

FINAL
Bloomfield Public Library
Board of Trustees
Conference Remote Meeting
<https://youtu.be/hA1-e5Vcxk0>
November 15, 2022

Attendance: Elizabeth Lane (*Library Director*), Ava Biffer (*Chairperson*), Leah Farrell (*Vice-Chairperson*), Todd Cooper, Patrick DeLorenzo, Beverlee Merritt, Maxine Ursery, Christopher Siloac (*Assistant Director*), Rachel Tonucci (*BPL Librarian*)

Absent: None

Quorum present? Yes, 6 of 6

A. Biffer called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

Roll Call – A. Biffer noted that all were present except for P. DeLorenzo, who would be joining the meeting soon. P. DeLorenzo joined at 7:34 PM.

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

Report from the Friends of the Bloomfield Public Libraries – There was no report from the Friends.

Chairperson's Report

Leah Farrell – A. Biffer congratulated L. Farrell for her work on the Wallingford Public Library voting guide, referring to it as vital work.

Meriden Site Tour – A. Biffer said she will thank P. DeLorenzo for attending the Meriden building site tour. She hopes Patrick will have take-aways to share.

NELA Conference – A. Biffer gave kudos to E. Lane and Allison Wilkos for presenting at the New England Library Association (NELA) conference, and for representing Bloomfield in such a positive light. She also congratulated Allison on finishing the NELS leadership program.

Director's Report

ECF Grant – BPL is the recipient of a grant through the Emergency Connectivity Fund that will pay for 22 hotspots, 20 Chromebooks (with built-in hotspot), and internet service for 50 devices for a year. Lending this equipment helps BPL combat the digital divide.

BPL Online Camp – Librarian Sara Ray will initiate a beta-test phase of a BPL Online camp in the new year, which will consist of a series of classes that introduce participants to the range of services and databases the library offers online.

Teen Advisory Group – BPL is moving forward with a Teen Advisory Group (TAG) to help generate ideas for teen-focused services and programs in the library.

Northstar Digital Literacy – Librarian Rachel Tonucci explained that the library is beta-testing a new online service, Northstar Digital Literacy, which provides a curriculum of technology skills, standards, and assessments. The idea is to have library staff test it first, and then roll it out to the public in the new year. The service also contains a proctored assessment feature that will allow patrons to get certificates.

This service is being funded by the Connecticut State Library and is another example of the library bridging the digital divide.

Big Read – The library is again participating in the Big Read. Prosser’s last art installation will occur sometime after Thanksgiving and will focus on the Asian-American community, which ties in with this year’s Big Read selection.

Historical Preservation Program – This Friday the library will partner with the Wintonbury Historical Society and the State Historic Preservation Office on the Certified Local Government program, which provides assistance to municipalities looking to incorporate historical preservation into their planning.

Interval House – The library would like to expand its partnership with Interval House by hosting a gift card drive for the domestic violence prevention organization. The board gave its approval to allow the library to collect funds for the gift card drive. This is an example of the library’s efforts to be more action-oriented with its social justice initiatives.

Children’s Reading Partners – The library has partnered again with Children’s Reading Partners, an online initiative that mentors students. Volunteer applications are currently being accepted for the program.

Annual Report for State Library – C. Siloac provided the library board with an overview of BPL’s 2021-2022 Connecticut Public Library annual report submission to the state library, which is required in order to receive Connecticut reimbursement. C. Siloac noted that many statistical measures were beginning to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels, such as library visits, computer sessions, and circulation. One statistic the library is most proud of is the addition of over 1,000 new library card holders over the past two years. Other items of note were the robust programming numbers, the near-doubling of database usage and digital material circulation over the last two years, and the increased Library of Things collection. E. Lane thanked the many staff members involved in compiling this data, and noted how crucial this year-to-year data was for benchmarking and comparison. E. Lane said that despite the growing usage numbers, many patrons remain unaware that the library offers 53 databases; the BPL Online camp is intended to raise awareness of these resources. She also noted the importance of detailed programming numbers when assessing goals and services and stressed that the library is looking to grow its teen programming in particular.

NCCJ Program – E. Lane and R. Tonucci attended a program, “The Role of the White Accomplice,” presented by the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ), an organization that has previously provided social justice training for library staff.

BPL Everywhere– The library has started a list of BPL Everywhere initiatives during building construction, including expanded hours in the swing space, additional mobile technology to lend, a focus on digital literacy initiatives, library staff in the schools, weekly pop-up library events around town, and increased staff training.

Westport Library – E. Lane and Town Manager Stanley Hawthorne toured the Westport Library, which completed a building renovation and expansion just before COVID-19 hit. The completed building is around 50,000 square feet and serves a population of roughly 27,000 people. E. Lane was impressed with the forward-thinking approach of the library and described their flexible approach to spaces and services. For example, the library doesn’t have a designated teen space, since teens should feel free to use all the spaces in the library. E. Lane noted that the library doubled its usage in the first year after opening, and also diversified its user base, which we should expect to see in Bloomfield after the buildings open.

LBC Communication Issues – E. Lane spoke about the ongoing communication issues with the library building committee, including the issue of the library being sidelined on decisions, or being asked to weigh in on decisions at the last minute. E. Lane said it was especially important that the library have

good communication with Chip from Collier's, the owner's representative. The staff at Westport Library made it clear how important their owner's representative was to the success of their building project.

Staff Appreciation Events – E. Lane spoke about the importance of keeping staff morale up during this challenging time and asked that the board consider a New Year's holiday celebration for staff in early January and a staff-away day in February. M. Ursery emphasized the importance of such events and recommended that a staff recognition day be an annual occurrence. The board expressed their support for both ideas. E. Lane will speak with her leadership team to craft a plan and then bring the board an amount for funding approval.

Old Business – There was no old business to discuss.

New Business

Review and Approve Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Policy – In December 2021, the library board approved the *Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Policy* and the *Request for Reconsideration of Material Form*, but since that time, best practices have changed due to recent nationwide organized attempts to ban and censor materials. The new recommendations, many of which come from Alison Macrina of Library Freedom Project, point to a more procedural approach. Rachel Tonucci, who took the lead on writing the policy and form, reviewed the proposed changes with the board, including a nine-step process to be followed for each challenge, which comprises an educational component for context, a 20 day review period, and rules limiting challenges. To prevent the library from being overwhelmed by potential challenges, T. Cooper suggested limiting the total number of challenges an individual can bring per year. The board discussed the possibility of limiting each person to two challenges in a year. A. Biffer suggested that they add the limit now, but then run the document through the town attorney for review. P. DeLorenzo suggested various edits to the document that clarified timelines and ensured consistency.

In response to a question by P. DeLorenzo about how many challenges the library has faced so far, E. Lane said that, to date, the library has been able to handle complaints through dialogue and customer service, but with the challenges seen throughout the country and state, it is best to be prepared. She added that questions have arisen at times in response to displays and social media, which is why both are included on the form. E. Lane reminded the board about the location of the policies on the library's website. R. Tonucci noted that the questions on the form promote education and self-reflection and that failure to answer them will void the request. E. Lane highlighted the note that each book challenge costs taxpayers \$600, due to the staff time and resources involved. A. Biffer recommended that the board vote to adopt the policy and reconsideration form now, so that the process is in place to cover the library, and then run it through the town attorney for possible changes. E. Lane noted that language about limiting challenges to Bloomfield residents was not included, but that she would ask the town attorney if it could be added. **MOTION by P. DeLorenzo to approve the Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Policy as amended;** seconded by B. Merritt and approved unanimously.

Review and Approve Request for Reconsideration of Material Form – This agenda item was discussed as part of the previous agenda item. **MOTION by M. Ursery to approve the Request for Reconsideration of Material Form as amended;** seconded by T. Cooper and approved unanimously.

Review and Approve Procedure on Library Closings Due to Holidays – The library is updating this policy to minimize closing for three days around holiday weekends, so patrons still have access to library technology, and in preparation for future Sunday hours. The board suggested minor changes to improve clarity and consistency. **MOTION by P. DeLorenzo to approve the Procedure on Library Closings Due to Holidays as amended;** seconded by B. Merritt and approved unanimously.

Review and approval of meeting schedule for 2023 – The new schedule includes a proposed 7:00 PM start time for meetings. After discussion, the board decided to keep the meeting start time at 6:00 PM. P. DeLorenzo suggested that the physical locations be removed as meeting locations, due to the building project. E. Lane and A. Biffer noted that the July and August meetings are now on the schedule, but that they can be canceled if needed, since it is easier to cancel a meeting than request a special meeting.

MOTION by P. DeLorenzo to approve the 2023 meeting schedule, as amended, to be submitted as official schedule to the town clerk; seconded by B. Merritt and passed unanimously.

Updating by-laws – The board reviewed A. Biffer’s suggested changes to the by-laws. A. Biffer noted that she reformatted the numbering and sections of the by-laws based on the Association of Connecticut Library Boards by-laws, which makes for easier reading. The list of agenda items was removed, since it does not seem necessary and the board now follows the town council’s format. A. Biffer emphasized that the by-laws should be a living document that changes as needed. In response to a question from P. DeLorenzo about citing the town charter, A. Biffer explained the difficulty with citation due to the number of sections that potentially apply. P. DeLorenzo suggested adding a statement to the effect of “All provisions in the Bloomfield town charter referring to the library board will also apply.” The board discussed language around teleconferencing and subcommittees. **MOTION by T. Cooper to pass the by-laws as amended;** seconded by M. Ursery and approved unanimously.

Approval of the Minutes

MOTION by T. Cooper to accept the minutes of the October 11, 2022 meeting as presented; seconded by P. DeLorenzo and approved, with B. Merritt abstaining.

Board Comments

Wintonbury Mall Lease – P. DeLorenzo attended last night’s town council meeting, where they approved moving forward with the lease for the Wintonbury Mall swing space. Some council members echoed Patrick’s request, as a member of the building committee, for a detailed list of all the locations that were considered and the reasons they were not chosen. A. Biffer emphasized the challenge of squeezing library services into 3,200 square feet of space, and B. Merritt spoke about expanding options by looking further from the center. The board hopes the building committee will keep its options open, since this constrained space will impact service to the public. E. Lane thanked P. DeLorenzo for asking for a document about rejected locations, since she believes the public will want that information. A. Biffer mentioned the importance of looking for space in other town buildings. E. Lane expressed frustration that swing space budget concerns were not addressed as part of the Community Investment Funds request, despite the fact that she asked if the amount requested was enough. She said that the poor communication from the chair and vice-chair of the building committee is unacceptable. A. Biffer noted that the library, through its grant writing efforts, has brought in more than 21.6% of total funds for this project, and that the library deserves to be in the know so that it can properly address issues and optimize service.

MOTION by B. Merritt to adjourn the meeting at 9:13 PM; seconded by P. DeLorenzo and approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Siloac
Assistant Director