

Library Board Minutes

November 13, 2023

Bethlehem Area Public Library

Meeting conducted in a hybrid form of in-person and virtual 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,
Rachel Leon, Delia Marrero
Bethlehem Township – Randi Blauth
Hanover Township – Telly Diacogiannis

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

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

ABSENT: City of Bethlehem – Joanne Garcia, G. Christopher Hunt
Bethlehem Township – one open seat
Fountain Hill – Will Rufe

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

1. Motion to approve the October minutes was made by Ms. Hinnefeld, seconded by Mr. Diacogiannis; motion approved unanimously.

APPROVAL OF OPERATING FUNDS:

1. Ms. Marrero asked for clarification of the overall deficit of \$76,000. Director Berk explained about a delay in receiving District Funds from the State. He has met with Representative Steve Samuelson, to try to understand when the library can expect district money to actually arrive. The State Budget has been passed, but certain buckets of funding are being held up in the Pennsylvania State Senate. BAPL was expecting \$200,000 for district expenses in August. Since District Funds have not arrived, cost related lines have been highlighted on the operating funds report. He reminded Board members how BAPL is the District Center for our area and district funding makes up those parts of the library's budget. Because district money has not arrived, BAPL is currently making up the difference by borrowing from the line of credit. The Board can decide if they should continue borrowing on the line of credit or start covering district expenses from the Endowment. Ms. Marrero wondered what else was being done to make up the difference. She suggested more fundraising, grant sources, and more donor cultivation. She also questioned if the security guard added expense was still the best choice.

Director Berk disagreed, saying that he would cut expenses in other areas before removing security for library patrons and staff.

Board discussion included support for more fundraising, although this particular situation is challenging to explain. Also want to be careful not to annoy the donor base, having just held 11Fest and announced the end of the year campaign. Many on the Board were open to suggestions for how to raise larger funds in a faster time frame, but no specifics were shared. Another point made was Board members contacting legislature representatives to continue inquiring and encouraging the distribution of the funding that is overdue. Grants are typically more specific and project based, rather than helping to make up budget shortfalls. President Felker asked about the interest rate for the line of credit. Director Berk said it is currently an APR of 7%. The Board could also choose to draw from the Endowment without paying additional interest, but potential future financial earnings would be affected. The final point of discussion was a letter to be drafted for the City of Bethlehem, government and local municipalities to request the funds from the higher education organizations, noting the additional cost for BAPL to offset the overdue district money.

President Felker then called for a motion to approve the operating funds subject to audit. Motion to approve the September operating funds, subject to audit, made by Ms. Leon, seconded by Ms. Hinnefeld; motion approved unanimously.

DIRECTOR'S ORAL REPORT:

Director Berk reported there were three large and successful events recently. For the second year, BAPL hosted a community Trunk-or-Treat, the AppleFest, including apple tasting, and finally, the beloved and established 11Fest.

He noted the second session of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training was completed in September. He also highlighted a South Side Branch initiative for supporting women's health that has taken off under South Side Technician Nayeli Hance's tutelage. This initiative provides menstrual products for anyone needing them.

COMMUNITY REPORTS:

1. City of Bethlehem – Ms. Hinnefeld shared details about the AppleFest. She had high praise for Scholl Orchards as a partner. They were great with the apple tasting experience. Ms. Farrow added there was very good press coverage for the event with local coverage from WFMZ and Lehigh Valley Live.

Ms. Leon reported that she had spoken with Business Administrator Eric Evans about more funding for the library from the City. She thought there was

pushback on an increase if the term "security guard" was a designated budget line item. She explained how the language concern does not align with the City's approach to supporting mental health and the unhoused population. Director Berk firmly stated that library patron and staff safety is essential for the library. He noted how it does not make sense for BAPL to call armed police officers to deal with a crisis situation, if having an unarmed security guard on site could prevent a situation from escalating to a level needing police officers to enforce safety. He also asked if the list of incidents of police calls from the library over the past year had been shared with city officials. Ms. Leon recommended discussion at another time. President Felker asked for advice on what terminology would be accepted. Board members brainstormed potential new labels including: resource officer, staff and patron safety consultant, or safety personnel.

Ms. Farrow expressed support that library patrons and staff must first be safe during a crisis before anyone can receive mental health support. She has spoken with many officials about how to phrase grant language to support safety personnel.

2. Bethlehem Township – Ms. Blauth reported she spoke with Commissioner John Merhottein about looking for someone to replace her and Mr. Sourbeck. Mr. Merhottein does not want a conflict of interest by having another commissioner serve on the Library Board. He and President Felker have had difficulty connecting. Ms. Gill pointed out that BAPL's By-Laws leave it up to each participating municipality to decide if it is an elected official or a community member to serve on the Library Board.
3. Fountain Hill – none
4. Hanover Township – Mr. Diacogiannis had two subjects to report about. First, Hanover Township will be adding a "library space" at their community center. It is a 14' x 12' room and will function similar to a pop-up library with donated books available. He is pleased that it is a low cost initiative that includes the library providing donated books; it will be on the honor system for community patrons to return borrowed items. There will be no staff regularly, and the BAPL will provide shelving which the township will maintain. He thinks this will continue to be a good opportunity for library outreach in the Township. Solicitor Faul asked if the township will sign off on an agreement related to content provided or will the area only provide children's books.

Second, Mr. Diacogiannis met with the Township treasurer and a 5 to 7% increase has been included in the Township's budget for 2024.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee – Ms. Farrow reported on two topics. She reported training was completed with FACES International. She gave an overview of group training. Two focus groups occurred after

that, which were specifically about improvements BAPL could make going forward. She expects Tyrone Russell, from FACES International, to present to the Board at some point about a future relationship and proposal for DEI maintenance.

She also spoke with Dr. Hunt regarding more programming for Black History Month. They want to be more clear about who can, and should participate in that programming. Want to improve and provide a clearer "entry point."

Solicitor Faul asked if FACES has a stance regarding patron and staff safety. Ms. Farrow was positive that FACES wants to be sure the library staff responds to situations while being aware of potential bias for those involved.

2. Finance Committee – Ms. Gill reported that she was requested to look at statistics like the consumer price index and service area population change. She is looking at this data to compare pre-pandemic levels prior to 2019. The proposed budget released to participating municipalities will be supported by conversations with these hot topic button items. For example, crime statistics to support increased safety and security costs.
3. Governance Committee – President Felker reported no meeting was held.
4. Human Resources Committee – Ms. Marrero reported there was no meeting, but this committee is continuing the process of getting the Governance committee's opinions and additions to the 360 draft. Goal for completion is December 1.
5. Marketing and Advocacy Committee – Ms. Hinnefeld reported what good support Ms. Farrow has been providing for fundraising. Funds raised from AppleFest are still being calculated. Mr. Diacogiannis is focusing on holiday events. The next committee meeting is planned for January. Ms. Farrow added how she has been focusing on building community goodwill and increasing BAPL's social media publicity. She also announced BAPL has been awarded \$20,000 from the Laros Foundation to be used to complete the first floor renovations. Director Berk shared that an additional \$1,000 from the estate of Millicent Drake was also received. Ms. Marrero would like to build on the success of Trunk-or-Treat and add a fundraising aspect to it.
6. Strategic Planning Committee – Ms. Blauth requested a progress update for December's meeting. President Felker and Director Berk agreed that would be timely.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

1. The Proposed 2024 Meeting Dates was included with the Board material. Meetings will be held in a hybrid format; in-person at the Main Library, 11 West Church Street, or virtually on Zoom beginning at 6:00 P.M. President Felker called for a vote to approve the dates. Motion to approve the 2024 Meeting Dates was made by Ms. Hinnefeld, seconded by Ms. Gill; motion approved unanimously. The 2024 meeting dates are as follows:

January 8

February 12

March 11

April 8

May 13

June 10

July 8

AUGUST – NO MEETING

September 9

October 14

November 11

December 9

2. The Proposed Budget for 2024 was not voted on, but discussion was lengthy. Director Berk explained that the City of Bethlehem will not increase their financial support in 2024 because they were already done with the budget process when he requested the 5% to 7% increase. He plans to go back and rework the numbers to make do without additional funding for 2024. He noted that all the library's expenses are increasing. Board members were confused as to how it was too late to request more support from the City of Bethlehem. Director Berk reported he was told to make any future increase requests early in the summer. Ms. Leon said budget draft work for the City will start in June 2024 for the 2025 City Budget. She also reminded everyone about the need to change the terminology of "security guard." Similar topics from the earlier discussions at the beginning of the meeting were raised again. Since the City of Bethlehem will not support an increase, none of the participating municipalities will be asked to increase their contributions either. Director Berk gave examples of employee benefits rising by 14% even after "shopping around." The Library plans to split these additional costs with staff members to help cover the increase.

President Felker reminded Board members to donate towards the End of Year campaign. She also has plans for a more festive atmosphere at December's meeting. This will be celebrating and thanking Ms. Blauth for her service to the BAPL Board. She also noted that the end of the year will also be time to wrap up her presidency.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Blauth. President Felker adjourned the meeting at 7:46 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

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