

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday December 11, 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: Laura DiBetta

GUESTS:

Jennifer Crawford, confidential secretary	Trudy Quaif
Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of Circulation and Technical Services	Robert McDonnell
Chris McGinty, assistant director	Molly Wladis
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk	Hope Amsterdamer
Colleen Scott	Yishai Amsterdamer
Dee Levy	Maayan Amsterdamer
Meredith Savitt	David DeCancio
Amie Bloom	Edward Wladis
Marcy Stryker	Susannah Levin
Leslie Hudson	Lianne Pinchuk Wladis
Jim Hudson	Harold Iselin
	Greg Burke
	Gail Sacco
	1 other attendee

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

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

M. Kissinger said the board would open the public comment period for 25 minutes and allow each speaker three minutes to talk. Several meeting attendees shared their feelings about a recent program sponsored by an outside organization and the library's Meeting Room Policy in regards to it. A recording of the meeting and the public comment period is available on the library's YouTube channel.

BOARD MEETING

M. Walsh said she watched a recording of the Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace event featuring Miko Peled and felt there was lot of offensive language used. She noted that the board allowed the event to be held in support of free speech, however she believed that the speaker violated the library's Patron Conduct Policy by disregarding the library director's requests and singling out and deriding an audience member who was wearing an Israeli Defense Force sweatshirt.

She made a motion to bar Miko Peled from the library. M. Kissinger seconded.

C. Brancatella agreed with M. Walsh that there is a distinction between free speech and behavior, and the library's policies are meant to regulate behavior. She said that when a member of audience is singled out, it goes beyond free speech and becomes about behavior, however, she doesn't believe a ban on the speaker accomplishes anything.

M. Walsh made a MOTION to ban speaker Miko Peled from the library. M. Kissinger SECONDED. M. Walsh and M. Kissinger voted in favor. L. Scoons, C. Brancatella, C. Wijeyesinghe and S. Patterson voted against. The motion did not pass.

C. Brancatella made a motion that the board take disciplinary action against Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace including, but not limited to suspension, for hosting a speaker that violated the library's Patron Conduct Policy provision that prevents harassment. C. Wijeyesinghe noted a point of order that there was already a motion on the floor when the second one was made.

C. Wijeyesinghe said that she was aware the library had already taken action against the group for violating the policy prohibiting the sale of merchandise at an event. She asked the board whether there was a need for an additional action. C. Brancatella said that her motion refers specifically to the behavior of the speaker. C. Wijeyesinghe said she wasn't sure if the event organizers had prior knowledge of what was going to be said. C. Brancatella said she believed they did have prior knowledge that people would be made uncomfortable by the talk.

M. Walsh said the library did its best by listening to the public and attempting to intervene during the event. She said it is not the job of library staff to police controversy, and that Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace should take responsibility for the events that took place at their meeting.

C. Wijeyesinghe said she believes the library shouldn't be in the business of banning speakers, and the best way to handle such incidents in the future would be through refining the library's existing policy based on what has been learned. S. Patterson said that the board's energy is best spent focusing on the future and setting policy to prevent issues.

M. Kissinger said it was unfortunate what took place at the library, and it is not how he would like the library to be portrayed.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board voted in favor of taking disciplinary action against Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace including, but not limited to suspension, for hosting a speaker that violated the library's Patron Conduct Policy provision that prevents harassment, upon future discussion of the board.

M. Kissinger, M. Walsh, L. Scoons, C. Brancatella and S. Patterson voted in favor of the motion. C. Wijeyesinghe voted against.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved minutes from the Monday November 13 meeting.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved minutes from the Monday December 4 emergency meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

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

- M. Walsh said that the library was still 2% under budget.
- C. Wijeyesinghe thanked S. Whiting for her investment strategy that has resulted in substantial interest earnings for the library.
- C. Wijeyesinghe asked about the "See detailed report" notation on the bill schedule. T. Choppy said that it is multiple purchase orders from the same vendor. S. Whiting said there was a change in the software that changed how it had previously been displayed. C. Wijeyesinghe asked if a detailed report or link could be provided to the board. M. Kissinger suggested that it be sent to the finance committee and C. Wijeyesinghe.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 30 November 2023 (Checks disbursed in November 2023 based on pre-approval \$45,508.12; Checks disbursed in November 2023 relating to payroll \$197,177.61; Checks being submitted for approval \$73,157.97; CapProject Fund/Hand-Drawn Checks \$21,273.00; Total: \$337,116.70).

PERSONNEL REPORT

G. Kirkpatrick said he was not requesting any personnel actions this month. The library is still looking for a part-time librarian, which had been previously approved. G. Kirkpatrick thanked staff for being willing to fill in those Friday night hours until a replacement is found. M. Kissinger noted some of the previously approved clerical positions and asked if they were being actively filled. G. Kirkpatrick said they will be filled as needed as circulation increases.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- Included in the report were before and after pictures of the recent carpet cleaning. G. Kirkpatrick said the cleaners used a quick-drying technique and the improvement was noticeable
- An AED will be deployed shortly. Many staff were trained in its use at staff development day. The new automated system is easier and not as daunting as previous versions.
- G. Kirkpatrick noted that NYLA reports were included in this month's packet. He thanked the board for supporting the staff and allowing them to attend. M. Walsh said it sounded like those who participated enjoyed attending. G. Kirkpatrick said it is always nice to have the opportunity to see what other libraries are doing.
- M. Kissinger and C. Brancatella thanked library staff for all the traditional work they do, as well as additional work over the past week.

UHLS BOARD UPDATE

There is no meeting in December. L. Scoons thanked Tim Burke and Mary Fellows at Upper Hudson for their guidance and support in the ongoing meeting room discussion. She said they are a great resource moving forward.

NEW BUSINESS

Building project discussion/bond amount/HVAC options

L. Scoons asked when the board might see the results of the architects' discussion with employees at staff development day. G. Kirkpatrick said he believed it would be part of the next design development phase, as the schematic design phase is officially complete. C. Wijeyesinghe asked if there was feedback from staff that might change the floor plan. G. Kirkpatrick said there were some space allocation questions from Public Services staff. He also said he has heard some comments that say the library is doubling staff space. He said that is not happening, and the floor plan in the design represent the loss of mezzanine space.

M. Kissinger said that with the completion of the schematic design phase, the architects are looking for the board to make a decision about moving forward with the project and how much they would be willing to bond. M. Walsh asked if the design is set in stone. G. Kirkpatrick said that it is not, but some decisions could impact the cost of the project.

M. Kissinger reminded the board that they are the clients and should speak up if they don't feel ready to move forward, especially in light of the Meeting Room Policy discussion, which won't be resolved right away. M. Kissinger said that the May vote timeline is very unlikely. He said he doesn't feel like they are ready to move the project forward and would rather have it done right than to rush a deadline. There are three things that must be in place for the project to go to vote: SEQR environmental review with comment periods; parcel consolidation; and a board decision on the scope/cost of the project.

C. Brancatella recommended that the board move to the next agenda item and table the discussion until January. M. Kissinger said the board has been talking about a building project for five years and needed to be comfortable with what they would be asking the community to spend. He said he didn't feel like he wanted to bond more than \$30 million. M. Walsh asked when the next ballot opportunity would be if they don't make the May vote. C. Wijeyesinghe recommended October. She asked S. Whiting to provide the amount of library money that would be available to draw down the total bond. S. Whiting said the number is likely to grow as time goes on.

M. Walsh said she was not comfortable with where the design currently stood because she has repeatedly asked for more space in the Children's Room and it has not been added. C. Wijeyesinghe said she would like to reconsider the size of the large meeting room. L. Scoons said that part of the reason for the larger room was to accommodate library programs. C. Brancatella reiterated that staff space was not being doubled.

G. Kirkpatrick said some segment of the board would need to meet with the architects to let them know what they are looking for and add some working sessions. He noted that the time spent on schematic design was not a wasted effort and the library learned a lot from the process.

The board decided to not take any action on the building project at this time. M. Kissinger urged fellow board members to review the environmental options before the next discussion.

Meeting Room Policy – update

C. Wijeyesinghe said the policy committee has been charged with reviewing the Meeting Room Policy, and they are working on setting up a December meeting. She said significant feedback from the public has been received. She said the board had requested a policy ready to vote on at the February meeting, but she doesn't believe the committee would be able to meet that deadline. She said the committee would consider what was learned from events in recent weeks. She said she doesn't support intervening in meetings and placing trustees and staff in that role, but that the library is unable to simply trust that outside organizations would have control over the meeting. She said there are very few restrictions a government organization can place on public meetings, and it might come down to an all or nothing approach.

C. Brancatella said that even though the policy would appear to be all or nothing, the library should try to find a balance. She said the board has shown itself to be in support of the First Amendment. She added that there is a question of safety for staff and patrons that should be addressed.

L. Scoons said she believes that providing meeting space to the community is part of the goal of the library. She also agreed that the February deadline would most likely not work.

M. Walsh said she agreed that the library was facing an all or nothing option, and she was strongly against the nothing. She said she wants to encourage free speech but library staff cannot be expected to police controversy. She suggested de-escalation techniques such as turning off the microphone and lights.

S. Patterson asked G. Kirkpatrick how many groups, on average, hold large public events with speakers. G. Kirkpatrick said he didn't have that number but he could find out. C. Brancatella said that the library only learned about speaker Miko Peled four days prior to the event and suggested that speaker names must be provided to the library 60 days in advance.

M. Kissinger said he would support keeping meeting rooms open to the public, but the board might want to consider pausing new reservations while the policy is examined. He also questioned why the library has had to shoulder the entire burden of providing meeting space in the Town of Bethlehem. C. Wijeyesinghe echoed his question.

C. Brancatella said the board has received numerous comments about the library being the place to uphold free speech.

S. Patterson said she agreed that pausing new reservations so the policy could be reviewed was the right way to go. M. Walsh said she didn't want to shut out longtime groups like the Progress Club. M. Kissinger said existing reservations during the next two months would not be affected. C. Brancatella said such a move would also send a message to other community partners that there is demand for meeting space.

C. Wijeyesinghe said the Policy Committee is in the middle of a number of projects, including naming opportunities that might have to be put on the back burner to move full steam ahead with the Meeting Room Policy.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously agreed to pause new meeting room reservations through Tuesday, March 12, to allow the board the opportunity to review the library's Meeting Room Policy.

Prepaid health care fees

G. Kirkpatrick said that the library is required to pay for health care administration fees and upfront FSA enrollment costs before the end of the year. Since open enrollment has just ended, an

invoice has not yet been prepared. G. Kirkpatrick asked the board to approve the payment of the bill not to exceed \$18,000.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board voted unanimously to authorize the approval for payment of the upcoming invoice from Marshall and Sterling to pay health insurance administration costs and upfront FSA enrollment fees not to exceed \$18,000.

Patron Point presentation

This presentation has been held for a future date.

Other new business

G. Kirkpatrick said the boiler pump is leaking and in need of a repair. He received a quote for a new pump and will send the old one out for repair to have a backup.

On a MOTION by L. Scoons with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board voted unanimously to have the pump on the boiler replaced by Trane for the cost of \$6,930.00.

OLD BUSINESS

Library properties consolidation – update

G. Kirkpatrick said the library and the school district have been exploring ways to consolidate all four parcels of library property under one owner. He said it was his understanding that the board expressed a desire to own the property, but there were some questions about whether the school district would be obligated to bond for the library in that case and whether a bond would be required to transfer ownership. The school has said that they would be willing to accept a consolidation of the property under their ownership, providing a path forward for the building project. They would have title to the property and require a strongly worded lease that would protect them from liability. Town approval of the process would be a relatively simple procedure. With school district ownership, any building project would be subject to SED review. C. Wijeyesinghe said she had always been in favor of school district ownership and asked to be notified when it would be on the school board's agenda.

Study Room Policy – 1st read

C. Wijeyesinghe presented the draft of the policy and said it was up for review.

Naming Opportunities Policy – update

C. Wijeyesinghe said the Policy Committee has created a price point grid for certain rooms and will send it out to board member for feedback.

Other old business

There was no old business discussed at this time.

FUTURE BUSINESS

Displays and Exhibits policy – language update

This topic will be discussed at a future meeting.

C. Wijeyesinghe asked fellow board members to consider whether they would be interested in some type of retreat and what the focus of the retreat would be.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Several meeting attendees shared their feelings about a recent program sponsored by an outside organization and the library's Meeting Room Policy in regards to it. A recording of the meeting and the public comment period is available on the library's YouTube channel. M. Kissinger said further comments could be submitted to the board in writing.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board voted unanimously to enter into executive session at 8:52pm to discuss the proposed acquisition, sale or lease of real property.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board adjourned the executive session at 9:30pm.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board adjourned the regular meeting at 9:31pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president