

DRAFT
Bloomfield Public Library
Board of Trustees
Conference Remote Meeting
<https://youtube.com/live/tKbbxFdKXS4?feature=share>
November 14, 2023

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

Absent: Erin Corbett

Quorum present? Yes, 4 of 6

A. Biffer called the meeting to order at 6:07 PM

Roll Call – E. Corbett was not present.

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

Report from the Friends of the Bloomfield Public Libraries

Friends Update –

Chairperson's Report

Recognition and Thanks – A. Biffer welcomed Claudia Gwardyak to the board and thanked her for dedicating her time to the library. A. Biffer acknowledged and thanked the library staff for the outstanding work they are doing in difficult conditions.

Director's Report

New Board Members – E. Lane welcomed Claudia Gwardyak and Erin Corbett to the library board. She stressed that she likes to share a lot of information with the board, so that there are no surprises.

Staffing Shortages – One of the biggest challenges facing the library is staffing issues. During the budget season, the library was given a 6 month hiring freeze, while already being down positions. The library is down 2 part-time librarians, 1 full-time librarian, 2 library assistants, and 3 pages, with another full-time retirement coming in December. Signs from the town council point towards an extended hiring freeze. The library needs to decide on which services to continue with at these staffing levels. The library is no longer offering notary services and will be ending homebound as of December 1. This staffing shortage has also led to morale issues, which E. Lane has spoken to the town manager about.

Partnership with Schools – There was a question at the last finance subcommittee meeting about the library's relationship with Bloomfield Public Schools. E. Lane stressed the importance of the library's partnership with the schools. The schools help us provide equitable library services, and we value our school partnership and hope we can keep it strong. The library could not reach as many children as it does without the schools. E. Lane does not want this partnership politicized going forward.

Town Attorney – At last night’s council meeting, the new councilors and new town attorney were welcomed. E. Lane is looking forward to meeting the town attorney.

Cash Handling Policy – E. Lane was asked by the town manager to produce a cash handling policy. E. Lane met with the finance director to discuss this matter, and hopes to have a policy prepared for the December meeting.

Youth Programming and Schools – As an example of the BPL and Bloomfield schools partnership, E. lane mentioned the recent program with Leland Faulkner, a Native-American storyteller and performer, which the library delivered virtually to school classes and the public. 450 people attended. This type of partnership helps extend the impact of tax dollars and serve more people.

ACLB Webinar – The Association of Connecticut Library Boards is presenting a webinar on library board basics on Wed, Nov 29, at 7 PM. This may be a good program for board members to attend.

Annual Report to the State Library – The library recently submitted its mandated annual state library report. C. Siloac shared his screen and provided an overview of the submitted report. The overview focused on the library’s strong programming statistics, growth in library card holders, and continued increases in most metrics since the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. C. Siloac spoke about the difficulty of completing the report the past three years, due to the changes wrought by the pandemic and the building project. The board was emailed a copy of the report prior to the meeting for further review.

E. Lane said much of the statistical growth aligns with priorities set in the strategic plan. She expressed thanks to the programming team and spoke about the success of BPL Online and virtual programming in particular. A patron recently said that BPL had the best virtual programming in the area. E. Lane noted that the increase in circulation is partially a result of weeding to a cleaner and newer collection. The higher number of library card holders is the result of staff emphasizing that library cards are free and empowering.

P. DeLorenzo confirmed with E. Lane that the state compiles this information so it can be used in comparison with other libraries and asked if comparables could be shared with the board. E. Lane said yes and explained the way the state’s data website works and how it is good for tracking trends across libraries, such as decreases in library card holders and increases in the use of digital materials and services. P. DeLorenzo noted that it is impressive that the library has continued to grow service statistics despite Covid, moving out of the library buildings, staffing shortages, and other disruptions. E. Lane acknowledged the work involved and the importance of recent promotions in helping manage the changes. She also expressed worry that the strong statistics could skew how the town council sees the library’s staffing concerns. C. Gwardyak agreed that the numbers are impressive and asked if the data has financial implications for the library and if it can be used for pursuing funding, such as grants. E. Lane spoke about how the completion of the report is mandated and affects state funding opportunities and noted that the data is helpful in making a case for the library when pursuing grants or for post-grant reporting. C. Siloac noted that the report has questions required by the federal government and the state, so the data is considered a key metric for evaluating library services and needs, especially in regards to grant writing.

State Library Grants – During the last legislative session, the state passed micro-grants of \$1200 for libraries with a materials reconsideration form and policy on their website, a criteria BPL meets, so we should receive the grant. These grants are a response to book banning. E. Lane noted that there will be a listening session for giving feedback to the state library on Dec 5th, which is important to BPL in light of the \$1 million state construction grants that we lost. E. Lane will speak at the session and focus on the lack of equity involved in how the construction grant situation was handled.

CLA Information Session – On Nov 27 at Avon Public Library, the Connecticut Library Association will host an information session for local legislators. E. Lane will reach out to Bloomfield’s state representatives, and the entire library board will be included as well.

Vendor Expo – E. Lane and A. Wilkos were at Southern Connecticut State University today for the Connecticut Library Consortium’s (CLC) vendor expo. This event, along with CLC discounts, helps BPL spend taxpayer dollars in the best way possible.

Board Response to Director’s Report – In response to a question from P. DeLorenzo, E. Lane said the hiring freeze is supposedly due to the budget increase to the board of education last year, as well as the absence of ARPA funds. P. DeLorenzo spoke about the possibility of working out a compromise with the town, or looking for opportunities to have volunteers assist with certain work. E. Lane is talking with P. Pearson and the Friends about the possibility of having the Friends work hours on the greeter desk at The Atrium. P. Pearson spoke about the importance of screening volunteers to find the right fit for this position.

P. DeLorenzo suggested that maybe the board of education’s budget should be contributing to the library’s budget, due to the library’s direct involvement in the schools. E. Lane worried that those conversations could lead to less library services for Bloomfield youth. Public libraries work with schools across the state; it is part of their mission. E. Lane asked if this is a conversation for the library board to have directly with the board of education. She hopes that an approach emerges that leads to better service for all. P. DeLorenzo wondered if the board of education should try to allocate funds to the library for its services to the schools, or maybe hire a professional librarian to work with the BPL librarians.

A. Biffer used to work in the Bloomfield school system in the 1990s. She said that library service to Bloomfield schools is not new, and that Linda Gabianelli and Roberta LaMonaca consistently visited schools during that time. A. Biffer expressed concern about the difficulty school children have getting to the Atrium and stressed that it is important to avoid politicizing the library and conditioning services to children on who pays for what. Ava said it is a delicate conversation to have, and the town is currently in a state of flux on many fronts. She added that when the board discusses the library and its services, we need to include the children in all service discussions and not put them in the middle of a political tug of war.

A. Biffer spoke about the library staffing shortage, and the fact that being down 2 full-time staff members is more than 10% of the staff, a shortage that is made worse by the unfilled part-time positions. A. Biffer also wanted to correct the talking point that there is now only one library location by pointing out that the library is serving patrons at two locations, the Atrium and BPL Tech at 330 Park, as well as serving patrons in various parts of town at outreach events.

Old Business

Discuss and possibly take action on Paid Sick Leave for Part-Time Staff – Last month, A. Biffer reported on a conversation with the town manager on this topic. The town manager passed it on to the human resources department. A. Biffer has not heard anything yet. Human resources is also severely short staffed. There have been people waiting for over a year, without accruing sick time, for this matter to be resolved. It would be nice to allow retroactively accrued sick time. The board can propose this after things progress.

Discussion and possible action concerning employee appreciation – Manager Carol Walters is collating staff ideas on what they want to do for an appreciation day. Visiting a museum is a popular

choice. E. Lane is proposing \$1000 be allocated by the board to provide a venue, food, and a professional development opportunity. The board expressed concern that the amount requested may not be enough, but emphasized that the library can come back to them if more is needed. **MOTION by B. Merritt to provide \$1000 from the Prosser Fund for employee appreciation activities**; seconded by P. DeLorenzo and passed unanimously.

Discuss and possible action on status of Library Buildings Project – The project is waiting for permits from DEEP in order to have Prosser commence, as well as for word from DECD that everything is set with the \$5.5 million CIF grant. There are many decisions being made in regards to plans for McMahon Wintonbury, though the library hasn't been involved with those plans so far. P. DeLorenzo noted that there will be an in-person/hybrid meeting in conference room 5 tomorrow, at which TSKP will go over flooring and other materials.

New Business

Election of Bloomfield Public Library Board of Trustees Officers – A. Biffer noted that the by-laws state that, at the first meeting following an election, the board must hold an election for chairperson and vice-chairperson. **MOTION by P. DeLorenzo that current chairperson Ava Biffer be nominated and elected to serve as chairperson again**; seconded by B. Merritt and passed unanimously. There were no further nominations. P. DeLorenzo said that Ava has done a great job as the board chair, and that he looks forward to working with her over the next two years. E. Lane said that having Ava as chair has been incredibly helpful, and that she is always there when needed, which is often. **MOTION by P. DeLorenzo to nominate and elect Beverlee Merritt to be the vice-chairperson**; seconded by C. Gwardyak and passed unanimously. A. Biffer said that Beverlee is the longest serving member of the library board, and that she fulfills a key role by being such a committed advocate and library user. P. DeLorenzo and E. Lane echoed A. Biffer's sentiments about B. Merritt's valuable contributions to the board and her ongoing commitment to the library.

Discuss and possibly take action on meeting room policy – With the recent change of town attorney, A. Biffer noted that we don't have access to legal review at this time. The board will make edits to policies and then decide to vote on the policy with the understanding that it will go through legal review first. The board can submit their draft of the policy to Attorney Needelman for him to pass on to the new firm once they are in place. E. Lane edited the policy live to accommodate board comments, which included adding clarity about how many people can be accommodated in the library's small meeting rooms, as well as making the document more bulleted and noting that its location specific.

MOTION by C. Gwardyck to accept the policy as amended with the understanding that it will go through legal review at the earliest possible time, and the board will revisit the policy if the attorney has suggested changes; seconded by B. Merritt and passed unanimously. E. Lane noted that the quick need for this policy arose because the library is in a facility that is not our own. The policy will be revisited when the library moves back into its buildings. E. Lane thanked librarians Sara Ray and Rachel Tonucci for their work on the policy.

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

Board Comments

P. DeLorenzo congratulated C. Gwardyck on her election to the board of trustees and said he looks forward to working with her and Erin Corbett. Patrick congratulated A. Biffer and B. Merritt on their election to chair and vice-chair and thanked E. Lane, C. Siloac, and A. Wilkos for all their hard work. Patrick also said he looks forward to visiting the Atrium soon.

B. Merritt welcomed C. Gwardyck to the library board and mentioned that she is already aware of Claudia's contributions to Bloomfield through her work for BELC.

C. Gwardyck said she is happy to be here and thanked P. DeLorenzo and B. Merritt for their kind words.

A. Biffer noted that C. Gwardyck's experience with grants and fundraising should be helpful to the library, since the town does not have a designated grant writer.

Motion by P. DeLorenzo to adjourn at 7:30 PM; seconded by B. Merritt and adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Siloac
Assistant Director