

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (COMMUNITY ROOM)
Monday July 10, 2023

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Mark Kissinger
Sarah Patterson
Lisa Scoons
Michelle Walsh
Charmaine Wijeyesinghe
Sharon Whiting, library treasurer

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

EXCUSED:

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

Marjorie Maniccia	Sean Garrity	Nicole Privitera
Laura DiBetta	Steve Simons	Lawrence Raab
Matt Lauricella	Ramona Stubbs	Robert Gianotti
Chris Kajano	Rob Stubbs	Deborah Gianotti
Tom Schnurr	Peter Corrigan	Erik Bice
Texanne Corrigan	Ron Swanson	Erin Rightmyer
Anthony Garaufis	Mike Iovine	Donna McMullen
Vistoria Haler	Maryann Landi-Zulto	Judy Rush
Paul Heiser	Gretchen Lena	Sara Lasher
Fran Royo	Dan Lena	Courtney Ryan
Elizabeth Floyd Mair	James McGaughn	Kisha Santiago
Earl Wallace	John Canning	Amanda Lefton
Thomas Chandler	Delta Coughlin	Ani Dowell Baum
Joann Palmer	Michele Dootz	Rev. Molly Dowell Baum
Donna McClyne	Tom Dootz	DD Dowell Baum
Cathy Comie	Tom Patterson	Nicole Correia
Heather Clarke	Stephen Dootz	Charlotte Correia
Jennifer Steuer	Seth Williams	Holly Crall
Meridith Wilsen	Krystal Williams	Steve Simons
Addy Miller	MaryGrace Dansereau	Theresa O'Neil
Rebecca Steuer	Anne Marie Mullin	Erin Bueller
Olivia Steuer	Rebecca Ross	Alan Gaughan
Laura Cooper	David Ross	Jessica Gaughan
Bill Keleher	Ellen Roberts	Barbara Urldrain
Michele Keleher	Kelly Goertz	

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

TRUSTEES OATHS OF OFFICE

M. Walsh administered the oath of office to trustees-elect M. Kissinger. M. Kissinger administered the oath of office to C. Brancatella.

ELECTION OF BOARD OFFICERS

C. Brancatella said that she and S. Patterson believed the best path forward for the board would be to maintain current slate of officers, considering the agenda in the year ahead. She thanked M. Kissinger for the significant time commitment he makes as president. C. Brancatella said there are many other roles on the board that require time and asked the trustees to think about where they might be able to contribute.

The slate of officers proposed for 2023-24:

- President: Mark Kissinger
- Vice President: Michelle Walsh
- Vice President: Charmaine Wijeyesinghe
- Secretary: Caroline Brancatella
- UHLS representative: Lisa Scoons
- Board treasurer: Shari Whiting

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously accepted the 2023-24 officer slate as presented.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

M. Kissinger said the public participation policy allows for a maximum statement of three minutes from each individual.

- Bill Keleher of Slingerlands said he has been a library patron for 50 years. He asked the library to reconsider Drag Story Hour because he believes it sexualizes and confuses children.
- Steve Simons of Bethlehem said he is a former school psychologist and he believes the event is not appropriate for the malleable brains of young people.
- Michelle Keleher said she felt like the library was trying to promote an agenda and acclimate children to trans ideology. She asked for it to be canceled.
- Elizabeth Floyd Mair of Guilderland said she has always tried to show her child how rich and varied the world is. She said the story hour is not a strip show and individuals should stay home if it doesn't appeal to them.
- Anthony said he lives and pay taxes in Bethlehem, and he is in favor of diverse library programming like drag story hour. He said he would have appreciated more gender expansive role models when young.
- Tom Schnurr, a library patron and resident of Delmar, thanked the staff for planning the event. He noted that there are 20 events at the library in the month of July so everyone can choose an event that's right for them.

- Fran Royo, a Bethlehem resident and former school librarian, objected to drag story hour and said it was dividing the town. She explained how individuals could file a formal request for reconsideration with the library.
- An unnamed speaker said that drag is as offensive as blackface.
- Earl Wallace, pastor of Liberty Christian Church in Albany, said he opposed drag story because it goes against his right to Christian speech.
- Kelly Goertz of Glenmont asked the board who was behind the decision to hold the event and who endorsed it.
- Delta Coughlin said, as grandmother, she felt drag story hour appropriate for children. She held images printed from the story reader's personal Instagram page.
- Lawrence Raab, a Bethlehem resident, said he believes drag is inherently sexual and could sow confusion in children. He asked the board to reconsider the program.
- Jennifer, of Bethlehem, said children denied freedom of expression higher rate of suicide. As a gay mom, she thanked library for the program and providing representation for her family.
- Chris Kajano, executive pastor of Kings Chapel, said he loves the library, but drag is a danger and engineered to cause confusion about gender. He asked the board to cancel the program.
- Paul Heiser, a Bethlehem resident, said he doesn't see a good reason for the event, and such things would give the town a reputation.
- Rebecca Ross, who raised children in Bethlehem, said she was speaking for the young people in the community when she asked why a drag queen wanted to read to children in the first place.

After a brief disruption, C. Brancatella said that trustees wanted to hear what people had to say, and she asked people to be respectful of one another and the speaking time limits.

- John Canning, a Bethlehem resident, asked whether the selection of books had any inappropriate content for children. He said constant exposure to sexual themes harms children and he was opposed to the story hour.
- James McGaughn, of Slingerlands, said he has spent many years at the library studying, tutoring and holding meetings, and the library has been and neutral no partisan place. He said drag story hour is shocking and predatory. He asked the board to cancel it.
- Gretchen Lena said she has raised two daughters in Bethlehem and called drag story hour predatory and confusing to children.
- Jennifer Steuer, of Albany, said drag story hour helps children see the variety of people that make up their community. She said when her children were younger, they would all play dress up, including her son, and it never was an issue.
- Sean Garrity, of Bethlehem, said he was against exposing youth to these idea embodied by a drag story hour and asked the board to reconsider the program.
- Heather Clarke, a resident of Delmar, said LGBTQ+ people deserve to be represented.
- Ellen Roberts, retired elementary teacher and mother, said she objects to drag story hour. She said the event normalizes the grooming of children and makes a mockery of women.
- Matt Lauricella said he supports the drag story hour and that many people speaking out against it had no idea of the actual content and were promoting hatred and fear of people who different. He said drag is not inherently sexual or adult and has long been a part of our history and culture.
- Olivia Steuer, of Albany, said she grew up dressing as anything she wanted, and has been to drag shows and Pride events and has never felt sexualized at them.
- Texanne Corrigan said she felt the board was determined to stage a spectacle that would polarize the community, and that such an event goes against the board's long-range plan.
- Bob Gianotti, of Glenmont, objected to drag story hour as being harmful to children and asked why it wasn't put to a community vote.

- Laura DiBetta, a Delmar resident with a fourth grader, thanked the board for the event and said it promotes inclusivity. She said past events in Albany have had huge turnouts of more than 200 people. She said those who think it is a great way to expose to positive queer role models should be allowed to decide for themselves.
- Erin Bueller, of Delmar, said people have a right to free speech but many are misunderstanding the First Amendment. She said she supports drag story hour, and everyone has the freedom of speech and separation of church and state.
- Donna McMullen, a Bethlehem mother of seven, said it's an illogical program requested by parents, not children. She said the library should learn from the lessons of Bud Light and Target.
- Kisha Santiago, of Delmar, said that as a queer parent of two, she thanks the library for creating a welcome environment for families like hers. She said she has attended other drag story hours and they are not places of sexualization and grooming.
- Amanda Lefton, who just moved to Delmar earlier that week, thanked the board for holding a program that embraces inclusivity and said it is benefit for community.
- Jessica Gaughan, a mother of two small children, asked the board to rethink the event. She said she didn't believe it benefited children and if there were other story times planned with Judeo-Christian or nuclear family values.
- Courtney, a homeowner in Delmar and parent of a 4- and 7-year-old, said that gender messaging is already everywhere and a drag story hour lets children know that it's OK to dress as they want. She said drag does not equate smuttiness, and drag story hours are age-appropriate.
- Nicole Privitera, an education specialist who lives in Delmar with four young children, said she supports drag hour because it exposes children to the "mirrors and windows" of different experiences.
- Ani Dowell Baum, 8, asked the library to please not cancel drag story hour.
- Rev. Molly Dowell Baum, youth director at First Presbyterian Church in Albany, is the parent of two children, one who is exploring gender. She said children start understanding their own identity around ages 3 to 5. She supported drag story hours because it provide more representation.
- DD Dowell Baum, 10, said drag is important way to express one's feelings, along with singing and dancing and being yourself. They said it can be inspiring to younger kids.
- Eric Bice, of Delmar, said drag story hour comes down to freedom and allowing parents to make their own choices. He said it was not OK for people to take that right away others.
- Ellen Kelly-Lind, of Delmar, said she is a church going gospel Christian and she supports drag story hour. She said drag story hours are not drag shows, and one of the most prominent national drag queens is a Bethlehem graduate.
- Mike Iovine, who lives in Slingerlands with his 5- and 7-year old daughters, asked if a background check had been done on the performer. He asked if there were plans to hold a rabbi or priest story hour.
- Alex Steuer, of Albany, said drag story hour is an incredibly import educational opportunity to let kids know that it is OK to live their lives as themselves.
- Seth Williams, of Delmar, said he is a foster and adoptive parent and has seen a lot of innocence lost in children. He said he is concerned about the loss of innocence with a drag story hour.
- Tom Dootz, of Feura Bush, said drag story hour is a slippery slope and could lead to children being vulnerable to sex trafficking.
- Rob Stubbs, from Glenmont, said he is opposed to the story hour and asked if the library would cover the cost of counseling if a vulnerable child were harmed by it.
- Sara Lasher, who grew up in Bethlehem, said she didn't think anyone would have a problem if she dressed up in formal men's clothing and read to children, but people are opposed if it is the other way around.
- Addy Miller, of Albany, spoke in favor of drag story hour.

- Meridith Wilsen, of Albany, shared picture of Noelle dressed as a princess at a previous story hour. She said little kids like to dress up, and people who equate drag and LGBTQ+ people as people who are trying to endanger children are wrong.
- Marjorie Maniccia, a Bethlehem resident for 30 years, thanked the library for holding the drag story hour. She said those who don't want to go don't have to attend, but she will be taking time off from work to go.
- Holly Crall, of New Scotland, said she doesn't believe drag story hours belong in the public sector.
- Dan Lena, of Singerlands, said drag story hour should not be allowed.
- Maryann Landi-Zulo said the Bible prohibits activities like drag story hour.

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

M. Kissinger recommended carrying over the current committee appointments until it could be discussed at the next meeting. C. Brancatella said she would like to volunteer for the policy committee. C. Wijeyesinghe said that she was interested in leaving the building committee. The committees remained as follows:

Finance

- M. Walsh
- M. Kissinger (ex officio)

Nominating (as needed)

- S. Patterson
- C. Brancatella

Policy

- C. Wijeyesinghe
- L. Scoons
- M. Kissinger (ex officio)

Building

- C. Wijeyesinghe
- M. Kissinger (ex officio)

Personnel

- S. Patterson
- C. Wijeyesinghe
- L. Scoons
- M. Kissinger (ex officio)

Collective bargaining (as needed)

- L. Scoons
- C. Brancatella

BOARD ANNUAL AUTHORIZATIONS

C. Wijeyesinghe noted for public record that the authorization for services needs to be approved by the board every year.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the 2023-24 authorizations as presented.

BOARD MEETINGS/HOLIDAYS AND CLOSINGS

L. Scoons asked why a meeting date for the third week in July was being proposed. G. Kirkpatrick said it would allow staff more time to get everything prepared following the fiscal year rollover. M. Walsh asked if the November meeting could be moved to Tuesday since Monday falls on Veterans Day.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board voted unanimously to adopt the amended board meeting schedule (with the November meeting held on a Tuesday) for 2024.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board voted unanimously to adopt the holidays and closings schedule for 2024.

ANNUAL ETHICS/CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Ethics statements were distributed to the trustees for signing and will be filed in the public record. C. Wijeyesinghe said she would be proposing an amendment to the text at the next meeting.

MINUTES

Minutes of the 13 June 2023 board meeting were approved unanimously on a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

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

- C. Wijeyesinghe said she appreciated all of the Finance Committee's work to maximize interest earnings.
- M. Walsh said it will be nice to have a small budget surplus as the library heads into a capital project.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 30 June 2023 (Checks disbursed in June 2023 based on pre-approval \$61,328.50; Checks disbursed in June 2023 relating to payroll \$199,201.96; Checks being submitted for approval \$194,659.62; CapProject Fund/Hand-Drawn Checks \$79,502.31; Total: \$534,692.39).

PERSONNEL REPORT

G. Kirkpatrick said the library is requesting to backfill a full-time librarian position due to the upcoming retirement of M. Farley. C. Wijeyesinghe asked if the library had a presence at area career fairs to talk about jobs at the library.

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

- Librarian 1, full-time, permanent, 35 hours/week, \$58,306/annual or per contract

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The board noted the director's report.

UHLS BOARD UPDATE

L. Scoons said the UHLS board would be meeting that Wednesday.

NEW BUSINESS

Architect's presentation

The architect's presentation was postponed.

Other new business

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board unanimously passed a resolution of recognition honoring former board member H. Narang for his 10 years of service.

OLD BUSINESS

Plaza entry –update

G. Kirkpatrick said he was still waiting on a couple of estimates from highway department.

Policy Committee update

- Internet Policy – second read,

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella, with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board unanimously adopted the proposed updates to the library's Internet Policy.

C. Wijeyesinghe said board members would likely be getting a preview copy of the Gifts, Memorials, Bequests, and Naming Opportunities Policy between now and August.

Other old business

G. Kirkpatrick said he met with BCSD chief business and financial officer to discuss the MOU between the library and the school district regarding PILOT income. The MOU is currently being reviewed by the library's attorney. It will be voted on by both the library board and school board at a later date.

The library has received a request from patron about sponsoring a memorial program series. G. Kirkpatrick said a policy regarding that type of gift is in the works, and he would be reaching out when it is done.

FUTURE BUSINESS

Director evaluation timeline and process

C. Wijeyesinghe shared a timeline for the evaluation process and ask trustees to look it over and let her know if there are any changes.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The following comments were submitted via e-mail:

- Laura Rabinow called drag an art form.
- Gianna Aiezza wrote that she supports the library's planned drag story hour.
- Barb Riegel applauded the library for bringing in diverse programs like drag story hour
- Sara Bickersmith commended the library for offering programs that support the LGBTQ+ community.
- Megan Singh thanked the library for representing diverse perspectives and experiences.
- Katelynn Carroll said drag story hour fosters a love of literacy.
- Robin Sutor said she supports drag story and hopes it doesn't get canceled.
- Nancy Hauss said she fully supports drag story hour.
- Caren Kennedy wrote in support of the story hour.
- Willow Baer said it was a relief to know that the library is inclusive.

G. Kirkpatrick said that he had received an appeal to his decision on a request for reconsideration regarding Drag Story Hour.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board entered into executive session at 8:28pm for the purpose of discussing the employment history of a specific individual.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board voted to adjourn the executive session at 9:42pm.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board adjourned the regular meeting at 9:42pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president