

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING  
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (COMMUNITY ROOM)  
Monday March 13, 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  
Meredith Savitt  
Hazel Landa  
Leslie Hudson  
Jim Hudson  
Kirk Cornwell  
Mark Roberts  
Robert McDonald  
Peter Looker

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

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

Four 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

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday February 12 regular meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

*Treasurer's update*

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

- S. Whiting noted that the library was about 3% under budget compared to 6% last year due to the library being fully staffed and salary increases from the recent negotiation.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 29 February 2024 (Checks disbursed in February 2024 based on pre-approval \$52,656.27; Checks disbursed in February 2024 relating to payroll \$196,872.82; Checks being submitted for approval \$53,264.12; CapProject Fund/Hand-Drawn Checks \$37,547.14; Total: \$340,340.35).

## PERSONNEL REPORT

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously voted to approve the following position:

- Library clerk, part-time, permanent, 13.57 hours/week, \$16.26/hour or per contract.

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- Library programs have had very high attendance this month, especially with the February break activities bringing in a lot of children.
- The Bethlehem Historical Association events also continue to draw significant crowds, and study room sessions continue to increase.
- G. Kirkpatrick also noted that early literacy programs continue to draw crowds multiple days a week that would exceed Story Hour Room capacity. He said it is unlikely those programs will ever fit back into the Story Hour Room, which holds a maximum of 25-30 people.
- M. Walsh said those numbers were just further proof that the library needs more space.
- L. Scoons asked if high attendance at story times is a trend that will continue upward or bubble out. G. Kirkpatrick said he doesn't believe the early literacy numbers are going to shrink anytime soon.
- G. Kirkpatrick pointed to outreach being done at the elementary schools and after school. S. Patterson said that the event at Elsmere filled up very quickly.
- Curbside pickup brings in about 200 transactions a month.
- G. Kirkpatrick said there are some examples of community bulletin board postings that staff were unclear on how to enforce and he asked the board for some guidance. He noted that some advertise off-site events where there is a cost to attend. He said he didn't need a decision right away but that staff was seeking some clarity. M. Kissinger said that it seems the line would be if it were a free public event versus something with a cost. M. Walsh said that as a resident she would like to see notifications for relevant fund raising events like a Brooks BBQ dinner. L. DiBetta asked how other libraries handle the situation. G. Kirkpatrick said there is not a lot of consistency across the Upper Hudson system. C. Brancatella asked how the question came up. G. Kirkpatrick said that staff had questions about it after the policy was revised to disallow price lists on the board for art on display. L. Scoons asked if the BCN-TV bulletin board could be used. G. Kirkpatrick said that it already was. C. Brancatella asked how far would they take such restrictions. She noted that a program taking place was being held by To Life! which is an organization that raises money for breast cancer research and support. She asked if

prohibiting that program would follow the same logic. M. Walsh said she thought the policy referred to sales on the property. G. Kirkpatrick asked if the board was comfortable allowing flyers as long as they are from a non-profit organization. C. Wijeyesinghe said that maybe the Policy Committee could look at that question at their next meeting.

- C. Wijeyesinghe said that someone in the community had characterized the children's area in the proposed building project as a "daycare center," and she wanted to clarify that it is a supervised space. G. Kirkpatrick said that kids are not allowed in the library unaccompanied and it's not the library's intent to provide daycare. He said that play is an important early literacy skill and it introduces children and their parents to the library in a welcoming way. He said he can see the demand, especially in the winter, for indoor opportunities for socialization. He said that current limits on the space means that it is spilling into areas that would be used as quiet reading spaces for caregivers and children.
- G. Kirkpatrick said the meeting with HILL went well, and they are interested in learning more about the Friends of the Library and how they are organized.

#### UHLS BOARD UPDATE

L. Scoons said the board is getting ready for the annual program awards. The celebration will be held the second Wednesday in June, and organizers are looking for a location in Albany County.

#### NEW BUSINESS

##### *Construction manager RFP*

G. Kirkpatrick said the library's architect has recommended hiring a construction manager at this point in pre-construction process. He said this individual will be helpful in cost estimating and buildability and would have a foot in both the construction and design worlds.

He asked the board if they were ready to move forward with the RFP process. M. Kissinger said the risk would be the financial exposure if the bond goes down, but he felt it is best to start the RFP process to be prepared. S. Patterson asked how much it would cost. G. Kirkpatrick said he was unsure until the bids start coming in. M. Walsh said a construction manager is vital to keeping things on time and on budget, as well as free from legal complications. L. Scoons said that the RFP process itself would take at least a month so she doesn't believe it to be premature to move forward. C. Wijeyesinghe noted that the construction manager works for the board, not the architect. G. Kirkpatrick said he believes it is a service that is important to an organization the size of the library.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously voted to begin the RFP process to hire a construction manager.

##### *Election official*

G. Kirkpatrick said the library would need to have an election official in place for an October bond vote, and he is moving forward with the search. G. Kirkpatrick said that the election official is the one who runs the election and certifies the vote. C. Wijeyesinghe suggested board members do some targeted outreach to see who might be interested. L. Scoons asked if the voting would be held in the Community Room. G. Kirkpatrick said that it would.

*Off-cycle check – museum pass*

G. Kirkpatrick asked the board to approve an off-cycle check for a museum pass so that it would be available in time for spring break.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the payment of an off-cycle check to Amelia Park Children’s Museum in the amount of \$275.

*Chromebook purchase*

G. Kirkpatrick asked the board to approve the purchase of 10 new Chromebooks to replace the ones purchased before the pandemic. He said that the nice thing about Chromebooks is they can be disabled remotely if they are not returned. C. Wijeyesinghe said the library might want to think about purchasing them on a replacement schedule.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board unanimously approved the payment of \$6,317.20 to Dell for the purchase of 10 Latitude 3445 Chromebooks.

*Request for reconsideration – “Breaking Biden” by Alex Marlow*

G. Kirkpatrick said the title went through the regular reconsideration process and it was decided to keep it in collection. L. DiBetta said that she did her due diligence and found G. Kirkpatrick’s decision consistent with ALA guidance.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board voted unanimously to uphold the director’s decision to deny the request to remove “Breaking Biden” by Alex Marlow from the library’s collection.

*Other new business*

There was no other new business at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

*2024-25 budget*

S. Whiting noted that the budget draft in the board packet had not changed other than some wording in the notes to make it clearer. M. Kissinger noted that the levy is at 4.32%, which is under the state tax caps and makes use of some of the unused cap from the previous year. In response to a question from L. Scoons, S. Whiting said the library is using what was left on the table to balance the 2024-25 budget.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously approved the 2024-25 library budget as written for public presentation. The budget proposes a levy of \$4,592,100, an increase of \$190,131 or 4.32%, coming in under the New York State tax cap.

*Public Meeting Room Policy – update*

The library’s attorney has made some progress with the policy, but it was not available in time to be included in the board packet. G. Kirkpatrick said he expects it to pass from the policy committee to the full board shortly. C. Wijeyesinghe said that, in this instance, the entire board is the policy committee.

### *Meeting room reservations*

M. Kissinger said the library's vote to suspend new meeting room reservations will expire the following day unless the board takes further action. L. Scoons asked if it would be reasonable to expect that the board could pass a revised meeting room policy at the next meeting. M. Kissinger said he wasn't sure. C. Brancatella said she believes it is an unreasonable expectation that the board would be in a position to approve the policy at the next meeting.

C. Brancatella said she has been consistent in her opposition to reopening the reservations until the library has a solid revised policy in place that would protect staff and the public. She said that the logistics of a large program hosted by the public is something staff are not in a position to deal with.

M. Walsh said she understood where C. Brancatella was coming from, but trustees have heard from many people who want the rooms reopened and the library had been able to operate under the current policy for years without issue.

C. Wijeyesinghe asked if it was possible to open the rooms for meetings but not events. G. Kirkpatrick said that the library could place a capacity restriction on bookings under the existing policy as a neutral manner restriction, but it is not a perfect solution. M. Kissinger asked if they could put that kind of provision in place while considering other policy updates. He said they could cap capacity at 50 for the Community Room and 25 for the Board Room. C. Brancatella said she was happy that the board was looking at a way to compromise but her concern was that any interim regulations would cost a lot of staff resources in terms of time and effort navigating questions from the public. L. DiBetta asked if there was a way to open the rooms to the public as they work toward a comprehensive policy and open up as much as possible for the regular groups that rely on the meeting space. S. Patterson said that it was her perception that about 95% of the groups use the room for smaller meetings and she wondered how many incidents the library might expect to encounter in the next two months. C. Wijeyesinghe asked what G. Kirkpatrick would recommend. G. Kirkpatrick said that it is generally the will of the staff that the rooms be reopened to the public.

L. DiBetta asked if the library has a right to cancel all meetings if there is any issue. G. Kirkpatrick said that exists under the current policy.

M. Walsh asked if people could be notified by email that the booking window has reopened. G. Kirkpatrick said that notification was set to go out ASAP.

C. Brancatella thanked the board for the constructive discussion. She said she wanted to make it clear to the public that reservations were not closed to punish any group or avoid controversial speech. The library is simply looking at ways to manage crowds in a safe manner.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board voted to reopen the meeting rooms to public bookings with a maximum capacity of 50 in the Community Room and 25 in the Board Room. L. DiBetta, M. Kissinger, S. Patterson, L. Scoons, M. Walsh and C. Wijeyesinghe voted in favor. C. Brancatella was opposed.

L. Scoons said she wanted to also encourage members of the community to put pressure on other organizations to make meeting spaces available.

C. Brancatella said she encourages those who care about library programs and policy to run for the board and commended L. DiBetta and M. Walsh for seeking re-election.

### *Naming Opportunities Policy – 1st read*

C. Wijeyesinghe presented the draft and noted the discussion about the provision that grants trustees the right to rescind any designation at their discretion. She said that an earlier document about

price points for naming opportunities is not part of the policy but meant more as a guidance document. M. Walsh said she is still opposed to the wording that allowed for removing a designation at the board's discretion. She is wary of extreme politics and this provision makes her think of the recent removal of historical statues. L. DiBetta said she supports that provision but had some other non-substantive edits. M. Kissinger said he hopes the public takes the time to look at the draft and weigh in.

### *Building project*

- *Referendum vote update*

G. Kirkpatrick said the library is moving forward with an Oct. 1 bond vote to be held in the library Community Room. He said he's been in touch with the board of elections and they will provide three voting machines, just like the school district. The school district will provide the library with printed voter roles. He shared a draft with tentative dates for tasks leading up to the vote. He said it will cost the library about \$12,000 to run the special election.

C. Wijeyesinghe suggest the board consider early outreach to the schools' Presidents Association and PTAs, possibly as early as late spring. S. Patterson suggested approaching the PTA in September.

G. Kirkpatrick said he doesn't see any roadblocks that would prevent the vote from happening.

- *Design options*

G. Kirkpatrick said that the architects have presented a pair of design packets seeking trustee feedback on meeting room configuration and curbside pickup options. The architects wanted to set up a working session with the board in the near future. A charrette with trustees about sustainability is planned for March 20.

M. Walsh said she wanted to discuss the curbside loop proposals because she felt blindsided by the fact that one of them no longer included a drive-up window. She said she was unaware that there was opposition to it.

G. Kirkpatrick said the architects want the board to weigh in on whether the curbside loop should be connected to the main lot and also whether they wanted a drive-up window or other curbside option that would provide a walkway that would keep pedestrians from having to cross over the pickup loop. The option without the window would feature a large canopy that could protect staff somewhat from the elements as they walk out to deliver the materials to patrons waiting in their cars.

L. Scoons said she did not like either of the options and felt that having people cross traffic was a bad idea. L. DiBetta said that she would prefer something that was more pedestrian and bicycle friendly.

S. Patterson asked how many people use the Delaware Avenue entrance. P. Berardi said it was about 1,300 a month

S. Whiting asked if there could be a library entrance before the circle to prevent the need to cross it. L. Scoons said that would address the long walk from Delaware Avenue to the proposed entrance. M. Walsh said she would also like to look at the possibility of putting a door back on the Delaware Avenue site.

M. Kissinger said the trustees also received information about the community spaces and configuration. He asked the board to take a week to look at it and provide their feedback to the architects.

### *Other old business*

G. Kirkpatrick provided a quote from Trane for \$16,000 for a new ductless split unit that is no longer functioning in the IT office. He said he would seek out additional quotes but asked the board to consider whether they wanted to do the work now if there is an upcoming building project.

## FUTURE BUSINESS

C. Wijeyesinghe told the board that she was planning to relocate in the coming months and has decided to step down from her term at the end of June 2024. Her seat would have one year left. She encouraged the public to consider running for the board, especially those that might have experience with a bond or building project.

## 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 C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board voted unanimously to enter into executive session at 8pm to discuss matters involving proposed, pending or current litigation.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board voted unanimously to immediately adjourn executive session at 9:07pm.

## ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 9:08pm.

Prepared by  
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by  
M. Kissinger, board president

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## Board actions

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