

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday November 10, 2025

PRESENT: Jill Adams
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:

GUESTS: Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of operations
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk
Jennifer Crawford, confidential secretary
Chris McGinty, assistant director/Public Services
Rachel Reynolds, auditor, MMB&Co
Mike Strohecker, CSArch
CJ Goodwin, Schoolhouse Construction

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

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

There was no public comment at this time.

AUDIT PRESENTATION

Prior to the presentation, C. Brancatella noted that the audit had been reviewed by the finance committee. R. Reynolds shared some slides describing the audit process and identifying some of the terms used. She noted that in communication with library management, there were no disagreements or uncorrected misstatements. She said the library received an unqualified opinion, which is the highest level of opinion.

L. DiBetta said she was happy that the auditor explained that risks are inherent and does not mean the library is doing anything wrong.

G. Sacco thanked S. Whiting, T. Choppy and G. Kirkpatrick for being meticulous with library funds.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board voted unanimously to accept the draft financial report from the auditors.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by J. Adams, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Tuesday October 14 regular board meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

S. Whiting presented her report.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 October 2025 (Checks disbursed in October 2025 based on pre-approval \$55,240.87; Checks disbursed in October 2025 relating to payroll \$341,401.05; Checks being submitted for approval \$72,789.43; CapProject Fund Checks \$8,086.70; Total: \$477,518.05).

PERSONNEL REPORT

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

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- G. Kirkpatrick said that he was pleased that the recently completed inventory showed very few missing items. He said staff has begun the process anew and are able to do a live inventory with items right on the shelf.
- M. Walsh asked if the items noted as missing had been checked out and not returned. G. Kirkpatrick said that it doesn't as those items can be tracked separately. He said the missing items from the inventory included those that have been mis-shelved or taken without being checked out.
- M. Walsh said she was pleased with the Red Cross blood drive held at the library, and noted the space in the Community Room was tight. G. Kirkpatrick said the library blood drives are successful because a lot of people feel comfortable at the library.
- C. Brancatella noted that the library recently shared a list of resources for those experiencing food insecurity or those wanting to help.
- G. Kirkpatrick said that the Delmar Progress Club recently met at the library, and their members filled a laundry cart of goods to donate to the food pantry.
- L. DiBetta asked if usage of the online New York Times is counted as a digital checkout. G. Kirkpatrick said the library does have numbers on that, and he will be looking into how to include that in the stats report.
- He noted that Upper Hudson will soon be adding a database called Comix Plus that would provide access to a number of graphic novels from various publishers.

UHLS REPORT

M. Kissinger said he would be attending the meeting on Wednesday.

FRIENDS REPORT

J. Adams said she pitched the idea of a T-shirt sale, and one of the Friends is considering taking that on. They were happy to hear about the decision to take down the Borthwick house and would like

some talking points on what went into that decision. They would love to have a consolidated storage space for their stuff, most of which is related to the book sale. The Friends' annual meeting will be held in December.

NEW BUSINESS

Boiler project update

C. Goodwin said the library received three bids for the boiler replacement project. He said that after the bids were opened, he conducted a post-bid review process. He noted that his recommended bidder did not provide a \$25,000 contingency in the bid amount. He said after further discussion, the bidder agreed to cover \$12,500 of any change order costs, and the library would cover additional costs. The contingency is in place so that the contractor can continue work on a project up to a certain amount in the event of a change order without having to wait for board approval.

C. Goodwin said he has worked with the bidder on previous school district projects and found them to be reliable.

M. Kissinger asked if there is there any way the library would be on the hook for more than the contingency? C. Goodwin said that could happen if they run through all of the contingency.

G. Sacco asked what would happen to the contingency funds if they were not all used. C. Goodwin said they would be returned to the library. He noted that he's never had a project that hasn't had some form of change.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board approved the proposal presented by Schoolhouse Construction Services for the replacement of the library's boiler with work to be done by BPI Mechanical for a base bid contract amount of \$149,966. J. Adams, C. Brancatella, L. DiBetta, S. Patterson, G. Sacco and M. Walsh voted in favor. M Kissinger was opposed.

The board chose to move up the discussion of the Borthwick property at this time in order to ask C. Goodwin some questions before he left.

Borthwick property use discussion

C. Brancatella noted that the board had voted in October to take down the Borthwick house. The board asked C. Goodwin for a rough estimate of the demolition costs. He said that, including the necessary abatement, the cost would be around \$200,000. He noted that costs look reasonably stable if the work is done before the end of the year.

The board also discussed the cost of re-milling and paving the parking lot and fixing the existing sink hole. Previous estimates had set the cost at about \$550,000.

When asked why those prices seemed so high, C. Goodwin said that a large component is that library work must be done at prevailing wage, which means it can be much more expensive than work done on personal property.

The board asked S. Whiting if it would make fiscal sense to do both of the projects in this fiscal year based on money available in the fund balance. S. Whiting said that there is approximately \$2.3 million available in the fund balance for projects, and while she would not advise spending all of it, she believes the board could do both projects and allocate around \$250,000 for improvements to the Borthwick site post-teardown. She noted that while she expects the year-end surplus in the budget to shrink, there will likely still be one, which will be added to the fund balance.

C. Brancatella asked the board if they were in favor of pursuing both of the projects and how much of a budget they wanted to look at for improvement of the Borthwick site. She suggested

establishing a budget and then working backward in order to set realistic expectations about what can be done.

G. Kirkpatrick said that he reached out to the town to see if some of the paving work could be done in partnership. He noted that the town has been very willing to work with the library on past projects, but something this size might be hard to fit into their already busy schedule.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously voted to move forward with planning and executing the rehabilitation of the library parking lot using money already in the fund balance.

C. Brancatella asked board members about a budget for Borthwick green space improvements. M. Walsh said she would hesitate to budget for anything until they know the final cost of the teardown and parking lot updates.

L. DiBetta said there might be opportunities to secure grants to help cover some of the cost.

C. Brancatella said she believes the public will want a chance to weigh in on the use of the site and would like to involve the public in the discussion early in 2026. She said a big part of the discussion would be how much money the library has available to spend. G. Kirkpatrick said that the library would be clearly communicating that this project is not an expansion.

The board agreed that it was important to be clear that the money will be coming from library reserves and not a bond vote.

M. Walsh said she doesn't see why the project needs so much public participation as it is being done with existing funds. C. Brancatella said that the house removal will be a very visible project, and she expects there will be questions about how the space is going to be used.

L. DiBetta suggests using terms like "modest" or "small scale" to describe the improvements rather than a number. C. Brancatella said the communications committee would continue to discuss the messaging.

- Board members mentioned the following ideas for the green space:
- Putting up an awning for smaller outdoor programs
- Native plant garden
- Sensory garden
- Community garden
- Free food fridge
- Book donation bin area
- Storage for Friends' book sales
- Labyrinth
- Reading circle
- Solar-powered picnic tables

Program policy

A revision of the policy was presented to clarify some wording about sales at library events that S. Patterson noted was ambiguous. G. Kirkpatrick said that library staff are currently looking at broader revisions to the policy. M. Kissinger and L. DiBetta said the wording in the draft was confusing. The board agreed that they wanted to clarify that book or music sales can only take place at library-sponsored event, but felt the language change could take place when a fully revised version of the policy will come to vote.

Long Range Plan discussion

C. Brancatella said the board had discussed at the last meeting extending the current long-range plan to give the planning committee time to think about the next one. G. Kirkpatrick said a long-range plan is the library's foundational document for goal setting.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously voted to extend the current long-range plan through the end of 2026.

New York State and Local Retirement System annual payment

The board discussed the annual bill and noted that it had increased. G. Kirkpatrick said the library would see a small reduction for paying it before the December early deadline.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the annual payment to the state retirement system in the amount of \$390,285.

Other new business

G. Kirkpatrick presented a proposal for PLA attendance in Minneapolis in 2026. He said he would like to send two people to attend.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by J. Adams, the board unanimously approved the request to send two individuals to the PLA conference in 2026.

OLD BUSINESS

Borthwick property use discussion

Discussed earlier in the meeting.

Other old business

There was no other old business at this time.

FUTURE BUSINESS

There was no future business discussed.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by J. Adams, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the regular meeting at 8:14pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
C. Brancatella, board president