public that like the human interaction, and that is not going away, but there are also people who prefer the other methods.
- The library is printing out illustrated genre library cards in honor of National Library Card Sign-up Month. M. Walsh said she has already heard from multiple people who really like the new design options.

UHLS BOARD UPDATE

L. Scoons said the service committee will meet the next day to consider 11 grant applications. She said they would not be able to fully fund all of the projects as there is just \$1.07 million to give.

NEW BUSINESS

Library property boundaries/impacts for construction

G. Kirkpatrick said the library's landscape architect has recommended the library combine all of its individual parcels into one. The original parcel was purchased by the school district for the construction of the library building completed in 1973. The library purchased two adjoining parcels in 2009 to expand the parking lot. In 2017, a fourth parcel was purchased by the library to be used for an eventual building expansion.

There are two reasons the parcels should be combined. The current building is already at the maximum footprint for the original parcel, and the proposed design would exceed that, as well as cross the boundary between parcels. Combining the parcels would require the agreement of the library, the school district and the town, and it would have to happen before the architects moved too far forward with the design.

G. Kirkpatrick said that another part of the discussion is who should hold title to the final, combined parcel – the library or the school district. C. Brancatella asked if there was a possibility for a co-title. C. Wijeyesinghe said she would want to be clear that if the parcels were combined, would the current design fit the maximum size parameters. G. Kirkpatrick said that the landscape architect is currently looking into what is involved in the process of combining the parcels. L. DiBetta asked who sets the maximum size and if the library might be exempt from that zoning.

G. Kirkpatrick said that although both the landscape architect and engineer recommend school district ownership, the library is not blocked from bonding through DASNY if it were to own the property. In years past, the library had discussed ownership of the original parcel, but the school district was not interested at the time. He noted that the negative of school district ownership is the burden of the SED review requirement, which can cause delays and expense. However the school district bonding process is easier and has better rates than other avenues. M. Walsh said the reduced rates would be a benefit for taxpayers.

G. Kirkpatrick stressed the urgency of moving forward with the process in order to not hold up the project. M. Kissinger said he would like to know the difference in rates between bonding through the school or DASNY and whether the savings would be significant. He said he is skeptical of a timely review from SED. L. Scoons noted that not having to go through the review process would give the library more flexibility when it comes time to pursuing state grants.

S. Patterson asked if there was any idea of how the district might respond to a library request to take ownership of the original parcel. G. Kirkpatrick said last time they were approached more than a decade ago, they were looking into the market value for the property, but other libraries in a similar position have received property in a \$1 transaction.

C. Wijeyesinghe said she would like to know more about the process before making a decision. G. Kirkpatrick said he would report back when he knows more. C. Brancatella said that despite the board's preference for one title option or the other, if a path forward presents itself, they should take it. M. Walsh asked if the building project is on hold until this is resolved. G. Kirkpatrick said plans are continuing, but at some point, it could be a potential stumbling block.

Project timing/school district coordination

S. Whiting and G. Kirkpatrick recently met with the school district's chief business and financial officer, John McPhillips, along with their attorney and financial advisor, to discuss what a potential bond would look like. He put together a debt service schedule that shows \$29 million bonded over 25 years. The chart, **which was for illustrative purposes only**, shows approximate debt service of \$1.9 million a year. J. McPhillips said the library should also be getting a SEQR (environmental) review done in a timely manner, and those comments were passed along to the landscape architect. C. Wijeyesinghe said there are ways to lower the total amount bonded, such as using capital funds or revising the design. M. Walsh noted that a rough estimate would have the average library tax bill increasing by 30 percent. G. Kirkpatrick said that he was warned by the school district to be cautious in estimating because a very large property will be coming off PILOT and going on the tax roll this year. G. Kirkpatrick said that another complication with the process is that the attorney most familiar with these types of situations already works for the school district, creating a potential conflict of interest.

M. Kissinger asked what the options were for bond vote date, assuming all the other pieces fell into place. G. Kirkpatrick said that adding a bond vote to the May ballot could still potentially happen, but the timeline would be tight. The architects are still using May as a default date. C. Brancatella said that if March is too early, and people are voting on multiple money requests in May, that she might support an early fall off-cycle vote. M. Kissinger asked how they could time it so the public has best opportunity to look at it. S. Patterson said that with so few people turning out for the budget vote regularly, she fears the only people who will turn out off cycle are those who don't want it. M. Kissinger said the library does really well traditionally in the May vote. C. Wijeyesinghe said she worries that the potentially millions of dollars on the May ballot would be too much for people. L. DiBetta said the people who turn out on off-cycle votes are the ones who want to stop something. M. Walsh said she can see people

having reservations about any asks from the school district but responding positively to a library request. C. Wijeyesinghe asked if the board could sit down and get more information from J. McPhillips about the process and then ask Ashley McGraw what they can do to help the library meet those goals.

Energy efficiency evaluation proposal

G. Kirkpatrick presented a proposal for the evaluation of environmentally friendly and highly energy efficient HVAC system design options for the building project. This additional service is not covered under the current contract with Ashley McGraw and would provide numbers for greener HVAC options.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously voted to enter into an agreement with Sage Engineering and Ashley McGraw Architects in the amount of \$14,375 to evaluate the cost environmentally friendly HVAC options.

Other new business

G. Kirkpatrick told the trustees that the geotechnical survey conducted last month was inconclusive, and the engineers would like to come back to get a better understanding of the strength and thickness of the sand layer above the wet clay that is below the library. They will focus on areas where the building expansion is proposed. S. Patterson asked if this should cause any concern about the existing structure. G. Kirkpatrick said the building does not appear to be affected by any instabilities underground.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a second by S. Patterson, the board unanimously agreed to pay for an additional geotechnical investigation in the amount of \$8,590.

OLD BUSINESS

Committee memberships

M. Kissinger reminded the board that the purpose of the committees was to streamline action at the full board meeting. He noted in his proposed committee memberships that all board members are considered to be part of the building committee at this point in the project. He said he tried to keep the committees to no more than two members to avoid the complications of reaching a quorum. C. Wijeyesinghe said she is stepping down from the personnel committee and that those who would be serving would have to manage the director's evaluation. S. Patterson agreed to take that on. L. Scoons said she would remain on the personnel committee but would like to cycle off next year.

Board President M. Kissinger made the following committee appointments:

Building Committee: all board members

Finance Committee: M. Walsh, S. Whiting, appointed trustee

Personnel Committee: S. Patterson, L. Scoons

Nominating Committee: S. Patterson, C. Brancatella

Policy Committee: C. Wijeyesinghe, C. Brancatella, L. Scoons

Public Services reorganization proposal

G. Kirkpatrick presented a proposal for the reorganization of Public Service, which has been discussed extensively at the committee level and was presented to the board at the August Information Meeting. The key requests include reclassifying a library clerk to library assistant and a librarian 2 to a 3, which would have an ongoing yearly cost of \$15,800.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh and a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the ongoing cost of \$15,800 associated with the reorganization of the Public Services Department.

Plaza entry – update

G. Kirkpatrick said that everything is ready to go and is just down to scheduling. M. Kissinger said there should be extensive outreach to the public explaining the reason for the change.

Policy Committee update

- Gifts, Memorials, Bequests, and Naming Opportunities Policy

C. Wijeyesinghe said the version in the packet was not a first read of the policy, and the text is the same as presented at the August Informational Meeting. She said a discussion points document was included with the draft. She said one thing to consider is that the draft currently combines gifts and memorials with naming opportunities into one policy. M. Walsh said that gifts and memorials policy had been working in the past, so she saw no reason to fix what wasn't broken. She suggested a separate naming opportunity policy. C. Brancatella suggested breaking it up into three things: financial gifts, physical gifts and naming rights. She also strongly recommended that the library not allow sponsorship of programs. M. Walsh agreed. L. Scoons said that one of the things the committee also talked about is who is responsible for the decision, with naming rights coming to the board, but other gifts and donations handled by the director. L. DiBetta said that with a building expansion on the horizon, it would make sense to have a document that spell out the costs associated with naming opportunities.

Review of 2022-23 library statistics

G. Kirkpatrick reviewed a number of charts that showed library statistics and trends from pre-pandemic up to the current month. He said board members can view the charts on Tableau at any time.

A chart detailing the use of public spaces shows that room use at peak times is maxed out. M. Walsh said those numbers could bolster the argument that the library needs more space. G. Kirkpatrick said he is increasingly hearing from groups that aren't getting their preferred times. L. Scoons added that there are also more people who are working remotely and would like to be able to use those smaller, quiet meeting spaces.

Director evaluation timeline and process

The review process kicks off in October and will be spearheaded by S. Patterson. C. Wijeyesinghe urged the board to look over the evaluation materials and make any recommendations for revisions in the next couple of weeks. L. Scoons mentioned that it might be worthwhile to revisit some of the language in the staff survey.

Other old business

M. Walsh said that while she wasn't at the August Information Only meeting, she wanted to voice her support for the hearing loop promoted by Laura Cooper that day. G. Kirkpatrick said that it

was definitely something that he would like to have as part of the building project, but the library may be able to implement a smaller option even before then. Such a project could potentially be eligible for an Upper Hudson construction grant or a possible member item.

FUTURE BUSINESS

Ethics statement

C. Wijeyesinghe proposed that the wording in the ethics statement be changed from “Trustees must be prepared to support to the fullest the efforts of librarians in resisting censorship of library materials by groups or individuals” to “Trustees must be prepared to support to the fullest the efforts of librarians in resisting censorship of library **materials, programs and services** by groups or individuals.”

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe and a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved the proposed updates to the ethics statement

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board adjourned the regular meeting at 8:05pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president