

DRAFT
Bloomfield Public Library
Board of Trustees
Conference Remote Meeting
<https://youtube.com/live/gbXbijkQGTs?feature=share>
December 12, 2023

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

Absent: Erin Corbett

Quorum present? Yes, 4 of 5

A. Biffer called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM

Roll Call – E. Corbett was noted as not present.

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

Legislative Listening Session – A. Biffer watched the recent library listening session with the lieutenant governor and the state senate, which focused on the expense and licensing of ebooks and the increase in book banning. The legislators invited librarians to speak to them. E. Lane attended. A recording is now available, which Ava will send to the library board.

Thank You to Staff – A. Biffer thanked the staff and the leadership team for all they are doing during difficult circumstances. The staff treats everyone with respect, care, dignity, and provides exceptional service.

Director's Report

Monthly Statistics – E. Lane shared the town manager's report statistics on her screen and reviewed the November stats with the board. The stats include 49 programs with 1,376 attendees, 747 visits to the BPL Tech Express lab at 330 Park, and 1,134 visits to the Atrium.

Legislative Listening Session – E. Lane and A. Wilkos attended the legislative library listening session. One topic of discussion was ebook legislation. E. Lane had hoped it would pass last year. Libraries spend large sums on ebooks, but then the books disappear due to licensing agreements. Legislators want to take the issue on and even the playing field for libraries. Intellectual freedom was the other topic of focus. Challenges in other towns have revealed that library boards are not always fully aware of this issue and the policies in place. E. Lane will resend BPL's policy to the board, so that the board is prepared if any challenges should occur.

Annual State Report Stats – E. Lane reviewed new graphics that feature annual report stats. Among the stats highlighted were early literacy programs, with 189 programs and over 6000 attendees; teen programs, an unprecedented high of 92 programs, and over 2,100 attendees; and a programming total of 704 programs with 17,425 attendees. There were 8,092 library card holders. Other significant numbers include 8,701 Ebooks, which is telling in light of cost issues, and 17,445 public computer sessions, a number that reflects the digital divide but not all the staff time that goes into supporting public computer use. P. DeLorenzo confirmed with E. Lane that the technology lab visits at 330 Park do not include weekends, because there are no weekend hours. P. DeLorenzo asked if it is possible to see card holders broken out by adult or child. C. Siloac said that it is possible to get those numbers, and that he would look to send them out to the board after the meeting.

Take your Child to the Library Day – On February 3, the library will celebrate Take Your Child to the Library Day at 330 Park, with a magic show, instrument petting zoo, and possibly a Read to Grow bookmobile visit.

Outdoor Book Return – B. Merritt mentioned that when she visited BPL at the Atrium today she noticed a new outdoor book return. E. Lane confirmed that the new book drop is open 24/7 and is located near the entrance, where the buses pick up and drop off. People are seeing it and using it, even before it has been officially announced. A. Biffer said that the BPL signs on campus are helpful.

Old Business

Discuss and possibly take action on Paid Sick Leave for Part-Time Staff – A. Biffer met with the town manager on this matter, and E. Lane checked back in with the town manager and human resources before the meeting, but nothing has changed. Library assistants are not covered, despite being service workers and performing tasks similar to librarians. Bloomfield is one of the few libraries in the state that does not give this benefit to part-time library assistants. E. Lane is hoping that legal opinion sways the town manager. A. Biffer emphasized that extending this benefit should not affect the budget. P. DeLorenzo asked what specific thing is needed to move this item forward. A. Biffer said that this is likely a question for human resources, because the reason for the hold up is not clear. With the interim town manager exiting, a new council and new town attorneys starting, and a large workload in human resources, the board discussed revisiting this issue when there is a new town manager in place.

Discussion and possible action concerning employee appreciation – The library is hoping to have a holiday party on 12/22, in honor of Zuzana Meistrick, who is retiring at the end of the month. **MOTION by B. Merritt to allocate up to \$1000 to spend on a holiday/retirement party for staff appreciation;** seconded by Claudia and passed unanimously. P. DeLorenzo confirmed with E. Lane that this allocation is separate from the proposed professional development day. E. Lane noted that the library will open at noon on the day of the party, and that the library board is invited. The event will go from 10:00-12:00 on December 22.

New Business

2024 meeting schedule – An email recently went out from the town clerk to set the 2024 meeting schedule. January 9 will need to be presented as a special meeting, since the board is filing its schedule within 30 days of the meeting. The library board received a copy of the proposed schedule. The board discussed the schedule and whether or not to change the meeting time and make the meetings hybrid. **MOTION by P. DeLorenzo to approve the 2024 meeting schedule as amended, with a 5:30 PM meeting start time as opposed to 6:00 PM, and with a note that hybrid meetings will take place at the Atrium and on Zoom;** seconded by B. Merritt and passed unanimously. C. Siloac will file the meeting schedule with the town clerk’s office.

Discussion of staffing deficits and impact on services – A. Biffer reviewed figures for full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing levels across time and noted a recent drop from roughly 19 FTEs to 15.5 FTEs, an 18.66% drop in staffing. A. Biffer reiterated that BPL is servicing from two locations, and also has librarians at schools, daycares, town hall and elsewhere in town. With the upcoming retirement, BPL is short nearly 120 man hours per week. A. Biffer stated that we cannot do everything we were doing, because we don’t have the people to do it. One bright spot is that Jennifer Marshall-Nealy, of the registrar’s office, has offered to provide notary services at no charge to the public at the registrar of voters through March 2024, which is good considering the town clerk’s office charges \$5 per document.

A. Biffer addressed the mistaken idea that there are 3 full-time BPL librarians in the schools. That arrangement was a plan put forward when the library was looking to move into the very small temporary space at Wintonbury Mall. That plan never went into effect. A. Biffer said the staffing situation is leading to staff burnout and cuts to programs and services. She also stressed that the library has always opened at 10 AM, and that the 10 AM opening does not reflect a cut in hours.

P. DeLorenzo put forth ideas such as moving line items to personnel, due to different needs at the Atrium, and using volunteers to assist with services such as homebound delivery. E. Lane said that the council has imposed a freeze and is looking to extend it to May 24, and then continue the freeze in the 2024-2025 budget. E. Lane met with the town manager and HR to plead the library’s case. An announcement of service reductions was included in the library newsletter. The Bloomfield Lions Club reached out to volunteer and help the library in some way, and the Friends may also be able to help. P. DeLorenzo wondered if the board should go to the finance subcommittee and seek approval to hire, even on a limited basis.

E. Lane said that there was a misconception that the library would begin rolling back services after it moved to the Atrium. That was never the intention. E. Lane discussed the invisible work of libraries, especially when it comes to materials processing, technology services and support, managing BPL Online, and programming. The library strives to provide equitable service to all residents. E. Lane spoke about the current difficulty of handling a sick call-out, as well as the challenge of getting new hires up to speed when replacing a longtime employee.

A. Biffer said that when considering the use of volunteers for homebound services, the library would need to look at the liability involved with volunteers using their own vehicles for deliveries. Ava noted that as wonderful as volunteers are, there is a limit to what they can do. The public needs assistance with a lot of things. Ava used the example of applying for a job online as a situation where what the library does positively affects the quality of life for people in Bloomfield. A. Biffer said it may be wise to pursue some of the ideas that P. DeLorenzo proffered.

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

Board Comments

C. Gwardyak visited the Atrium and toured the library yesterday. She knew she was in the right place when she saw the book drop. Everyone she talked to was very nice and helpful. It was a positive experience.

Approval of the Minutes

Motion by P. DeLorenzo to accept the minutes of the October 10, 2023 meeting; seconded by B. Merritt and accepted unanimously.

Motion by B. Merritt to accept the minutes of the November 14, 2023 meeting; seconded by C. Gwardyak and accepted unanimously.

Motion by C. Gwardyak to adjourn at 7:26 PM; seconded by P. DeLorenzo and adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Siloac
Assistant Director