

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES EMERGENCY MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (COMMUNITY ROOM)
Monday December 4, 2023

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Laura DiBetta
Mark Kissinger
Sarah Patterson
Lisa Scoons
Michelle Walsh
Charmaine Wijeyesinghe

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director

EXCUSED:

GUESTS: Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of Circulation and Technical Services
Chris McGinty, assistant director

David DeCancio	Steve Redler
Robert McDonnell	Marcy Stryker
Bruce Ginsburg	Hazel Landa
Alon Mazor	Deborah Shafran
Rabbi Nachem Simon	Allon Filler
Karen and Steve Fein	Jonathan Cohen
Terry Kindlon	Wendy Love Anderson
Laurie Shanks	Steven Ainspan
Sean Garrity	Dawn Moser
Galina Levin	Mary Fellows
Sylvia Kaminsky	Laura Weisblatt
Ruth Mendel	Deborah Sokoler
Libby Liebschutz	Maud Easter
Dee Levy	Richard Sokoler
David Weinstein	Joanne Shawhan
Jody Ference	Harold Idelin
Zalman Simon	Greg Weitzman
Cherie Simon	Amy Drucker
Alan Richer	Dalia Ben
Robert Kovach	Haim Ben
Rivi Bahir	Tal Ben Eliezer
Haim Bahir	Steve Downs
Taymoor Naqi	Evelyn Loeb
Gail Sacco	Marc Gronich
Alan Rosenblum	Miles Garfinkel
Shawn Rosenblum	Jason Warshowsky
Valerie Strauss	Molly Wladis
Laurence Kranich	Lianne Pinchuh Wladis
Janice Thompson	Allen Herr
Sheila Baker	Therese Ellsworth
Hank Greenberg	Lee Rosen

Naomi Jaffe
Sandra Sabzevari
Ruth Malke
Jacob Malke
Laurie Gericke
Jonathan Warner
Sheldon Singer
Jim Walsh
Ruth Singer
Farah Malek
Brad Goldstein
Shalom Kieval

Elise and Jeffrey Steinfield
Harold Iselin
Jen Steil
Amie Bloom
Maryan Amsterdamer
Lisa Mandel
Elana Gordis
Richard and Markia Schaefer
Janine M. Patschoreck
Steven Kamenir
Mansoor Umar
20 additional attendees

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 6pm. He advised the public about the evening's agenda and expected rules of conduct.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

Several meeting attendees shared their feelings about an upcoming program sponsored by Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace and the library's Meeting Room Policy in regards to it. The board called for a 10-minute break at 6:40pm before resuming public comments. A recording of the meeting and the public comment period is available on the library's YouTube channel.

MEETING ROOM POLICY DISCUSSION

M. Kissinger opened the discussion of the library's Meeting Room Policy. C. Wijeyesinghe said she wanted to clarify that the board would be discussing the policy and not taking a vote on the December 5 Neighbors for Peace event.

M. Kissinger made a motion to direct the Policy Committee to review the current Meeting Room Policy and report back to the board no later than the February 2024. C. Wijeyesinghe, chair of the committee, said she believed the committee would be able to meet in December to address the policy, but she doesn't believe the committee would have a first-read of revisions ready for the January meeting. She said she would like to set the goal of reporting back on the general discussion and seeking feedback from the board at the January meeting.

C. Brancatella, a Policy Committee member, noted that the library is not legally required to provide community meeting space, but it has chosen to do so. She said the policy, as it currently stands, covers the program scheduled for the following day and cannot be changed before then. She asked the board and the public to consider whether it would be a better option to close the rooms to everyone or open them to everyone. M. Kissinger urged the committee to explore whether there was a middle ground, monitored option. C. Wijeyesinghe asked G. Kirkpatrick to discuss with staff how they might be affected should that policy be revised in a way that puts additional requirements on them.

M. Kissinger told the assembled crowd that the board was hearing their concerns and he thanked everyone for coming and being respectful of their fellow speakers.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger, the board unanimously agreed to send the library's Meeting Room Policy back to the committee to review.

C. Brancatella asked those who organized the December 5 event to consider whether it is an event that refrains from language or behavior that threatens, harasses, abuses or intimidates patrons of the library. She also said she does not take lightly the concerns and fears expressed by those in the room and that the atmosphere in the United States has changed demonstrably in the past few weekend for members of the Jewish community.

C. Brancatella made a motion that the board direct a Bethlehem Public Library executive staff member to be present at the December 5 event to ensure that the Patron Conduct Policy is followed, and if not the program is terminated.

C. Brancatella made a motion that the board ensure that there is a clear and easily accessible way to communicate to the board any belief that the Patron Conduct Policy has been violated, such as a link from the library website's home page. M. Kissinger asked that the library also try to find other ways to get that information out.

C. Wijeyesinghe seconded both motions up for discussion.

M. Walsh said she understood that executive attendance at the event was already planned, and that is something already allowed in the policy, so she was unsure what the board was voting on specifically. C. Brancatella said that the staff already has the discretion but her motion was for the board to direct it to happen in this instance.

C. Wijeyesinghe said she wanted to revise the motion so that it doesn't imply that there is any policy change and that it is related specifically to the meeting held the following day. She said that the Patron Conduct Policy applies to everyone inside and outside the building on library grounds. She also noted that the Solicitation and Distribution Policy prohibits blocking access to the library building and suggested copies be made available.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously voted to direct a Bethlehem Public Library executive staff member to be present at the December 5 event to ensure that the Patron Conduct Policy is followed, and if not, terminate the program.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously voted to direct the staff to ensure that there is a clear and easily accessible mechanism for members of the public to communicate their belief that the patron conduct policy has been violated at any program.

C. Wijeyesinghe asked what that complaint system would look like in practice. She asked if the process would take place in real time while the event was ongoing. C. Brancatella said that the second motion was mainly creating a clear and prominent process by which patrons can bring their concerns to the board. G. Kirkpatrick said Patron Conduct Policy violations are typically responded to by library staff in the moment, but making the means to complain more prominent was an alternative way for people to have their voices heard.

M. Kissinger said he believes the library is the right place to talk about difficult issues in a respectful way and made a motion that the board direct library staff to develop a program on the

current events in the Middle East that takes into consideration all perspectives and that such a program should take place as soon as possible. C. Brancatella said that library staff should consult community groups for input on how to best portray all perspectives. C. Wijeyesinghe said staff were welcome to reach out to the board if they needed any connections.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously voted to direct the staff to develop a program or series on the current events in the Middle East that takes into consideration all perspectives and that such a program should take place as soon as possible.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The board reopened the floor for public participation and several people spoke. A recording of the meeting and the public comment period is available on the library's YouTube channel.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board adjourned the meeting at 8:52pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president