

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (BOARD ROOM)
Monday March 13, 2023

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Mark Kissinger
Harmeet Narang (virtual)
Sarah Patterson
Michelle Walsh
Charmaine Wijeyesinghe
Sharon Whiting, library treasurer

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

EXCUSED: Lisa Scoons

GUESTS: Chris McGinty, assistant director
Jennifer Crawford, confidential secretary
Tracey McShane, personnel administrator
Phil Berardi, head of Circulation and Technical Services

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

G. Kirkpatrick shared an email received from resident Robert Khalife, who asked if the library had considered diversifying its holdings in light of the recent failure of handful of banks.

MINUTES

Minutes of the 13 February 2023 board meeting were approved unanimously on a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's update

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

- C. Wijeyesinghe asked if the budget is tracking 6% under due to shifts in staffing and turnover over the past year. S. Whiting said that it is primarily due to being under in salaries because of unfilled positions, but that number would likely change in the coming year with the library reaching near full staffing levels.
- C. Wijeyesinghe asked for clarification about two of the expenses on the bill schedule: Pronunciator, the library's language database and attorney fees for contract review.
- M. Kissinger asked if S. Whiting could address the public comment from earlier. S. Whiting noted that the treasury bill is independent of TD Bank. She noted that the library has a standby letter of credit that collateralizes the deposits, so she feels pretty secure with where the library stands. She also noted that the library has gotten very favorable

rates on CDs through TD Bank because it does business there. G. Kirkpatrick said that, because of the treasury bill, the library is currently more diversified than it has been before. M. Kissinger suggested the finance committee discuss the issue further. M. Walsh thanked Robert Khalife for bringing it to the board's attention.

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board unanimously approved the Financial Statement dated 28 February 2023 (Checks disbursed in February 2023 based on pre-approval \$44,653.03; Checks disbursed in February 2023 relating to payroll \$189,637.17; Checks being submitted for approval \$50,408.90; CapProject Fund/Hand-Drawn Checks \$4,490; Total: \$289,189.10).

PERSONNEL REPORT

G. Kirkpatrick said the library is nearing full staffing for the first time in three years. He asked the board to allow the reclassification of a full-time library assistant position to full-time Librarian I. He proposed eliminating the approved part-time clerk position of 19 hours per week to make that reclassification close to budget neutral. C. Wijeyesinghe said the personnel committee supported the move.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously voted to reclassify the following position:

- Library Assistant, full-time, permanent, 35 hours/week, \$39,604/annual or per contract
TO Librarian I, full-time, permanent, 35 hours/week, \$55,529/annual or per contract

UHLS BOARD UPDATE

Upper Hudson has set the date for the in-person annual ceremony for Wednesday, June 14. All trustees are invited. The event will feature a dinner and awards ceremony and is attended by trustees and staff from across Upper Hudson.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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

- G. Kirkpatrick reiterated that attendance at programs has been growing, building momentum toward an increased door count, which has been growing more rapidly since about November.
- Lawmakers at Advocacy Day were very supportive of libraries, but it is hard to know what that will translate to when it comes to state aid. G. Kirkpatrick said he expects next year's Advocacy Day to be even better attended.
- Circulation is still increasing, but those increases are slowing as they approach more traditional numbers.
- M. Walsh mentioned the budget decreases for DVDs and said she said she was among a small number of patrons that still use the collection. She said she would like the library to continue providing DVDs that are historically and culturally significant, as well as those new releases that aren't available through streaming services. G. Kirkpatrick said the DVD collection is not going away, and the library continues to add to the collection because of those same reasons. The library is still circulating about 6,000 DVDs a month, and purchasing is in line with demand.

NEW BUSINESS

NYS annual report for public libraries

G. Kirkpatrick said the state report represents information from July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022. C. Wijeyesinghe said she was heartened to see big increases in early childhood offerings and WiFi use, representing a return from pandemic times. She asked about the decreases in resident cardholders. G. Kirkpatrick said that was due to a purge of expired cardholders. C. Wijeyesinghe also mentioned the library's assistive technology and asked if there was a demand for Braille readers that would justify the cost of the technology. G. Kirkpatrick said that he would look into it.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously approved the information to be submitted in the NYS annual report for public libraries.

Schematic design proposal

G. Kirkpatrick presented the proposal from architects Ashley McGraw for the next phase of design work. He said this schematic phase would provide more defined concepts and include some reimbursable site work. The architects also proposed a timeline for when they expected the work to be done, which would be around March 2024. This design phase would be followed by a third phase that would be used to engage a project manager and construction work.

C. Wijeyesinghe said it would be interesting to see if they could move the timeline up to November 2023. She noted that it would be preferable to avoid the winter for an off-cycle bond vote.

S. Whiting asked if the fee schedule provided by Ashley McGraw included their own fees in the previous estimates provided. C. Brancatella said that was a good question that she would like to have clarified. S. Patterson asked if the library was locked into further expenses if they approved the next phase. G. Kirkpatrick said they would only be approving the schematic design and further work would still have to come before the board.

M. Kissinger said he supports moving on to the next phase to avoid any additional costs associated with delays. C. Wijeyesinghe asked if the board would still have input as they move forward. G. Kirkpatrick said there would be many opportunities to review and make suggestions moving forward.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously voted to further engage Architects Ashley McGraw to provide schematic design services in the amount of \$283,638 with an additional, reimbursable expense of \$8,800 for a HazMat survey and testing.

Confidential records policy – 1st read

C. Wijeyesinghe said there are copies of the policy with tracked changes for people to review, if desired. C. Brancatella thanked the policy committee for their work again to policy committee.

Exam proctoring policy – 1st read

M. Walsh asked if this was a new policy. G. Kirkpatrick said it was a rewrite of an existing

policy. C. Wijeyesinghe noted that the changes were mainly about clarifying the language and organization for consistency.

Other new business

There was no other new business at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

Draft 2023-24 budget

S. Whiting said that the presented draft had not changed substantially from what the board had reviewed at the previous meeting. She noted that the levy had increased by about \$94,000, which is an increase of about 2.18% and is significantly below the tax cap. The budget does not include any new positions but has some flexibility to account for unplanned expenses and inflation. M. Walsh said the materials budget is on the higher end of what comparable libraries in the region spend. She also noted that the finance committee expects the expenses will be closer to the budget amount in the coming year as staffing is closer to being full than in the past. H. Narang noted the operations budget was up about 1.2% and asked if that was related to inflation. S. Whiting said that energy and other expenses are expected to increase. A public hearing about the budget will take place at the May board meeting.

On a MOTION by M. Walsh with a SECOND by C. Wijeyesinghe, the board unanimously approved the 2022-23 library budget as written for public presentation. The budget proposes a levy of \$4,401,969, an increase of \$93,893 or 2.18%.

Plaza entry

G. Kirkpatrick said that he had gotten a rough estimate of about \$60,000 for the removal of the bricks on the plaza and their replacement with poured concrete. He said a project of that amount would need to go out for public bid and asked the board if that is something they would like to pursue given that they are currently looking into a bigger long-term capital project. He noted that icing on the plaza bricks continues to be a problem and a liability. M. Walsh asked if it was something that could be done before the snow flies in fall. G. Kirkpatrick said that it is possible, especially since the project would not fall under SED review. C. Brancatella noted that there are likely 2-3 winter seasons left before any capital project, and the cost per year would be worth it for public safety. M. Walsh said the funds already exist as part of the contingency and capital improvements budget lines. C. Brancatella asked if there might be additional Upper Hudson grant money available to put toward the project. C. Wijeyesinghe said removing the bricks will change the aesthetics in a way some people will not like.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board voted unanimously to allow Library Director G. Kirkpatrick to begin pursuing bids to replace the bricks on the plaza with concrete.

Donations/naming rights

The policy committee has been tossing around some ideas about naming rights, but they are seeking some direction from the greater board to see what they might be interested in exploring further. One concept would be central location with plaques or some other type of monument, like a bronzed book. Another idea would allow naming of different objects or rooms throughout the library.

C. Brancatella asked if it would have to be one or the other or if it could include both aspects. M. Walsh said the board needs to first make a decision on whether they want to do naming rights or not, and that it doesn't make sense to iron out the minutiae when the overall concept hasn't even been decided on. She also asked if it might make sense to wait and see how the building project progresses before making a decision. C. Brancatella suggested just throwing together some concepts from others' policies for the board to look at and make decisions from there. She said it wouldn't be wasted work even if the board ultimately decides against offering naming rights.

Negotiations – update

G. Kirkpatrick said a tentative date of March 27 has been set for negotiations.

Volunteer policy – 2nd read

The volunteer policy was presented for a second read. It is a new policy for the library. M. Walsh asked if most volunteers are students. G. Kirkpatrick said that they are in number, but the library is now working to provide sought-after opportunities for all ages to volunteer.

On a MOTION by C. Brancatella with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board unanimously adopted the proposed updates to the library's volunteer policy.

Other old business

There was no other old business at this time.

FUTURE BUSINESS

C. Wijeyesinghe said the policy committee would be reviewing the patron conduct policy soon, but she noticed that it is very specific about unacceptable activities and wondered if the board might want to consider streamlining it to say something like "patrons are expected to comply with posted notices." G. Kirkpatrick said the library is currently under the emergency patron conduct policy but that will end in May when the governor's emergency order expires.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board adjourned to executive session at 7:00pm to discuss contact negotiations pursuant to Article Fourteen of the Civil Service Law

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by M. Walsh, the board adjourned executive session at 7:51pm.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by S. Patterson, the board adjourned the regular meeting at 7:52pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president