

## **Library Board Minutes**

September 11, 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 6:03 P.M.

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

Bethlehem Township – Randi Blauth

Fountain Hill – Will Rufe

Hanover Township – Telly Diacogiannis

Staff – Josh Berk, Amresse Farrow, Sonya Hennes, Edana Hoy,  
Sarah Phillips, Erin Poore, Sue Schirripa

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

ABSENT: City of Bethlehem – Joanne Garcia, Rachel Leon

Bethlehem Township – one open seat

### **COURTESY OF THE FLOOR:**

None

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

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

### **APPROVAL OF OPERATING FUNDS:**

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

### **DIRECTOR'S ORAL REPORT:**

Director Berk reported on a positive trend of library attendance; the numbers continue to rise. Summer programming was also very successful. Next, he highlighted Brenda Grow's impending retirement from BAPL on September 28. She has been with the library for 44 years. Ms. Gill did some research and shared that Ms. Grow started with the library as a shelver. Ms. Grow moved on to other positions including work in Circulation, Reference, and the Bookmobile before her role as the manager of the South Side Branch. There

is a party planned for September 28 at the South Side Branch. Interviews for the next branch manager are in process and an announcement will be made soon.

### **COMMUNITY REPORTS:**

1. City of Bethlehem – There was a discussion of board terms that are coming to an end at the end of the year. President Felker noted that the current members are all open to being reappointed and no changes are expected.
2. Bethlehem Township – Ms. Blauth reported that a Bethlehem Township volunteer, Susan McNamara, offered to serve on the Human Resources Committee, but has not yet been invited to a meeting. Ms. Marrero reminded everyone of the Board decision not to have community members serve on the Human Resources Committee in order to ensure privacy of staff information. President Felker wondered if Ms. McNamara would serve as a Board representative instead. Ms. Blauth and Ms. Felker plan to reach out to Ms. McNamara and the Township respectively. Ms. Blauth shared that it is not her intention to accept re-appointment next year.
3. Fountain Hill – Mr. Rufe reported that the Borough is in process of hiring a new Borough Manager. He shared that library support was definitely part of the conversation for interviewing candidates.
4. Hanover Township – Mr. Diacogiannis reported that he had a good meeting with the Head of Outreach Regina Kochmaruk and township officials. He is encouraged by many of the ideas discussed. Hanover Township is having a fall festival on October 7. He is planning on having the book bike there for outreach that day. He also requested that the board minutes be posted on the BAPL website once they are approved. President Felker added that there probably will not be a replacement library vending machine at the Township building after all. Ms. Kochmaruk is looking at the space to understand what might work there instead. The Board may need to make a decision once potential proposed plans are solidified further.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee – Dr. Hunt reported that their next meeting will be held in October. He also thanked everyone involved for getting DEI training started for library staff. Ms. Farrow added that the training is going well. Many staff members were able to attend the first session. The second part of the training includes an online component, followed by an in-person session. The third session will consist of more online work.
2. Finance Committee – Ms. Gill started a discussion about removing overdue fines for youth patrons. She worked with the Head of Acquisitions, Library Systems, and Technology Dan Solove to gather statistics for all BAPL

locations. Many ideas were discussed and brainstormed for how to approach and manage details including:

- A- Offer a “Fine Forgiveness” week? What about children and families that do not see the message?
- B- How to handle items that are not returned at all? Presently the replacement charge is added to a patron’s amount due.
- C- Could stop charging overdue fines for all patrons, for youth and adult cards. Currently, \$45,000 is the budgeted amount for fine income. Would also need to add an amount to the budget for replacing items not returned.
- D- What has Easton Area Public Library’s experience been, since they changed to fine free over a year ago? Are there other local libraries to talk to?

The Board decided to table this discussion until next month.

- 3. Governance Committee – none
- 4. Human Resources Committee – Ms. Marrero reported that work continues on Director Berk’s review.
- 5. Marketing and Advocacy Committee – Ms. Hinnefeld reported that Ms. Kochmaruk has been added to this committee. The Apple Tasting event is scheduled for Friday, November 10, from 4-6 P.M. This event will be free to the public with potential for a raffle to raise funds. There are many other partners joining to promote the community. Planning will continue around the theme of “10”, taking inspiration from 11Fest, which will be the following day. Ms. Hinnefeld hopes other Board members will be in attendance that weekend. A question about signage for allergens was raised. Attorney Sebia offered to help craft that verbiage.

Ms. Farrow added an update on the summer’s marketing activities, which included attendance at a Pride event and “Walla Gazoo” (a Chamber of Commerce golf tournament). She also reported on mini monthly videos called “Meet the Merchant” for a new promotion. Ms. Hoy answered a question about plans for Hispanic Heritage month. She shared there is a book display planned along with supportive programming in October.

- 6. Strategic Planning Committee – none

**OLD BUSINESS:**

None

**NEW BUSINESS:**

- 1. Director Berk began the preliminary discussion for the 2024 Budget. He reminded everyone that BAPL has not asked to increase funding requests in

four years. He would like to ask for an increase this year, and asked Board representatives to begin talks with their respective municipalities. Topics to point out included comparing library staff raises over the last four years compared to the cost of living increase over those last four years, which is at nearly 20%. The Finance Committee will help gather data points.

Ms. Blauth explained her township will be looking at ongoing and future fundraising efforts by the library in addition to considering giving more to the library. While other municipality representatives agreed, it was also noted that supporting a library displays a township's commitment to its community. Director Berk explained, he prefers to fundraise for special projects as it is difficult to budget based on "hoped for" money to cover fixed costs like salaries. Ms. Poore voiced her agreement and added how reliable income is important for consistent staffing to remain in place. Other Board members encouraged everyone to be confident when asking for funding and to remind officials everything that BAPL does for their constituents. The library gives and offers so much more than the monetary amount citizens are contributing. To help show the value, it was calculated that BAPL services cost \$1.70 per person per month. Another idea was adding a corporate acknowledgment that would be seen more than a plaque on the wall. For example, a book plate for larger donations, similar to the Buy-A-Book campaign. Director Berk said they should be telling municipalities by next month what the requested increase amount will be. He noted that the City of Bethlehem usually agrees to a 2% increase, but the library may need to ask for more than that this year.

2. Director Berk shared that there had been some complaints from patrons about the BAPL grounds around the library. Some presumably unhoused people have begun camping in the area of City Hall and the Tea Garden, often sitting right outside the library entrance doors during the day. Other patrons shared that they felt too uncomfortable trying to walk past a group of people lounging on the walkway to enter the library itself. He wanted the board to understand the situation as we head into cooler weather seasons. The library may need to add additional security so all patrons have access to the library.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Blauth. President Felker adjourned the meeting at 7:39 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

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