

Library Board Minutes

March 8, 2021

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, Jane Gill, Joyce Hinnefeld, Rachel Leon, Olga Negrón, Emil Signes, Julie Zumas

Bethlehem Township – Randi Blauth

Fountain Hill – Annamarie Jordan

Hanover Township – Jay Finnigan

Staff – Josh Berk, Julia Brennan, Erin Poore, Sue Schirripa

Other – Cathi Alloway (Strategic Planning Consultant), Terence Faul (King, Spry, Herman, Freund & Faul), Michael Prendeville (Hanover Township alternate)

ABSENT: Bethlehem Township – Dale Sourbeck

Reminder from President Felker: Alternate Board members should restrict comments to the “Courtesy of the Floor” period of the meeting. Also, new Board members are asked to complete the Board Member Agreement form, accessible via the Board page on the website. Added to New Business this evening is the possibility of having someone else take minutes, so that Joyce Hinnefeld is able to participate more fully in meetings; she would still oversee these minutes as Board Secretary.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR: None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: A motion to approve the February minutes was made by Annamarie Jordan, seconded by Randi Blauth; abstention by Emil Signes. The motion was approved.

APPROVAL OF OPERATING FUNDS: President Felker asked about funds listed as being in a BB&T market account; what is the purpose of having a shorter-term fund like this? Director Josh Berk explained that while Philadelphia Trust funds are doing well, unrestricted funds held with them (readily available for library use) were not earning much interest. The decision to move these specific funds to BB&T was connected with the desire to earn more interest (and not be charged fees) while still ensuring that the funds are accessible via a short-term/more liquid account.

A motion to approve the January operating funds, subject to audit, was made by Jane Gill, seconded by Annamarie Jordan. The motion was approved.

DIRECTOR'S ORAL REPORT:

1. Director Berk noted that since the preparation of the January Director's Report, computers have become available for users. Users are provided with wipes and asked to clean computers before and after use (staff are doing this at the smaller Branches); staff members also clean computers at the Main Library at least twice a day. Overall this is working well; some staff have expressed concern about the difficulty of keeping distance, and being brief, when patrons request help at the computers.
2. Director Berk drew attention to the partnership (Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium, Audubon Society, architects at Masonic Temple) involved in the Chimney Swift project. A second program is coming up this week.
3. Also coming up: Lehigh Valley Book Festival, sponsored by Let's Play Books, is to be held virtually beginning March 26. Opening remarks will be made by Olga Negrón. The plan is to hold this festival in person eventually.
4. Libraries have been in the news recently, in connection with the decision to stop publishing some Dr. Seuss books, because of racial insensitivity. These books are still available at BAPL, though not prominently displayed. Some patrons have asked about this. It is not clear yet whether this will continue to be considered a controversial issue. Olga Negrón noted the example of Disney's plans to include some sort of disclosure that explains similar issues in some of their older films. There has been some talk among BAPL librarians about making similar material about historical context available for the Dr. Seuss books.
5. Director Berk noted a recent staff change: Kate Racculia, marketing and development specialist, took a job at Lehigh University. A search for her replacement is underway, and this will continue as a part-time position for now.
6. Joyce Hinnefeld raised the question of vaccinations for librarians. Director Berk noted that librarians do not seem to be included with educators (in group 1B), though they probably should be. His sense is that it will be important to urge the Bethlehem Health Bureau to ensure that library staff be included with this group.

REPORTS:

1. City of Bethlehem – none
2. Bethlehem Township – none

3. Fountain Hill – Annamarie Jordan posed some questions to Director Berk regarding the Fountain Hill Books on the Hill. She noted that there have been many questions from Fountain Hill residents about progress with this library site. Also, the Borough is interested in creating a retention basin, benches, etc.--a small nature area--on the same site as Books on the Hill. Engineers involved in this project have an MS4 deadline. At Borough council meetings, it would be helpful to be able to provide more concrete information about planning and progress. Director Berk responded that delays have come from various mechanical issues, which seem to have been addressed now. This month workers should be on site to do interior work, begin delivering books, etc. He also noted that collecting and cataloging of books for Books on the Hill have begun. He said he is hesitant to give a firm timeline, but he is certain that major work will happen this month. The library will need to consult with Borough council members about the best time to open.
4. Hanover Township – none
5. Friends of the Bethlehem Area Public Library – none

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

1. Finance Committee – none
2. Governance Committee – Randi Blauth is the new head of this committee. A March 22 meeting is scheduled to discuss, and hopefully complete, the By-laws. There will be follow-up with Director Berk and the Board to consider other documents to be reviewed next.
3. Human Resources Committee – none
4. Marketing and Advocacy Committee – none
5. Strategic Planning Committee – Cathi Alloway has revised the report, which Julie Zumas will share with the Board. Alloway joined the meeting at this point with recommendations, including a quarterly review of the plan by the Board, with Director Berk reporting on what parts of the plan have been addressed. The Board can then organize reporting by Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3--and within those years, by quarter. This allows for flexibility in adjusting the timeline as needed. Alloway also recommends that at least once a year (maybe around budget time), the committee examine the plan and determine what, if anything, needs to be changed.

President Felker asked about determining what is to happen in each year, and Alloway recommends having the committee work with Director Berk on this and report back to the Board.

Cathi Alloway confirmed that she will provide all of these recommendations in writing. She also recommends that the Board approve the plan officially. This can also be valuable in responding to community complaints, and also in connection with grant/funding possibilities.

Julie Zumas will share the final report, and Board members will review for our next meeting.

President Felker and Board members expressed gratitude to Cathi Alloway for her fine work with us on the strategic plan, and wished her well in her upcoming retirement.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Members of the Board discussed the possibility of hiring a note taker to relieve Board Secretary Joyce Hinnefeld from the responsibility of taking notes during Board meetings (as secretary she would review these notes afterwards). Director Berk said the cost of doing this would not be significant (probably roughly \$30 per meeting, to be paid to a staff member). Jay Finnigan also noted the possibility of recording Zoom Board meetings, so that notes might be taken at a later date, or checked, in this way. Hinnefeld expressed a preference for NOT needing to “attend the meeting twice” in order to take notes while viewing a recording. President Felker made a motion to begin paying a note taker during Board meetings, with Hinnefeld as secretary to review these notes for meeting minutes; motion seconded by Annamarie Jordan, and the motion was approved.
2. Hanover Township Community Center satellite branch plans: Jay Finnigan noted that the community center is re-opening and so not ready to do the needed work to prepare the satellite space now, but would want this work to “happen quickly once the time comes.” Finnigan pointed to the high number of books checked out by Hanover Township residents, noting that while Bethlehem Township has twice the number of residents of Hanover Township, January withdrawals of library items were 2,193 for Hanover Township and 2,977 for Bethlehem Township.

President Felker expressed concern about ensuring that the Fountain Hill Books on the Hill project is completed first.

Randi Blauth asked Director Berk how long it took to complete plans for the Coolidge Building in Bethlehem Township, and asked Finnigan exactly how soon he is envisioning starting work on the Hanover Township site. Finnigan

responded that he was not exactly sure, but assumes this would be one to two years away.

Director Berk reported that the Coolidge Building project took around a year and a half (due to issues with flooring, etc.). Finnigan said he expects work at the Hanover Township Community Center to go much faster--maybe two months of work on the Township's part. Director Berk responded that this seems like a reasonable projection, reminding Board members that the Fountain Hill Books on the Hill project is unique, involving installing a decommissioned bus, need for electricity, etc., and of course a year-long shutdown as a result of the pandemic has also slowed progress.

President Felker noted that we will need to decide where the Hanover Township project fits in relation to the library's larger priorities. A presence within the Township might be appreciated, but how great is the need relative to other communities?

There was some further discussion about the plan that led to development of the Coolidge Building in Bethlehem Township, solicitors' involvement, etc., and President Felker concluded that further discussion is needed, and that a Hanover Township satellite project might need to be added to the strategic plan.

A motion to adjourn made by Annamarie Jordan at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Hinnefeld, Secretary

