

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

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Laura DiBetta
Mark Kissinger
Sarah Patterson
Gail Sacco
Lisa Scoons
Michelle Walsh

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, public information specialist

EXCUSED: Sharon Whiting, library treasurer

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
Tracey McShane, personnel administrator
CJ Goodwin, construction manager, Schoolhouse
Oliver Holmes
Jill Adams
Bonnie Goldsmith
John Chaplin
Robert McDonnell
Louis Wittig

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

Prior to public participation M. Kissinger made a statement about the process and noted how to get in touch with the trustees, as well as public trustee office hours.

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

BUILDING MAINTENANCE

Potential projects

C. Goodwin presented estimates for a number of repair projects and noted that each project was estimated individually but there could potentially be savings if some of them were grouped together. He said his estimates included base construction costs, with additional estimates for design costs and contingencies. He noted that these estimates represent his best guess at this moment in time.

G. Sacco said there are a number of costs involved in library projects that are due to it being a government building. C. Goodwin agreed and said that the estimates took into account the needs for a State Education Department approval process as well as prevailing wage and other requirements.

C. Brancatella said board members had received a lot of questions about contingency costs and noted the lack of ability to predict market conditions. She asked how those conditions might affect costs in the coming months. C. Goodwin said his company is still working through the process to see how tariffs might impact costs in the future, but he feels like the document he presented has prepared for some of that.

M. Kissinger asked if there were some projects that would make sense to group together. C. Goodwin said he would recommend doing the all of the abatement projects together. He also said that energy efficiency projects are also a natural fit together. He said the elevator replacement is a good standalone.

The board discussed the basic scope of some of the projects listed. M. Walsh said that some of the numbers on the report didn't add up. C. Goodwin noted the discrepancy and said he would provide a corrected copy to the board.

G. Sacco asked if the earlier completed SEQR could apply to any of the new projects. G. Kirkpatrick said it was something he would ask the attorney.

C. Brancatella said that the projects on the list are not new concepts to the board and have been discussed for years as part of the long-range plan. The board had attempted to address them holistically in the earlier design, but will now be looking at them separately.

Status of building

C. Brancatella said the board now needs to decide whether to put out a new bond to address some or all of the issues or address them piecemeal using the operational budget. She asked if it would make sense to pause the discussion until after the election so as to include the new board member(s). She said she would like to provide the public with some parameters or guideposts for the ongoing discussion.

L. DiBetta said that every month they wait, they could create stress and a bottleneck at the end of the process, even if they are shooting for a bond vote in May 2026. She said it feels like it would make the most sense to continue the discussion rather than pausing.

G. Sacco said there are still needs to be discussed that don't involve basic repairs, such as a reconfiguration of the children's and teen areas. She said those were items that the public indicated they were interested in.

S. Patterson said she agreed that the board should keep the building discussion going.

The board agreed that there would not be a bond vote before May 2026, but the boiler project should move forward while they continue the discussion.

Boiler replacement engineer RFP

G. Kirkpatrick said he was drafting an RFP for the boiler project and would have it ready shortly to C. Goodwin to review to make sure the scope of the project is clear.

M. Kissinger asked the trustees if they wanted to have the full board continue meeting as the full board for the building committee. The board agreed to do so moving forward.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

L. DiBetta noted a small change in the draft minutes to be corrected.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday February 10 regular board meeting as amended.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

- G. Kirkpatrick presented the treasurer's report.
- M. Walsh noted that the proposed 2025-26 budget does not include new positions, and said that was a great way to move forward with economic uncertainties.
- C. Brancatella asked if there was any concern about cost increases for materials. G. Kirkpatrick said that the biggest risk for increases are the unknowns involved with health care costs and NYS retirement contributions, as they are numbers outside the library's control. He said S. Whiting has been very good at investing money and getting some non-tax income. M. Walsh said that is just another way that the board has acted as good stewards of taxpayer money.
- C. Brancatella said that heading into the budget vote, she would like to highlight to the public why the library has reserves, what those reserves are used for and what are the most unpredictable parts of the budget. She also said they should highlight the ways they are working to meet the fiduciary duty of their role as trustees. The board discussed ways to share this information with the public.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 28 February 2025 (Checks disbursed in February 2025 based on pre-approval \$56,480.47; Checks disbursed in February 2025 relating to payroll \$210,889.34; Checks being submitted for approval \$87,951.76; CapProject Fund Checks \$9,948.06; Total: \$365,269.63).

PERSONNEL REPORT

The board noted the personnel report.

PERSONNEL ACTIONS

G. Sacco asked if the listed salary for a Librarian I was for entry level candidates and what the library did for candidates with more experience. G. Kirkpatrick said there was some freedom to negotiate step increases for people with experience.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously voted to approve the following positions:

- Librarian I, full-time, permanent, 35 hours/week, \$60,346/annual or per contract

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- S. Patterson asked if the report that the library was busy in February was supported by the numbers. G. Kirkpatrick said that a lot of it might have to do with the increasing popularity of Saturday story times. He also said the cold weather might be a contributing factor.
- G. Sacco asked if people seemed to be looking more for story time or socialization. G. Kirkpatrick said that people on the weekend seemed to be looking for less structured activities.
- C. Brancatella said that she and her family were in over the weekend and the table areas were very crowded.

UHLS REPORT

L. Scoons said the board was still working to hire Time Burke's replacement and had interviewed two candidates so far.

NEW BUSINESS

Draft budget 2025-26

M. Kissinger said that the PSEG PILOT has been extended, which made the final budget draft less complicated. The budget now comes in \$10,000 under the tax cap.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by G. Sacco, the board unanimously approved the 2025-26 library budget as written for public presentation. The budget proposes a levy of \$4,711,910, an increase of \$119,810 or 2.61%, coming in under the New York State tax cap.

Better World Books bin – Friends' request for extra parking spot/bin

The Friends of the Library have requested approval for a second Better World Books bin to meet the needs of those looking to donate books. They receive a portion of the proceeds. The addition of a second bin would take a second public parking space. The board discussed other locations that might be better to accommodate the bins, as well as the logistics involved.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the request by the Friends of the Library seeking to locate a second Better World Books bin in the library parking lot but tasked G. Kirkpatrick with investigating other locations that might not impact library parking or traffic flow.

Trane maintenance contract

G. Kirkpatrick presented a three-year maintenance contract renewal from Trane. He said the library has been happy with their service in the past. G. Sacco said the increases presented seemed very reasonable.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously approved an HVAC maintenance contract with Trane totaling \$70,863 over the course of three years.

NYS Annual Report

The annual report covers statistics for the fiscal year ending in June 2024.

G. Sacco noted that Summer Reading numbers have been going down over the past couple of years. G. Kirkpatrick said the librarians have been looking at ways to engage more children moving forward.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the NYS Annual Report for submission.

Room rental contract

The board was presented with a facility rental agreement for a piano recital.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by G. Sacco, the board unanimously approved a room rental agreement for a piano recital scheduled for June 29, 2025.

Friends of the Library resolution

G. Kirkpatrick presented a resolution that clarifies the Friends' relationship with the library and their ability to use library space.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously passed a resolution regarding room use by the organization.

Spotlight archive request

G. Kirkpatrick presented the board with a written request from an individual requesting that their name and picture be removed from the Spotlight archive hosted by the library. He said that unlike many requests, this one did not involve an article about a crime, but the individual strongly believes it is causing them harm. Past boards have decided not to remove any articles from the archive, and there is nothing legally requiring the board to do so, but G. Kirkpatrick said it is a question that comes up from time to time and he wanted to put it before the full board so they could review their historical stance. G. Sacco said the library is custodian of the newspaper and does not have the power to remove the content and as a historical document, it is important to keep it intact from an archival point of view. The board agreed that they support maintaining an accurate representation of the paper archive we hosted by the library.

New UHLS board member

L. Scoons said she will be stepping down from BPL board and UHLS board at the end of June when her terms are up. G. Kirkpatrick said he was seeking someone to fill the UHLS seat. L. Scoons said the time commitment included monthly meeting and committee meeting and noted that some times of the year are busier than others. Meetings start at 4:30 p.m. and are usually over by 6 p.m. There is no virtual attendance. She said that sitting on the board gives you a much broader view of libraries across the Capital District and how they are run.

Other new business

There was no other new business at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

Policy Committee update

C. Brancatella said the Policy Committee has decided to make the following changes to the meeting room policy:

- Room checkout capacity would increase from 25 to 35.
- Facility rental contracts would no longer require board approval
- Electronic signatures on the room use agreement would be allowed.

She reminded the public that if a room is checked out under their card, they will need to be there to check in. Check in must take place at the Information Desk.

M. Walsh said she has heard some concerns from area HOAs and asked if the increase to 35 would address those concerns. M. Kissinger said they wouldn't, but it might be something they need to look at as an exception.

Other old business

There was no other old business at this time.

FUTURE BUSINESS

There was no future business at this time.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

One member of the public spoke during the public comment period. A recording of the meeting is available on YouTube.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously voted to enter into executive session to discuss the employment history of a particular individual at 8:35pm.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously voted to adjourn executive session at 9:24pm. No action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by L. Scoons with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the regular meeting at 9:25pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president