

Library Board Minutes

June 10 2024

Bethlehem Area Public Library

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

President Jane Gill called the meeting discussion at 6:13 P.M.

ATTENDING: City of Bethlehem – Anne Felker, Jane Gill, Joyce Hinnefeld
Bethlehem Township – Peggy Salvatore
Hanover Township – Telly Diacogiannis

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

Other – Alison Diefenderfer (Bethlehem Township alternate),
Terence Faul (King, Spry, Herman, Freund & Faul)

ABSENT: City of Bethlehem – Joanne Garcia, G. Christopher Hunt, Rachel
Leon, Delia Marrero
Bethlehem Township – Carolyn Harper
Fountain Hill – Will Rufe

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR:

1. Mr. Diacogiannis asked if there is a summer library intern program in place? Director Berk explained there is an informal relationship with area colleges for credit-earning internships during the school year. Interns are not typically available during the summer, but high school students do volunteer over the break from school.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

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

APPROVAL OF OPERATING FUNDS:

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

DIRECTOR'S ORAL REPORT:

Director Berk reported that fun was had by all at Spike the library lizard's birthday celebration. The Summer Reading Program has begun with over 100 kids signed up to participate on the first weekend.

Other reporting numbers continue to be skewed when compared to 2023 because of the remodeling of the Main Library last year.

The South Side Branch has been harder to get to, due to UGI digging up roads in that area of Bethlehem. Drainage issues at that location have been better recently. Director Berk and library custodians will continue to monitor and manage that situation as needed. There is not an estimated cost to correct that drainage problem, without details for a solution.

Director Berk finished by sharing that the 2023 Annual Report is completed. It has been emailed to Board members, participating Townships, and posted on the BAPL website. Limited print copies are available for Board representatives needing a paper copy for their Townships. Board members were very pleased with how the report turned out.

COMMUNITY REPORTS:

1. City of Bethlehem – No report. It was noted there has not yet been another person appointed to replace Ms. Garcia.
2. Bethlehem Township – Ms. Salvatore reported that the Coolidge location continues to be busy. She is interested in information to share with the Township for financial planning. She also thanked everyone who shared library information to help bring her, Ms. Harper, and Ms. Diefenderfer up to speed.
3. Fountain Hill – none
4. Hanover Township – Mr. Diacogiannis reported that the new Township pool officially opened last Saturday with a grand opening. He thanked the Library for all the help, especially for having the Book Bike there. He noted there was a flier for Summer Reading in each book given out. There was a donation from JAF Comics and the raffles were popular that day. He also shared that he now has a connection for a potential volunteering service by the Hanover Township Girl Scouts. He may do another pop-up or something else to promote summer reading at their pool next summer too.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee – none
2. Finance Committee – President Gill noted the 2025 budget would be discussed during new business.

3. Governance Committee – There was discussion of the rights and responsibilities of alternates who have been appointed to the Board by their municipalities. Solicitor Faul suggested that the Governance Committee look into this question and perhaps amend the Library By-Laws to address this question.
4. Human Resources Committee – none
5. Marketing and Advocacy Committee – Ms. Farrow reported on fundraising efforts continuing for a new Bookmobile. Potential sponsors have been contacted including Lehigh Valley Hospital Network, who may offer a donation in return for their children's hospital logo being placed on the new vehicle. Community outreach and social media events are on-going to call attention to the fundraising campaign; it was covered recently by WFMZ and *The Morning Call*. Mr. Diacogiannis added a suggestion to connect with the Food Co-Op, opening soon in Bethlehem. He will reach out to see what he can learn about a projected opening date.
6. Strategic Planning Committee – none

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Preliminary 2025 Budget Discussion.

Director Berk began discussion noting that budget numbers for 2023 and 2024 were the same, since there was not a per capita funding increase. However, costs have continued to rise and the library would like to increase staff salaries by 2%. He pointed out how a 2% increase is a relatively small amount and it is still less than the current 3% inflation rate. Director Berk is requesting the Board to come up with a funding percentage increase to request from the City of Bethlehem.

Board comments and discussion points were as follows:

Considering that the request of 4-6% in 2023 was not given, a request for a 7-8% increase is reasonable. Increased costs were still managed in 2023 without increased funding.

Board members would like a compilation of data from the last 10 years. Data including a history of increase requests and actual increases in funding, along with associated materials' costs and staffing costs for those years.

Are there numbers on staff retention available? Especially relating to employees leaving when finding higher salaries elsewhere? Director Berk noted some positions are required by the State of Pennsylvania to be filled by a person with a Master's Degree in Library Science, including the Head of Youth Services. This position is currently open and is not attracting many candidates due to the degree requirement and low starting salary.

How do BAPL salaries compare to other area libraries?

Director Berk noted that trimming collection costs and staff salaries are the only areas of discretionary spending available to him to make budget numbers work without an increase in funding.

Board members will lobby their municipalities with these above mentioned talking points.

Some mentioned how their other township costs will probably be rising too. Although difficult, they will need to balance the Library's ask for an increase in a way that continues the good relationship.

Board members encouraged Director Berk to speak officially with the City of Bethlehem as soon as possible. They agreed that a 7% to 8% funding increase would allow for a decent working budget in 2025. Ms. Felker will accompany Director Berk to speak with the City. He will work on compiling numbers to help make the case for the funding increase.

Mr. Diacogiannis shared how Hanover Township plans for a percentage increase every year.

Solicitor Faul reminded Board members that the City of Bethlehem determines what the percentage per capita increase will be, and they do not officially approve their budget until December. The timing may be circular, but this is how the agreements are structured with participating municipalities.

Mr. Diacogiannis shared that he had feedback from Hanover residents that they would have liked to have seen publicity about Bethlehem not agreeing to a funding increase for BAPL in 2023.

Multiple Board members commented it would be good to have articles in the newspaper about the value of the library in the community. Perhaps a regular press packet with library updates could encourage even more local media coverage.

Director Berk shared a lobbying request from the Pennsylvania Library Association (PaLA) to restore state funding of public libraries back to the percentage levels of 2001. The request is for a 4% increase in the public library subsidy, which would benefit BAPL and all state-aided libraries in the state.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Hinnefeld. President Gill adjourned the meeting at 7:09 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

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