

FINAL  
Bloomfield Public Library  
Board of Trustees  
Conference Remote Meeting  
<https://youtu.be/npzM3GIQWC0>  
June 14, 2022

**Attendance:** Elizabeth Lane (*Library Director*), Ava Biffer (*Chairperson*), Leah Farrell (*Vice-Chairperson*), Patrick DeLorenzo, Beverlee Merritt, Maxine Ursery, Penny Pearson (*Friends of the Library Representative*), Christopher Siloac (*Library Staff*)

**Absent:** Todd Cooper

Quorum present? Yes, 5 of 6

A. Biffer called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

*Roll Call* – A. Biffer performed roll call and noted the absence of T. Cooper.

*Report from the Friends of the Bloomfield Public Libraries*

**Book Sale** – The Friends’ book sale was very successful, with over \$4000 earned for the first time since 2010. P. Pearson thanked E. Lane and Allison Wilkos for helping the Friends visualize what a book sale on the floor of the library could become. Both the volunteers and the public enjoyed this year’s sale. A. Biffer thanked the Friends for the essential work they do on behalf of the library.

*Chairperson’s Report*

**Community Partnerships** – A. Biffer spoke of the need to continually recognize all that the staff is doing during this difficult period of transition. She described the crucial work that Youth Librarians Heidi Sacchitella and Nicole Dolat are doing to build community partnerships, for example, with Bloomfield schools and the University of Hartford. A. Biffer pointed out that Bloomfield schools are not staffed with certified librarians

*Director’s Report*

**Friends’ Book Sale** – E. Lane thanked the Friends for their successful book sale and noted how fun it was to have the sale on the main floor of the library, intertwined with library staff and services.

**Summer Reading** – Summer reading, which is open to all ages and fully funded by the Friends, has officially started. Anyone who signs up will receive a magnetic flashlight that helps highlight the building project. Summer reading runs through August 12.

**Juneteenth Celebration** – The town’s Juneteenth celebration starts on Friday, 6/18. The library is participating in a number of ways, such as forming a BPL Jeopardy team, having library staff march in the parade, and hosting an all-ages outdoor concert at McMahon Wintonbury, with the band Alike Hope & the Ray of Hope Project.

**Pride Month** – The library will celebrate Pride month in a number of ways, such as pride flags, stickers on the doors, and library programming.

**New Computer Tables and Exterior Tables at McMahon** – E. Lane thanked the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for funding new exterior tables purchased for McMahon Wintonbury, as well as the Connecticut State Library, through the ARPA funds program, for funding new computer tables at McMahon. The new computer tables have allowed the library to safely add more public computers.

**Parking Lot Dispute** – A verbal altercation recently took place in the Prosser parking lot, between the library's neighbor, Robert Schwartz, and the delivery driver who empties the clothing donation bin. The incident was referred to the chief of police and town manager.

**Increased Usage** – Both libraries are seeing increased usage, including in strategic plan benchmarks. 1,300 library cards have been added since COVID-19 began, with 76 cards added in May. 1,519 people attended a program in April, and there were 67,000 minutes of computer use between the two locations. This usage also speaks to the amount of staff time involved in assisting patrons on the computers, a key component in addressing the digital divide.

**ARPA Survey** – E. Lane encouraged everyone to fill out the town's ARPA funds community survey and recommend how those funds should be spent.

**Free Summer Meals** – There will be free summer meals available to all at McMahon. Meals are served Monday through Friday, between 11:30 AM and 12:30 PM.

**All CT Reads** – BPL has partnered with Cora J. Belden Library in Rocky Hill for a book discussion of *This Town Sleeps* by Dennis Staples. This discussion is part of the All CT Reads statewide program, and also ties into Pride month.

**Playaway Launchpads** – The library has added Playaway Launchpads to the collection, which are mini-tablets preloaded with educational games for children. They are ad-free, curated by subject experts, focused on early literacy, and could help parents during the summer slide.

*Old Business* – There was no old business to discuss.

#### *New Business*

**Building Project Costs, Issues, and Potential Delays** – E. Lane explained that the building project is now estimated to be over budget, due to inflation related to COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, and supply chain issues. Elizabeth said that the numbers keep changing, and that she does not feel like she has been kept in the loop. The building committee has chosen to pursue about \$5 million in cuts to the project, including a \$1.4 million cut that will reduce the size of the Prosser Library building by 10%. She stressed that the size of Prosser at referendum was already small and was barely adequate, and that she wanted to go on the record to say that the library is too small. Main libraries for communities of this size tend to be between 35,000 and 40,000 square feet. The proposed cut will make the new Prosser far too small and less efficient, including a community room that is barely bigger than the current room. She said she believes in spending money responsibly by building a library capable of serving the public for decades to come.

Elizabeth expressed concern about the economic diversity of the committee, and that those who will need the library do not have a seat at the table. She wants the cuts presented in a more organized way, including the scope of impact on the project. When she speaks tomorrow night at the building committee meeting, she wants to be able to say that she has the full support of the library board.

Ava Biffer echoed many of Elizabeth's points, including the fact that the library and library board have not been fully informed. She also spoke about the depth of cuts to Prosser's size earlier in the process, so that any further cuts will create an inadequate facility. She said the first order of business is to vote to open discussion on formally supporting Elizabeth. **MOTION by P. DeLorenzo to allow discussion of library board support of Elizabeth**; seconded by B. Merritt. Discussion added.

Ava stressed that Elizabeth is the voice of the library and its leader in the community. P. DeLorenzo expressed his complete support for Elizabeth and spoke about the importance of building for growth and towards residents' needs, the lack of professional librarians in Bloomfield schools, and the need to explore additional funding options. He said square footage cuts should be off the table. M. Ursery expressed her full support for Elizabeth and said the library needs to be given a stronger voice in shaping this process, and proposed that the library develop a series of questions about possible funding sources. Maxine said there is a clear misunderstanding about what communication means. Decisions are being made and shared with the library instead of being shaped by the library.

B. Merritt likewise expressed her support and stressed that she always felt the proposed Prosser building wasn't big enough, and said that pursuing additional funding seems to be the best option. She also thought it unfortunate that non-voting members are expected to do so much crucial work, while not being included fully in the decision-making process. A. Biffer spoke about potential funding, and said that once the bonding language in the referendum was finally shared, it became clear that additional funding could be pursued if certain rules and procedures were followed. She expressed frustration with the lack of communication on this issue, as well as with the delay in communication, which has made it more difficult to explore the many federal and state funding opportunities that are out there. She encouraged board members to show up at the Library Building Committee meeting on Wednesday and speak on the library's behalf.

E. Lane said that the library board and library staff have different goals than the building committee chair, whose primary focus is bringing the project in on budget and on time. The money issues should have been shared more widely instantly. Elizabeth said that she will push for more clarity at building committee meetings, since many things are being presented in a way that is difficult for non-experts to understand. A. Biffer stressed the importance of more voices at the table when it comes to problem solving. She said now that the bonding attorney has weighed in, additional funds can be pursued. B. Merritt emphasized that this project is a marathon not a race, and it needs to be done properly. She said she cannot attend the next building committee meeting, but she will reach out to committee members ahead of time with her views.

E. Lane said that the proposed cuts do sacrifice functionality, programming, and aesthetics, contrary to what the chair of the building committee has stated publicly. A. Biffer reiterated that Elizabeth has the library board's full support.

**Emergency Preparedness for Active Shooter Situations** – Libraries have recently been the target of disruption and attacks, and as incidents increase, A. Biffer has concerns about staff and patron safety. There is a lack of panic buttons, sightlines, and fire suppression systems. A. Biffer said she wanted to start a conversation about providing reliable and fast ways to call for help. She recommended that E. Lane reach out to the police chief and identify safety needs. P. DeLorenzo said Elizabeth should reach out to the town manager's office and public safety about what preparedness plans are already in place. C. Siloac noted that there was an emergency preparedness plan put in place within the last decade that staff participated in, but that it seems to have stalled, likely due to COVID-19. A. Biffer stressed the importance of training and quick reference. M. Ursery asked about current drills. E. Lane said the library participates in fire drills, which are initiated by facilities.

**Letter of Intent McMahon Wintonbury Grant** - P. DeLorenzo asked about the letter of intent for the state construction grant for the McMahon Wintonbury Library, which was mentioned in the May minutes. The board discussed the fact that the timeline could change, making the McMahon grant more feasible, so it would be best to submit the letter by the June 30 deadline and leave the option open. **MOTION by B. Merritt to authorize E. Lane to submit the letter of intent for the Connecticut State Library**

**construction grant for the McMahon Wintonbury project;** seconded by P. DeLorenzo and passed unanimously.

*Approval of the Minutes*

**MOTION by L. Farrell to accept the minutes of the May 10, 2022 meeting as presented;** seconded by P. DeLorenzo and passed, with B. Merritt abstaining.

*Public Comments* – There were no public comments.

*Board Comments*

**Cooling Centers** – P. DeLorenzo asked if the libraries are designated as cooling centers on hot days. E. Lane said that the libraries are not officially cooling centers, but that they operate as cooling centers by providing a cool space with water. The public is made aware of the library as a cool place on social media, BATV, and through town hall alerts.

**New Libraries Coming Signs** – P. DeLorenzo remarked positively on the new signs around town trumpeting the fact that new libraries are coming. These signs raise awareness.

**Library Building Committee** – P. DeLorenzo said he shares E. Lane’s concerns about the Library Building Committee and hopes the board can have an impact on ensuring the project is done right. Patrick will attend the next building committee meeting and speak.

**MOTION by B. Merritt to adjourn the meeting at 7:36 PM;** seconded by M. Ursery and approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Siloac  
Technology & Administrative Coordinator