

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (COMMUNITY ROOM)
Monday February 12, 2024

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Laura DiBetta
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
Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of Circulation and Technical Services
Chris McGinty, assistant director
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk
Tracey McShane, personnel administrator
Trudy Quaif
Hazel Landa
Leslie Hudson
Jim Hudson
Mary Finneran
Candace Linden
Meredith Savitt
David Van Duesen
Eyab Alkarasi
Andrew Seeman
Robert McDonald

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 5:59pm.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

Seven attendees addressed the board. A recording of the meeting and the public comment period is available on the library's YouTube channel.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

C. Wijeyesinghe asked about the clarification that was requested for the December minutes. C. Brancatella said the wording was spoken at the December minutes but hadn't initially been included in the minutes. Board members noted some misattributions in the special meeting minutes. K. Roberts said those changes would be made before posting the final documents.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday January 8 regular meeting.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved the minutes as amended from the Thursday January 25 special meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

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

- M. Kissinger asked if there was anything unusual or extraordinary to note in the warrant. S. Whiting said that everything was pretty routine.
- C. Wijeyesinghe said she had asked S. Whiting about the check made out to the Chamber of Commerce and learned that it was payment for an ad in their annual directory.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 January 2024 (Checks disbursed in January 2024 based on pre-approval \$57,992.55; Checks disbursed in January 2024 relating to payroll \$192,192.10; Checks being submitted for approval \$137,994.28; CapProject Fund/Hand-Drawn Checks \$0; Total: \$388,178.93).

PERSONNEL REPORT

No personnel actions were requested at this time.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- The maintenance department is very pleased with the results of the plaza resurfacing. M. Walsh said the library paved the plaza in response to information brought forward by the public, and it was nice to hear the positive impact that the change has had.
- Some librarians have been training to assist patrons in the studio makerspace. Currently the IT department is handling makerspace bookings, but the intent is to shift that role back to Public Services.
- G. Kirkpatrick pointed to the very high story time attendance and said those programs are the library's "bread and butter."
- Librarians will be returning to The Pit at the middle school to provide after-school outreach.
- Hoopla recently experienced its most traffic since being introduced in 2020 early in the pandemic.
- M. Walsh asked for more information about the hearing loop that was recently installed at the library's service desks. G. Kirkpatrick said they interact directly with an individual's assistive listening device to cut down on background noise, improving customer service for patrons using those devices. The library is currently looking at whether it would be feasible to install one in the Community Room, which uses an infrared hearing technology that has never really worked properly. G. Kirkpatrick said meeting rooms in the new building project will automatically include the service. C. Brancatella asked if the hearing loop installation was the result of a patron's request at a

recent board meeting. G. Kirkpatrick said that patron had presented a lot of information at the meeting that added to a conversation that had already begun.

- C. Brancatella noted that the Children’s Place has been very busy. She said she had heard from some people in the community that it had been difficult to borrow a copy of a very popular children’s book. She asked how the library deals with high-demand items. G. Kirkpatrick said that more books are purchased based on the number of reservations, so people are encouraged to make a reservation to trigger that process.
- L. DiBetta said she was happy to see the 3D printer back in action based on patron feedback. She asked how the virtual webinar about difficult conversations went. G. Kirkpatrick said that 29 people attended. He has been setting up meetings with local Jewish and Muslim community leaders to begin a conversation about how to frame a program about the challenges in the Middle East that would promote conversation and healing in the community.
- C. Wijeyesinghe said the difficult conversation program was a good first step, and that farther down the road, the library might look to train staff or volunteers as facilitators.

UHLS BOARD UPDATE

L. Scoons said Advocacy Day was well received by those in attendance. She noted that UHLS is seeking to fill a number of positions, including their head of IT, who is retiring after many years with the system.

NEW BUSINESS

2024 Draft Budget

S. Whiting said the proposed budget stays a little under the cap, which was the goal. The total levy comes in at \$4.587 million. She said she is budgeting about \$90,000 for interest income, which is fairly conservative even as rates are expected to stay steady in 2024. She pointed out that total salaries and benefits are increasing per the contract and step increases. She said retirement and health insurance costs are going up and can be more difficult to project, but she feels the proposed budget can accommodate those increases. She has also increased the professional services line in anticipation of a growing need with the upcoming building project. She noted that the budget reclassifies how Friends contributions are shown, but there is a net zero effect on the overall budget.

The total levy increase is 4.2%, which includes this year’s cap and some of what was left on the table in past years. M. Kissinger said the finance committee had reviewed the budget. M. Walsh said she believes it represents a reasoned and well-thought-out approach to spending. G. Kirkpatrick said the trustees would need to vote on a final budget by March 20, the school district deadline. S. Whiting encouraged the board to look over the numbers and be ready to vote at the March meeting.

C. Wijeyesinghe asked if there is a public hearing on the budget. G. Kirkpatrick said that it takes place every year at the beginning of the May board meeting, with a copy appearing in the May/June Footnotes.

L. Scoons asked if there were any big swings expected in the coming year from a staffing perspective. S. Whiting said there have been no new positions added and the turnover allowance has held steady.

Capital Projects Fund Resolution

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously authorized the transfer of funds from the operating fund to the capital projects fund, as needed, to cover design development fees as per the contract. Total amount not to exceed \$750,000.

NYS Annual Report for Public Libraries

G. Kirkpatrick noted that the state annual report covers the state fiscal year time period so the actual numbers are about 6 months out of date. The report is required for every chartered public library and has to be officially approved by the board. L. DiBetta noted that she was listed as a trustee. G. Kirkpatrick said that is one area in the report that is current to the calendar year.

C. Wijeyesinghe said she wanted to affirm and celebrate that the library has been registered for 110 years, and 600 books have been added to the adult collection in the past year. She said she noted that the library does not have a Braille display. G. Kirkpatrick said that the cost of the technology has come down so much that he doesn't believe there is much of an urgent in-library demand.

C. Wijeyesinghe asked about adult literacy programs. G. Kirkpatrick said they overlapped slightly with digital literacy and primarily included lessons on how to use the library's resources, such as Libby. It does not include ESL programs, which have their own category. C. McGinty shared a list of some of the library's recent adult literacy programs.

On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board unanimously approved the information submitted in the 2023 New York State Annual Report for Public Libraries.

Annual report to the community

State standards also require that the library make available a board-approved report to community annually. G. Kirkpatrick presented the board with a graphically driven report representing the calendar year of 2023 created by K. Roberts. Board members were also given wallet cards outlining some library stats so they would have them on hand when networking. C. Brancatella said she is pleased that the library has Sunday hours and that it helps out a lot of people.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the 2023 annual report to the community.

UHLS Equity Challenge

G. Kirkpatrick presented the Upper Hudson Equity Challenge to the board and asked them to approve the library's participation. The UHLS Equity Committee has outlined a series of benchmarks in multiple areas to work toward. Many of the goals have already been met through the library's own equity efforts outlined in the long-range plan. The challenge runs through December 2026.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board voted unanimously to participate in the UHLS Equity Challenge.

April board meeting

G. Kirkpatrick asked the board if they would be willing to reschedule the April meeting from the 8th to the 15th. He said that he will be at the ALA conference April 3-5 and would rather be there and present than trying to participate while scrambling to put together the board packet. L. DiBetta said she would not be available on the 15th.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously voted to reschedule the April board meeting from the 8th to the 15th.

G. Kirkpatrick said that in March, there is a library program that will be taking place at the same time as the board meeting. It is scheduled to be held in the Community Room. G. Kirkpatrick asked the board if they wanted to try to switch rooms with the event or meet in the Board Room that night. C. Wijeyesinghe said she prefers the larger Community Room in general, but would be fine meeting in the Board Room for March. M. Walsh said she doesn't want to take the room from larger groups and programs just because the trustees prefer the space, especially if there isn't a need to accommodate meeting crowds like there has been recently. M. Kissinger said that would be a good topic to discuss further at the board retreat.

Other new business

There was no other new business at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

Library properties consolidation – update

G. Kirkpatrick said discussions continue between the library and the school district about consolidating the parcels that make up the library property. He and M. Kissinger have met with district officials to discuss the relationship between the entities and whether the path forward is to consolidate with district ownership or library ownership.

Building project – update/Bonding discussion

G. Kirkpatrick presented a breakdown of some building project numbers to get clarification for the architects about the sources of funding.

M. Kissinger made the following resolution:

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger and a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously resolved to direct the library's architect firm (Ashley McGraw) to design a renovation and expansion of the library with a cost of no more than \$36 million. It was further resolved that Ashley McGraw and their associated engineering firm shall design an HVAC system with ground source (geothermal) as discussed at the January 25, 2024, special board meeting. Due to substantial state and federal grants and subsidies available for energy efficient and climate friendly designs and the relatively short term return of a substantial portion of the HVAC cost, it is the intention of the board to finance the HVAC system outside the long term bond and separate from the project costs.

M. Walsh said the finance committee is still exploring short term financing options.

M. Kissinger told the board that the bond vote would not be taking place in May 2024, and asked if it was the board's intention to have something ready to vote on in October 2024. C. Wijeyesinghe said

she thinks any later than that would be too far out. S. Patterson said that since the board has the number now, it made little sense to delay. L. Scoons said that costs increase as time goes on.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously stated their intention to present a building project bond vote to the public in October 2024.

Meeting Room Policy – update

The library has been in discussion with an attorney about how to move forward with updating the meeting room policy. G. Kirkpatrick noted that the only controls they can put on those reservations are time, manner and place. He said there are a lot of ways to make space available to the public under those constraints.

C. Wijeyesinghe said the attorney noted that the library had been treating all reservations the same – from small, neighborhoods groups to 501C3s. It was suggested that the library start looking at them as separate entities based on the intended use of the room.

Other policy concepts under consideration:

- If an outside group hosts a program with a speaker, a rental agreement would be required.
- Rental fee would be nominal – just enough to cover costs.
- Groups renting rooms would have exclusive use of the space, and events would not have to be open to the public. Business transactions are still forbidden.
- Restrictions will be made regarding crowd size at certain events. Hosting groups would be responsible for enforcing those rules

M. Walsh asked whose job it would be to parse out whether it is a reservation for a group or a registered nonprofit. G. Kirkpatrick said the library already has an employee who does this.

C. Brancatella said she wanted to clarify that the intent of the policy overhaul is to allow free speech to take place in a safe environment that the library is prepared to deal with. She said recent events showed that a one-size-fits-all approach wasn't working.

M. Kissinger urged the board to review the drafts as they are presented and not let “perfect be the enemy of good.”

M. Walsh said she thought the staff was trying to move away from the exchange of money at the library and asked if a rental agreement is the only way forward.

Displays and Exhibits Policy – 2nd read

M. Walsh noted that the policy does not allow any price lists or other means of solicitation. She asked if contact information was included with the display. G. Kirkpatrick said that it is a requirement. M. Kissinger said that prices would also not be allowed on the public bulletin board.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved updates to the Displays and Exhibits Policy.

Study Room Policy – 2nd read

G. Kirkpatrick said the individual study rooms remain in high demand.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board unanimously approved updates to the Study Room Policy.

Board retreat – March 4

The board noted that the retreat would be held March 4. Food options were discussed. M. Kissinger asked fellow board members if they had anything they wanted to bring to the table to send it his way.

Other old business

M. Walsh said that it still feels like she is facing really long wait times for materials and has heard the same complaint from others in the community.

FUTURE BUSINESS

Naming Opportunities Policy discussion

C. Wijeyesinghe said she would like to see this topic return to the agenda as she doesn't want to lose track of it.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

One person addressed the board. A recording of the meeting and the public comment period is available on the library's YouTube channel.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board voted unanimously to enter into executive session at 8:02pm to discuss the employment history of a particular individual.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board voted unanimously to immediately adjourn executive session at 9:04pm.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 9:05pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president

Board actions

1. On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday January 8 regular meeting.
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6. On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the 2023 annual report to the community.
7. On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board voted unanimously to participate in the UHLS Equity Challenge.
8. On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously voted to reschedule the April board meeting from the 8th to the 15th.
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11. On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved updates to the Displays and Exhibits Policy.
12. On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board unanimously approved updates to the Study Room Policy.
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