

Library Board Minutes

November 9, 2020

Bethlehem Area Public Library

Meeting conducted virtually via Zoom

President Anne Felker called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

ATTENDING: City – Anne Felker, Joyce Hinnefeld, Emil Signes, Sharon Yoshida, Julie Zumas
Bethlehem Township – Randi Blauth
Fountain Hill – Annamarie Jordan

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

ABSENT: City – Jane Gill, Olga Negrón
Bethlehem Township – Dale Sourbeck
Hanover Township – Jay Finnigan

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR: Sharon Yoshida commended all who contributed to the production of the 2019 Annual Report (Kate Racculia--layout and graphics; Kate plus other staff contributed writing; copy editing by intern Lara Slabber from Moravian College). Director Josh Berk reported that the report is sent to various municipal leaders, etc. Yoshida suggested that copies go to card holders, if possible (digitally)--as good advertising/P.R. for the library.

Randi Blauth promoted the Easton Book Festival, noting in particular a valuable session on book history presented by a Lafayette professor, Chris Phillips, and his students.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: A motion to approve October minutes made by Annamarie Jordan, seconded by Randi Blauth; motion approved.

APPROVAL OF OPERATING FUNDS: Randi Blauth asked if the roughly \$7,500 in contributions (Annual Appeal) would be considered a good year. Director Berk responded that while the budget calls for \$12,000, this is “backloaded,” counting on larger gifts at the end of the calendar year--and concluded, therefore, that this year’s amount is “ballpark” for past years.

A motion to approve the September operating funds subject to audit made by Sharon Yoshida, seconded by Emil Signes; motion approved.

DIRECTOR’S ORAL REPORT:

1. Director Berk shared his screen to display the BAPL website--including the page announcing re-opening for “limited and by-appointment browsing.” At the Main Library, the second floor is not open and children’s books have been

moved to the first floor. There is a time limit of one hour for browsing, and chairs have been removed so no one can sit down to stay. Shelves only are open (no lingering or studying at tables); an appointment is required, unless there is space for a walk-in. No appointments are needed at the Coolidge Building in Bethlehem Township. Computers are available by appointment at each location. The Bookmobile is also operating but with no browsing, just reserved books.

2. Sharon Yoshida noted that at the Main Library there is a person at the door to ensure that masks are worn (Director Berk identified him as Adrian, an AARP volunteer “in training” as greeter); plexiglass dividers; arrows directing foot traffic--all good safety precautions. Director Berk reported that a lot of masks (handmade cloth ones) were donated for staff, but as staff did not really need them, these are available at the desk for users who need them.
3. *TUG*--the new children’s book published by BAPL, in partnership with the National Museum of Industrial History, will be launched next week at a “Last Cast” event (celebrating the last time iron was made at Bethlehem Steel, in 1995). The book’s story was written by BAPL staff member Catherine McCafferty. There will be a number of events connected with the Last Cast, and the first storytime with *TUG* is scheduled for noon on November 14 at the museum.
4. Also on the BAPL website, there are virtual versions of the children’s rooms at the Main Library and South Side Branch, with online activities, graphics, etc.--including Spike the lizard’s Instagram!

REPORTS:

1. City of Bethlehem – none
2. Bethlehem Township – none
3. Fountain Hill – none
4. Hanover Township – none
5. Friends of the Bethlehem Area Public Library – The annual meeting will be held on Zoom on November 18 at 6:30 p.m. President Felker and Director Berk have the link for this. On the agenda are election of officers and a presentation by one of the library departments. Members are still working on membership and ideas for fundraising.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

1. Finance Committee – In Jane Gill’s absence, Sharon Yoshida reported on the last Finance Committee meeting, where the budget for the coming year was discussed. Once the new treasurer is in place, there are plans to consider Mike Prendeville’s request for additional information in the financial reports.

2. Governance Committee – none
3. Human Resources Committee – none
4. Marketing and Advocacy Committee – none
5. Strategic Planning Committee – No meeting, but the committee looks forward to the December 3 Board strategic planning retreat. Strategic planning activities have continued, including staff meetings with consultant Cathi Alloway. Cathi has also constructed surveys for staff. Staff member Catherine McCafferty reported that there has been a lot of good discussion at the meetings with staff.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

1. The proposed meeting dates for 2021 were approved.

Mondays – 6:00 p.m. Main Library

January 11

February 8

March 8

April 12

May 10

June 14

July 12

August (No Meeting)

September 13

October 11

November 8

December 13

A document with proposed Board meeting dates for 2021 (above) was shared by Director Berk. President Felker suggested noting that these meetings will be held at the library or via Zoom, as required. President Felker proposed adoption of these dates. Emil Signes moved in support of this proposal, Randi Blauth seconded, and the motion passed.

2. Proposed 2021 Budget: Director Berk noted that during the fourth quarter (October on), the library is being somewhat cautious about spending, because we are still awaiting funds from the state. He noted that there may be expenses that can't be controlled (such as repair to the fan)--in which case we would need to dip into reserves.

Next year, of course, no one knows what to expect. Staff are making their best guesses. The library continues not to charge overdue fines during the pandemic; reserve charges were also dropped (normally patrons reserve

roughly 20,000 items per year, at a charge of 50 cents per item) because this was the only way to get library items. Room reservations (i.e. the Cohen Room) are unlikely in the year to come, as are fundraisers. The library has been holding outdoor book sales; typically, five in-person sales/year bring in roughly \$50,000; this amount will also be lower. Book Sale Coordinator Laurel Stone has connected with several book collectors and dealers who have been purchasing books from the sale in large quantities by appointment, but the \$50,000 target will not be reached for the year, nor next.

Director Berk estimates a \$122,000 shortfall due to the above losses.

Areas in which cuts have been made to recover these losses in disbursements: salaries and wages (staff retirements with people not being replaced, cutting of hours at South Side Branch, no staff raises); purchase of fewer library materials, reduced supplies, IT purchases. This takes care of everything as long as the promised state government funding comes through.

Following Director Berk's report, Sharon Yoshida noted that the Finance Committee approved these plans for the 2021 Budget, and also pointed out that these plans will require no additional funds from contributing municipalities. Mike Prendeville asked if it would be possible to sell books via the bookmobile. Director Berk liked this idea and will look into it.

Director Berk reported that the library Endowment has held pretty steady at \$2.1 million. A percentage of Endowment interest (5%) contributes to the budget (nothing from principal); this amount was determined by the Board years ago. Fortunately the Endowment continues to grow, through good management and also contributions. Mike Prendeville asked how often Director Berk meets with advisors from Philadelphia Trust. Director Berk said maybe once a year, and acknowledged that more frequent meetings might be wise.

Director Berk also drew the Board's attention to the Unrestricted Funds (\$353,707), held in a low-interest money market account; this is a more recent fund (from gifts, bequests, etc.), and is essentially viewed as a kind of capital account, available for repairs, renovations, building improvements (e.g. children's room, Cohen Room, etc.). Director Berk has been talking with our local bankers and with Philadelphia Trust about the very low interest rate for this account--but wants this fund to continue to not be invested (and therefore subject to risk). While there is interest in new carpet and improvement to the first floor, Director Berk feels this financially uncertain time (in light of the COVID-19 pandemic) is not the right time for such work.

Though it is difficult to make predictions, Director Berk noted that cuts to State Funding (or future changes in local funding) will, of course, require adjustments. He will share a pdf version of the budget with Board members soon.

Annamarie Jordan asked if the State has given any indication at all about remaining funding. Director Berk noted that we have gotten 5/12 of our funding for 2020, and a check for \$100,000 has also arrived--identified by the state as 2021 funding, NOT the remainder of funds for 2020. It is unclear why the State has the solvency to pay toward 2021, but not 2020. Mike Prendeville asked whether anyone has spoken with state government representatives about this. President Felker noted that she has in the past, and Prendeville suggested inviting certain representatives to present to the board on this topic.

In response to another question, Director Berk noted that he is hearing about anxiety over funding from other library colleagues across the state. What has not arrived yet is BAPL's "district center" funding. Julie Zumas speculated about whether this could be CARES Act-related, with the state possibly opting to use 2020 library funds for something else at this point.

The 2021 budget was presented at this evening's meeting--not yet adopted.

3. Hanover Township Proposal: Mike Prendeville spoke about the possibility of using a couple of rooms in the Hanover Township Community Center for library space (the center is currently closed due to the pandemic and space may need to be repurposed following reopening). Director Berk has visited the center to see the space in relation to this possibility.

President Felker asked what the library would be replacing, and Prendeville noted that it would be replacing a preschool program. He stressed that at this point, this is just exploratory, but he would like Director Berk to put together a plan or proposal, possibly similar to what was done for the Coolidge Building in Bethlehem Township--in order for the Hanover Township board to consider this possibility. He asked for board approval of this plan.

Julie Zumas asked about the cost to the library of setting up the Coolidge Building. Director Berk will need to look up the actual number; he noted that at this point the main cost is paying a staff member to work in the space. This has worked well with Regina Kochmaruk, who was a part-time outreach librarian at that time and was made full-time in connection with working at Coolidge. A number of physical repairs were handled by the township, and there was "creative shopping" (e.g., used shelving purchased from another library for roughly \$1,500). Both upfront, one-time costs and ongoing costs have to be considered.

Mike Prendeville said he is not proposing additional costs to the library and asks that the plan/proposal Director Berk prepares note all costs that would be expected to be covered by the Township. Director Berk estimated that the start-up Coolidge Building costs were in the neighborhood of \$10,000. Julie Zumas asked if it is a good time for this, considering the pandemic and possible budget issues ahead. Annamarie Jordan noted that Books on the Hill in Fountain Hill is also still in process. Sharon Yoshida expressed her view that looking into this possibility in Hanover Township, just making initial

inquiries, is a good idea. Director Berk noted that a project like this might also draw donations.

Mike Prendeville reiterated his request for Board approval before bringing the idea to the Hanover Township board. President Felker and Sharon Yoshida noted that the Township would definitely need to be clear about handling certain costs. President Felker asked if Director Berk feels that he has enough direction to begin assembling a proposal, and Director Berk confirmed that he believes he can get started on this. Prendeville acknowledged that this is exploratory and early, and will of course take time. Director Berk noted that Outreach Librarian Regina Kochmaruk has actually been interested in this possibility for a while.

4. Randi Blauth asked Board members about responses (or the lack of a response) to the October 20 email from Rayah Levy about anti-racism training. Blauth asked if others have considered the possibility of such training--for staff and volunteers, and also for board members. President Felker suggested that this might be a topic of discussion for the board strategic planning retreat. Mike Prendeville asked if plans for such training should come from the board governance committee, but President Felker thought not. Julie Zumas acknowledged that yes, this is something that has been considered in relation to board participation in strategic planning initiatives, and agreed that such training would be good. She asked about the possibility of consulting with a human resources firm about this, noting that such trainings are increasingly common in most workplaces. This is about being in compliance--but also about treating all people fairly and well. Legal counsel Terry Faul noted that this would likely be a budget issue, because human resources consulting can be expensive.

President Felker noted that we are really considering two different things--one is reactive and situational, the other broader and designed to address perhaps less obvious issues. While consultants could be expensive, there is also very good programming available that perhaps the board and others could draw on. Perhaps, she suggested, we could bring this into the strategic planning process as a possible goal--and then invite staff and board members to investigate possible resources, possibly here in our community. Mike Prendeville urged making sure that whatever program or training is considered is approved by our legal advisors.

A motion to adjourn was made by Annamarie Jordan. The meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Hinnefeld, Secretary