

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING  
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM) **DRAFT**  
Monday July 14, 2025

PRESENT: Jill Adams  
Caroline Brancatella  
Laura DiBetta  
Mark Kissinger (Remote)  
Sarah Patterson  
Gail Sacco  
Michelle Walsh  
Sharon Whiting, library treasurer

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director  
Kristen Roberts, public information specialist (Remote)

EXCUSED:

GUESTS: Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of operations  
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk  
Chris O'Brien, library employee and union president  
C.J. Goodwin, Schoolhouse Construction  
Mike Strohecker, CSArch

Vice President M. Walsh called the meeting to order at 6:04pm.

#### TRUSTEE OATHS OF OFFICE

M. Walsh administered the oath of office to trustee-elect L. DiBetta.

#### ELECTION OF BOARD OFFICERS

S. Patterson presented the nominating committee's slate of officers.

The slate of officers proposed for 2025-26:

- President: Caroline Brancatella
- Vice President: Sarah Patterson
- Secretary: Laura DiBetta
- UHLS representative: Mark Kissinger

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously accepted the 2025-26 officer slate as presented.

C. Brancatella noted that J. Adams was en route to the meeting and will be sworn in when she arrives.

#### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

C. Brancatella shared a statement about the purpose of public participation and ways to get in touch with board.

C. O'Brien introduced himself and said he would be serving his second four-year term as union president.

#### COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

C. Brancatella said that the bylaws for the library required the following committees: personnel, finance, building and nominating. She said the library had previously establish a policy committee, which is not required by the bylaws, and she is recommending that policy review goes back to the full board.

She recommended the establishment of three new committees: director evaluation, long-range planning and communications.

M. Walsh reiterated that any board member may attend any committee meeting without necessarily holding a seat on one. L. DiBetta noted that if there are four or more board members attending a committee meeting, then that meeting is open to the public.

On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously agreed to establish/renew the following committees in addition to those required by the bylaws: director evaluation committee, long-range planning committee and communications committee.

Committee members are:

- Personnel: S. Patterson, G. Sacco
- Finance: L. DiBetta, G. Sacco, M. Kissinger, M. Walsh
- Building: J. Adams, S. Patterson, G. Sacco
- Nominating: M. Kissinger, M. Walsh, L. DiBetta
- Director evaluation: Same as personnel
- Long-range planning: TBD
- Communications: L. DiBetta, M. Kissinger, J. Adams

#### BOARD ANNUAL AUTHORIZATIONS

G. Kirkpatrick presented the authorizations for the 2025-26 fiscal year. G. Sacco said that \$100 for petty cash seemed low. G. Kirkpatrick said it is rarely used as there are purchasing cards to pay for program supplies. T. Choppy said it have been at \$100 for more than a decade and it has never had to be replenished more than once a year.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the 2025-26 authorizations as presented.

#### HOLIDAYS AND CLOSINGS

G. Kirkpatrick presented the proposed list of library closings for the 2026 calendar year. He noted that the listed items in red represented contractually negotiated closings.

L. DiBetta asked if the October 12 holiday can be listed as Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples Day to be more inclusive. C. Brancatella said that she was unsure if the board could make that change as it is listed in the union contract as Columbus Day. M. Walsh said that changing the designation might ruffle some feathers. G. Kirkpatrick said trustees could vote to make that change if it is the will of the board.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board voted unanimously to adopt the holidays and closings schedule for 2026 and to list the October 12 holiday as Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples Day in the official calendar.

C. Brancatella administered the oath of office to J. Adams.

#### ANNUAL ETHICS/CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Ethics statements were distributed to the trustees for signing and will be filed in the public record.

C. Brancatella said that in the interest of transparency, she wanted to note that her husband is an employee of SED on a government relations team. She said he has no role in the decision-making of policies overseeing the library, so it is not a formal conflict but something she wanted to disclose.

#### ANNUAL ETHICS/CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The board reviewed the proposed meeting schedule for the 2026 calendar year. M. Walsh asked if there was any conflict with the school district's spring break. K. Roberts said she reviewed the calendar for any conflicts with the school district and Jewish holidays and found none.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board voted unanimously to adopt the board meeting schedule as presented for 2026.

#### REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson the board approved the minutes from the Monday June 9 regular board meeting. C. Brancatella, L. DiBetta, M. Kissinger, S. Patterson, G. Sacco and M. Walsh voted in favor; J. Adams abstained.

#### FINANCIAL REPORT

##### *Treasurer's update*

S. Whiting presented her report. She presented a preliminary year-end explanation of variances in the revenue and expenses report. She said those numbers are not final until the pending audit is concluded, but it looks like the library will see a surplus of about \$369,000. She said some of the surplus is from additional income from interest rates and PILOT revenue. She noted that the salaries and benefits line was on target but may see some small adjustments after the audit regarding accruals and pension expenses.

- G. Kirkpatrick said he was proud of the work that went into spending the materials line within \$216 of what was budgeted.
- Auditors will be at the library to start their preliminary work in the coming week. A final report will be presented to the board in November after review by the financial committee.
- G. Kirkpatrick noted that when the board votes to approve the financial report, they are authorizing the disbursement of all the checks listed in the board packet. C. Brancatella said that any questions about the disbursements can be brought to the board, and a detailed report is also available on the Board of Trustees page online.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by M. Walsh the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 30 June 2025 (Checks disbursed in June 2025 based on pre-approval \$91,192.42; Checks disbursed in June 2025 relating to payroll \$202,149.41; Checks being submitted for approval \$136,087.45; CapProject Fund Checks \$6,352.50; Total: \$435,781.78).

## PERSONNEL REPORT

The board noted the personnel report.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously voted to approve the following position:

- Library Page, part-time, permanent, 9.8 hours/week, \$15.50/hour

C. Brancatella said she was also requesting a vote for a salary adjustment for G. Kirkpatrick.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously voted to approve a salary adjustment for G. Kirkpatrick as part of the M/C salary schedule.

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- The librarian-curated Book Bundles remain a popular service. Every time they are mentioned in the e-news or on social media, there is a flurry of requests.
- Summer Reading signups for adults are really strong this year. The raffle prizes sponsored by the Friends.
- There continues to be year over year increases in physical use of the library post pandemic.
- IMLS funds have been received for 2025 in full. There had been some question about whether the funding that had been released would be recalled. The funding for 2026 remains uncertain.
- A wrap-up of end of year library use numbers will be presented next month. Circulation remains pretty steady year over year with continued increases in digital use.
- G. Sacco said that art programs and other events for adults, particularly older adults, are directly related to core library services because they provide mental stimulation and socialization.
- L. DiBetta said she has heard from some people that there is a feeling that there isn't much for older people to do in the community.
- G. Sacco said she would like to see more of a library presence at the Thursdays in the Park collaboration with the town, such as a banner communicating the library's sponsorship of the series.
- G. Sacco asked if there was a way to see which part of the community makes up the biggest segment of digital borrowing. G. Kirkpatrick said he would see if there is a way to get those stats while keeping the data anonymous.

## UHLS REPORT

M. Kissinger noted that he would be serving as the next UHLS board member. G. Kirkpatrick said that the library catalog would be moving to a new platform in the coming months. He also noted that the UHLS mobile app would also be changing at the end of the month.

## FRIENDS REPORT

C. Brancatella discussed what the Friends of the Library do. She noted that the board does not have the authority to tell the Friends what to do, but they would like to increase communication between the two groups. J. Adams has offered to be the board's Friends liaison and will attend the group's regular meeting. C. Brancatella said that the Friends' longtime president Jeremy Johannesen has stepped down and Mary Service would be serving as the new president. The Friends have donated a sum of money to support a new fish tank in the Children's Place.

## NEW BUSINESS

### *Boiler project presentation*

Mike Strohecker, a mechanical engineer at CSArch, presented the preliminary boiler project drawings that will be finalized for SED approval. He noted that the new boiler would be located in the same spot as the old one and a new flue will go out the side wall instead of through roof.

M. Walsh asked if the flue will be visible from the outside. M. Strohecker said it will look like a white vent. G. Sacco asked if cold air would be coming into the boiler room when it is below freezing outside. M. Strohecker said that sub-zero air would not be coming into the room itself.

J. Adams asked if there would be any hazardous materials to deal with. G. Kirkpatrick said that some asbestos would need to be abated as part of the project.

G. Sacco asked about the expected lifespan of the boiler and whether there is a warranty on it. M. Strohecker said the lifespan was 20-30 years and he would look into the warranty question.

M. Strohecker said the boiler works by condensing water from a vapor to a liquid, so plans include adding a trench to the floor to allow drainage while not being a trip hazard and not be a trip hazard.

G. Kirkpatrick said the board would vote on the official plans at the August meeting which would allow the project to move forward to SED review.

### *Construction manager proposal – boiler project*

C.J. Goodwin from Schoolhouse Construction, presented a proposal to offer construction manager services for the boiler project. He noted that in preliminary discussions, the board had found a full on-site construction manager presence would be cost-prohibitive for the relatively small process. He offered a scaled-down version of services that would help get the project through the bid process and then be available on an hourly basis as it moves to completion.

G. Kirkpatrick noted that when the library replaced the HVAC system, a construction manager was not part of the project and, in retrospect, that expertise would have helped. He said that having that service pre-construction would put his mind at ease.

M. Walsh asked if the bid process would be as complicated as it was for the HVAC project. G. Kirkpatrick said the process is the same whether the project is big or small. M. Walsh said that was one of her concerns with doing all of these projects piecemeal.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously voted to hire C.J. Goodwin from Schoolhouse Construction to provide pre-construction services in the amount of \$6,500.

### *BCSD PILOT MOA non-renewal*

C. Brancatella said that the library has historically received a percentage of the PILOT money that is negotiated through the Bethlehem IDA. In the early 2000s the library was going to be in on the negotiations for a significant PILOT for PSEG. School district representatives suggested at the time that

they would negotiate for the PILOT and give the library a proportionate share of the money. An MOU was passed at the time outlining the relationship. In exchange, the library agreed to pay back any funds if a court judgement reduced someone's property taxes. The MOU was most recently renewed 3 years ago. In 2015, the requirement for the library to pay back its share of reduced property taxes has become law. The school district has since said it will not be renewing the MOU. That means that the library will once again be required to negotiate for its own PILOT share. Bob Schofield, an attorney who has represented Albany Public Library in its PILOT negotiations, has agreed to represent Bethlehem Public Library in future discussions. It is still unclear if the substantial PSEG PILOT will be extended. C. Brancatella noted that it would not be catastrophic to the library budget to lose the PILOT, but the library has a right to be at the negotiating table. G. Kirkpatrick said he was proposing that the library reach out to the IDA with an attorney and reestablish that relationship and make them aware of the library's legal status.

M. Kissinger asked that any outreach be done both verbally and in writing so there is a clear record.

#### *Attorney retainer agreement*

Bob Schofield from Whiteman Osterman & Hanna has offered to represent the library on general matters. He is no longer the school district's general counsel but is still authorized to work with them. Conversations with him are ongoing but there is not yet an updated proposal. The library would need a retainer agreement to use his services in PILOT negotiations.

#### *Fish tank update*

G. Kirkpatrick said that the library was interested in using the \$1,500 allocated by Assemblyman Scott Bendett to put toward a new 175-gallon fish tank in the Children's Place with the Friends sponsoring the rest of the project. He said that as these plans were being formed, an individual from Dave's Glass approached the library about donating a fish tank of that same size. The individual wanted to have something on the tank that would say that it was donated by Dave's Glass.

J. Adams asked what would be the downside. She said it strengthens relationship with people who love library and reminds people they could give to library. L. DiBetta said that before promoting a commercial entity, she would like to know more about the business and whether it would come into conflict with the library's values and mission. She said she would like to see something that would let the library remove such a sponsorship if needed.

M. Walsh said she has done business with Dave's Glass and was very happy with them. She noted that she didn't like how quickly the discussion had turned to the negative about the potential gift. She said she was in favor of putting the company's name on the gift.

G. Sacco noted that the library's gift and donations policy already gives the board the right to terminate sponsorship.

The board agreed to accept the donation of the tank if it is suitable for the space. G. Kirkpatrick said the library could put together an agreement outlining the parameters and the size of the plaque noting the donation.

S. Patterson said she would like to see some additional clarity in the policy outlining the parameters of gifts and donations.

#### *Other new business*

There was no other new business discussed.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

#### *Trustee training*

G. Kirkpatrick said he signed up for a group viewing rate for ALA's United for Libraries training. He said the trustees can decide what session they would like to view and choose the date to satisfy their required yearly trustee training. G. Sacco asked if there could be food provided as well.

*Building Committee – update*

There were no updates at this time.

*Board engagement*

C. Brancatella said the board has been discussing how to best interact with the public and encourage engagement. She said further discussion may fall to the newly formed communications committee.

The board asked if the engagement survey that had been reviewed at the previous meeting had been sent out. K. Roberts said it is ready and can be promoted in the upcoming weekly e-newsletter.

*Other old business*

There was no other old business at this time.

**FUTURE BUSINESS**

There was no future business discussed.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public comment at this time.

**ADJOURNMENT**

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the regular meeting at 8:04pm.

Prepared by  
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by  
M. Kissinger, board president