

**James Blackstone Memorial Library  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES  
Wednesday, April 7, 2021**

The meeting was conducted remotely via Zoom.

**Trustees (Present):** Maryann Amore, Michelle Blank, Liz Ferguson, Don Gentile, Cheryl Kaiden, Mary-Rita Killelea, Ed Kirk, Janice Kochanowski, Beth Law, Heather Nolin, Matt Roth, Pat Sanders, Adam Spilka, Jack Thompson, Jeff Vailette

**Trustees (Absent):** Norman Dahl, Ed Prete

**Friends of the Library:** absent

**Staff:** Karen Jensen, Library Director, Katy McNicol, Associate Librarian for Development & Outreach, Kathy Oxsalida, Business Manager

**Guests:** Eloise Owens, Yale SOM, Nikki Whang, Yale SOM

**Public:** Mary Hally

Beth Law called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. She took a few moments to recognize Eloise Owens, Yale SOM, who will be graduating in May.

Beth also reported that she had received correspondence from Mary Hally, who requested clarification about the \$25,000 donation from the Friends of the Library which had been designated to install a new audio system in honor of Betsy Klarman (recorded in the January 2, 2019 minutes). Beth stated that the work is still to be completed.

**Additions to the Agenda** – Michelle Blank requested that the Strategic Planning Committee report be moved ahead. Adam Spilka requested time on the agenda to speak about the Library’s 501(c)3 status and prohibition against political activity. Michelle Blank made a motion to add these two items; Janice Kochanowski seconded the motion. The motion carried with all voting in favor.

- 1) **Approval of Minutes (March)**— Beth Law presented the minutes of March 3, 2021. Maryann Amore made a motion to approve the minutes of March 3, 2021; Pat Sanders seconded the motion. The motion carried with all voting in favor.

**Director’s Report** – Karen Jensen circulated a written report in advance of the meeting. She noted that the computer lab opening is going very well. Staff are moving ahead with vaccinations, and the Associate Librarian for Youth Services will be on family leave throughout the summer. She also highlighted a new digital resource available through the library: Creativebug, which offers access to expert craft instruction. Because the subscription cost is based on the population of the town, we are able to offer access to patrons of the Willoughby Wallace library as well.

- 2) **Friends of the Library** – In the absence of Friends President Al Bertoline, Karen reported that the Friends board of directors had worked hard in the past few weeks to update their bylaws. They will vote on them at the April 20 regular meeting. Major changes to the bylaws include: Members of the board of directors will be elected at the Friends annual meeting in June. Also, the President will be limited to two, 1-year terms. Directors will be limited to two, 4-year terms. They have also included a conflict of interest form and decided that Robert’s Rules of Order will govern all proceedings. Karen thanked Trustee Adam Spilka for reviewing the bylaws for the Friends.

The Friends are holding a series of smaller sales in their warehouse at River Run: The first weekend (Friday, 5/14/2021 through Sunday, 5/16/2021) is Children books. The second weekend (Friday, 5/21/2021 through Sunday, 5/23/2021) is for Adult Fiction Books only. Hours for the sale are Friday & Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 3p.m. Last year's smaller sales were very successful, and the Friends is hoping for a similar result.

- 3) **Treasurer's Report** – Janice Kochanowski reported that today's approximate value of the investment account is \$3,285,000. She noted that the March value included the addition of the \$50,000 gift which was deposited in January; also, quarterly investment fees of \$7,800 were withdrawn in that month. Kathy Oxsalida presented the February variance statement, noting that the variance is holding steady. There was a \$21,000 deficit in January, which grew to \$34,000 in February. This was due to receiving the invoices for snow removal, which totaled \$12,000. We are 32% over budget in that line, which is not unexpected. Contributions include the \$50,000 which has been moved to the investment account. The current deficit is approximately \$80,000, which is in line with expectations.

In response to questions from Jeff Valette, Kathy replied that we do not pay for snow removal if it does not snow, and that the Library contracts with Nardella's for snow removal and landscaping.

4) **Committee Reports—**

**Finance Committee**—Janice Kochanowski reported that the Finance Committee met on April 1 to review the following:

- **Budget Process Report** – The Board of Finance heard Karen's presentation of the Library's budget request on March 25 and unanimously voted to approve it. Karen presented the Library's budget request to the RTM Education Committee on April 5. Ed Prete, the Chair of the Education Committee and our ex officio Trustee, sent a highly complimentary note the next day regarding Karen's presentation and this year's budget process generally. The Education Committee will vote on its recommendation at a meeting scheduled for May 3. Ed Prete will present that recommendation at the May 11 full RTM meeting, when the final town budget will be approved. The Library's request to establish a sinking fund was approved by the entire RTM on March 10.
- **Friends Gift** – The Friends of the Library have awarded the library a \$30,000 gift in addition to their annual support of programs and extra resources. The Friends have had unusual success with online book sales, this year, which accounts for some of the excess. The Finance Committee discussed the allocation of this gift and decided to review at the next meeting, when we are closer to the end of the fiscal year.

**Strategic Planning –**

Michelle Blank reported that interviews with the closest stakeholders are nearing completion, and she is working on a report about the initial stakeholder information. The staff and members of the committee including Michelle, Mary-Rita Killelea and Pat Sanders have spent the past few weeks working on identifying motivational segments. Phase 2, in which staff begins working with Innovation Builders, is scheduled to start on April 12. This work is in preparation for discussions with community members, a critical part of the strategic planning process. Michelle thanked Karen and Katy for spearheading the training with staff. She noted the importance of the staff's ability to undertake this work independently in the future. Finally, Michelle offered to provide a link to the knowledge library; Pat Sanders noted it is a great resource and recommended that all Trustees review it.

### **Development Committee—**

- Katy reported that Library Giving Day on April 6 had started out strong. She thanked Adam Spilka for recording a video that was sent to donors. She encouraged other trustees to volunteer for such videos.
- Spring Fundraiser – Bid for Blackstone – Katy McNicol reported that we have 13 confirmed auction packages and the PR is ready to go. Our goal is to raise \$2,500; the value of the confirmed packages is closer to \$5,000.
- April appeal – The letter is ready to go out; it will be sent to Trustees following the meeting. Katy will contact those Trustees who offered to write personal notes to donors.
- 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – Karen reported that Maryann Amore, Michelle Blank, Mary-Rita Killelea and Matt Roth have volunteered for the committee. More members are very welcome. Heather Nolin asked if there is a date for a special event. Karen replied that the official date of the anniversary is June 17 and she and Michelle Blank had discussed making the anniversary celebration a yearlong event.

### **Project Planning Committee—**

- Roof Repair Update – The March 11 meeting was canceled, and the committee has not yet met to discuss pending issues delaying the issuance of a certificate of occupancy – an early detection fire alarm in the children’s area, and a decision on whether the historic doors at the computer lab entrance and auditorium balcony entrance will need to be fire-rated.

### **Governance Committee—**

Pat Sanders asked for a motion to establish a nominating committee. The committee’s purpose is to nominate a slate of candidates for officer positions. The committee will include Pat and Don Gentile, who will discuss with incumbents their interest in serving another term. The committee will present the slate at the May meeting; the related vote will be held at the June meeting. Michelle Blank made a motion to establish the committee; Ed Kirk seconded the motion; the motion carried with all voting in favor.

- 5) **Library 501(c)3 status and Prohibition of Political Activity** – Adam stated that donations to the Blackstone are deductible because of our status as a 501(c)3 public charity. To maintain our 501(c)3 status there are a number of requirements. He described the prohibition on “political activity”: the Library cannot support any individual candidates or political parties, nor can it oppose any individual candidates or political parties. This is true of national, state and local races.

Individuals associated with the library have related constraints. However, if a trustee or employee wanted to speak on behalf of a candidate, or work on his or her campaign, or support the work of a particular party, they are free to do so. They must simply make clear that they are not doing so on behalf of the Library, or in their role as trustee or employee of the Library.

Maryann Amore noted that there have been instances when legislators have spoken or held office hours at the library. Karen clarified that the rule does not apply to incumbents who have not declared their intention to run for another term.

Ed Kirk noted that on Charity Navigator, a website that rates charities to assist donors, the Blackstone has a 97/100 score, and that we might wish to use their toolkit to increase our visibility to potential donors. Karen noted that Library information is also maintained on Guidestar, a similar website.

- 6) **Public Comments** (10 minutes) – none.
- 7) **Adjournment** – Maryanne Amore made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Janice Kochanowski seconded the motion and all voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 6:44 p.m.
- 8) Next regular meeting—May 5, 2021

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Jensen

***Note: minutes are unofficial until approved by the Board of Trustees.***