

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday February 9, 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
Chris McGinty, assistant director/Public Services
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk
Jennifer Crawford, confidential secretary
Mary Service, president of the Friends of Bethlehem Public Library
Claire Crawford
Patty Caporta
Bruce Phillips
Asim Husain

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

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

C. Brancatella reminded everyone that the board would be hosting a cookies and coffee event at the library on Feb. 25.

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 January 12 regular board meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

S. Whiting presented her report.

- M. Kissinger asked about the increase in the Miscellaneous Income line. T. Choppy said that the line usually covers payments for exam proctoring, USB drives, etc. She noted that the large

increase was from a donation from the Hungerford Foundation. S. Whiting said that it should be filed under the Gifts and Donations.

- In response to a question from G. Sacco, T. Choppy said that about 10% of the state aid allocation hasn't come in yet, but it is expected to.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 January 2026 (Checks disbursed in January 2026 based on pre-approval \$60,103.79; Checks disbursed in January 2026 relating to payroll \$218,879.53; Checks being submitted for approval \$105,669.74; CapProject Fund Checks \$1,210.00; Total: \$385,863.06).

2026-27 draft budget

C. Brancatella noted that the draft budget has been discussed and reviewed by the finance committee. S. Whiting noted that a few modifications were made based on that discussion.

S. Whiting said the coming fiscal year was a difficult one to budget because projected expenses exceed the levy increase amount. She noted that contractual increases in salaries, as well as larger-than-expected increases retirement and health insurance costs have been a budgeting challenge. She said that in order to balance the budget the library may have to use money from the fund balance to cover the \$225,000 shortfall. She said that in the past, the library has ended the fiscal year with a surplus, and if that happens in 2026-27, then there might not be a need to use the entire \$225,000 from the fund balance.

G. Sacco noted that the budget does not exceed the state-mandated tax cap. She said the library is facing the same economic pressures that everyone is facing right now, including health insurance increases.

C. Brancatella said that S. Whiting is very conservative in her estimates, and the finance committee has talked about not overreacting based on a single budget year. She said they will continue to watch how things are trending and will know more next year. S. Whiting said she will try to work on a forecast, but it has been difficult with so many unknowns.

M. Kissinger asked about the increase in health insurance costs. S. Whiting said that, when budgeting, the library only knows the actual costs for July-December and has to rely on estimates for the second half of the fiscal year, so bigger-than-expected increases can have a major impact. Health insurance renewal runs on a calendar year while the fiscal year runs from July-June. This year, health insurance costs increased 20%. L. DiBetta asked if that could be included in the explanation next to the budget line. G. Kirkpatrick said that additional factors make that health insurance line hard to estimate, including new employees jumping on the plan or others switching to it during open enrollment.

M. Kissinger asked if the budget deviates too much from the goal to spend a certain percentage on the collection. G. Kirkpatrick said it is down a little this year but still about 12% of the budget. C. Brancatella noted that the library hasn't changed spending or estimates in any areas, and that the main driver of budget are things that are out of our control, such as health care and retirement costs.

The board will vote on the draft budget at the March meeting, and it will be presented in the May/June Footnotes newsletter.

S. Whiting noted that she included a fund balance report in the packet to show its history and how it has grown over the years. She said the library needs to keep \$1.3 million in reserve to fun operations from the end of the fiscal year until the receipt of property taxes at the end of the calendar year. She said that leaves about \$2.3 million to use toward the boiler and other capital

projects, to use toward boiler and Borthwick property. She said they should be thinking about what they can do without depleting the fund.

S. W said that budgeting for interest income is also challenge to predict, and if something were to happen to the market, the library may not be able to rely on interest income.

PERSONNEL REPORT

The board noted the personnel report. G. Kirkpatrick said that the two positions approved last month were filled internally, so he was requesting to backfill those newly open positions, as well as that of another part-time clerk due to a recent retirement. He was also requesting to fill a part-time page position in anticipation of that employee moving to one of the clerk positions.

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

- Library clerk, part-time, permanent, 13.57 hours/week, \$18.83/hour or per contract
- Library clerk, part-time, permanent, 11.67 hours/week, \$18.83/hour or per contract
- Library clerk, part-time, permanent, 11.67 hours/week, \$18.83/hour or per contract
- Library page, part-time, permanent, 12.8 hours/week, \$16.00/hour or per contract

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- G. Kirkpatrick said he was sharing the architect's assessment of the Borthwick property in response to some questions he's been getting.
- Digital circulation accounts for about one-third of total circulation. The library is circulating more digitally than at any time during the pandemic. G. Kirkpatrick said that number includes e-books, audiobooks, downloadable video through Kanopy and Hoopla and e-periodicals. Bethlehem patrons have been very quick to adopt e-magazines and newspaper.
- The January mid-term exam study traffic was very busy with lots of teens. The library opened up additional rooms when possible.
- The new public catalog has met with some mixed reviews. It was purchase by the consortium because the old catalog had reached the end of its lifespan. Staff are working to get the wrinkles out.
- G. Kirkpatrick said there will be some changes to the physical layout of the children's place to accommodate changing use patterns.
- Staff is looking at parsing the studio area back into two spaces, in order to store some of the chair and table racks, allowing for more space in the community room.
- G. Kirkpatrick noted that the stat report shows public use of the meeting rooms is decreasing because the library is increasing the number of early literacy programs, so the rooms are less available to public.

UHLS REPORT

M. Kissinger said the meeting is coming up. C. Brancatella said that Upper Hudson participated in the recent Library Advocacy Day, which was a great opportunity to talk about the value of libraries.

FRIENDS REPORT

J. Adams said she would be attending the meeting the following Monday.

NEW BUSINESS

Other new business

C. Brancatella said the Long Range Planning committee recently met and hope to have a new plan for the board to consider by fall.

OLD BUSINESS

Borthwick property discussion

C. Brancatella opened the discussion by noting that the board had committed to vote on a rough plan for the Borthwick property once the house has been demolished so that it could be communicated to the public in March. She noted that the board had brainstormed some ideas at the previous meeting and had heard from staff about their interests for the space.

She said that although a free food fridge had been one of the ideas, discussions with the town indicated that there might be plans to meet that need. She also noted that during the public comment period, the Friend's president indicated that their organization might not have the infrastructure in place at this time to manage a book sale/storage area. She proposed removing those two concepts from the list.

M. Walsh said that she would still like the board to consider some type of electrified storage space, as the library will be losing significant off-site storage when the house comes down. She said she believes there is room on the property for both a garden/green space/flex space and storage.

L. DiBetta asked that since the board had significantly narrowed down the list, did they even need to have a vote. She said that the board could come up with a general concept for the space and ask for feedback and discussion from the public on the details. She said she is interested in engaging the public in what to do with the space instead of telling them what is going to be done.

C. Brancatella said that the end goal is that when house taken down, people will have an idea of what that space is to become. She said the communications committee will meet to propose what might be included in the March meeting about the property.

M. Kissinger questioned the need to gather extensive public feedback for something relatively small in scope. He said it's not a process the board uses for library programming. G. Sacco asked how the board might move forward with people being disappointed if their feedback is not part of the final project.

S. Patterson said she believes the board should present a plan to the public and get feedback on the details. J. Adams added that they could present several vision boards and take the feedback as it comes rather than asking specific questions.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously agreed to move forward with creating a welcoming space that includes both flexible space and garden space for the Borthwick property, as well as exploring options for the storage needs of the library.

Borthwick property architect's proposal

M. Kissinger said he was concerned with some of the "squishy" language in the contract, specifically the "desire to explore" water and electricity possibilities. He said that if that was something the board wants, it should be a more concrete directive. G. Kirkpatrick said the proposal was for the design to remove the house as directed by the board in 2025. He said there could be costs associated with preserving the electricity or water or both and that is something the board had wanted to explore.

S. Patterson said she doesn't think water hookups would be necessary and the board could just indicate they want electricity. She noted that opinions could change if it adds a lot of cost.

M. Kissinger said he would like to see the language changed to affirmatively say the library would like to retain electricity and what would be associated with maintain water.

On a MOTION by G. Sacco with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously voted to accept a proposal from CSArch, with the amended language discussed, for design, bidding and construction administration fees related to the Borthwick property demolition in the amount of \$22,900.

Boiler project – update

G. Kirkpatrick said the boiler project has been on pause because of the extreme cold. It will resume as soon as winter weather returns to normal. He said the boiler and all associated parts are on site, and work on the drain is complete. He said a positive change is that there will no longer be a need for asbestos abatement. Contractors will be able to use an existing metal flue to run the new exhaust through so the mastic layer in roof will not be disturbed.

Director evaluation – update

S. Patterson said that she has sent out email to the board with feedback due on Friday.

Other old business

There was no other old business at this time.

FUTURE BUSINESS

There was no future business at this time.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

ADJOURNMENT

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

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
C. Brancatella, board president