

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday February 10, 2025

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Laura DiBetta
Mark Kissinger
Sarah Patterson
Gail Sacco
Lisa Scoons
Michelle Walsh
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
Chris McGinty, assistant director of Public Services
Jessica Ross
Bonnie Goldsmith

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 5:59pm.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation at this time.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday January 13 regular board meeting.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday January 27 building committee meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

The board noted the treasurer's update. M. Walsh noted that S. Whiting has been seeking out these investment opportunities since becoming board treasurer. S. Whiting said that interest rates had been favorable recently, and her goal is to maximize those investments while making sure there is money readily available to pay the bills.

M. Kissinger asked for clarification of the expenses paid out of the H Fund. G. Kirkpatrick said that the charge from Kenney Geotechnical was for a sonar survey of the land beneath the library and that the charge from Ashley McGraw was the final bill for their design services. He said the attorney fees were billed in their entirety at the end of the building project proposal. He added that these are the final charges associated with the building planning process, other than an approximate \$9,000 bill from the school district for election-related charges, which will be included in the March bill schedule.

On a MOTION by M Walsh with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 January 2025 (Checks disbursed in January 2025 based on pre-approval \$53,510.36; Checks disbursed in January 2025 relating to payroll \$210,136.07; Checks being submitted for approval \$76,535.48; CapProject Fund Checks \$224,610.89; Total: \$564,792.80).

PERSONNEL REPORT

The board noted the personnel report.

PERSONNEL ACTIONS

On a MOTION by L. Scoons with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously voted to approve the following positions:

- Library page, part-time, permanent, 15 hours/week, \$15.50/hour or per contract

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- The increases in door count and wireless use are positive signs of growing in-person library use.
- The implementation of new software for digital museum passes has been successful as evidenced by the usage numbers. M. Walsh said her family recently borrowed a pass for the Wild Center in Tupper Lake and were very happy that the library offers it. She asked if there was a way to return digital passes early if a patron was not going to be able to use it. G. Kirkpatrick said that the library would look into that.
- L. DiBetta asked if Library of Things items are available to all members of the UHLS system. G. Kirkpatrick said that they are, but for many items, one must be a BPL cardholder to put something on reserve. The library asks that items are returned to the library they are borrowed from.
- Lots of impromptu one-on-one tech help takes place at the Information Desk, but the longer, reserveable sessions have proved popular.
- The Pit at the middle school has been discontinued as attendance has not recovered since the pandemic.
- G. Sacco said she would like to see a tech help program that talks about storing and organizing digital photos and what tools to use. G. Kirkpatrick said the library has held programs on personal digital archives in the past and that it might be a good time to revisit the topic.
- M. Walsh said that Advocacy Day was well attended and lawmakers were supportive. C. Brancatella said representatives from Bethlehem met with legislators Scott Bendett and Pat Fahy and encouraged them to talk about libraries and their importance when out and about and on social media. G. Kirkpatrick said that in this year's budget, the governor had brought the library budget line up to the statutory minimum for the first time in many years.
- M. Kissinger asked about YA non-fiction use. G. Kirkpatrick said that it is one of the library's smaller collections so even a small drop in circulation will appear as a larger percentage. C.

Brancatella asked if having a teen area might help increase YA circulation. G. Kirkpatrick said that, unlike other libraries, Bethlehem has never had a dedicated teen area, so it's hard to know what an impact it would have. L. DiBetta said she recently visited the library in Saratoga Springs and was impressed with its setup for young people. C. Brancatella said she found the same thing with the Clifton Park library and praised its sensory area for children. She said it is important to highlight what other communities are doing.

- M. Kissinger asked about the children's video collection, and G. Kirkpatrick said it is decreasing as part of an ongoing trend of people finding the content for free on multiple other platforms. M. Kissinger said the board should discuss at a future meeting dropping collections that are no longer being used.

UHLS REPORT

L. Scoons noted that the governor's budget for library construction grants has been lowered to about \$34 million from \$44 million and that hopefully the legislature will bump it back up. G. Kirkpatrick said that Upper Hudson typically gets about \$1.5 million to allocate among its 29 libraries.

NEW BUSINESS

Draft budget 2025-26

S. Whiting said that putting together the budget was challenging because costs have gone up, including increases to salaries and benefits. She noted that although there were requests to increase spending on materials, the budget could not accommodate it. She said the biggest change in the 2025-26 budget is the elimination of the contingency line in the amount of \$35,000. This was done to accommodate for the reduction of PILOT income. She noted that the fund balance should be able to cover a contingency should it be needed.

The loss of \$229,000 in PILOT income is the result of PSEG going on the tax rolls. This will have an effect on the tax levy but doesn't mean individual taxpayers will see a big increase.

She said the 7.33% increase to the levy is within the stat-mandated tax cap.

M. Kissinger asked what that increase would translate to for taxpayers. S. Whiting said a rough estimate would be around 11 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. G. Kirkpatrick said that the number was still just an estimate as the school district sets the rate and has not yet released the numbers. The library will be meeting with the school district shortly to better understand the details.

M. Kissinger asked if it would make sense to use the fund balance to cover the \$229,000 no longer available from the PILOT. S. Whiting said that would be part of a discussion about how to best use the fund balance as they plan for upcoming repairs. The board continued to discuss the tax implication of the reduced PILOT and asked for more information about the tax implication before making a final decision on the budget. G. Kirkpatrick said the board did not need to make a final decision until the March meeting.

G. Sacco said she was concerned about losing the contingency line altogether. L. DiBetta noted that it had been discussed by the finance committee and that the line had only been added about 3-4 years earlier.

Boiler replacement engineer RFP

G. Kirkpatrick said that at the January building committee meeting, it was agreed that replacing the boiler was a priority. G. Kirkpatrick said he has met with some people from the community and has drafted an RFP to solicit proposals for an engineer to look at the boiler and make design recommendations. He asked how the board would like to go about selecting a consultant from the proposals. The board agreed to use the system they have in the past where an interview committee

would talk to the candidates and make a recommendation to the full board. C. Brancatella and M. Kissinger volunteered to be part of the interview committee. G. Kirkpatrick asked the board for their thoughts on the wording of the RFP and said that he would also like to have CJ Goodwin from Schoolhouse to look at it as well to review the scope outlined in the request. G. Sacco said the board should clarify the library's relationship with Schoolhouse as they look at these new projects.

Other new business

There was no other new business at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

Building Committee update

M. Kissinger said the building committee discussed potential repair projects and prioritized them. He said they are trying to get an idea of the cost of the projects and would be meeting in another week or so. He said they have received valuable expertise from some members of the community.

Policy Committee update

C. Brancatella said the committee was in the process of reviewing the meeting room policy and had received some technical comments from staff to address. She said they were looking at ways to simplify the wording to make it easier to understand and implement. She said the committee was also reviewing the updated staff handbook. M. Walsh said she has heard from some members of the public who are running up against the capacity limits for room checkouts. L. DiBetta asked if the committee would be evaluating the capacity limits.

Other old business

S. Patterson asked the board members to return their questionnaires for G. Kirkpatrick's evaluation as soon as possible.

FUTURE BUSINESS

There was no future business at this time.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

One member of the public spoke during the public comment period. One written comment was received and read by G. Kirkpatrick. A recording of the meeting is available on YouTube.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president