

DRAFT  
Bloomfield Public Library  
Board of Trustees  
Conference Remote Special Meeting  
<https://youtube.com/live/q41nmVIq-Dc?feature=share>  
February 20, 2024

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

**Absent:** Erin Corbett

Quorum present? Yes, 5 of 6

A. Biffer called the meeting to order at 4:35 PM

*Roll Call* – E. Corbett absent. S. Chance joined the meeting at 4:40 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*

**State of the Library Address** – A. Biffer urged everyone to watch the State of the Library Address. BPL team did a great job with the presentation. The address showed off the extraordinary performance of BPL, and the amazing work and dedication of the staff.

*Director's Report*

**Prosser Groundbreaking** – The Prosser groundbreaking ceremony was held on January 24. Downes Construction said they have never had so many people show up to one. It was a great celebration. In her remarks, E. Lane highlighted the fact that BPL had the fifth highest virtual attendance in the state last year, and then asked everyone to picture those people at programs in the new Prosser.

**Take Your Child to the Library Day** – On Saturday, February 3, BPL celebrated Take Your Child to the Library Day at 330 Park. The successful event consisted of a magic show attended by 110 people, a Hartford Symphony instrument petting zoo (75 people), and a visit from the Read to Grow Bookmobile, which provided every child who attended with a book they could take home.

**Staff Development Day** – BPL held its annual staff development day on February 6. The morning session, delivered by Dionne Nichols, focused on purpose driven leadership. In the afternoon, the staff visited the Noah Webster House in West Hartford and toured their new archive space and had a conversation about reimagining McMahon Wintonbury without the expansion.

**State of the Library Address** – The State of the Library was delivered on February 12. The BPL leadership team, the mayor, and the board chair all spoke. E. Lane said that the address provided a good overview of BPL's vision of the library going forward, as guided by the mission statement and strategic plan.

**Annual Report** – Staff is reviewing the 2022-2023 annual report. After staff review, E. Lane will send it to the board for another review. The report covers the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023.

**Monthly Visits** – In light of the current plan to close BPL Atrium in August 2024 and move the entire library operation to McMahon in September, E. Lane reviewed BPL Atrium visits, which continue to increase. There were 1,134 visits in November, 1,299 in December, and 1,400 in January. E. Lane anticipates this trend will continue.

**Staffing** – The town approved moving forward with hiring the full-time youth librarian position. This will still leave the library with 1 unfilled full-time (FT) position and 8 unfilled part-time (PT) positions. BPL is currently down over 100 hours per week of staff capacity.

**CLA Awards** – E. Lane hopes we can nominate one or two staffers for the 2024 Connecticut Library Association's awards.

**Tanglewood Marionettes** – E. Lane emphasized that Bloomfield schools are the library's most important ongoing partnership. One recent example is when Metacomet hosted a library program on Friday, February 16. The program was a performance of *The Dragon King*, a puppet show presented by Tanglewood Marionettes. There were 110 attendees and great feedback from everyone.

**Scheduling Software** – A. Wilkos has fully rolled out updated scheduling software for the library, providing a more professional approach to scheduling. A. Wilkos spoke about the challenges of staffing and how the WhenToWork software has improved efficiency. BPL learned about the software from other Connecticut libraries, so using this software is an example of adhering to best practices. E. Lane thanked A. Wilkos for her thoughtful approach to scheduling.

**EBook Legislation** – The state legislative session has resumed. One big thing libraries are hoping to accomplish is the passage of ebook legislation. Ebook vendors charge libraries far more than they do individual consumers. E. Lane will submit testimony on the issue, alongside around 15 other library directors at tomorrow's general assembly hearing. E. Lane encouraged board members to lend their voices to the process going forward. Ebook circulation continues to grow, while library budgets remain static. Along with pricing, libraries are seeking more equal terms. E. Lane described the problem of long hold lists for ebooks, and the digital divide that results from communities not able to afford more. A. Wilkos mentioned that lending models have metered access, with materials disappearing from the collection after two years or 26 checkouts.

**Homebound Services** – Wendy Williams and the Bloomfield Lions Club have stepped up to help BPL deliver homebound service while the library is understaffed. Volunteers will deliver the materials to homebound individuals and facilities. The town has given a green light in terms of liability issues. E. Lane is grateful to the Lions for this help.

**Board Questions/Comments** – A. Biffer mentioned that Bloomfield's statewide rankings are impressive considering there are 169 towns, and Bloomfield is not particularly large. One challenge is figuring out how to maintain this service level with staff shortages.

### *Old Business*

**Discussion of staffing deficits and impact on services** – BPL continues to be down 2 FT and 8 PT positions, though the town recently greenlighted moving forward to hire 1 FT position. The hope is to have someone added within 3 months, which will allow for service expansion. E. Lane noted that there is

misinformation in town about library staffing levels and explained that, with the unknowns brought about by the building project, the library did not immediately replace staff that left. E. Lane made that decision, thinking the library could hire when things settled down, but she did not anticipate the hiring freeze. She emphasized that full-time equivalent (FTE) staff has declined to a point where the library cannot maintain service levels. BPL currently has 27 people, but not all have actually worked during this time, due to a mismatch between part-time availability and the temporary service hours, which include shorter nights and no weekends. E. Lane is thankful the council has allowed the hiring of one FT position, and she hopes to add more positions going forward. In 2019, FTE was 18.52. Currently, it is 15.68. This difference has a massive impact on service delivery. For comparison, E. Lane noted the FTE levels of surrounding libraries: Farmington 25.2, Hartford 102, Simsbury 18.53, West Hartford 33.85, and Windsor 18.63. BPL is significantly short staffed in comparison with past staffing levels and the staffing levels of surrounding libraries. With the help of the Lions and the hiring of the new librarian, BPL can resume homebound delivery and other services.

**Discussion of Fiscal Year 2025 Budget** – E. Lane noted that she should have emailed the board FY25 budget information. The budget is focused on returning to full staffing levels. Last year’s hiring freeze was actually a deduction of the budget, so the big increase in this year’s budget is actually a restoration of the funding for the frozen positions, which were a cut to the overall budget. Everything else is flat.

#### *New Business*

**Discussion of temporary restitution of homebound services** – This item was already discussed in the Director’s Report, but E. Lane explained why homebound restitution is considered temporary. Full resumption of the service requires onboarding the new staff member. Additionally, the Lions have only agreed to deliver the service until the end of current fiscal year.

**Discussion of temporary restitution of notary service** – The restitution of notary service depends on the temporary assistance of Jennifer Marshall-Neely, the Democratic Registrar of Voters, who will provide free notary services by appointment. A. Biffer thanked the library’s community partners for stepping in to help at this moment.

In response to a question from P. DeLorenzo about the Lions only committing to homebound delivery until June 30, 2024, E. Lane explained that they want to see how it goes before committing longer. P. DeLorenzo verified with E. Lane that the Friends still wanted to place informational signage about the temporary locations at both building sites and said that he will ask that the item be added to the library building committee’s (LBC) agenda.

In order to be a better advocate, S. Chance asked for clarification on full-time staffing levels, as well as for the number of monthly visits to the Atrium. E. Lane said the position being filled is a youth librarian position. Once the library hires for that position, the library will have 12 of its 13 full-timers in place. E. Lane will send an email with the number of Atrium visits. In January, BPL passed 1,400 visits for the first time. 712 people visited Tech Express that month. The numbers have grown month to month.

**Discussion of BPL Atrium License Agreement Expiration and McMahon Wintonbury Timeline** – Currently, the building committee is on track to upgrade the interior of McMahon Wintonbury, with a timeline that coincides with the end of the agreement with the Atrium. The lease expires in September 2024. E. Lane explained the current plan would mean moving the entire library operation, including staff, into McMahon Wintonbury for 6-8 months, which would negatively impact library services. McMahon will have a smaller usable footprint after the ADA upgrades, so it will be difficult to have collections in this scenario. E. Lane said the acting town manager has not been involved in these discussions and

mentioned the idea of potentially using other town facilities for library services. E. Lane emphasized that reconfiguring library services yet again will be a great disruption to the community and to library staff.

C. Gwardyak offered up the possibility of using the vacant BELC building for library services, staff, or storage if the library leaves the Atrium. She said the building is owned by the Corporation for Independent Living, a non-profit real estate developer. It was determined that such an idea would likely need to go through the building committee. The board discussed the possibility of using the building as storage. P. DeLorenzo said he would take the idea to building committee leadership. The close location to McMahan could make it worth considering.

B. Merritt said the best course of action was to find some money so the library can stay at the Atrium until Prosser is finished. She said the building committee should approach the town council with that idea. Moving again is expensive and creates disruption and confusion. P. DeLorenzo said that one consideration is where the funds will come from, and noted that the LBC has not explored this option with the town council.

E. Lane suggested speaking with the Department of Economic Community Development (DECD) about a grant to help sustain library services. A. Biffer spoke about a grant-in-aid program offered through the DECD, but is not aware of the guidelines. The LBC should look into the grant-in-aid option. P. DeLorenzo will speak to committee leadership about this idea.

B. Merritt suggested that if the library stays at the Atrium, McMahan Wintonbury can open as a technology location when it is complete. That would make for two good service locations. A. Biffer said it will be a nicer space than the lab at 330 Park and would be more convenient to the surrounding neighborhoods. E. Lane emphasized that these service disruptions and changes are really difficult for the public as well. BPL is hoping to have a community forum, with a tentative date of March 5, to give more voice to our public on the McMahan project. A. Biffer said that people need to be more aware of what is happening. There had been maximum community input earlier in the process, so it would be valuable to have it now.

C. Gwardyak, as part of her work on the Conservation, Energy, and Environment Committee, asked what plans the library would like to pursue for green technology, if funding was available. The board discussed some of the environmentally-friendly aspects of the new and renovated library buildings, such as solar panels and LEED certification. A. Biffer noted that Lois Hager from the building committee has been involved on this front and would be a good person to start with. C. Gwardyak said this feedback would inform the comments on a larger proposal.

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

*Board Comments* – There were no additional board comments.

*Approval of the Minutes*

**Motion by C. Gwardyk to accept the minutes of the January 9, 2023 meeting;** seconded by P. DeLorenzo and accepted unanimously.

**Motion by A. Biffer to adjourn at 5:45 PM.** Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Siloac  
Assistant Director