

Library Board Minutes

October 9, 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, Joyce Hinnefeld, G. Christopher Hunt, Rachel Leon, Delia Marrero
Bethlehem Township – Randi Blauth
Fountain Hill – Will Rufe
Hanover Township – Telly Diacogiannis

Staff – Josh Berk, Julia Brennan, Amresse Farrow, Edana Hoy, Sarah Phillips, Erin Poore, Sue Schirripa, Cleveland Wall
Other – Terence Faul (King, Spry, Herman, Freund & Faul)

ABSENT: City of Bethlehem – Joanne Garcia, Jane Gill
Bethlehem Township – one open seat

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

1. Motion to approve the September minutes was made by Mr. Rufe, seconded by Ms. Blauth; motion approved unanimously.

APPROVAL OF OPERATING FUNDS:

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

DIRECTOR'S ORAL REPORT:

Director Berk highlighted a few items from his written report. This past book sale was the most successful one in recent history. South Side Branch Manager Brenda Grow's retirement celebration was held at the South Side Branch. Aside from Director Berk, other local dignitaries including Bethlehem Mayor J. William Reynolds, Pennsylvania State Representative Steve Samuelson, and City of Bethlehem's Director of Equity and Inclusion Janine Santoro bestowed honors on her and spoke glowingly of her long career. Later on, an actor portraying Harry Potter (Brenda's favorite) made an appearance to add to the celebration and wish her well in her retirement. Alison Madden has been hired as the new Branch Manager. Next Director Berk mentioned some cool October events coming up for the Library. Trunk-

or-Treat will be happening on October 24 with a rain date of October 25. This popular event features community vehicles parked around the plaza, including Tug the Tow Tractor and the Just Born Candy Peeps mobile this year. An adult program with Katherine Ramsland, a true crime author who has experience with serial killers, is scheduled on October 16.

COMMUNITY REPORTS:

1. City of Bethlehem – none
2. Bethlehem Township – No report, but President Felker asked Ms. Blauth for a contact recommendation. Ms. Blauth suggested John Gallagher. Since President Felker has not gotten a response about representation to serve after Ms. Blauth, President Felker may decide to go to a Township meeting in order to gather information.
3. Fountain Hill – Mr. Rufe reported the two-year anniversary of Books on the Hill is coming up. The Borough is onboarding a new manager with great excitement. Mr. Rufe will share her contact information with Director Berk. They are also pleased to report that the road work has been completed in the area around Books on the Hill.
4. Hanover Township – Mr. Diacogiannis reported his Township had a successful Fall Festival where BAPL had a presence. He handed out books with BAPL's Book Bike, which Director Berk brought over for the event. The book bike is still on location, bringing good attention and prompting library conversations. Upcoming, Hanover Township will have their tree lighting on the first Friday in December. Mr. Diacogiannis will be looking for more input on outreach ideas.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee – Dr. Hunt reported there will be a meeting on October 13. They plan to come up with a program suggestion regarding book banning. Ms. Farrow reported the second DEI training session went well. She reminded Board members that this time it consisted of a combination of in-person and online staff time. The third session will be self-guided and offered online. Additionally, there are some smaller group workshops planned for late October/early November.
2. Finance Committee – none
3. Governance Committee – President Felker reported on three topics discussed at their committee meeting.

First, they would like to see children's access to library resources remain available, regardless of any fine status. This committee would like funds from the apple tasting event to go towards this effort. Ms. Hinnefeld noted that the

apple tasting fundraising will be a basket raffle and asked for Board members' support at the event, and/or basket donations.

Second, the Governance committee discussed writing a specific goal with a timeline for BAPL to move towards a fine-free policy. They propose working with the Finance committee and Marketing and Advocacy committee to prepare a detailed specific plan. This prompted many questions from other Board members including:

Will switching to a fine-free business model cost BAPL more than the lost income line item from paid fines? What is a realistic estimate for replacing items never returned? Director Berk shared that he spoke with the Easton Area Public Library. They are pleased with how positive their experience has turned out. He explained that if items are not returned after some designated point, that patron's account is "locked" until those items are returned, or the patron has paid for replacement of any lost items.

Third, Director Berk requested an updated Room Use Policy. With recent events at the nearby Nazareth library resulting in protests and misunderstanding/misleading support for a controversial group, he asked if BAPL can limit use of its library spaces in certain cases such as when a group's or event's ideology is counter to the goals of the library. Board member discussion included clearly advertising all events hosted by outside groups as not BAPL-sponsored events. The Board also asked for Solicitor Faul's opinion. He will look into it further, but noted that a public library probably cannot limit public discourse even in cases of groups advocating harmful agendas. Any policy limiting access to the library would need to focus on safety concerns, perhaps, but those are legally tricky definitions. Mr. Faul asked if there is a limit for the number of people in the building. Director Berk said that is already in place and the number is set by fire code. Board members want to be proactive but also realized that any anti-book banning programs could also bring more attention to the Library from groups who wish to advocate censorship.

4. Human Resources Committee – Ms. Marrero reported that the Executive Director's 360 assessment is complete. Next the Human Resources committee plans to share it with the Governance committee to get another viewpoint. She detailed areas that the 360 assessment has looked at. They will be requesting feedback returned within two weeks and expect the evaluation to be done for the new year.
5. Marketing and Advocacy Committee – Ms. Hinnefeld reported on planning for the Apple Tasting/AppleFest taking place on November 10 from 4 to 6 P.M. Mr. Rufe inquired if there is need for apple slicers or other food prep support. Discussion also circled back to the basket raffle fundraising. Perhaps BAPL will be able to sell raffle tickets at the Trunk-or-Treat.
6. Strategic Planning Committee – none

OLD BUSINESS:

Director Berk began the 2024 Budget discussion with a presentation. He proposes requesting an increase of 5% to 7% per capita from the City of Bethlehem and participating municipalities. His presentation included an update on the financial status thus far for 2023. All expenses are on track as expected for the year but projections show a need for additional funds next year. The last per capita increased the amount to \$18.89 in 2018. The proposed increase request for 2024, calculates between \$19.83 to \$20.21 for 2024. His presentation showed how BAPL expenses have increased in areas such as employee benefits, computers/IT, and building maintenance costs. Additionally \$50,000 has been added to cover security on the library premises. President Felker recommends Board representatives share this budget proposal with their municipalities respectively.

Board discussion focused around talking points to share with their municipalities; for example, when library staff received raises of 2% compared to a higher cost of living. Additionally, Board members requested some statistics regarding the number of police calls needed at library locations over the past few years, to help understand the \$50,000 increase addition for security. More board discussion occurred around potentially reducing the need for this amount of security, but nothing that would be able to be put in place with satisfactory results in a timely fashion. Director Berk foresees on-site security being needed from this point on for public libraries as large as BAPL. Most grants are usually focused on community improvement measures as opposed to managing a crisis situation. Grants received will help cover community-facing services, such as support groups and a part-time social worker on site. Mr. Rufe offered to create a talking point list to share with other Board representatives for each municipality. Ms. Marrero asked if a compensation review for BAPL staff had been done recently. Since the library has not done one, she noted that this could be helpful when creating future budgets. Ms. Leon offered up a gentle reminder to municipalities that BAPL is more than simply books. Especially with colder weather months approaching, the Library has become a resource for daytime sheltering. Mr. Rufe added that many people in the community still need computer access. While that number continues to decline, computer and internet access is essential for those that do not have it from home or otherwise. The Bethlehem Area Public Library fills that need for the City and all the participating municipalities.

NEW BUSINESS:

None

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Leon. President Felker adjourned the meeting at 7:34 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

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