

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (VIRTUAL)
Monday April 11, 2022

PRESENT: Mark Kissinger
Harmeet Narang
Mary Redmond
Lisa Scoons
Michelle Walsh
Charmaine Wijeyesinghe
Sharon Whiting, library treasurer

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

EXCUSED: Caroline Brancatella

GUESTS: Catherine Stollar Peters, assistant director
Chris McGinty, assistant director
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk

*All present via Zoom broadcast live on YouTube and the library website.

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

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

Geoff shared with the board a letter and flyer submitted anonymously by a patron regarding the potential language used to communicate the library's elimination of fines.

MINUTES

L. Scoons asked that a reference to the Library of Things be spelled out in the March 14 minutes.

Minutes of the 14 March 2022 board meeting were approved unanimously on a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe.

Minutes of the 24 March 2022 special board meeting were approved unanimously on a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Redmond.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

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

- C. Wijeyesinghe noted the Brainfuse payment on the check warrant and asked for more information about the service, which provides online education and tutoring opportunities for cardholders, as well as career resources.

- S. Whiting discussed her recommendation that the board of trustees authorize the purchase of \$1 million in a six-month T-Bill that would that would bring in \$10,000 once it matures. The T-Bill will tie up \$990,000 of the library’s surplus for the duration of the six months, but would leave approximately \$1.8 million for operating expenses for April through September, along with a surplus remainder of \$1.2 million. M. Redmond said that as a finance committee member, she was in favor of the investment. She said that it was a good first step, and if the library continued in that direction, they might consider laddering some of the T-Bill investments in terms of when they would mature. T. Choppy noted that it also provides an opportunity for financial diversification, which is something the comptroller looks at favorably. M. Walsh asked that the board remain mindful of when they might need access to the money in the fund balance for any upcoming projects. S. Whiting said she would be watching that timeframe closely in order to advise what a next step should be. In response to board questions, G. Kirkpatrick noted that a typical fund balance when there isn’t a construction project on the horizon is closer to 50% of the budget. S. Whiting said purchasing the T-Bill is relatively easy and carries a small transaction fee. This type of investment is backed by the U.S. government.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Redmond, the board unanimously agreed to authorize the purchase of a \$1 million 6-month T-Bill using money from the library’s fund balance.

On a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 March 2022 (Checks disbursed in March 2022 based on pre-approval \$59,262.10; Checks disbursed in March 2022 relating to payroll \$182,650.29; Checks being submitted for approval \$69,410.62; CapProject Fund/Hand-Drawn Checks \$0; Total: \$311,323.01).

PERSONNEL REPORT

G. Kirkpatrick said the library was seeking to fill two part-time clerk positions to maintain circulation desk coverage. M. Redmond asked if the board was actively seeking to fill the previously approved library clerk positions. G. Kirkpatrick said that the ones related to collection maintenance and public services were being filled as needed as those duties ramp up. The library is interviewing for the Librarian II position.

On a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board unanimously approved new hires for the following vacancies:

- Library Clerk, part-time, permanent, 11.67 hours/week, \$14.17/hour
- Library Clerk, part-time, permanent, 11.67 hours/week, \$14.17/hour

DIRECTOR’S REPORT

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

- G. Kirkpatrick noted that despite the uptick in area COVID cases, library staff have still been able to provide services in a safe way. He noted that the home test kits have helped the staff self-monitor any potential exposures. At this time, there are ample tests for both staff and the public.
- The library is planning a “Then and Now” photo display to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the library building this summer. L. Scoons said she expects that to be a popular promotion on social media.

- The contract with the Library Speakers Consortium will make available 2-3 virtual author talks per month for Bethlehem cardholders. G. Kirkpatrick said that while virtual programs are not everyone's cup of tea, the pandemic exposed that they are a viable option. The success of this subscription will be evaluated at the end of the contract.
- In the past month, the library has been looking less like a transaction-only space with foot traffic increasing and in-person programs bringing people in to the library to gather.
- The Friends book sale fundraiser in May has scheduled some musical performers for the outdoor event.
- Circulation is getting very close to pre-pandemic levels.
- Electric costs continue to be high, but not as high as last month.
- L. Scoons asked if some of the technology programs could be offered in the evening or recorded so that they can be watched by people who aren't able to attend daytime meetings.
- C. Wijeyesinghe asked if there was a cost to expanding the library WiFi in town. G. Kirkpatrick said that, depending on where it is, there can be significant costs associated with it. He continues to pursue grant options and member items for potential funding. C. Wijeyesinghe asked if there a possibility for another agency to share in the funding. L. Scoons said the board has discussed this on previous occasions and feel that it isn't the library's responsibility to do all of the work.

UHLS REPORT

L. Scoons reported that library aid in the state budget is up \$5.5 million this year and construction aid is at \$34 million. She said the library should be considering what projects they might be able to submit.

She said the UHLS board has begun the racial equity training, and it has been enlightening and worthwhile.

NEW BUSINESS

Personnel committee report/Director evaluation process

C. Wijeyesinghe said the personnel committee of herself, M. Kissinger and G. Kirkpatrick is presenting a pair of timelines to the board: one to review the materials and the other to lay out the review process. She said the goal is to conduct a director's review annually – with the first one completed by January 2023. The proposed process would include a section for goals developed by the director and expanded questions regarding the director's communication and relationship with the board. C. Wijeyesinghe asked the board to review the timelines and evaluation materials with the goal of finalizing them and adopting them by May 31.

Chairs

G. Kirkpatrick presented the board with a state contract quote for 30 new chairs for patron use. The price for the chairs, which would match the fabric of the existing chairs, has increased dramatically. These upholstered wooden chairs have slowly been replacing the solid wooden chairs that are not popular with most of the public. He noted that with the increase in foot traffic at the library, there is a growing need for more seating. Another option would be to bring out some of the solid wooden chairs once again. The board asked G. Kirkpatrick if he could look into possibly less expensive options in neutral colors and styles. In the meantime, the library would bring out some of the older wooden chairs to increase seating.

Naming rights – Makerspace

Bethlehem resident Joe Storch, whose family funds the Krakower-Storch Family Technology Fund, spoke recently to G. Kirkpatrick and said he was interested in continuing that level of giving. An interest was expressed in naming rights for the Studio Makerspace. G. Kirkpatrick asked the board to consider if that was something they were interested in doing for the community spaces and what the level of giving might be to qualify for naming rights. Board members said they wanted a little time to think about how they felt about it. C. Wijeyesinghe asked if it could be put under old business on future agendas.

OLD BUSINESS

Borrowing policy

C. Wijeyesinghe clarified that the language referring to patrons should be standardized in the final version of the policy. The board agreed that the preferred term would be “patron.” G. Kirkpatrick noted that in addition to information about fine-free rules, the updated policy changed the threshold at which point a cardholder would be blocked from borrowing from \$5 to \$10 in fines. There was also additional clarification about electronic materials and how they do not accrue fines.

On a MOTION by H. Narang with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously approved the recommended updates to the library’s borrowing policy, which will go into effect July 1, 2022.

Building committee update/Report/Next steps

The committee has met with three architects and have been impressed with all of them. The next step is to meet as a committee and narrow down the options.

Fines committee/existing overdue fines discussion

The board continued their discussion about whether or not to waive pre-existing fines when going fine-free. G. Kirkpatrick said that other large libraries that have gone fine-free have waived those back fines. He noted that it would be helpful to eliminate those pre-existing fines in order to maximize the “welcome back” aspect of marketing the library’s fine-free status. Board members said they would be hesitant to bend the rules before the implementation date of July 1. They also encouraged all marketing materials to make it clear that fines were being waived but not charges for lost or damaged items. L. Scoons said it would also be helpful to provide real-world examples to the public so they can see how it will work. Marketing for the library going fine free will begin in mid-June.

On a MOTION by L. Scoons with a SECOND by M. Redmond, the board unanimously approved the following fine-free lending parameters:

- Implementation date of July 1, 2022
- Keeping the current 31-day billing period
- Waiving pre-existing overdue fines

Also part of the lending parameters and included in the updated borrowing policy, which will go into effect July 1, is the blocked card threshold being raised to \$10, as well as maintaining \$1/day fines on Library of Things and ILL items and \$5/day fines on museum passes

OTHER BUSINESS

G. Kirkpatrick mentioned a pair of incidents the previous week involving the harassment of a library volunteer on library property. The perpetrator was a minor, and a letter detailing the incident had been sent to their parents. G. Kirkpatrick asked the board to approve banning the individual from the library until Sept. 15. The board discussed the process in place for the individual to appeal the decision and noted that it could be appealed at the next board meeting or in writing to the board.

On a MOTION by M. Redmond and a SECOND by H. Narang, the board voted unanimously to ban from the library the minor patron mentioned above until Sept. 15, 2022.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation at this time.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by H. Narang, the board adjourned to executive session at 7:50pm to discuss the employment history of a particular individual.

On a MOTION by M. Redmond with a SECOND by H. Narang, the board adjourned executive session at 8:13pm.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board adjourned the regular meeting at 8:14pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president