

Library Board Minutes

February 13, 2023

Bethlehem Area Public Library

Meeting conducted in a hybrid form of in-person and virtually attendance via Zoom.

President Anne Felker called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M.

ATTENDING: City of Bethlehem – Anne Felker, Jane Gill, Joyce Hinnefeld,
G. Christopher Hunt, Rachel Leon, Delia Marrero

Bethlehem Township – Randi Blauth

Fountain Hill – Will Rufe

Hanover Township – Telly Diacogiannis

Staff – Josh Berk, Amresse Farrow, Sarah Phillips, Erin Poore,
Sue Schirripa

Other – Terence Faul, Karley Biggs Sebia (King, Spry, Herman,
Freund & Faul)

ABSENT: City of Bethlehem – one open seat

Bethlehem Township – Dale Sourbeck

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR:

None

Board members received a current list of Board members.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

1. Motion to approve the January minutes was made by Ms. Gill, seconded by Ms. Hinnefeld; motion approved with Ms. Marrero and Mr. Rufe abstaining.

APPROVAL OF OPERATING FUNDS:

1. President Felker called for a motion to approve the operating funds subject to audit. Motion to approve the December operating funds, subject to audit, made by Ms. Marrero, seconded by Mr. Rufe; motion approved unanimously.

DIRECTOR'S ORAL REPORT:

1. Director Berk reported that library usage numbers are up for 2022 from the previous year, although they are still slightly lower than pre-pandemic levels. The Annual Report will flesh things out a little bit more. He answered a question about finding cloud library (e-book) data. These electronic books are included in the reports in addition to physical items borrowed.
2. Director Berk reported there continue to be major safety and security incidents, both at the Main Library and the South Side Branch. These are a

big concern for library staff as the incidents are increasing. Along with the severity, it is stressful to have continual behavior issues with patrons, many needing police support to diffuse the situation or remove the offenders.

One pattern identified is that Trinity Episcopal Church is passing out mid-day meals, but does not allow people to remain at their location to eat. This is a holdover from COVID-19 restrictions. People are looking for somewhere to eat their food indoors, which has resulted in problems at the Main Library. Director Berk is considering hiring security guards to better manage building security. Bethlehem police have increased regular patrols and pepper spray is carried by some staff members. Situations on the first floor are causing some adults to come up to the youth area searching for less disruption, which causes some additional issues.

Many Board members offered suggestions. Ms. Leon shared that grant funding through the City will be available to be applied for during March. It could be used to bring on specialized staff members with a goal of reducing tensions. Ms. Leon will share information needed to apply for these grants. Ms. Marrero recommended a supportive partnership with any staff hired who are trained to deal with defusing situations. Ms. Marrero also encouraged working with other local agencies.

Director Berk noted since incidences are occurring at multiple locations across all open hours, the library may need more than one person to help manage. Dr. Hunt posed the question of how to get library staff support sooner. Waiting for grant funds to come through, realistically any potential hires could be four to five months away. Director Berk said the City has hired social workers that come out in addition, or in place of, police officers and this has been helpful. Two potential groups mentioned for potential partnering are Bethlehem Emergency Shelter and Lehigh Valley Street Medicine. Mr. Rufe wondered if contracting with a security company would mean they follow BAPL's guidelines for expected behavior or their own training protocols. Director Berk said he hoped to sign a short-term contract with clearly defined expectations. Most companies were quoting between \$25 and \$40 an hour. He thought 25 hours a week would be a good place to start.

Director Berk said a staff development day is scheduled for April 18. Continuing education presentations for staff will be offered that day on topics related to dealing with difficult situations, helping patrons who are unhoused, and dealing compassionately and safely with individuals suffering from mental illness.

President Felker summed things up by saying that Board members all agreed patrons should continue to be treated respectfully and to please share the support of the Board with library staff.

A brief discussion followed about a specific incident at the South Side Branch. The Branch Manager is working with a school community resource officer for that situation. Board members thought it would be good to have any involved

staff prepared if they need to go to court as witnesses. Perhaps discuss with Director Berk and Assistant Director Poore before and afterwards and perhaps involve legal counsel to help understand what to expect.

NEW BUSINESS:

President Felker moved the meeting ahead for new business next, to ensure all Board members could be present.

1. Capital Campaign Update: For the first floor renovations, carpet has been ordered. More information will be shared next month after the Governance committee meets.
2. Director Berk shared news about the first floor renovation plans at the Main Library. Funds previously raised will be used, but a campaign will be needed to raise more. He thinks there is a clever design in place to eliminate blind spots. The first floor, which houses the adult collection, is due for a refresh and re-organization. Ms. Gill asked about how much more money is needed. Director Berk explained there is a \$500,000 estimated budget for this project. While there is that amount in the money market currently, he would prefer to engage donors so all the library savings are not depleted. He asked the Board to look for grant opportunities that could be utilized for this project.

COMMUNITY REPORTS:

1. City of Bethlehem – Ms. Leon reported that the BAPL should apply for grant money and will be sure to share application details. She also shared that there were potential board members being considered for the open seat.
2. Bethlehem Township – none
3. Fountain Hill – none
4. Hanover Township – Mr. Diacogiannis reported that the library kiosk at the Community Center has been out of service. He wants to look at a new option and plans to gather information to figure out the next potential plan. From conversations with patrons, he understood the kiosk was not ideal for adult borrowers. Director Berk said a temporary fix to the current machine will be covered by the service contract and he will look for a new system to replace the kiosk.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee – Dr. Hunt reported they met on January 25 and considered proposals for DEI training. They will present options at the next meeting. Director Berk and Ms. Farrow will share information ahead of time. Dr. Hunt also highlighted the library's programming for Black History Month.

2. Finance Committee – Ms. Gill reported that this committee meets on a quarterly basis and will meet before the March Board meeting.
3. Governance Committee – Ms. Hinnefeld reported that when this committee met, they were looking at the social media policy and discussing the capital campaign.
4. Human Resources Committee – Ms. Gill asked to be removed from this committee and suggested another Board member should take her place. This elicited a side discussion about compiling a list of Board members' skill sets to help build these committee groups.
5. Marketing and Advocacy Committee – Ms. Farrow reported they are working on the capital campaign, helping plan the Lehigh Valley Book Festival, and are open to new members, in addition to Mr. Diacogiannis.
6. Strategic Planning Committee – Director Berk reported he will have the quarterly report for March's meeting. There will also be a review of the checklist for the year 2022.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Director Berk shared an update regarding the Hellertown Area Library and Lower Saucon Township situation. The Hellertown Library has begun selling cards to Lower Saucon Township residents. Those purchased cards are not part of the State Library System. Therefore those cards cannot be used through the Access program to open a library card with BAPL. BAPL does not sell cards because it is not a sustainable way to fund a library long-term. Staff has been explaining this detail to Lower Saucon Township residents. Director Berk wanted to be sure Board members understood this as well.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Marrero. Vice President Hinnefeld adjourned the meeting at 7:33 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Phillips (BAPL Staff) and Randi Blauth (Secretary)