

FINAL
Bloomfield Public Library
Board of Trustees
Conference Remote Meeting
<https://youtube.com/live/IUsyBwh2LDc?feature=share>
August 8, 2023

Attendance: Elizabeth Lane (*Library Director*), Ava Biffer (*Chairperson*), Leah Farrell (*Vice-Chairperson*), Todd Cooper, Patrick DeLorenzo, Beverlee Merritt, Penny Pearson (*Friends of the Library Representative*), Christopher Siloac (*Assistant Director*), Allison Wilkos (*Assistant Director*)

Absent: Maxine Ursery

Quorum present? Yes, 5 of 6

A. Biffer called the meeting to order at 6:12 PM

Roll Call – T. Cooper and M. Ursery were not present at roll call, but T. Cooper joined the meeting afterwards.

Citizens' Statements and Petitions – There were no public comments.

Report from the Friends of the Bloomfield Public Libraries

Friends Update – P. Pearson noted that summer reading is coming to an end, and that there was good participation this year. A. Biffer thanked the Friends for funding the Load Your Tote bags.

Chairperson's Report

Recognition and Thanks – A. Biffer congratulated E. Lane and Diah Seccareccia for being selected to be part of the equity alliance cohort, and congratulated Sheila McCallum for finding the Junior Library Guild's golden ticket. A. Biffer thanked public works for their efforts to open BPL Atrium; their constant efforts in town often go unnoticed. Ava thanked BPL staff for dealing with difficult working conditions, a high volume workload, and the challenges of preparing the Atrium. Ava also thanked her fellow trustees, saying that they do not get enough credit for their efforts to ensure BPL thrives.

Director's Report

Summer Reading – This year's summer reading program was a success, especially considering the circumstances. E. Lane mentioned library programs that were held throughout the town this summer. The library continues to address many of the literacies as outlined in the strategic plan. E. Lane gave a shout out to library programming staff. This Friday, from 5-8 PM, there will be an all ages block party to end summer reading, which will be held at the Blue Hills Fire Department. The summer reading program was once again generously funded by the Friends. The cost for performers/programs has increased. E. Lane thanked the Friends for their continued support.

Author Talk – Duncaster funded author talks with the popular youth graphic novelist, Nathan Hale, which included school visits and an evening program open to all. E. Lane thanked youth librarian Nicole Dolat for making this event happen.

BookWrym Fest – BPL partnered with the West Hartford Public Library on the popular BookWrym Fest, which was held in West Hartford in July. E. Lane received a letter of thanks from the director of West Hartford Library, Laura Irmscher. The two libraries look forward to collaborating on the event again next year.

Juneteenth – For the second year in a row, the library participated in another successful Juneteenth celebration. Alika Hope performed, and the Emancipation Proclamation was read out loud.

CT State Library – BPL and other libraries in the state continue to have issues with the Connecticut State Library. E. Lane is working with other directors to address the problem. For example, the state library is making it difficult to get approved for grant funds, and a librarian was recently censored and banned from the listserv. E. Lane is hoping to get the state library board more involved on these issues.

Connecticut Library Consortium (CLC) – E. Lane was elected to serve on the board of CLC. The board fulfills a leadership and policy role, with a mission to leverage the collective power of members and increase services. CLC helped BPL save \$86,000 last year alone.

2023-2024 Annual Report – BPL is working on its next annual report. E. Lane shared some stats from the year. BPL delivered 94 teen programs, with over 2,300 attendees. This reflects huge growth when compared against the last decade of numbers. In June and July 2023 alone, the short-staffed youth department interacted with over 3,500 children and their families in schools, camps, and through programs.

BPL Everywhere – The BPL Everywhere initiative continues. Library staff will be at the public pool tonight for National Night Out. BPL staff have been attending all concerts, as well as last week's West Indian Festival. Visits to Geissler's and Stop and Shop are upcoming.

Junior Library Guild – E. Lane shared a photo of librarian Sheila McCallum with a golden ticket from Junior Library Guild. As part of the prize winnings, Sheila was flown to the company's headquarters in Ohio to represent Bloomfield Public Library.

National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) – As noted earlier by A. Biffer, E. Lane and D. Seccareccia have been selected to be part of the NCCJ's inaugural Equity Leadership Alliance (ELA). BPL continues to make serving everyone a priority. The library now has over 8000 library card holders, which works in every library in the state, as well as provides access to BPL Online's many free resources.

Duncaster and Seabury – E. Lane recently spoke at both Duncaster and Seabury. She spoke at Seabury yesterday and thanked them for their warm welcome and ongoing support of the library. The feedback from both institutions has been invaluable.

Bloomfield Messenger Archive – Issues of the Bloomfield Messenger are now archived on the Library of Congress website. They can be found by clicking Digitized Newspapers and then listed under Connecticut. The archive will supplement Bloomfield schools and their research in a number of ways. BPL will do a media blitz soon.

Library Building Committee – Construction bids came in \$9 million over budget, which was a shocking turn of events after three years of hard work by the building committee, BPL staff, consultants, Downes Construction, TSKP, and the public (through surveys). Before deciding, years ago, to move forward with the current two-building project plan, the LBC and its partners had extensively reviewed multiple building sites and options. The BPL building project's overages are on par with construction projects across the

Northeast. BPL leadership is working with the LBC on value engineering cuts, but there are no planned cuts to space/programming.

BPL at the Atrium – The BPL leadership team recently had a constructive meeting with the property management at the temporary location. Going forward, the temporary location will be called BPL at the Atrium.

Certificate of Occupancy – The town’s building official is holding off on issuing a certificate of occupancy due to an issue with emergency lighting in the library’s suite at the Atrium. Despite the delay, E. Lane gave a shout out to Meyer for the efficient move, plus Allison Wilkos and Chris Siloac for all their work orchestrating it.

Bloomfield Messenger Op-Ed – E. Lane summarized an op-ed that she recently submitted to the Bloomfield Messenger. The purpose of the op-ed was to highlight factual information about where we are with the building project, especially in light of ongoing misinformation about the project and its tax impact (which has yet to be determined). The town council is considering a potential referendum for \$11 million. E. Lane reminded the board that when we applied for the \$5.526 million CIF grant and received it, we were told to go for more if needed.

In response to information in other op-eds, E. Lane stated that a one library solution would have needed to be decided on years ago. The libraries were planned in tandem, and a single library would have to be bigger than the current Prosser design. Additionally, there are no professional librarians in Bloomfield schools, so BPL staff does that work, going into schools and helping address literacy. Our public libraries are the libraries for students. The cost to build McMahon would be a one-time cost that would lead to decades of service.

The board discussed the status of the building project, as well as the role of the library in serving the town’s students. A. Biffer stated that the school libraries do not have credentialed staff, and that it is critical for children to have access to credentialed library service. Research demonstrates that credentialed staff is essential for student literacy and information verification/accuracy, and that it affects test scores directly. The town council is not valuing in a dollar figure the service that BPL staff is providing to all Bloomfield schools.

A. Biffer noted that the town knew years ago, when they built McMahon Wintonbury, that two libraries were needed to serve the whole town. To not expand McMahon will lead to less access for those with the greater need, especially in regards to the digital divide. She emphasized that people should be allowed to have their say by voting on a referendum.

P. DeLorenzo asked about the possibility of having BPL librarians in the school libraries for set hours after the school day. E. Lane noted that librarian Rachel Tonucci is currently at the high school on Fridays in this capacity. P. DeLorenzo talked about the need to clarify the CIF grant and its impact on the budget/cost of the project. The grant increases the budget, but it is not an amount the town needs to repay. The CIF grant shows how legislative bodies believe there is a return on investment on libraries, including in terms of economic development.

T. Cooper echoed P. DeLorenzo’s point that the grant is being conflated with the town’s spending on the project, which is not accurate. T. Cooper asked if all Bloomfield students have a library card and, if not, how the library might accomplish this goal. E. Lane emphasized that BPL, as outlined in its strategic plan, wants 100% of residents to have a card. She agreed with T. Cooper that the first focus should be ensuring all students have library cards. E. Lane reiterated the staffing challenges BPL is having and the impact it

can have on serving the students. The library was the only department to have a 6 month hiring freeze, which includes a full-time youth librarian.

Old Business

Discuss and possibly take action on Paid Sick Leave for Part-Time Staff – E. Lane discussed this issue with the town manager and informed him that legal counsel says we are not in compliance with the legislation, due to staff doing the same customer service work and not receiving the benefit. E. Lane is waiting to hear back from the town manager, but it may be prudent for the library board to reach out. A. Biffer will contact the town manager on behalf of the board and inquire about this issue. It is unacceptable that the town is out of compliance with the state statute.

Discuss and possibly take action on BPL Policy on Animals in the Library – The policy was approved at the last special meeting, with a request that it be reviewed by the town attorney. Attorney Needelman amended the policy slightly. **MOTION by T. Cooper to adopt BPL policy on animals in the library as amended**; seconded by P. DeLorenzo and passed unanimously. The board discussed the difference between service animals and emotional support animals, as well as the fact that the library director has discretion to make exceptions.

Discussion and possible action concerning employee appreciation – A decision was made to table this topic for now. E. Lane will email a request once a plan develops.

Discuss and possible action on status of Library Buildings Project – This topic was discussed during the director's report. E. Lane asked that individual library board members make their voices/opinions known, especially if there is not a consensus.

New Business - There was no new business to discuss.

Citizens' Statements and Petitions – There were no public comments.

Board Comments

The Atrium – P DeLorenzo looks forward to visiting the Atrium space.

Leah Farrell – A. Biffer announced that L. Farrell has been hired by West Hartford Public Library to run their programs and maker space. This will help strengthen the partnership between the libraries.

Approval of the Minutes

Motion by P. DeLorenzo to accept the minutes of the May 9, 2023 meeting; seconded by T. Cooper and accepted unanimously. **Motion by B. Merritt to accept the minutes of July 19, 2023 special meeting**; seconded by T. Cooper and accepted, with P. DeLorenzo abstaining.

Motion by P. DeLorenzo to adjourn at 7:21 PM; seconded by B. Merritt and adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Siloac
Assistant Director