

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday January 13, 2024

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Laura DiBetta
Mark Kissinger
Sarah Patterson
Gail Sacco
Lisa Scoons
Michelle Walsh (virtual)
Sharon Whiting, library treasurer

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, public information specialist

EXCUSED:

GUESTS: Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of Circulation and Technical Services
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk
Jennifer Crawford, confidential secretary
Tracey McShane
Anne Moore
Rick Bird
Jessica Ross
Bonnie Goldsmith
Robert McDonnell
Oliver Holmes
Jim Moshier

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 6:02pm.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

There was no public participation at this time.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday December 9 regular board meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

G. Sacco said she wanted to confirm that part of the fund balance is there to cover expenses from the end of the fiscal year in June until the library receives the money from tax payments in the fall.

S. Whiting said a finance committee meeting will be set up shortly before the February board meeting to discuss the 2025-2026 budget proposal.

M. Kissinger asked about the \$2,926.60 payment to the Town of Bethlehem. T. Choppy said that represents the library's share of special district taxes.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 December 2024 (Checks disbursed in December 2024 based on pre-approval \$45,509.39; Checks disbursed in December 2024 relating to payroll \$237,097.77; Checks being submitted for approval \$55,490.33; CapProject Fund Checks \$75,332.55; Total: \$413,430.04).

PERSONNEL REPORT

The board noted the personnel report. G. Kirkpatrick said the library would be filling the previously approved part-time clerk position but the other open positions were currently on hold.

PERSONNEL ACTIONS

There were no personnel actions requested.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- The window in the Children's Place has been replaced. The old window was not tempered glass but the new one is. The external entrance door was fixed on Friday.
- The new online system for museum passes has been implemented and patrons have adapted to the platform quickly.
- M. Kissinger noted that the addition of the Zoomax reader and Spanish and Chinese welcome emails ties in with the library's long-range plan goals for increased accessibility.
- G. Kirkpatrick said the Library Consortium author talks continue to be popular and allow the library to connect with more authors of national note. This will be the third year that the library has subscribed to this service. G. Sacco said that many of the talks had coincided with what her book group was reading and that she also like that there are YA and children's authors included in the lineup.
- G. Kirkpatrick thanked staff for their work on the day of the vote for directing the crowds and keeping people out of the cold. He noted that the door count for December was especially high because of the vote.
- M. Walsh said she was glad to see the addition of a second public copier. She also said that she had seen a social media conversation directing someone to the fax machine in the library.
- C. Brancatella thanked G. Kirkpatrick and the staff for making the time to participate in the town holiday events.
- M. Kissinger asked about the 68% increase in registered borrowers in the month of December. G. Kirkpatrick said that might be due to the number of card signups on election day.

UHLS REPORT

L. Scoons said Advocacy Day would take place Feb 5. She said the job posting for UHLS Executive Director was up, and they had received two applications so far. She also noted that there are two new board members from Albany and Troy.

NEW BUSINESS

Assemblyman Scott Bendett Special Legislative Grant

G. Kirkpatrick said the Assemblyman Scott Bendett recently gave the library \$1,546, which was a portion of a \$20,000 legislative grant that was divided equally among the libraries in his district. S. Whiting said it shows up under the budget line that says “grants.” M. Kissinger thanked the assemblyman for looking out for libraries. G. Kirkpatrick said that the money could potentially be used to fund one of the Thursdays in the Park performances or a children’s performer. He also said it could be used to replace some of the play equipment in the Children’s Place.

M. Walsh said that while the repairs that were part of the building proposal are well beyond that price point, she was interested in if that money could be used for some kind of needed repair. G. Kirkpatrick said it could go toward the window replacement in the Children’s Place or the front door repair. G. Sacco asked if there was an area that could use new furnishings. She said she would like to see the money go toward something visible and durable.

C. Brancatella said that if it went toward a performance, the library could invite the assemblyman to attend. She also asked if it could be set aside to replace play equipment as needed.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board unanimously voted to set aside the grant money to be put toward the next necessary repair and report on it at the following board meeting.

C. Brancatella said that, despite the allocation of the grant money for repairs, the toys in the Children’s Place will still be replaced as needed.

Director review update

S. Patterson said that the process would have normally begun in December, which means turnaround times for responses might be a little quicker than in the past. She said the personnel committee would be using some of the same forms as had been used in the past. G. Sacco said that it was her understanding that they would not be doing a staff survey, but G. Kirkpatrick would be doing a self-evaluation.

Next steps – post bond vote

M. Kissinger said that based on feedback following the bond vote, he felt that the next step in the building committee discussion would be to prioritize repairs from urgent to less urgent and put together a summary of the cost and scope of those projects to bring back to the full board for discussion at the March meeting.

C. Brancatella agreed and said the board needs to be clear with the public that there will not be a quick turnaround to another bond vote, and there was a good chance that it wouldn’t happen in 2025. She said it would be a good idea to work out when a bond vote would take place and create a month-by-month action plan that also identifies public outreach opportunities. She said it is important to define the effort that goes into each step to the public.

L. DiBetta said she has heard from a number of people who are very interested in helping with the outreach and communications piece.

M. Walsh asked G. Kirkpatrick to outline why a May 2025 vote would be impossible. G. Kirkpatrick said that the vote would need a public notice 45 days before the election date, and in order to do that, a proposal would need to be ready for the School Boards April 2 meeting. He said it would be impossible to get a plan ready and complete the SEQR process on that timeline.

L. Scoons asked on the status of the relationship with Ashley McGraw. G. Kirkpatrick said the contract is done, but there are still some final invoices to be delivered. G. Sacco said there may be some aspects of the previous design that would be useful going forward. G. Kirkpatrick said the library has received all of the design documents from them at this time. He said the board will need to decide if that is the firm they want to move forward with on a future plan.

C. Brancatella asked what the timeframe would be if the board decides to conduct another RFP for architect services. G. Kirkpatrick said it would amount to a couple of months at the earliest.

L. DiBetta asked if there were any necessary repairs that would not require outside expertise. G. Kirkpatrick said that almost everything done would require the full SED review process and architect's design, including asbestos removal and boiler replacement.

C. Brancatella said that part of the communication to the public should include details of the bond process because there seems to be a mistaken impression about the soft costs involved and why those things are important. G. Sacco also noted that the library is required to pay prevailing wage.

S. Patterson said the library had received a lot of feedback throughout the design process and should look at where that feedback is coming from.

L. DiBetta said that it is important to understand how much the public would be willing to pay for the things they would like to see as improvements.

C. Brancatella said she would like to thank the public for coming out to vote, and it was so nice to see so many people come to the library to have their voices heard. She encouraged the public to engage with the library as they restart the discussion.

M. Kissinger suggested the board members set up a time before the next regular meeting to meet as a building committee to talk about repairs and prioritization.

G. Sacco thanked the Friends of Library for supporting the bond effort.

Other new business

There was a discussion about continuing trustee office hours on a monthly basis. A sign-up schedule will be sent out for trustees to volunteer.

OLD BUSINESS

L. Scoons said the Policy Committee will be reviewing the meeting room policy and staff handbook. G. Kirkpatrick said that he has a report from staff on the meeting room policy implementation and some comments from the public that he will share.

FUTURE BUSINESS

There was no future business at this time.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Five members of the public spoke during the public comment period. A recording of the meeting is available on YouTube.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:15pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president