

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (COMMUNITY ROOM)
Monday June 10, 2024

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Laura DiBetta
Mark Kissinger
Sarah Patterson
Lisa Scoons
Michelle Walsh
Charmaine Wijeyesinghe
Sharon Whiting, library treasurer

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

EXCUSED:

GUESTS: Jennifer Crawford, confidential secretary
Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of Circulation and Technical Services
Tanya Choppy, accounts clerk
Tracey McShane, personnel administrator
Chris McGinty, assistant director
Meredith Savitt
Hazel Landa
Leslie Hudson
Jim Hudson
Hazel Landa
Robert McDonald
Gail Sacco
Evelyn Loeb
Miles Garfinkel
Susanne Angarano, Ashley McGraw (virtual)
Elbert Eller, Ashley McGraw (virtual)

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 5:57pm.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Four attendees addressed the board. A recording of the meeting and the public comment period is available on the library's YouTube channel.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Monday May 13 regular board meeting.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved the minutes from the Tuesday June 4 special board meeting.

BUILDING PROJECT UPDATE – ARCHITECT’S PRESENTATION

S. Angarano began the design update with a recap of the discussions leading up to this point in the design and planning process. Of note:

- The design features three entrances, with the main entrance facing the parking lot, a second near the curbside pickup loop and a third located approximately where the current Delaware Avenue entrance stands.
- The parking lot has an overall increase in spaces, including 6 EV charging spots and 6 accessible spots.
- There would be an overall increase in library area by 52% to support patron volume and usage.
- The lobby area features a lot of flexible space that could be adapted to future needs of the library.
- A “living room” area would be located in the middle of the library where the Information Desk currently stands.
- A fire protection system with sprinklers would be added based on the size of the project.

C. Wijeyesinghe asked if the areas that needed improvements to meet building codes would be grandfathered in if the library were to not move ahead with the project. S. Angarano said that while it would be grandfathered in, she would recommend that the library address those issues. C. Wijeyesinghe asked if the board could get a list of those recommendations and the costs associated with addressing them.

S. Angarano presented some new interior renderings of the design, saying the architects wanted to balance the geometric shapes with existing forms, using natural elements like wood to bring warmth to the existing brick elements. A variety of carpet and tile would help with the acoustics of the space and create visual interest. S. Angarano noted that the renderings were generated from the design concepts and imagery that people responded to in earlier focus groups. She said she welcomed any initial reactions and said the architects would begin revising the designs in the coming weeks.

C. Wijeyesinghe asked if the rendering of the children’s area was a full view and noted that it looked kind of small. S. Angarano said that it is from the viewpoint of about two-thirds of the way into the space. M. Walsh agreed that it made the area look small and also not very childlike. C. Wijeyesinghe said she would like a view of the full space to better engage parents.

M. Walsh asked if the updated design has eliminated the problem of pedestrians having to cross the curbside loop. S. Angarano said that maintaining the Delaware Avenue entrance would accomplish that, and the footpath doesn’t connect around the building to discourage walking that way.

M. Kissinger asked what the point of the pathway is if it just breaks off. S. Angarano said it was decorative and to encourage the use of the library’s outdoor spaces.

L. Scoons asked where the after-hours book drop would be located. E. Eller said it would be just south of the curbside window.

L. DiBetta said she loved the wood and natural elements and the brightness of the space. She said she would like to see more diversity of ages in the renderings, as well as someone who is using a wheel chair so that it could clearly show there is enough space between the stacks and other elements to maneuver. M. Kissinger said he would like to partner with an organization that could give the design a full disability review. C. Wijeyesinghe and L. DiBetta both noted that it might be time for a logo refresh. L. Scoons said the circles around the columns were perplexing.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

The board noted S. Whiting's treasurer's report. Additional items:

- The fiscal year will be closing out in a month. S. Whiting said there will be a surplus, but she is not yet sure how much.
- M. Walsh asked if the reason for the increase in spending on materials was because costs have risen. S. Whiting said it was more likely because there are more materials available to purchase.
- C. Brancatella said the biggest reason for the increase in overall spending is the bump in salaries. L. Scoons added that the library was also fully staffed.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 31 May 2024 (Checks disbursed in May 2024 based on pre-approval \$47,433.10; Checks disbursed in May 2024 relating to payroll \$303,037.58; Checks being submitted for approval \$113,348.11; CapProject Fund Checks \$190,304.57; Total: \$654,123.36).

PERSONNEL REPORT

The board noted the personnel report. G. Kirkpatrick said there are no personnel actions being requested at this time.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- The library continues to experience very high attendance at early literacy programs. In summer, many will take place on the Green, but if they are held inside, they have to be in the Community Room because of the need for space. G. Kirkpatrick said this makes the room less available to the public, but programming for children is the priority.
- Museum pass circulation was up again. He noted that the print-on-demand passes allowed for 35 checkouts that would not have happened before because one checkout no longer takes the pass out of circulation for three or more days.
- Door count continues to climb.

UHLS BOARD UPDATE

L. Scoons said she would see everyone at UHLS annual celebration on Wednesday.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board voted unanimously to enter into executive session at 7pm to discuss matters involving proposed, pending or current litigation.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board voted unanimously to adjourn executive session at 7:26pm.

NEW BUSINESS

Public Meeting Room Policy

M. Kissinger noted that the policy would be effective July 1, 2024. C. Brancatella said that, since the last meeting, the draft had gone through two rounds of comments from staff and board members, taking into account public feedback, as well as additional review by the library's attorney.

She said the most significant modification is the expansion of the definition of a community organization that can bring in outside speakers. Such an organization would have to be either a registered 501c3, registered with the New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau or a New York not-for-profit corporation. If a group does not fall under one of those categories, they can still be sponsored by one that does.

Other edits included some wording changes regarding the security provision and an opportunity to appeal a decision that an event require additional security.

L. DiBetta said she wanted to add that there has been a lot of discussion surround the definition of a "community organization. She said the idea of a sponsoring organization is very common with grant programs, opening up opportunities for organizations that might not be otherwise eligible. She said her hope was that the expansive definition would be more inclusive.

C. Wijeyesinghe said that, in addition, any library cardholders can book a space for smaller meetings. She also noted that the policy would be reviewed quarterly so if the board finds that it is limiting people unfairly, then it can be revisited. M. Walsh said that there may be a learning curve with the new policy, but she believes it casts a wide net of inclusion.

Library staff will begin preparing the required training module in advance of implementation. The cost for room rentals was still being discussed, but M. Kissinger said it would probably mirror what the school district does.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board voted unanimously to adopt the updated Meeting Room Policy with an implementation date of July 1, 2024.

Code of Conduct – Resolution

M. Kissinger said he was in attendance at the December 5 event hosted by the Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace. He said he witnessed a lot of bad behavior from people for and against the program both in the room and in the hallway. He noted that in the aftermath, two actions were taken. The first action, taken by the director, was to suspend the group for one year for the selling of books on library property, the group's third violation of the policy. That action was appealed to the board, and the board asked the director to consider the length of the suspension. The second action, taken by the Board of Trustees, was a motion to consider sanctions against the group for

violations of the Patron Conduct Policy. That motion has been under discussion since and is the reason for a resolution read into public record by M. Kissinger. (See attached.)

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board voted to adopt a resolution that states that no sanctions will be imposed for violations of the Patron Conduct Policy at the Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace event on Dec. 5, 2023. C. Brancatella, L. DiBetta, M. Kissinger, S. Patterson, L. Scoons and C. Wijeyesinghe voted in favor. M. Walsh was opposed.

C. Brancatella thanked library staff for their significant effort in investigating complaints of harassment received that night. C. Wijeyesinghe said she thinks the resolution is good in terms of equity because some of the people from the evening are more recognizable than others and it wouldn't be fair to only take action against those who could be identified.

Construction manager

G. Kirkpatrick said the library received t very strong proposals, and the interview team had spoken to both and were recommending Schoolhouse Construction Services. M. Kissinger said Schoolhouse seemed to have a good understanding of the proposal. S. Whiting said they also came with the lowest bid. G. Kirkpatrick said that after board approval, a contract would be drawn up and would go to the library's attorney for review. C. Brancatella noted that the construction manager costs are part of the total project cost estimate.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board voted to enter into a contract with Schoolhouse Construction Services for construction management for the library's proposed in the amount of \$1,642,500.

M/C salaries 2024-25

M/C staff are not covered under the five-year union contract, but G. Kirkpatrick typically recommends increases in line with the what is outlined in the contract. These salaries need to be approved each year.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board voted unanimously to approve the 2024-25 salary schedule for management confidential employees not covered by the union contract.

Other new business

There was no other new business to discuss.

OLD BUSINESS

Building project update

G. Kirkpatrick said the SEQR process has begun, and the long assessment form is in progress and when complete will be part of the upcoming board packet. He said the board needs to pass a resolution stating that they intend to be the lead agency in the process and send out letters to other government agencies with a potential interest informing them of that intent. L. DiBetta noted that she would abstain from voting to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board voted to pass a resolution declaring itself the lead agency in the SEQR review process. C. Brancatella, M. Kissinger, S. Patterson, L. Scoons, M. Walsh and C. Wijeyesinghe voted in favor. L. DiBetta abstained.

Animals in the Library Policy – second read

C. Wijeyesinghe said the policy revisions consisted mostly of minor edits and modernizing the language.

On a MOTION by S. Patterson with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board voted to unanimously to approve updates to the Animals in the Library Policy.

Community Bulletin Board and Literature Rack Policy – second read

L. DiBetta said she had some concern is that the policy was too restrictive on who can post information and that a lot of groups could end up being excluded because of it. She said she understands the desire to be consistent with the meeting room policy but she would like to discuss it further and see if more inclusive language could be used. She noted that she has had two events at her Little Free Library that would not be eligible because it is not a registered 501c3 or charity. She worried that student and parent groups could end up be excluded too. G. Kirkpatrick recommended that the board table the discussion.

On a MOTION by M. Kissinger with a SECOND by C. Brancatella, the board voted to unanimously to table the discussion of the Community Bulletin Board and Literature Rack Policy until a later date.

Meeting Room Policy violation – update

G. Kirkpatrick said that he had taken into consideration the trustees' direction to re-evaluate the length of the suspension of Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace for their third violation of the Public Meeting Room Policy. He said the only other action to base the decision on had previously been for a no call, no show violation, which is a year suspension. He said he has given careful thought to the request and has decided to shorten the suspension, allowing it to expire on July 1, when the new Public Meeting Room Policy is enacted, and contingent on the group's completion of the training module. C. Brancatella asked that G. Kirkpatrick send a copy of the communication he would be sending to the organization.

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 attendee addressed the board. A recording of the meeting and the public comment period is available on the library's YouTube channel.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. DiBetta, the board voted

unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:57pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president

Appendix

WHEREAS, on December 5, 2023, the community group Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace (the “Group”) hosted an event (the “Event”) at the Bethlehem Public Library (the “Library”); and

WHEREAS, on December 5, 2023 while the Event was ongoing, the Library Director ejected two (2) individuals from the Event on the basis of violation of the Library’s Patron Conduct Policy, but was unable to fully respond to all instances of unauthorized behavior during the Event; and

WHEREAS, in response to specific complaints from Library patrons, on December 11, 2023, the Library Board of Trustees (the “Board”) passed a resolution to consider sanctions against the Group related to the conduct of individuals at the Event in violation of the Library’s policies, including the Patron Conduct Policy (the “December Resolution”); and

WHEREAS, after receiving additional complaints regarding the conduct of individuals at the Event, the Library has investigated such complaints and reviewed the behavior of additional individuals at the Event in relation to the Patron Conduct Policy; and

WHEREAS, upon such investigation and review, the Library found numerous additional instances of patron behavior at the Event that were in violation of the Library’s Code of Conduct; and

WHEREAS the Library is not able to determine the identity of all individuals in violation of the Library’s Patron Conduct Policy or potentially in violation of the Library’s Patron Conduct Policy at the Event; and

WHEREAS, the Library has concluded that it is not able to equitably impose sanctions against all individuals who acted in violation of the Patron Conduct Policy at the Event; NOW THEREFORE

BE IT RESOLVED, in the interest of equitable application of its policies, no sanctions will be imposed by the Board on the Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace pursuant to the December Resolution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, also in the interest of equitable application of its policies, the Board shall impose no further sanctions against anyone in attendance the night of the Event based on violations of the Code of Conduct at the Event.