

Library Board Minutes

December 9, 2024

Bethlehem Area Public Library

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

Vice President Joyce Hinnefeld called the meeting to order at 6:06 P.M.

ATTENDING: City of Bethlehem – Anne Felker, Nicole Gencarelli, Joyce Hinnefeld, Rachel Leon

Bethlehem Township – Carolyn Harper, Peggy Salvatore

Hanover Township – Telly Diacogiannis

Staff – Josh Berk, Lauri Miller, Sarah Phillips, Erin Poore, Sue Schirripa

Other – Alison Diefenderfer (Bethlehem Township alternate),

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

ABSENT: City of Bethlehem – G. Christopher Hunt, Delia Marrero, one open seat
Fountain Hill – Will Rufe

BOARD MEMBER VACANCY:

Jane Gill was thanked for her many years of library board service. Further discussion of open board seats would occur during New Business.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

1. Motion to approve the October minutes was made by Ms. Salvatore, seconded by Ms. Felker; motion approved unanimously.

APPROVAL OF OPERATING FUNDS:

1. Ms. Harper asked for further explanation of a 176% increase for postage expenses. Director Josh Berk explained that Interlibrary Loans (ILL) are a District-reimbursed expenses and the billing process has changed. Many ILLs were formerly handled by a courier service, but rising costs for that service resulted in a change so that these items are now mailed. Although the postage costs have increased, no longer using that courier service results in no significant change to the overall budget.

After board discussion, Vice President Hinnefeld called for a motion to approve the September operating funds subject to audit. Motion to approve the September operating funds, subject to audit, made by Ms. Felker, seconded by Ms. Salvatore; motion approved unanimously.

2. Vice President Hinnefeld called for a motion to approve the October operating funds subject to audit. Motion to approve the October operating funds, subject to audit, made by Ms. Felker, seconded by Ms. Salvatore; motion approved unanimously.

DIRECTOR'S ORAL REPORT:

Director Berk reported that the South Side Branch recently had some closed days in recent months, due to staffing shortages. Thus the numbers reported for the Branch would be lower for that reason. Overall, BAPL's reported numbers are similar to those in 2023 with increases seen at the Main Library and Bethlehem Township's Coolidge location.

He also reported that the hiring situation has improved. There is still an open position, but interviews are currently ongoing.

Director Berk's next topic was how the new bookmobile has been out in the community on its regular rounds. Plan to wait for the outside art and logo application before having an official launch and "grand opening." Zachariah OHora, the author and illustrator who also created the art for Fountain Hill's Books on the Hill, will create art for the exterior of the new bookmobile. Mr. OHora has a new show on PBS called *CARL THE COLLECTOR*. Because of this show connection, the local PBS station (PBS39) will help with the bookmobile launch and support with promotions. Hopefully a Carl character visit will be possible for that event. Director Berk plans a social media tie-in leading up to the big launch. Ms. Harper requested a special visit from the bookmobile at the beginning of their summer camp time for Bethlehem Township. Ms. Salvatore asked for clarification on insurance for employees driving the bookmobile. Board members learned that any employee driving the bookmobile will be covered under BAPL's policy. Another benefit of this new bookmobile is that it is easier to drive than the old one. Employees do not require a special license to operate.

He happily shared that everyone should have received the Annual Appeal letter. Coincidentally, after Ms. Hinnefeld's idea of asking a patron to write the letter, a patron named Catherine Hildenberger posted on social media about getting her first library card at age 4. Director Berk used this story in the appeal letter. Inspired by her story, Board members discussed many promotional ideas, including local college projects and fun interactions with social media posts.

COMMUNITY REPORTS:

1. City of Bethlehem – Ms. Leon reported that the City budget was expected to be passed. She also shared that there is a list of names for potential new board members to serve on the Library Board for the City.

2. Bethlehem Township – Ms. Salvatore reported that the Township's budget meeting was scheduled for the following Monday and the increase for Library funding is included. Ms. Harper added a thank you to Mr. Diacogiannis for his consultation and time shared with her and Ms. Salvatore. They both found it valuable to share ideas between the townships for the promotion of BAPL. They also plan to visit the Coolidge location and will add a promotional paragraph to the Township's newsletter, *The Observer*. The Head of Outreach Regina Kochmaruk's capabilities were highly complimented.
3. Fountain Hill – none
4. Hanover Township – Mr. Diacogiannis reviewed his efforts to help promote the library over the past year. He plans to continue these efforts in the new year. He also shared that the work towards opening a Township Building borrowing area stocked from BAPL continues.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee – No report. Director Berk shared that the scheduled meeting had been cancelled. Ms. Harper asked about the inclusion roundtable from November hosted at BAPL. Director Berk explained this was a gathering organized by BAPL reference librarians and other library professionals in the Lehigh Valley.
2. Finance Committee – No report.
3. Governance Committee – Ms. Felker reported on three highlights from their meeting. First, they recommend adopting the language proposed for an amendment to clarify an alternate representative from participating municipalities. January's agenda should have a motion regarding the new language to govern the roles and responsibilities of alternate library board members.

Second, they are working on a board attendance policy in order to have more meetings with a full quorum to ensure monthly business can be accomplished.

And finally, they are working on a draft for employee education reimbursement towards a master's degree in Library Science. It will possibly be retroactive since many employees are already working towards their degrees. Director Berk noted this would be covered with donation/donor funding and would not be a budget line item.

4. Human Resources Committee – No report, but Vice President Hinnefeld shared that she had spoken to Ms. Marrero. Ms. Marrero will share the director evaluation she was working on, as compiled so far. Ms. Marrero will also be done serving on the Library Board. In 2025, this committee will need another Board member for leadership.

5. Marketing and Advocacy Committee – Mr. Diacogiannis shared potential new plans for the new year with guidance from Director Berk. He also foresees continuing a business relationship with the Bethlehem Co-Op.
6. Strategic Planning Committee – Director Berk shared that the current plan only covers through the end of 2024, but there are options for how to proceed. The current plan was set up for three years and written so that it could be completed after that time or extended with updates. Board members asked how the plan was created. Director Berk mentioned there is no official guidance from the State of Pennsylvania Office of Commonwealth Libraries (the OCL) mostly because there is such diversity in types and sizes of libraries throughout the state. It is difficult to have an effective way for standards that can apply equally well to all libraries. He mentioned the Philadelphia Free Library as a huge library example compared to very small libraries such as Slatington and Hellertown, which may only have one full-time librarian. He suggested working again with Cathi Alloway, who was the consultant who helped create the current plan. Board discussions centered around requesting that she assist again and probably revising or writing for a potential five-year plan. The current plan was shorter than typical, due to uncertainty from the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. There was also discussion about helping with board cohesion and an annual board retreat that could help with team building.

OLD BUSINESS:

Discussion for the 2025 Library Budget began with Board inquiries about the rental of meeting rooms. Is this an area that makes money? Director Berk said it is, especially with the Laros and Cohen Rooms. The smaller “huddle” rooms on the main floor are free for patron use, but not as separate from library daily activity. There has been growth in the room bookings; perhaps the online reservation system has added to the ease of use for the community. Other local rented spaces may have a higher charge or not be available any longer. Director Berk also shared that many ArtsQuest classes will be held at BAPL locations while the Banana Factory is being demolished and rebuilt. Since we are community partners with ArtsQuest, there will not be a charge, but there will be incidental value for the Library. For example, there will be additional foot traffic with parents bringing students and waiting for them during class.

The next question was why non-governmental income sources are not being increased. Director Berk noted that he did not expect to make as much as they had in 2024. He also reminded Board members how he does not rely on fundraising dollars when creating a budget. However, special projects are and would be covered through fundraising.

The next question was about regularly reviewing IT pricing before renewing any contracts. Director Berk explained that the Head of Acquisitions, Library

Systems, and Technology Dan Solove, along with IT Specialist Andrew Krebs, manage this area. He is confident in their abilities and how they shop around for what best fits with BAPL's needs. Around mid-year they meet with Director Berk and come to agreement for the following year's plan. Director Berk added a budget cushion to cover expected increases.

The City of Bethlehem and participating municipalities budgets' are expected to pass with increased library funding included. Director Berk is cautiously optimistic for 2025.

Motion to approve the 2025 Budget was made by Ms. Felker, seconded by Ms. Salvatore; motion approved unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

Board reorganization discussion began with noting there will be three open seats for the City of Bethlehem at the beginning of 2025. Ms. Leon mentioned how the City's library liaison does not need to be a city council member, but it has been previously valuable for both groups. Ms. Leon has a conflicting meeting at the same time as Library Board meetings each month and will not serve on the Library Board in 2025. Ms. Marrero and Ms. Gill have both decided to step away from Library Board responsibilities.

A person from the City of Bethlehem interested in library board service should send a letter of interest to the City Council President along with their résumé. Copying Director Berk would be appreciated also.

Discussion for a nominating committee resulted in Ms. Felker and Mr. Rufe working together. Ms. Hinnefeld will resume her position as president. If Mr. Rufe continues as treasurer, there will need to be another vice president and a secretary nominated. Ms. Felker will contact Mr. Rufe to complete this task before January's reorganization meeting. Board members also expect committee appointments to occur in January.

The Proposed 2025 Meeting Dates were distributed to Board members in November. The 2025 meeting dates are as follows:

January 13

February 10

March 10

April 14

May 12

June 9

July 14

AUGUST – NO MEETING

September 8

October 13

November 10

December 8

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Salvatore. Vice President Hinnefeld adjourned the meeting at 7:26 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Phillips (BAPL Staff) and Delia Marrero (Secretary)