

FINAL
Bloomfield Public Library
Board of Trustees
Conference Remote Meeting
<https://youtube.com/live/BFGqmcpj5IM?feature=share>
May 9, 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*)

Absent: Maxine Ursery

Quorum present? Yes, 5 of 6

A. Biffer called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM.

Roll Call – M. Ursery and T. Cooper noted as absent. T. Cooper joined towards the end of the meeting.

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

Report from the Friends of the Bloomfield Public Libraries

Summer Reading – The Friends are funding summer reading again this year, including the resumption of some in-person programming.

Tote Bags – The Friends provided funds for BPL branded tote bags to encourage patrons to load up on extra books before the buildings close. E. Lane showed the board the bags.

Chairperson's Report

Promotions – A. Biffer congratulated Carol Walters and Diah Seccareccia on their recent promotions.

CLA Conference – A. Biffer congratulated Rachel Tonucci and Sara Ray on their well-received presentation at the Connecticut Library Association (CLA) conference.

CEN Conference – A. Biffer was pleased to note that C. Siloac and Quincey Gill would be presenting at the Connecticut Education Network (CEN) conference this week.

Staff Thank You – A. Biffer thanked BPL staff for continuing to deliver exceptional service, all while preparing to relocate and working on plans for the new facilities.

Director's Report

Annual Report – Copies of the library's annual report were printed about six weeks ago and are available to the public. E. Lane showed how to access the report through the About menu on the library's website.

Hartford History Day – Carol Walters, Mara Whitman, and A. Biffer represented Bloomfield in the Hartford History Day contest in March.

Library Building Committee – The anticipated lease start date for the temporary location is July 1. If lease proceeds as anticipated, there is a chance the library's last day open to the public will be June 30, the last day of the fiscal year.

FY24 Budget – It was a challenging budget year for the town. E. Lane showed a spreadsheet indicating that the library emerged with a .63% increase. The library was also subject to a hiring freeze on all open positions, including a full-time position. This hiring freeze will likely lead to a need to slow down services. P. DeLorenzo noted that no budget modifications and CIP funds were approved. E. Lane added that the Board of Education received a significant increase, while the town operating budget was decreased. The BPL leadership team is looking at ways to limit the impact this will have on the community, while also managing expectations going forward.

Organizational Realignment – The second phase of the organizational realignment is complete. As A. Biffer noted, Carol Walters and Diah Seccareccia have been promoted to management roles and are already beginning to assist with day-to-day operations and future planning. The full management team had its first meeting this week.

Summer Reading – Summer reading plans are moving forward quickly. There was an increase in costs for presenters. Summer reading will officially kick-off as part of Juneteenth weekend.

Load Your Tote Campaign – The new bags that P. Pearson spoke about are part of a new Load Your Tote campaign that will likely kick off soon. The campaign will encourage patrons to stock up on library items before the buildings close.

Duncaster – E. Lane spoke at Duncaster earlier today about the present and future of the library system. She was encouraged by all the library supporters she met there and thanked Mara Whitman for all her hard work as the outreach librarian to Duncaster. Numerous residents noted the impact Mara's assistance has had on their lives.

State Library Construction Grants – The town continues to have a disagreement with the Connecticut State Library about the two \$1 million dollar construction grants that Bloomfield was awarded and then asked to forfeit. A team from Bloomfield, including the town attorney, recently met with the State Librarian and the Director of Library Development. The town emerged from the meeting disappointed with the direction the state library is taking on this issue. The town has submitted a Freedom of Information Request to the state library to look into issues of grant administration. Other libraries have experienced problems receiving funding through this grant program, and some have chosen to not even pursue a grant due to administrative issues, both of which seem at odds with the purpose of the grant. The town intends to keep pushing forward on this issue.

CLA Conference – As noted by A. Biffer, BPL had a successful CLA conference, with the highlight being a presentation by librarians Sara Ray and Rachel Tonucci, titled *Adult Programming Through a Social Justice Lens*. The presentation received a lot of positive feedback and participation. The Connecticut Library Consortium (CLC) presented conference attendees with a check that showed the \$86,000 in savings Connecticut libraries have received through their partnership with CLC.

CEN Conference – On May 11, C. Siloac and Quincey Gill will present at the CEN conference, with a session titled *Power to the People: Technology Planning that Puts Users First*. C. Siloac explained that the session will focus on the flexible, user-centered approach to technology services that the library embraced during the pandemic, and how this approach is informing plans for the new buildings.

Councilor Comments – Two town councilors are making public comments about the building project being too big. The comments seem aimed at McMahon Wintonbury, so E. Lane thought it important to share some statistics. McMahon is one-third the size of Prosser, yet it has 50% of the visits of Prosser and 60% of computer sessions, while also having more total faxing and study room use. E. Lane stressed that McMahon is an important location, especially in terms of social justice and the digital divide, and that it provides crucial services to the community.

Services to Blue Hills Community – The Republican Town Committee has expressed concerns about the planned temporary location at MetLife being out of reach to residents in the Blue Hills area. E. Lane

announced a formal partnership with Hartford Public Library and its Albany branch, which is on the Blue Hills bus line. The Albany branch will welcome Bloomfield residents, including on evenings and Saturdays.

Library Staffing – The library is officially short staffed, a situation that has been made worse by the hiring freeze. This is having an impact on shift coverage and could affect operating hours.

Syracuse iSchool Program – For the third year in a row, BPL has worked with Syracuse University's iSchool program. Graduate student Valerie Craig gave a presentation at an all staff meeting concerning ideas for boosting library card holders, a key strategic planning goal. E. Lane reported that the library currently has 8,089 card holders, a number that continues to increase.

Juneteenth – E. Lane invited board members to participate, along with library staff, in this year's town-wide Juneteenth celebration.

Paid Sick Leave – The part-time paid sick leave proposal did not pass during this year's budget process. E. Lane expressed her disappointment and said that the town council seemed onboard with the proposal until cuts needed to be made. She stressed that this issue concerns part-time staff members working side-by-side, with overlapping duties, yet receiving different treatment in terms of benefits, a situation that legal counsel found problematic.

EveryLibrary Advocacy – The executive director of EveryLibrary, an advocacy organization for libraries, presented at the CLA conference. E. Lane stressed the importance of ongoing library advocacy on all fronts, including staff, Friends, boards, supporters, and stakeholders, especially with libraries fighting battles on so many fronts, such as funding and censorship.

Response to Director's Report – A. Biffer responded to multiple items in the director's report. 1. Illinois recently passed a law making book banning illegal; Ava stated that Connecticut may want to pursue something similar. 2. Concerns about McMahon users reaching the swing space highlights the importance of McMahon to the community it serves, including many users with limited transportation options. 3. Connecticut has seen a statewide decline in library cardholders, so the continuing library card increases at BPL speak to a successful service model. 4. The state library asks the seeker of the grants to forfeit when there is an issue or dispute, but Ava believes it is important not to forfeit, since it implies that Bloomfield did something wrong. Ava stressed that this is a procedural issue based on questionable interpretations by the state library. 5. Ava thanked Bridget Quinn, the CEO of Hartford Public Library, for partnering with Bloomfield to help serve users in the Blue Hills area.

Old Business

Discuss and possibly take action on Paid Sick Leave for Part-Time Staff – A. Biffer stated that she believes the board needs to take this issue further by focusing on the fact that it should not have been treated as a budget modification. Providing sick leave will not result in more spending, due to the fact that missed shifts can be covered using existing staff and resources. A. Biffer stressed that the library already runs two buildings and provides ample services with insufficient staffing, and that the lack of sick time could make it more difficult to hire part-time staff. This is a social justice issue, one where only some part-time employees receive the benefit for the same or similar work. Ava proposed bringing the issue to the town manager to see if it can be brought to council.

P. DeLorenzo spoke about the importance of looping in Human Resources and getting their support, since it affects other town departments. The budget modification had estimated that \$15,000 would cover all eligible part-time employees in the town. Patrick proposed that the end of the fiscal year may provide more budget clarity, and that the issue could be brought to a subcommittee. A. Biffer stated again the need to stress to the council that the accrual time does not reflect an actual expenditure. She also noted that the

council sets terms of employment, so the decision needs to come from the council. The board decided that the best first step is to have E. Lane bring the issue to the town manager.

Discuss and possibly take action on Privacy Policy – E. Lane explained that, per the board’s request, the proposed privacy policy was submitted to the town attorney for review, and that his updates were incorporated into the document. **MOTION by P. DeLorenzo to approve the privacy policy, which includes legal review and changes from the town attorney;** seconded by L. Farrell and approved unanimously.

New Business – There was no new business to discuss.

Citizens’ Statements and Petitions

Linda Pagani – L. Pagani expressed concerns about waiting for the state library construction grant dispute to resolve, since waiting could negatively impact the project’s bidding timeline. A. Biffer answered L. Pagani’s concerns by stating that the intention is not to wait any longer. The bid packages were sent to the state library for review and approval and they declined. The town has a two-library project to complete, one that was voted for overwhelmingly, so the project will move forward. A. Biffer summarized the overall funding situation.

Board Comments

Albany Branch – P. DeLorenzo thanked E. Lane for the partnership with Hartford Public Library and its Albany branch and said that he will pass the information to Robert Ike and the rest of the Republican Town Committee.

Budget Process – P. DeLorenzo expressed his disappointment at the way the budget process played out. The increase to the Board of Education budget led to a cut to the town operating budget, including the complete cutting of capital projects and budget modifications. These cuts were paired with a 6.5% increase in taxes. Patrick said he was hoping for a better end to a difficult budget season.

Approval of the Minutes

MOTION by P. DeLorenzo to accept the minutes of the March 14, 2023 meeting as corrected; seconded by T. Cooper and approved.

MOTION by L. Farrell to adjourn the meeting at 7:05 PM; seconded by P. DeLorenzo and approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Siloac
Assistant Director