

DRAFT
Bloomfield Public Library
Board of Trustees
Conference Remote Meeting
<https://youtube.com/live/zcMZivuZb3w?feature=share>
January 9, 2024

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

Absent: None

Quorum present? Yes, 6 of 6

A. Biffer called the meeting to order at 5:37 PM

Roll Call – C. Gwardyak was not present at roll call, but joined the meeting at 5:53 PM.

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

Report from the Friends of the Bloomfield Public Libraries

Friends' Report – The Friends are pleased to fund refreshments for the Book Voyager series at Laurel and Metacomet. The Friends continue to look for funding and volunteering opportunities, as well as ways to be helpful to the staff and advocate for the libraries. Ava thanked Penny and the Friends for all they do.

Chairperson's Report

New Trustees – A. Biffer welcomed E. Corbett and S. Chance as trustees.

Prosser Demolition – Demolition is in progress at the Prosser site, which is an important step for the building project.

Library Staff – A. Biffer thanked library staff and the BPL leadership team for serving all of Bloomfield, and for continuing efforts to maintain excellent service amidst a staff shortage.

Director's Report

New Board Members – E. Lane welcomed the new trustees and invited them to tour BPL at the Atrium and meet the staff.

Holiday Party – The staff had a wonderful two-hour holiday party on December 22. E. Lane thanked B. Merritt and C. Gwardyak for attending.

Town Newsletter – *In Bloom*, the town newsletter, featured the library project in its latest issue, with new images of what Prosser will look like. The newsletter also included an advertisement for the two temporary library locations, the Atrium and Tech Express. E. Lane thanked Brian Wolff and India Rodgers for featuring the library.

Library Receipt – BPL recently updated its checkout receipts to show the number of materials borrowed and how much money a patron saved by borrowing from the library.

Town Manager – The town was unsuccessful in its recruitment for a town manager, with the final candidate withdrawing. The town will go out again for a search. Sharron Howe is again serving as interim town manager.

Town Council Orientation – The five member BPL leadership team will present at the upcoming town council orientation, which will be held on January 11. Each member of the leadership team will provide a different angle on what the library does. E. Lane will focus on the invisible work of libraries. Elizabeth said that too many people equate library staff only with service desk work and not with all the work that goes into technology, online services, programming, and materials processing.

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

BPL Online Overview – E. Lane shared her screen and provided an overview of the library's website, bplct.org. She showed pages for the building committee, online resources, and digital media, and stressed how digital services are free to access with a library card. She reviewed the library board's webpage and asked the new trustees to send a photo to post, along with preferred contact information. E. Lane pointed out the sign-up link for the library newsletter, which is issued every Friday morning. The library board will be featured in an upcoming newsletter. E. Lane reviewed the newsletter layout and features. In addition to the website, BPL has a strong social media presence, including accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The library records virtual programs whenever possible and archives them on YouTube for more access.

Reconsideration Process – E. Lane spoke about the recent library listening session with the lieutenant governor, which focused on book banning and censorship. One point that emerged from that session is the importance of having library stakeholders prepared ahead of time to meet challenges to materials. E. Lane showed the board where to access policies on the library's website, including the Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Policy and the Request for Reconsideration of Material Form. E. Lane highlighted the role of parents and guardians in selecting what is appropriate for their own children and reviewed the reconsideration form and the step-by-step process in place to adjudicate challenges. The library board will make the final determination in regards to challenges. E. Lane stressed that a challenge will happen in Bloomfield at some point. In response to a question by E. Corbett, E. Lane said that it is expected that the library board will read a book in full if under review, but that the requirement will depend upon the challenge, and the feasibility of completing the book in a timely manner.

Library Cardholders – In response to a question from the board at a previous meeting, C. Siloac ran a report for library card holders by age group (adult or youth) and then compared those numbers to census data. C. Siloac reviewed the statistics: BPL has 6,321 adult card holders, which is 34.67% of the adult population, and 1,774 youth card holders, which is 53.71% of the youth population. The higher percentage of youth card holders is a testament to the outreach work, particularly in the schools, of the youth librarians. Looking at patron statistics in this manner can help the library target its efforts.

Library Statistics – E. Lane informed the new board members about the multitude of statistics that library's collect and submit to the state library. These statistics are compiled annually and then used for benchmarking and comparisons. E. Lane noted Bloomfield's high state-wide rankings when it comes to youth and adult programming, with a particularly strong rank for Pre-K outreach (#1), adult virtual programming (#5), and for the number of adult programs offered (#19).

Take Your Child to the Library Day – Take Your Child to the Library Day is on Saturday, February 3. BPL will celebrate it at 330 Park this year, with a magic show, musical instrument petting zoo, and a bookmobile.

Staff Shortages – Staffing shortages continue. The library is currently down 10 positions, 8 part-time and 2 full-time, equalling about 130 hours of staff time per week. The shortages impact morale and staff burnout. The library has suspended homebound and notary services. Bloomfield Lions reached out to help with the homebound service, particularly with delivery of materials. E. Lane is looking into liability issues around having volunteers make deliveries. BPL may be able to expand this service if the volunteer model works. The Democratic Registrar of Voters will offer free notary services through March.

Finance Committee Meetings – The next two town council finance subcommittee meetings are January 16 and February 20. E. Lane noted that these meetings are where decisions about hiring freezes are made, and that it is important for the library to speak about the invisible work of libraries and staffing.

Paid Sick Leave for PT Staff – The board has decided to wait until a new town manager is in place before moving again on the issue of paid sick leave for all part-time staff. The problem in Bloomfield is that librarians receive the benefit, while library assistants do not, which is not the case in most towns. It is a matter of social justice and a moral issue.

Budget for FY25 - The town is working on the budget for FY25. The library's budget has been submitted. The budget appears to be an 8% increase over last year, but that is due to the hiring freeze last year acting as a cut to the budget. When the freeze is accounted for, it is about a 4% increase. E. Lane will update the board again as the budget process continues.

Prosser Demolition – Demolition on the Prosser building started last week. E. Lane noted that many people have nostalgia for the Prosser building. She stressed that it could not be renovated due to flooding and a poor layout, and that the demolition paves the way for the future.

Early Literacy – E. Lane spoke about how much the library values early literacy. Public libraries play a crucial role in school readiness. BPL youth librarians visit preschools and daycares throughout the community on a regular basis. The library values these partnerships.

Monthly Statistics – E. Lane reviewed the December statistics that she is including in the town manager's report. BPL hosted 45 programs with 1,293 attendees. 1,121 online resources were accessed, and 2,010 items were circulated digitally. 580 people visited Tech Express at 330 Park and 1,229 visited the Atrium.

Board Questions/Comments – P. DeLorenzo asked if E. Lane was working with the town attorney on evaluating the liability question regarding using volunteers for homebound delivery. E. Lane is waiting on a proposal from the Lions Club. She presented the idea to the Purchasing and Risk Manager and Town Manager, but she will also loop in the town attorney, as suggested by Patrick.

P. DeLorenzo and E. Lane discussed ways in which the board can help at finance subcommittee meetings. E. Lane said there is not enough recognition of the impact this hiring freeze has had on the library and the public. It is hard to deliver equitable service to 20,000 plus residents, and the library is preparing for the future in our new buildings. The library board can provide a different perspective on the issues. P. DeLorenzo will attempt to attend at least one of the meetings. E. Lane spoke last night at the town council meeting. It is important for the library to maintain a presence at this time. There is a lot of misinformation about the library right now.

P. DeLorenzo asked if the budget includes utility costs. E. Lane noted that there are partial amounts for utilities for McMahon and Prosser this year. That figure comes from public works. E. Lane said those numbers may not reflect reality, due to the uncertain timeline for the library moving back into its buildings. P. DeLorenzo asked that the language on the library's website regarding the McMahon project be revised. The project is not delayed, it is in the process of moving forward. E. Lane said the library can revisit and change that language.

C. Gwardyak asked about meeting protocol for board member comments and talked about the need for better talking points as an advocate. A. Biffer said she is open to a free flow of discussion at board meetings but noted that the Board Comments agenda item is always a good place to bring up matters.

In a follow-up on E. Lane's overview of the library's website, A. Biffer encouraged the board to visit the site and read the mission statement, social justice mission statement, and library policies. She stated that trustees will get a chance to draft new policies and review and update existing policies and the by-laws as needed, and that board members should raise any policy or procedural concerns that they want to address. Policies are normally submitted for legal review before final adoption.

A. Biffer spoke about the reconsideration challenges facing libraries, including an issue at BPL regarding a Pride flag and LGBTQ materials, and recommended that board members read the reconsideration form. Ava recounted reconsideration experiences from her time as a school librarian and stressed that the library board would approach challenges with a thorough process driven by concerns for intellectual freedom and professional standards.

A. Biffer was impressed with BPL's annual state report statistics, especially the fact that Bloomfield is ranked as a top 25 library in multiple categories, in a state with 169 towns. There is a downward trend in most libraries, but Bloomfield is trending in the opposite in many categories. Ava also stressed the importance of getting library cards into the hands of children at an early age.

Old Business

Discussion and possible action concerning employee professional development– The library has set February 6 for its staff development day. The training facilitator is Dionne Nicholls. E. Lane thanked manager Carol Walters for putting the agenda together.

Discussion of staffing deficits and impact on services – This issue was also covered in the Director's Report. E. Lane reiterated the burnout and morale issues being faced at BPL and across the town. There has been a lot of turnover and vacancies. E. Lane is trying to be better about professional development to address these situations as a manager. A. Biffer said that staffing and morale is also impacted by the town not allowing all part-time employees to accrue sick time, despite how vital their work is to the library.

New Business

Discussion of Fiscal Year 2025 Budget – This item was also discussed during the director's report. A. Biffer spoke about the importance of advocating for the library on staffing issues, especially with the possibility of an extended hiring freeze. Everyone deserves library services that meet their needs and to be treated with dignity and respect. Staff shortages can prevent the library from fulfilling this mission. Ava called on the board to act as advocates and get the word out.

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

Board Comments

P. DeLorenzo welcomed E. Corbett and S. Chance to the board of trustees. Patrick hopes to meet them in person if the board has a hybrid meeting option in February. P. DeLorenzo encouraged everyone to stop by the Prosser construction site. Demolition is going extremely well, including the sorting of materials. Patrick confirmed that the bricks from Prosser are being saved and noted that there should be discussions about what to do with them. Jason Smith from Downes Construction would be happy to meet or give a tour to library trustees.

A. Biffer talked about the emotions associated with the Prosser building, but said that its demolition is making way for a new library experience. Ava will send S. Chance a trustee packet after the meeting.

S. Chance said she is happy to join the library board, especially at such an exciting time. Sherry-Ann has helped launch Little Free Libraries and has visited libraries in other towns and looks forward to an updated library that serves all of Bloomfield.

Approval of the Minutes

Motion by E. Corbett to accept the minutes of the December 12, 2023 meeting; seconded by C. Gwardyak and accepted unanimously.

Motion by C. Gwardyak to adjourn at 6:52 PM; seconded by P. DeLorenzo and adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Siloac
Assistant Director