

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

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

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, public information specialist

EXCUSED:

GUESTS: Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of operations
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk
Jennifer Crawford, confidential secretary
Tracey McShane, personnel administrator
Bruce Phillips

President C. Brancatella called the meeting to order at 6:06pm.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public comment at this time.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by M. Kissinger the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday September 8 regular board meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

S. Whiting presented her report.

- S. Whiting noted that the library received \$4.4 million in tax revenue on Friday, and it will appear on the November report. She noted that the timing was typical for revenue receipts.
- The interest rate on investments at Metropolitan Bank has decreased to 3.92%, but remains higher than what the library would earn on CDs.

- S. Whiting noted recent discussions with the library's insurance broker regarding the replacement value of the library building. M. Kissinger asked if the school district also insures the building. G. Kirkpatrick said that it does not. G. Sacco asked if the building value included the materials and furniture in the library. G. Kirkpatrick said that materials etc. are covered under a separate policy.
- S. Whiting said the library just received the draft financial statement from the auditors. The finance committee will meet to discuss in further detail.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 30 September 2025 (Checks disbursed in September 2025 based on pre-approval \$52,684.38; Checks disbursed in September 2025 relating to payroll \$218,669.63; Checks being submitted for approval \$83,643.52; CapProject Fund Checks \$4,788.00; Total: \$359,785.53).

PERSONNEL REPORT

The board noted the personnel report. There were no personnel actions requested at this time.

C. Brancatella thanked G. Kirkpatrick for testifying earlier in the day before the State Assembly about the future of libraries and electronic materials.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- The sudden loss of Baker and Taylor as a book vendor has had a major impact on libraries as a whole, but BPL staff have been able to keep the book supply steady. At the same time, P. Berardi has been investigating a new vendor to diversify the book supply.
- Vlogging kits are being added to the Library of Things. The library will be seeking reimbursement from town's PEG fund. G. Sacco asked if it would be possible to include some information in the kits about vlogging and how to use the equipment. M. Walsh said the kits are a great addition to the collection. She asked if there was a way for patrons to recommend items for the Library of Things collection. G. Kirkpatrick said there is a suggestion box at the Information Desk and online. He said that a number of suggestions have led to the addition of new items.
- M. Kissinger asked how the summer reading numbers compared to past years. G. Kirkpatrick said there have been big increases. He said staff continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the online tracking system and looking into incentives to encourage kids to return to the library throughout the summer.
- L. DiBetta noted that the Super Smash Bros. program has been a hit with her preteen and his friends.
- Some of the collections in the library have been moved to maximize space and accessibility, with large print books moving into the space where DVDs once were. M. Walsh said that the DVD collection is a good way to access classic films that are not available on streaming services but are still in demand. G. Kirkpatrick said that some classics may also be available to stream through Kanopy.

- Through a partnership with Upper Hudson, the library will be expanding its online newspaper collection, which continues to get heavy use.
- C. Brancatella applauded the library's partnership with school libraries and through the Sora app. She also noted that e-materials are extremely expensive with a complicated purchasing structure that presents challenges when trying to meet the needs of digital borrowers.

UHLS REPORT

M. Kissinger said that other libraries represented at the meeting were still coming to terms with the Baker and Taylor fallout. He noted that the digital newspaper that would be added to the collection is the Wall Street Journal, and it should become available in the next year.

FRIENDS REPORT

J. Adams will be attending the upcoming Friends meeting. C. Brancatella said the fall book sale raised more than \$9,000. She thanked the Friends for their hard work putting everything together.

NEW BUSINESS

Boiler project update

G. Kirkpatrick said that the boiler project has been approved by the State Education Department in one of the swiftest turnarounds he has seen. The project will now head to the architects before going out to bid. He said it is possible there may be a contract ready to approve at the November or December meeting. He noted that the boiler is the library's primary source of heat so if it has to be taken offline during the winter for replacement, it should have minimal impact on the main areas in the library.

Library T-shirt proposal

C. Brancatella said that in response to staff comments regarding the new Staff Handbook, the library would be purchasing official library T-shirts for those who are interested twice a year.

Borthwick property discussion

C. Brancatella noted that the board had agreed to continue the previous month's discussion about the future of the Borthwick property and house that the library owns. She said she was interested in feedback about what to do with it and a consensus of whether it stays up or goes down, as well as ways to involve the public in the process of deciding how to use the space.

M. Walsh said she was in favor of demolishing the house and opening it up as green space.

L. DiBetta said that she thinks the space could serve as a community hub to serve a few needs, such as book sale storage for the Friends of the Library, a new site for the Better World Books donation bin, a green space or community garden; or a location for a Farm to Library free food fridge to help address food insecurity in the area.

G. Sacco asked if it would be possible to put together a schematic of what the area would look like without the current structure. She also asked if there was a way to locate an entrance to the library on that side of the building to make it more accessible to the parking lot. She said she does not think the neighborhood wants to see a big building in that space.

C. Brancatella asked if anyone was against taking the building down. M. Walsh said that the floors in the house are slanted and unsafe. M. Kissinger said he doesn't think the structure would be code compliant. G. Kirkpatrick said that in his analysis of the building, architect Paul May said there was very little chance that it could be used as library space due to its condition.

L. DiBetta said the board should come up with a vision that they could articulate to the public.

C. Brancatella said that once the board decides how they would like to move forward, they could potentially take action in late spring of 2026.

M. Kissinger said he was on the board when the property was purchased and the intent at the time was that it would not be used for parking. He said he was in favor of it becoming green space for library use.

C. Brancatella said she would like to present the public with financially feasible options for the space.

The board asked G. Kirkpatrick if he could provide some rough demolition estimates. He said he would look into it. S. Whiting said that there is money in the fund balance to cover the cost.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson the board unanimously voted to take down the Borthwick structure using money from the library's fund balance with a projected 2026 date to be determined.

Other new business

There was no other new business at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

Other old business

M. Kissinger said that, although the Long Range Plan had been extended by an earlier vote, he thinks it might be a good time to get a committee together to discuss it. C. Brancatella said it could be extended further until after the library has been able to make their projected fund balance improvements. G. Kirkpatrick said that they also have the option to separate the services and building plans. M. Kissinger proposed putting together a Long Range Plan committee before the end of 2025.

M. Walsh asked when the board needed to complete their second hour of required trustee training. G. Kirkpatrick said that it had to be done before the end of the year. He said he had a couple of good webinar options. M. Walsh said she was interested in the open meetings law training provided by the FOIL presenter.

FUTURE BUSINESS

There was no future business discussed.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public comment at this time.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by J. Adams, the board unanimously voted to enter into executive session at 7:23pm regarding matters involving proposed, pending or current litigation.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously voted to leave executive session at 8:04pm.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by J. Adams with a SECOND by M. Kissinger, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the regular meeting at 8:05pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
C. Brancatella, board president

BOARD ACTIONS

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