

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday January 12, 2026

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
Robert McDonnell
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 J. Adams, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday December 8 regular board meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

S. Whiting presented her report.

- Overall, the library expenses are tracking on budget. S. Whiting said she does expect some lines to be over by the end of the fiscal year.
- M. Kissinger asked about the increases in healthcare. G. Kirkpatrick said that the CDPHP plan offered went up by 20%. C. Brancatella said those increases and other fiscal trends are something the board will be discussing as the 2026-27 budget is prepared.
- M. Walsh asked if the increases in gas and electric costs were a surprise. G. Kirkpatrick said the rates are higher across the board, and that could be due to a number of factors. S. Whiting said the budget line had been reduced in the previous year because it had been consistently underbudget.
- G. Sacco asked if the library's investments were protected from a potentially volatile market. S. Whiting said that all of the investments are insured.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 December 2025 (Checks disbursed in December 2025 based on pre-approval \$55,733.38; Checks disbursed in December 2025 relating to payroll \$251,207.55; Checks being submitted for approval \$127,802.24; CapProject Fund Checks \$17,504.80; Total: \$452,247.97).

PERSONNEL REPORT

The board noted the personnel report. G. Kirkpatrick said he was seeking to refill two positions in the Circulation Department following a retirement and a resignation.

On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously voted to approve the following positions:

- Library clerk, part-time, permanent, 11.67 hours/week, \$18.83/hour or per contract
- Library clerk, full-time, permanent, 35 hours/week, \$34,270/annual or per contract

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- In December, staff tracked the use of toys in the Children's Area and found that on several days, more than 100 people used the space. He said staff will be rearranging some of the collections to open up some more space.
- M. Walsh asked how people generally access ILL services. G. Kirkpatrick said they can speak to a librarian at the Information Desk or fill out a form available online. M. Walsh asked if there could be additional language on the website that lets people know that if they can't find what they're looking for in the catalog, the library might be able to get it through ILL. G. Kirkpatrick said that would be a good idea.
- G. Kirkpatrick pointed to some early stats about heavy Bethlehem patron use of the newly launched digital Wall Street Journal. He noted that Bethlehem patrons are very in touch with the variety of services available through the library and take advantage of them. G. Sacco said that she was able to save \$500 on the cost of a subscription, and she appreciates how the WSJ balances out the New York Times subscription.
- M. Walsh said she heard some praise about a recent library program about scanning and organizing a digital photo archive and asked if it would be repeated. G. Kirkpatrick said it would, as the topic of digital archives is really important to people. M. Walsh asked if there was a way for someone to request a repeat of a popular program. G. Kirkpatrick said a person could use the contact form online or the suggestion box at the Information Desk. G. Sacco said that a recorded or virtual option might be nice for those who are unable to get to the library building.
- M. Kissinger said he has heard some interest in programs about AI. G. Kirkpatrick said staff received AI training at the recent Staff Development Day to make sure everyone is up to speed. There is an AI program already scheduled for February.

UHLS REPORT

M. Kissinger said the UHLS board would be meeting later in the week.

FRIENDS REPORT

J. Adams said at the December meeting, the Friends held their annual officer elections and honored Polly Hartman, who was stepping down as vice president but would remain on the board of directors. She said the Friends were very interested in the discussion surrounding the Borthwick property. She said some of the Friends were planning to attend the February 25 Cookies and Coffee with

the Board event. She noted that a staff member had suggested a story time yurt as an idea for the Borthwick property.

NEW BUSINESS

Director's evaluation

G. Sacco and S. Patterson will be spearheading the review as part of the Personnel Committee. G. Sacco said the format would be conversational with an assessment and look at future goals. G. Kirkpatrick asked them to let him know if they needed anything from him. S. Patterson said she expects to have something in the next couple of weeks.

Boiler project – update

G. Kirkpatrick said the old boiler is still in place, but needed parts are arriving and work is scheduled to start next Monday. During the construction, the library will be without a boiler for about a week.

Staff recognition

C. Brancatella said she wanted to publicly thank the staffers who assisted with the medical emergency at the library in late December: G. Kirkpatrick and Sylvia Taylor for using the AED; Sylvia for doing chest compressions; and Frank Somers and Erin Meyer for maintaining communication with emergency personnel. She made a plea to other organizations to consider getting an AED and training. G. Kirkpatrick thanked the board for approving the AED purchase.

Other new business

There was no other new business discussed.

OLD BUSINESS

Borthwick property

C. Brancatella opened the discussion about what the board would like to see on the Borthwick property following the demolition of the structure. She said the idea was to refine and narrow down some concepts that they could present to the public.

G. Sacco asked if the ideas would go to the building committee for review or straight from the board to the public. She said she would rather look at the parcel in relation to overall building needs and not on its own.

The board talked about the prior decisions that led up to the current discussion, as well as the role of the building and communication committees.

M. Walsh noted that while a majority of the board agreed to move forward with coming up with ideas to present to the public, it was not a consensus. She said she believes the director and staff should be the ones to decide how to use the space.

G. Kirkpatrick said the demolition process is moving forward following the board's vote last year to tear down the Borthwick structure. He said if some potential uses for the green space will need infrastructure like electricity and utilities, it would be easier to address sooner rather than later.

C. Brancatella said she was looking to collect ideas from the group to compile a list of additional information needed to move things forward.

S. Patterson suggested a labyrinth and presented a few examples.

M. Kissinger said a Zen-like outdoor reading space for the public would be nice. He shared some examples of whimsical bench ideas. He said it might also be a good opportunity to create space for book storage for the Friends.

M. Walsh said she supported a book storage area and said it would be useful to prep the area for future plumbing or electricity needs. She also suggested a simple awning.

G. Sacco said she would like to see it as a grassy green space. She said she would ultimately like to see the entrance to the main part of the library moved to be more accessible to the parking lot, and the Borthwick property may at some point be useful to that goal. She noted safety concerns about keeping children away from Borthwick traffic.

L. DiBetta also liked the garden concept, and said there are a number of ways to make it interactive. She said it would also be a good opportunity to partner with volunteers. She added that a community fridge that provides fresh produce for free would meet a need in the community.

J. Adams also suggested looking into a Farm to Library Program. She said she supported a garden for outdoor reading and relaxing.

C. Brancatella said her idea was a historical garden that could be used to grow things that would have been cultivated during a certain historic time frame. She said this could tie in with a lot of programming opportunities.

G. Kirkpatrick shared some images of book sheds to point out that the storage structures can also be aesthetically pleasing. He also suggested some type of awning or covered space and outdoor tables.

The final list of the ideas discussed included:

- A garden. Several types were put forward, including a reading garden, a community garden, a historical garden, pollinator garden, native garden, a hedge maze, sensory garden, garden to produce fresh veggies, etc.
- Storage space for the Friends of the Library book sale.
- A grassy lawn reserved for future library use (possibly including picnic tables with umbrellas).
- Free food fridge.
- Shaded space/small space for outdoor programs. This could include an awning or other similar structure. It could be used for programs, or just a space for patrons to sit outside.

C. Brancatella said the next step would be to figure out what information they would need to communicate these ideas to the public, including the dimensions of the space, as well as the size of any proposed structure.

G. Sacco said it is important to communicate to the public that the current structure has been evaluated by architects and declared unfit for library use, and that is why it is coming down. C. Brancatella said the board would be looking at a communication strategy for the public in early spring. S. Patterson said that they should also seek staff feedback.

Other old business

G. Sacco said she felt the Coffee and Cookies with the Board event only targets people who live in Delmar and suggested that, in the future, the board look at ways to engage people in Glenmont and Slingerlands for broader input. She said it is something that should be part of the long-range plan discussion.

FUTURE BUSINESS

Budget update

G. Kirkpatrick said that in order to meet school district election guidelines, the board will need to approve a 2026-27 budget by the March meeting. S. Whiting said she will start work on it within the week and should have something to review by the end of January or first week of February.

M. Walsh asked if there are estimates for the demolition of the Borthwick structure. G. Kirkpatrick said he has some preliminary numbers.

C. Brancatella asked if the library was expecting any significant increases in cost. S. Whiting said it will likely be a challenging budget year.

M. Kissinger requested an email with a list of all upcoming board meetings and events.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Two people spoke during the public comment period. A recording of the meeting is available on YouTube.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the regular meeting at 8:11pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
C. Brancatella, board president

BOARD ACTIONS:

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