

## **Library Board Minutes**

September 14, 2020

Bethlehem Area Public Library

Meeting conducted virtually via Zoom

President Anne Felker called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

ATTENDING: City – Anne Felker, Jane Gill, Joyce Hinnefeld, Emil Signes,  
Sharon Yoshida  
Bethlehem Township – Randi Blauth, John Merhottein  
Fountain Hill – Annamarie Jordan

Staff – Josh Berk, Caitlin Cuba, Dana Hoy, Regina Kochmaruk,  
Catherine McCafferty, Sarah Phillips, Erin Poore, Sue Schirripa  
Other – Terence Faul (King, Spry, Herman, Freund & Faul), Michael  
Prendeville (Hanover Township Alternate)

ABSENT: City – Olga Negrón, Julie Zumas  
Hanover Township – Jay Finnigan

**COURTESY OF THE FLOOR:** Sharon Yoshida attended an online session hosted by the Pennsylvania Library Association about Library Legislative Day, which will be held on September 21. The event is held yearly as a day to focus on lobbying for State Funding of libraries. September is “Library Card Sign-Up” month.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** A motion to approve the July minutes made by Jane Gill, seconded by Emil Signes; motion approved.

**APPROVAL OF OPERATING FUNDS:** A motion to approve the June operating funds subject to audit made by Annamarie Jordan, seconded by John Merhottein.

Mike Prendeville asked about the possibility of including monthly dollar amounts, rather than percentages only. He also raised a question about E512 (Expenses/Unemployment Costs) - what is this? Director Berk explained that these were funds paid to a former employee who had filed for unemployment. In this case, BAPL was a “calendar year reimbursable fund” provider. In response to question from John Merhottein, Director Berk confirmed that the library did attempt to fight this. Regarding item E225A under Expenses, Director Berk explained that this is a fund for reimbursing employees toward covering the high health insurance deductible.

John Merhottein noted that expenses are exceeding revenues this month. Sharon Yoshida agreed and noted the absence of significant book sales and fundraisers as factors here. Director Berk noted that the delay in receiving State Funding is the main reason for the lower revenues. State Funding has been delayed, but it is promised for next month.

Mike Prendeville raised an additional question about Endowment interest being included as income; is this customary? President Felker and Director Berk responded that 5% of the Endowment is dispersed as income, and this has been the case for years.

### **DIRECTOR'S ORAL REPORT:**

1. Sharon Yoshida noted that it is good to see that people are still getting library cards. Director Berk reports that it is possible to do this in person, at the door, again. Youth Services was active this month; almost 900 kids participated in the Summer Reading Club. The partnership at Broughal Middle School was highlighted, as well as the successful addition of the Coolidge Building into the summer program. A memoir group and other writing opportunities were popular parts of adult programming over the summer, also.
2. President Felker asked whether it will be possible for the library to open physically to people again in the coming months. Director Berk noted that it is fortunate that we have been able to provide a lot of services outdoors. Computer use, however, is not possible outdoors; so a few people are being permitted inside to use these. Director Berk and staff are working on floor plans for safely bringing people indoors as it gets colder. Check-in/check-out, reference, and programming are all functioning fine. What people are missing is browsing the shelves, but this is complicated. Once people are admitted to browse, there is going to be a desire to linger. Part of the plan is to have nowhere for anyone to sit when the building opens more fully. CDC guidelines point to specific dangers, including bad air flow, lots of people in close contact in small spaces, and talking. These are all issues at the Main Library. Another concern is restroom use. There does not seem to have been clear guidance on this from the State or City. The State does have guidelines for occupancy of 50%. We do not really know the occupancy rate for the entire facility (we have these numbers only for meeting rooms). President Felker suggested possibly putting a time limit on people's presence in the library (i.e. an hour). Director Berk responded that this would be doable, but hard to enforce. Staff would have to time-stamp everyone on the way in somehow. Not having bathrooms open could help limit this indoor time.

### **REPORTS:**

1. City of Bethlehem – none
2. Bethlehem Township – Randi Blauth just learned, from Facebook, that Coolidge now has extended hours. Director Berk explained that this had just been decided today. Regina Kochmaruk noted that the library had to get permission from the Township to change those hours, and permission was provided by Township commissioners. Part of the increase in hours has to do with Regina not being able to do her usual outreach in schools, freeing up more of her time for Coolidge.

3. Fountain Hill – none
4. Hanover Township – none
5. Friends of the Bethlehem Area Public Library – Sharon Yoshida provided more information on the Pennsylvania Library Association workshop she attended addressing Legislative Action Day on September 21. Guidelines were provided for contacting legislators and speaking on behalf of level budgeting for this year and next. All (Friends, Board Members, staff, etc.) are urged to call state legislators and “tell your library story” (e.g., the particular importance of the library in helping with educating children now). Sharon will share talking points for these calls with Board Members. She also stressed that it would be good for the Board to have a relationship with the Pennsylvania Library Association. Director Berk noted that in past years, library supporters convened in person to reach out to legislators in Harrisburg. This year this will have to be done virtually, which might work as well. He stressed that it is important to speak up for libraries in what is going to be a complicated budget year.

Sharon Yoshida noted that the Friends of the Library are still working on growing membership.

#### **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

1. Finance Committee – No meeting. Budget work coming up.
2. Governance Committee – Met in the past month and focused mainly on social media policy.
3. Human Resources Committee – No meeting.
4. Marketing and Advocacy Committee – No meeting.
5. Strategic Planning Committee – Julie Zumas reported previously that the committee will be meeting on September 15 with Cathi Alloway, to discuss completing steps for the strategic plan.

#### **OLD BUSINESS:**

None

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

1. President Anne Felker noted that it is time to discuss the Budget for next year. She expressed her view that it makes sense to institutionalize the budget year by year, by applying a standard rate of inflation. In looking at past years’ budgets, she did not appreciate the ways in which the library’s budget requests fluctuated, and in some years there were no requests for an

increase at all. But she stressed that, considering the times and the circumstances in municipal budgeting right now, a proposal to ask for the same budget for the coming year, with no increase, makes sense. Sharon Yoshida reported that Pennsylvania ranks 7th in State Funding but around 25th in Local Funding, and she supported the idea of a yearly increase based on inflation--except for this year.

Mike Prendeville remarked that census results should bring an increase in population numbers and, therefore, funding. Director Berk noted that following past censuses, this has typically shown up in the budget two years later. This was confirmed by Board member Emil Signes.

John Merhottein objected to budget increases based on inflation, saying that "the majority of Bethlehem Township does not use the library." He also expressed an overarching objection to the Township's contribution to the library's budget. He argued for cuts in library expenditures and more fundraising.

Emil Signes recalled that 30 years ago the library came very close to turning funding over to the Bethlehem Area School District. President Felker acknowledged that there are alternate models for funding libraries like this, some of which are used in neighboring municipalities (Easton, Allentown). Director Berk confirmed that there are many different funding models for public libraries.

Mike Prendeville raised a separate question regarding pensions not "being accrued" on a monthly basis. Director Berk referred him to the statement of operating funds for accrual figures. Both cash and accrual versions of the budget are provided. Director Berk explained that this way of presenting budget figures was the preferred method in the past. He is open to presenting figures differently, if that is the Board's preference. He noted that restricted funds also do not appear as part of the operating budget. In other words, there is money (in the Endowment, etc.) -- but right now, there are losses in the operating budget. President Felker asked that the Finance Committee look into other ways of presenting budget information.

In attempting to provide guidance to Director Berk as he begins the process of shaping next year's budget, President Felker again proposed asking for flat funding (same as last year), with no increase, because of the circumstances of this year. John Merhottein and Mike Prendeville contended that "rubberstamping" this year's budget will be a hardship for the Townships. Prendeville asked whether there have been "tough conversations" about cuts that may have to be made in the library budget, asking "where's the pain?" Randi Blauth agreed that as a responsible Board we may need to look at possible cuts, asking, for instance, whether the library needs to be open as many hours as it is. She asked whether it would be a "good faith gesture" for the Board to look at possible areas for cutting the budget. President Felker responded that the library has worked responsibly not to expand, but to hold

steady (e.g., not replacing employees in full-time positions) -- because in difficult times like these the library's services are especially needed.

A vote was taken on President Felker's proposal to authorize Director Berk to begin to shape a budget based on last year's numbers (with no increase); the proposal was approved.

President Felker suggested that we bring concerns about increases in future years' budgets into our strategic plan discussions.

A motion to adjourn was made by Annamarie Jordan and seconded by Emil Signes. The meeting adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Hinnefeld, Secretary