

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday December 8, 2025

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

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, public information specialist

EXCUSED: Gail Sacco

GUESTS: Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of operations
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk
Jennifer Crawford, confidential secretary
Chris McGinty, assistant director/Public Services
Bruce Phillips

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

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

There was no public comment at this time.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday November 10 regular board meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

S. Whiting presented her report.

- M. Kissinger asked about the balance total in the cash and investments summary. S. Whiting said that total includes revenue received to date, less funds that have already been spent on operations. M. Kissinger also asked about the transfers detailed in the same summary. T. Choppy said that in November, there is a larger-than-usual transfer to pay the library's retirement account bill.

On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 30 November 2025 (Checks disbursed in November 2025 based on pre-approval \$443,323.38; Checks disbursed in November 2025 relating to payroll \$225,261.77; Checks being submitted for approval \$90,750.38; CapProject Fund Checks \$1,846.90; Total: \$761,182.43).

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 thanked the maintenance crew for their work on the new aquarium in the Children's Place, the Friends for purchasing the aquascaping and the fish, and Larry Powers who donated the tank.
- G. Kirkpatrick said that technical services staffers have done a great job ordering books and transitioning to a new vendor following the shutdown of Baker and Taylor. He noted that Bethlehem will be one of the first local libraries set up with Ingram.
- There is continued high attendance at the library's youth programs.
- M. Walsh asked about Bethlehem being mentioned at one of the NYLA programs for their public participation policy. G. Kirkpatrick said a director from another system positively mentioned the public hearings regarding the drag story hour and Miko Peled talk because they gave people an opportunity to have their say.

UHLS REPORT

M. Kissinger said there isn't a meeting in December.

FRIENDS REPORT

J. Adams said the Friends will hold their annual meeting the following week, where they will select officers. C. Brancatella noted that the Friends meetings are open to the public and a good opportunity to get involved with the library. Meetings are held in the Community Room.

NEW BUSINESS

Boiler project update

Representatives have been in the building starting to coordinate how to get the air handlers to put out more heat while the boiler is being replaced. G. Kirkpatrick said the contracts are all signed and work on the boiler will likely start soon. M. Kissinger asked if there would be any impact on patrons during the project. G. Kirkpatrick said that some areas of the library might experience temperature fluctuations until it is back online, but the construction shouldn't impact public areas.

S. Whiting said that any time the board needs to transfer money to the capital reserve fund, it must be done by board resolution.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board authorized the transfer of \$150,000 from the general fund to the capital reserve fund to cover costs associated with the boiler replacement project.

Children's area

C. Brancatella noted that there had been some comments on local family social media groups about the state of the toys and carpet in the children's play area in the library. She noted that the toys are replaced regularly but they do experience a lot of wear and tear. C. Brancatella noted that the recent bond project included a significant overhaul of the children's space. Although the bond did not pass, the children's area remains part of the discussion. G. Kirkpatrick said there is also a bin for parents to place toys that are in need of cleaning. C. Brancatella said the board might consider ways to move those

passive discussions into a more constructive sphere. G. Kirkpatrick said the children's area is a fixed space, so staffers are always looking at ways to balance the collection space with play space and other needs. L. DiBetta said the carpet in the area remains on the list of priorities for updates.

Statistics and staff development day

G. Kirkpatrick gave an overview of the training provided at staff development day.

Other new business

C. Brancatella said the board has been talking about ways for the public to interact with the board. The communications committee has been looking at some dates in February for a coffee and conversation with board members and library Friends.

OLD BUSINESS

Borthwick property

C. Brancatella said there has been some discussion about a communications strategy related to the Borthwick property. She said the communications committee met recently and discussed a general timeline. It is possible that the house could come down as early as the beginning of the summer. She noted that the actual content of the communication hasn't been finalized.

C. Brancatella said that the committee is recommending an early March presentation to the public about the property before seeking additional written feedback. She said the board should finalize what information will be part of that initial presentation by the February meeting. She noted that whatever is done with the space, it will remain flexible if other needs arise in the coming years.

M. Walsh asked how long the demo process would take. G. Kirkpatrick said he is currently seeking proposals for a plan for demolition and added that it would not fall under SED approval but would need approval from the town. In response to a question from M. Walsh, G. Kirkpatrick said six months sounded like a reasonable timeframe. M. Walsh asked if it wouldn't make more sense to start that process before hosting public events and table displays about it. She asked if that would be holding up the actual demo. C. Brancatella said that both the communication and the planning pieces would happen at the same time, and the work the board had done for the 2024 bond proposal will help streamline the process since there are no significant roadblocks anticipated. She noted that the communications piece would let the public know what is happening before the building comes down.

G. Kirkpatrick said he is working on the premise that it would be demolition to a grassy lot and that discussion about the uses of that space will be ongoing.

M. Walsh said that if the board were to put some ideas before the public about the use of that space, it would be helpful to have some cost estimates as well. C. Brancatella said they could probably get some ballpark figures. She also asked the board to be thinking about those potential uses for the space as they will be discussing them as a full board at the next two meetings.

L. DiBetta said there is also a space limitation that needs to be considered. She noted that the planning process could help the board identify a list of the community's priorities.

M. Walsh said that staff should also have input about how the space is used. She added that the board should be clear that the presentations on the space are presentations and not debates.

J. Adams asked about the acreage of the property. G. Kirkpatrick said he believes it is about a quarter acre. He noted that the actual demolition should be quick. C. Brancatella said that a neighborhood email list will be used to inform those living near the library.

Other old business

G. Kirkpatrick noted an email request sent to some of the trustees regarding an article in the Spotlight archives. He noted that he told the individual that the next step would be an appeal to the board.

M. Walsh said she has an opposing opinion on the board having a social media presence. She said she sees some pitfalls, including the uncontrolled negativity that can take place in that format, as well as the blurring of the lines between personal opinions and official opinions. She added that the library should be the ones promoting events, services and community engagement, and that the board should be promoting governance.

S. Patterson said that during her library training she learned about the library's social media policy that governs some of that conduct.

FUTURE BUSINESS

There was no future business discussed.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

C. McGinty thanked the board for providing cookies at the staff development day training.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by J. Adams, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the regular meeting at 7pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
C. Brancatella, board president

BOARD ACTIONS:

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