MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday July 13, 2026 (DRAFT)

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

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, public information specialist

EXCUSED: Gail Sacco

GUESTS: Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of operations
Chris McGinty, assistant director/Public Services
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk
Jen Crawford, confidential secretary
Bruce Phillips
Robert McDonnell
Mary Service
Claire Crawford

President C. Brancatella called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.

TRUSTEE OATHS OF OFFICE

C. Brancatella administered the oath of office to trustee-elect K. McNamara.

ELECTION OF BOARD OFFICERS

M. Kissinger presented the nominating committee's slate of officers. The slate of officers proposed for 2026-27:

- President: C. Brancatella
- Vice President: S. Patterson
- Secretary: L. DiBetta
- UHLS representative: G. Sacco

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by J. Adams, the board unanimously accepted the 2026-27 officer slate as presented.

J. Adams will continue as a liaison to the Friends.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

There was no public participation at this time.

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

C. Brancatella said that there are four standing committees that are required by the bylaws: personnel, finance, nominating and building. After a short board discussion, she recommended the renewal of two additional committees: long-range planning and communications. The board decided against a separate policy committee.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously agreed to establish/renew the following committees:

- Personnel: J. Adams, S. Patterson, K. McNamara
- Finance: L. DiBetta, M. Kissinger, G. Sacco
- Nominating: M. Kissinger, K. McNamara, L. DiBetta
- Building: J. Adams, S. Patterson, G. Sacco
- Long-range planning: G. Sacco, M. Kissinger, L. DiBetta
- Communications: J. Adams, L. DiBetta, K. McNamara

BOARD ANNUAL AUTHORIZATIONS

G. Kirkpatrick presented the authorizations for the 2026-27 fiscal year. M. Kissinger asked if four law firms was necessary. G. Kirkpatrick said the library most frequently uses the services of Whiteman Osterman and Hanna, and they are on retainer. The others are engaged on an as-needed basis.

G. Kirkpatrick said he is proposing to remove the Times-Union as an official newspaper and add the Schenectady Gazette, which now owns The Spotlight. He said the reason is threefold: the Gazette is significantly less expensive, they will allow a purchase order, and there is generally no wait time for a legal ad to begin publishing. L. DiBetta asked if there was any concern about not having the coverage area that the Times-Union has. G. Kirkpatrick said the library could still use the Times-Union for advertisements but by removing them from the list it would no longer be required.

S. Whiting discussed the proposed addition of ACH transfers for payment of certain accounts payable. She said the finance committee has been discussing it for some time. She said it will simplify transactions with some vendors and is as secure as direct deposit. She noted that a number of organizations have started using ACH, including the Bethlehem school district.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by K. McNamara, the board unanimously approved the 2026-27 authorizations as presented.

HOLIDAYS AND CLOSINGS

G. Kirkpatrick presented the proposed list of library closings for the 2027 calendar year. He noted that the listed items in red represented contractually negotiated closings. He proposed closing the library on New Year's Eve, as it falls on a Friday. M. Kissinger asked if that would prevent staff from participating in First Night Bethlehem. G. Kirkpatrick said that since it is not a contractual holiday, staff can still participate, but there tends to be little interest.

M. Kissinger asked what would it take to be open Sundays in the summer, possibly every other week. G. Kirkpatrick said he could work up some numbers. He noted that that the closures aren't contractual, but rather a monetary decision and a recognition that usage patterns change from evenings and weekends to 9-5 in the summer. He said that people may say they want the library to be open on Sundays in the summer, but he's not sure whether the actual usage patterns would support that. J. Adams said that an every other week approach might be confusing. C. Brancatella said it would be worth seeing the costs associated with it, but it might not be feasible.

On a MOTION by J. Adams with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board voted unanimously to adopt the holidays and closings schedule for 2027.

ANNUAL ETHICS/CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Ethics statements were distributed to the trustees for signing and will be filed in the public record.

2027 BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE

The board reviewed the proposed meeting schedule for the 2027 calendar year.

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board voted unanimously to adopt the board meeting schedule as presented for 2027.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday June 8 regular board meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

S. Whiting presented her report.

- She included an end-of-year explanation of variances that highlights overall revenue and expenses during the fiscal year. She noted that the net surplus is about $52,000, which is smaller than in previous years, mostly due to, personnel, health insurance and retirement costs. Auditors will be coming in shortly to prepare the final numbers, and she expects a few adjustments for accruals for payroll and retirement that will bring the number down a bit more. The final net profit amount will be added to fund balance.
- M. Kissinger asked about the contingency line. S. Whiting said it was not used last year, but it is included for emergencies that may arise. She also noted that the capital expenditures line had seen a lot of use last year for various building upkeep needs.
- C. Brancatella asked if there were any other budget trends the board should be aware of besides increases in personnel-related expenses and utilities. S. Whiting said that salaries are going to be a challenge in the coming fiscal years, with contractual increase percentages higher than the levy allowance. She said the library will be looking at attrition to control salary costs. C. Brancatella noted that managing cost increases is a board priority moving forward.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by J. Adams, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 30 June 2026 (Checks disbursed in June 2026 based on pre-approval $89,246.27; Checks disbursed in June 2026 relating to payroll $220,942.18; Checks being submitted for approval $94,012.84; Checks being submitted for approval – Capital Project Fund $10,342.65; Total: $414,543.94).

PERSONNEL REPORT

The board noted the personnel report. There were no personnel requests.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The board noted the director's report.

- G. Kirkpatrick said he wanted to publicly thank Deanna from Public Services, who made little crochet "shoulder sitter" dinosaurs for all of the staff in celebration of Summer Reading and the theme "Unearth a Story."
- He noted that there was recently a discussion on a Bethlehem Facebook page for families about a lack of engagement from library staff, and said it was hard to hear. He said he was reminded that a "complaint is a gift" because if people did not care about the library in the first place, they would not have taken the time to complain. He said he would be focusing on expectations and customer service in the coming year.
- G. Kirkpatrick said that overall circulation has remained steady, but there have been big year-over-year increases in digital circulation.
- The library is experiencing increasing door count numbers, despite flat overall circulation.
- The library's new digital newspaper holdings have been a big hit, and will be reported as a separate statistic in upcoming reports.
- Last year, staff was directed to purchase additional physical items for the collection, but it did not result in a bump in circulation.
- Bethlehem has heavily invested in Libby for years, and now many other libraries are increasing contribution to the shared collection. At this time, the total digital circulation across the system, is higher than any one library. Digital materials are no longer considered supplemental as they are now a core part of the library's business.
- Digital materials now represent 40 percent of the library's total circulation. G. Kirkpatrick said that at some point in the coming year, physical and digital circulation will be 50/50.
- C. Brancatella said it was important to note that there are more financial challenges involved with purchasing digital materials versus physical and that meeting demand for electronic materials is more expensive.
- M. Kissinger asked if the board could go more in-depth at a future meeting future about what goes into purchasing e-books and what's behind the cost.
- J. Adams asked why door count might be increasing. G. Kirkpatrick said that a lot of it has to do with students and a return to using the library as a study space. C. Brancatella suggested putting an informal survey near the entrance that asks what brought someone to the library that day.
- L. DiBetta asked about the dip in outreach programs. C. McGinty noted that the middle school closed the Pit after-school program, which the library frequently took part in.

UHLS REPORT

M. Kissinger said the board is discussing the delivery contract, as well as the UHLAN agreement. He noted that there has been some discussion about moving the annual meeting to April or May. He said he would help G. Sacco prepare to step in as the new UHLS trustee from Bethlehem.

FRIENDS REPORT

J. Adams said that she wasn't at the last meeting, but former trustee Michelle Walsh prepared some notes. She said the Friends were very happy about the library budget passing. She said the next book sale would be Sept. 19, and there will be a small pop-up book sale in January. She said the Friends had also agreed to purchase a storage shed for the Borthwick property to store sale-related items.

NEW BUSINESS

Demolition bids

The library received three bids for the demolition of the house on Borthwick. The low bid was made by David Frueh Contracting. The companies were interviewed by the architect and engineers to make sure they understood the complexities of the project, including asbestos abatement. The bid included a price for taking down the structures on the property and returning it to a grassed over lot, with additional alternate prices for retaining electricity on the site and adding an 8-by-10-foot shed. G. Kirkpatrick said he was recommending to not move forward with the shed as part of the project since the Friends had voted to explore and fund that structure separately.

C. Brancatella noted that the board had budgeted around $200,000 in all-in costs, and the bid puts the total significantly under that. Project costs are being covered by the fund balance. The board discussed the electrical add alternate and decided it would be worthwhile to pursue at this time.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board unanimously voted to allow the library director to enter into contract negotiations to accept a bid from David Frueh Contracting for the demolition of 59 Borthwick. Ave. in the amount of $69,750, with an additional $13,000 to maintain electrical services on site for future use.

Friends book sale storage shed

C. Brancatella said that the Friends had indicated they would like to move forward with discussions about the purchase of a shed to store books and items for the book sale.

On a MOTION by J. Adams with a SECOND by M. Kissinger, the board unanimously voted to work with the Friends to develop a plan for purchase and siting of a storage shed.

C. Brancatella thanked the Friends for their support.

Other new business

There was no other new business discussed.

OLD BUSINESS

Boiler project update

G. Kirkpatrick noted he had discussed the status of the project earlier in his director's report.

Long Range Plan Committee report

C. Brancatella said the committee continues to meet and has made progress on the mission and is now working on action items. She said they plan to meet again in August and hope to have a draft ready by the September board meeting.

Recording policy – process update

S. Patterson said she has received an opinion from our lawyer that sheds some new light on what is and is not allowable to maintain patron privacy so she will be revisiting the draft using notes from that meeting and expects to have a new draft ready in a couple of weeks.

Social media policy

On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board unanimously voted to accept updates to the library's social media policy.

Other old business

There was no other old business at this time.

FUTURE BUSINESS

There was no future business at this time.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

One member of the public spoke. A recording of the meeting is available on YouTube.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by L. DiBetta with a SECOND by J. Adams, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:35pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
C. Brancatella, board president