

James Blackstone Memorial Library
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, January 4, 2023, 6:00 p.m.
Location: Library Auditorium, 758 Main Street

The meeting was conducted as a “hybrid”; participants were able to attend in person at the auditorium in the Library, or remotely via Zoom.

Trustees (Present): Michelle Blank, Chad Edgar, Nancy Goldstein, Cheryl Kaiden, Mary-Rita Killelea, Janice Kochanowski, Beth Law, Matt Roth, Pat Sanders, Adam Spilka, Jack Thompson, Sue Wharfe

Trustees (Absent): Maryann Amore, Liz Ferguson, Don Gentile, Ed Prete, Jeff Vailette,

Friends of the Library: Barbara Barrett

Staff: Katy McNicol, Library Director; Deirdre Santora, Circulation Department Supervisor

Yale SOM Fellow: Alyson Mathews

Public: none

Adam Spilka called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Additions to the Agenda – Adam Spilka noted that Deirdre Santora will replace Jenna Anthony to deliver the Staff Presentation at today’s meeting.

Approval of Minutes—Adam Spilka said that he had received no comments on the draft minutes of the November meeting that had been circulated with the materials for the meeting. Nancy Goldstein made a motion to approve those minutes. Pat Sanders seconded the motion. The motion carried. Adam noted that since a formal board meeting was not held in December there are no December minutes to approve. Brief informal notes from a holiday party, held on December 7, 2022, were circulated with the materials for this meeting.

Director’s Report – Katy McNicol referred to her written monthly report circulated prior to the meeting and highlighted some additional events during the month of December. Yale Librarian Barbara Rockenbach visited the Blackstone and toured the building. She enjoyed the beauty of the building and expressed appreciation for the skill and expertise required to maintain such a structure. Barbara plans to attend board meetings when her schedule permits. Katy noted that staff are encouraged to attend a wide range of free library-focused webinar sessions as their time allows. These webinars often offer tips and ideas for expanding services and programming as well as ideas for in-service training days. In December staff attended workshops entitled Implementing a Digital Navigator Program, detailing focused tech help in the community, and The Librarian’s Guide to Homelessness. Katy also attended a Director’s Roundtable organized by the CT Library Consortium where old and new colleagues discussed their intentions and resolutions for work for the new year and ways to support and motivate staff. Staff enjoyed a holiday party in the reading room sponsored by the Friends and there are plans for another staff get-together in the spring on the terrace.

Staff Presentation - Katy introduced Deirdre Santora to the Board. Deidre is the Associate Librarian for Access Services, better known as head of the Circulation Department. Deidre has been with the Blackstone for over 20 years and supervises a busy department of seven people. She joined the board to introduce herself and her job and to enable the board to get to know her better.

Deirdre addressed the Board. She stated that after receiving a BS from SCSU in Biology/Art History and a MLS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison she began working full time at the Blackstone in 1999 as a Reference Librarian. Deidre supervises a staff of 7 hardworking and energetic frontline members who provide a wide range of services. Among their many roles and responsibilities, the circulation staff build friendships and rapport with many regular patrons, staff the computer lab, design and post weekly, monthly and ongoing displays, including Poem of the Week, Black History Month, Staff Picks and manage various book groups, game night and social media. Circulation staff also deal on a daily basis with assisting patrons in getting library cards and registering for programs. In addition to her supervisory role Deidre's duties include scheduling volunteers and staff desk assignments, acting as the library coordinator for the consortium's delivery service, which delivers 30 bins weekly containing hold requests and books being returned from other libraries, collaborating with Barbara Barrett and the Friends Book sale, scheduling displays in the Art Gallery, and calculating monthly circulation statistics for a wide range of materials. Deidre enjoys the collaboration across all departments and finds her job "...exhilarating, exhausting, energizing; there is never a dull moment." In response to a question from a Trustee, Deirdre noted the importance of providing excellent service for patrons; the Library currently enjoys a very positive reputation for service but that wasn't always the case.

Friends of the Library –Barbara Barrett reported that online books sales were very good during the month of December and that this year, as expenses keep rising, the Friends will focus on developing strategies to reduce expenses and increase the revenue stream, with the goal of providing additional funds to the Blackstone.

Treasurer's Report – Janice Kochanowski reported that today's approximate value of the investment account is \$3,473,000. The change in value represents a slight decrease of \$31,000 from the December 7 value of \$3,504,000, reflecting that markets continue to be whipsawed by recession concerns. Janice then presented the November variance report that had been circulated with the materials for this meeting. The November variance continues to be favorable to budget. This reflects the favorable variance in salaries, payroll taxes and benefits as a result of staff retirements, open positions that are taking longer to fill, and some changes in staffing levels. The negative variance in Development and Fundraising is due to cancellation of one fall event and the positive variance in Professional Fees is due to timing variance.

Committee Reports—

Finance Committee—Janice Kochanowski reported that the Finance Committee did not have a regular meeting in December. On December 12 they did meet with Blackstone auditors Bailey Scarano to review the Financial Statements for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022. The auditors are responding to some adjustments and questions from the committee and the committee anticipates submitting the financials to the Board for approval at the February meeting.

The next meeting of the Finance Committee is scheduled for January 26 at 4:30 p.m.

Development Committee – Matt Roth reported that Tina Strell is continuing to secure sponsors and auction items for the spring mini golf fundraiser and has circulated a revised poster for comment. Katy announced that the Fall Appeal has raised over \$40,000 to date. This amount does not reflect checks received during the last week of December.

Governance Committee – Pat Sanders announced the formation of a subcommittee to review and revise the bylaws. She noted that it is best practice to review bylaws on a regular basis, that the Blackstone bylaws have not been reviewed and revised in over 10 years and that she did not anticipate a major overhaul. The members of this subcommittee are Adam Spilka (Chair), Chad Edgar and Mary-Rita Killelea.

Buildings and Grounds Committee – In Liz Ferguson’s absence, Adam Spilka reported on the December 15th meeting of the committee:

- We are working with John Hoefflerle (town engineer) to finalize Silver, Petrucelli’s proposal to study the balcony enclosure;
- Staff has asked goodyFab (a North Branford firm) to move forward on the railings at the side of the stairs leading to the Cosgrove terrace, and is awaiting a proposal from that firm to refurbish the chiller screen;
- A new sign identifying the location of accessible parking has been installed;
- Staff and Pat Sanders will work with a donor to find an agreeable location for a memorial bench;
- We received 17 mural proposals for the children’s space; staff has forwarded three finalists to Liz, who will organize a subcommittee of B&G to make a recommendation to the full board; and
- There are three projects related to the grounds: regarding the sculptures, the committee is looking into returning them to their owner and determining a better placement of them; committee considered but declined to move forward with a gazebo, citing issues such as placement, maintenance and mis-use; committee will explore the possibility of erecting an outdoor sign facing Main Street.

Public Comment – none

Adjournment – Pat Sanders made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Nancy Goldstein seconded the motion. The motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Next regular meeting will be held on February 1, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary-Rita Killelea
Secretary

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