

Library Board Minutes

July 11, 2022

Bethlehem Area Public Library

Discussion began at 6:09 P.M.

ATTENDING: City of Bethlehem – Jane Gill, Joyce Hinnefeld
Bethlehem Township – Dale Sourbeck
Fountain Hill – Will Rufe
Hanover Township – Jeff Warren

Staff – Josh Berk, Amresse Farrow, Sarah Phillips, Erin Poore
Other – Rachel Leon (City Council Liaison for City of Bethlehem),
Karley Sebia (King, Spry, Herman, Freund & Faul)

ABSENT: City of Bethlehem – Anne Felker, G. Christopher Hunt, Delia Marrero,
Emil Signes, one open seat
Bethlehem Township – Randi Blauth

A quorum was not established in order for any business to be conducted. Five Board members were present, five Board members were not able to attend, and the City of Bethlehem still needed to appoint one additional Board member.

Director Berk shared that the State of Pennsylvania increased library subsidies for the 2023 budget. There are many potential ways BAPL will be able to use those funds. Along with the “pension catch up” payments being completed this year, these additions to income will be welcome for next year's budget. He would like to look at current employee salaries and pay rates, and there are improvements to the physical plant that should be considered. The South Side Branch elevator installation remains out of reach with an estimated cost of half a million dollars. On the other side of the spreadsheet, the library endowments lost about 15% with the current stock market conditions. Those are long term investments, but must also be considered when budgeting.

Director Berk also shared how a huge number of copies of a book about the life of Allentown painter Walter Emerson Baum were donated to the library. The author also gave a \$4,000 donation and asked BAPL to find good homes for the books. We will add copies to the collections; reach out to various schools, other local libraries, and museums; and offer some copies as prizes for our patrons.

Director Berk finished by sharing that Ms. Blauth asked him for statistics about current library usage, basically wondering if library usage has returned to pre-pandemic levels. He is looking at multiple indicators and will officially present his findings in the near future. So far, Director Berk has found that the Main Library is almost back to pre-shutdown usage, the Bookmobile has fully returned to typical usage levels, and the South Side Branch numbers are down. The Coolidge location has increased usage numbers and continues to experience growth each month. These general findings began discussion about changes in

usage style at the South Side Branch. Multiple factors are contributing to that situation, including changing demographics, an increase in student housing, the closing of the Holy Infancy Church, and moving of the Boys and Girls Club.

Ms. Gill asked for an update about the proposed development to the property adjacent to the South Side Branch and trash issue with the existing building on the other side owned by a non-local landlord. Ms. Leon reported that the City Council and Historic Conservation Commission are in contact with the group proposing this new development, but do not anticipate their proposals being passed.

Ms. Farrow shared that the DEI Committee meeting is scheduled for July 22 at 1:00 PM. Dr. Hunt will host members and other interested people at Moravian University.

Board members reminded each other they do not meet during the month of August. The next board meeting is scheduled for September 12.

Ms. Hinnefeld confirmed that the Governance Committee should get started on a Social Media Policy. She and Mr. Sourbeck plan to confer with President Felker to schedule a time to meet together. There was some discussion of concerns about coordinated, subversive attacks on libraries in our country. There has not been anything so organized seen at BAPL. A common dilemma for libraries is wishing to support free speech, but not wanting to spread disinformation (for example books with false health information being requested for purchase by patrons). How can a library best manage their collection, keeping in mind patrons' interests in reading certain books and the library's role in providing access to information (preferably *accurate* information) for everyone.

Discussions ended at 6:55 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Phillips (BAPL Staff) and Joyce Hinnefeld (Vice President)