

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday May 12, 2025

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Laura DiBetta
Mark Kissinger
Sarah Patterson
Gail Sacco
Michelle Walsh
Sharon Whiting, library treasurer

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, public information specialist

EXCUSED: Lisa Scoons

GUESTS: Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of operations
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk
Jennifer Crawford, confidential secretary
Anne Moore
Meredith Savitt
Robert McDonnell

President M. Kissinger called the budget presentation to order at 6pm.

BUDGET PRESENTATION

S. Whiting presented the 2025-26 budget to the public. She noted that it represents a 2.61% increase in the levy, which is \$10,000 under the tax cap. Key elements of the budget include contractual salary increases and increases in health insurance costs. Operational costs have remained stable, and the budget includes a built in contingency for emergencies. Interest rates remain fairly high so the library will continue to seek positive investment opportunities.

M. Kissinger asked how many employees the budget supports. G. Kirkpatrick said the library is fully staffed with 34 full time and 38 part time employees.

S. Whiting said the budget line for materials has increased to support the purchase of in demand books and electronics.

C. Brancatella said the library has received a lot of questions about the impact of potential federal funding cuts and noted that while it does not directly affect library operations and the budget, it is a detriment to some of the services the library relies on support. State funding is expected to be just over \$26,000, a relatively small percentage of the library budget.

C. Brancatella said that the bulk of the library's budget goes to support the staff and union-negotiated salaries and benefits. G. Kirkpatrick said that the budget also assumes an increase of 12% in insurance costs. He said the library typically plans for increases of 8% to 10% but in recent years those costs have jumped dramatically. He said it was one of the biggest unknown factors when preparing a budget.

C. Brancatella also noted that the vote in May is not a building referendum but is a vote for the library's annual operating budget and open trustee seats.

G. Sacco noted that the library was open 72 hours a week and staff spend a considerable amount of time doing outreach work within the town.

G. Kirkpatrick described the challenges of purchasing e-materials and the pricing structure but said that is where the biggest demand is.

The board noted that while the library does have a reserve fund that can be used for capital improvements, a significant percentage must be held aside to cover operating expenses from the end of the fiscal year in June until school district taxes are received in the fall.

M. Walsh said she want to point out the \$185,000 in projected interest earnings for 2025-26 and said that library investments help keep the levy down.

M. Kissinger asked those in attendance if they had any comments or questions about the budget.

Delmar resident Anne Moore asked how the library's health insurance worked and whether retirees get the same coverage as staff. The board answered her questions and noted that a further conversation about health care insurance would be discussed later in the meeting.

G. Sacco said she believed the budget going before voters was a good conservative plan and she thanked everyone who worked on it.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the budget recap at 6:19pm.

President M. Kissinger called the regular meeting to order at 6:20pm.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

There was no further public comment at this time.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday April 7 regular board meeting.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Tuesday April 22 building committee meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

S. Whiting presented her report.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 30 April 2025 (Checks disbursed in April 2025 based on pre-approval \$57,235.70; Checks disbursed in April 2025 relating to payroll \$208,208.16; Checks being submitted for approval \$140,082.40; CapProject Fund Checks \$28.77; Total: \$405,555.03).

PERSONNEL REPORT

The board noted the personnel report. G. Kirkpatrick said he was seeking permission to fill the position of a Librarian 1 who will be leaving in June.

PERSONNEL ACTIONS

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

- Librarian I, full-time, permanent, 35 hours/week, \$60,346/annual or per contract

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- Additional seating has been added throughout the library to accommodate growing in-person use. L. DiBetta said it was nice to see all the seats in the teen section full on a recent visit.
- Librarians will be holding a lot of outreach visits at the schools in the coming weeks to promote summer reading.
- There continues to be very high attendance at early literacy programs.
- The HELPS program is expected to sunset at the end of 2026. G. Kirkpatrick said that HELPS has temporarily removed the Civil Service exam requirement for competitive jobs. Applicants must still meet the minimum qualifications. He said it widens the applicant pool and reduces some of the barriers to librarianship.
- There is growing demand for e-materials, and G. Kirkpatrick said she was grateful that Upper Hudson had recognized the trend early on and has spent over a decade growing a broad e-collection.
- C. Brancatella thanked library staff for the digital outreach related to Library Week/Month.
- M. Walsh pointed to the library's robust programming and said it was a great way to share the library's educational and creative resources.

UHLS REPORT

G. Kirkpatrick noted that the state budget had recently passed and that Upper Hudson gets most of its operational money from state budget. This money is used to provide courier services, the catalog and online system, and more. Chris Sagas was named the new director and will be starting in June.

G. Kirkpatrick said he will email trustees with the date and time of the annual celebration in June.

NEW BUSINESS

Trustee office hours

M. Kissinger opened a discussion about the experience and whether to continue holding them. L. DiBetta said it was good that the board tried it even though there wasn't much public feedback or participation. She suggested putting out a short survey to find out how people would best like to interact with the board. M. Walsh cautioned that surveys can sometime lead to ambiguous results. She noted that the board is always reachable by email. As board secretary, S. Patterson said she had received and responded to three emails in the past month.

C. Brancatella said that even with the low attendance, interacting with the public provided increased visibility for the board. S. Patterson said the board had also discussed having an informal time to interact with the public before board meetings.

Board members continued to discuss the subject. M. Kissinger suggested trustees continue to think on it and discuss it further at the next meeting. G. Sacco asked if board members could also get name tags.

Trustee training

G. Kirkpatrick said that trustees are required to have two hours of training per year and asked if they preferred to do the training as a group or individually and what they might be interested in. M. Kissinger asked board members to send topics of interest to G. Kirkpatrick. G. Kirkpatrick said he would also forward a list of online training options to board members.

HVAC repair

G. Kirkpatrick said the heating system has experience issues ever since the system overhaul in 2018, which did not fully connect it to other parts of the system that didn't get worked on. A mechanic come in to evaluate system and identified problems with the air handlers on the roof and some of the other components. They prepared a proposal to fix it through NYS contract. G. Kirkpatrick said they were needed repairs as they affect the public portions of the building.

M. Kissinger noted the wording of the proposal that mentions tariffs and asked if the board approved the proposal, would they be on the hook for surprise costs related to tariffs. C. Brancatella said the board should assume that other service contracts with raw materials would include and tariff clause and pay attention to what that might mean.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously voted to approve repairs to the library's existing HVAC system not to exceed \$33,589 to be carried out by Trane. If tariffs cause the price to exceed that amount, the board reserves the right to renegotiate.

Boiler replacement design

M. Kissinger said the building committee had received and considered two boiler design proposals: one from Ashley McGraw and another from CSArch. They are recommending the proposal from CSArch as best addressing the library's needs and cost. G. Kirkpatrick said that all of the references were quite positive, and they also included a timeline that may allow the library to apply for a construction grant to help cover the costs of the project.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously voted to move forward with CSArch as the design consultant for boiler replacement work for an estimated fee of \$24,000.

Albany County healthcare consortium

G. Kirkpatrick said that Albany County has been directed by the legislature to create a municipal health consortium that would include smaller government entities to help address the drastic increases in health care costs. The library has the opportunity to join the application but the timeline is still up in air. He said it would be easier to drop out of the discussion at any point than to get in at a later date. He noted that this would allow the library to explore this option, but the union would be part of any final decision.

The board discussed the pros and cons of joining the consortium. G. Sacco said that authorizing the library to enter into the discussion does not commit the library to be a part of it. M. Kissinger said he was not comfortable with a blanket authorization and would want the board to be able to review the final proposal before approval. He said he was worried that the union could block non-union members from

their preferred health care insurance choice. He proposed an amendment that would allow the executive committee of the board a final review and decision.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board approved a resolution to allow Library Director G. Kirkpatrick to explore the feasibility of the Albany County Municipal Cooperative Health Benefits Plan with the caveat that any plan must be approved and reviewed by counsel and the executive committee of the board. C. Brancatella, L. DiBetta, S. Patterson, G. Sacco and M. Walsh voted in favor. M. Kissinger voted against.

Other new business

There was no other new business at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

Building committee update

C. Brancatella said the committee had discussed the two boiler proposals and arrived at recommendation. They have determined list of building priorities and recommend combining the house demolition with parking lot paving.

Other old business

There was no other old business at this time.

FUTURE BUSINESS

M. Kissinger said he wanted to remind everyone about the upcoming Friends book sale, as well as the book drop off on Thursday.

G. Kirkpatrick said he would send out an email about participation in the Memorial Day parade.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

One member of the public spoke during the public comment period. A recording of the meeting is available on YouTube.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the regular meeting at 8:02pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president