

James Blackstone Memorial Library
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, December 1, 2021

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): Maryann Amore, Michelle Blank, Don Gentile, Cheryl Kaiden, Mary-Rita Killelea, Janice Kochanowski, Heather Nolin, Ed Prete, Pat Sanders, Adam Spilka, Jack Thompson, Sue Wharfe

Trustees (Absent): Norman Dahl, Liz Ferguson, Beth Law, Matt Roth, Jeff Vailette

Friends of the Library: Al Bertoline, Helen Wong, Joe Genua, Judy Stebbins, Pam Roy, Barbara Barrett

Staff: Karen Jensen, Library Director, Katy McNicol, Associate Librarian for Development & Outreach, Kathy Oxsalida, Business Manager, Jenna Anthony, Christina Kondziela, Sarah Mallory, Angela Meikle

Guests: Nikki Whang, Yale SOM, Jeanine Esposito, Founder and CEO of Innovation Builders, Frederic Chiu, Innovation Builders

Public: none

Maryann Amore called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Additions to the Agenda – Maryann Amore asked that a sub-allocation of \$3,000 from the \$15,000 DeLaurentis Gift allocation, to be used for 6 pole banners and 2 front entrance banners in celebration of the Blackstone’s 125th Anniversary, be added to the agenda.

- **Approval of Minutes**— Maryann Amore presented the minutes of the November 3, 2021 meeting of the Board that were circulated with the materials for this meeting. Mary-Rita Killelea made a motion to approve the minutes. Don Gentile seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.
- **Director’s Report** – Karen Jensen circulated a written report prior to the meeting. She drew attention to the library’s winter calendar of events and noted the variety of programs being offered. Many of these programs are sponsored by the Friends, some are supported by grants, and some are presented in partnership with local organizations. Karen thanked the Friends for sponsoring the cost of printing the calendar. She announced that the November appeal has generated \$9,776 to date and thanked the donors for their continuing support. Karen also encouraged Trustees and Friends to take advantage of upcoming workshops sponsored by the Association of Connecticut Library Boards.
- **Friends of the Library** – Al Bertoline reported that online sales are not as robust as in past years and speculated that perhaps this was due to people wanting to be out in stores this year. He thanked trustee Cheryl Kaiden for providing him with a lead on alternative warehouse space to store books for the annual sale.
- **Treasurer’s Report** – Janice Kochanowski reported that today’s approximate value of the investment account is \$3,683,000, which includes the \$226,000 DeLaurentis gift. This value reflects a decrease of \$73,000, which excludes the \$226,000 gift, from the November 3 value of \$3,529,000, reflecting

the volatility of the markets. The balance is still up from January's balance of \$3,114,000. Kathy Oxsalida reviewed the October variance statement and highlighted the increase in the Contribution line due to the receipt of the DeLaurentis \$226,000 bequest and early appeal donations. Expenses have been consistent, with the past few months running slightly below budget expectations. The second draft of the audited financial statements will be available in the next day or two, and will be reviewed by the Finance Committee at its next meeting and is expected to be presented to the Board for acceptance at the January meeting.

- **Committee Reports—**

Finance Committee—Janice Kochanowski reported that the Finance Committee met on November 23. She stated that the committee reviewed the list of project proposals for DeLaurentis funding and approved a disbursement of \$15,670, which includes \$5,000 for the 125th Birthday Celebration, \$3,000 for 6 pole banners and 2 front entrance banners in celebration of the library's 125th Anniversary and \$7,670 for improvements to the library grounds. The remaining project proposals are currently on hold for approximately 6 months until the final amount of the gift is determined. The next Finance Committee meeting will be held on December 30.

Presentation by Jeanine Esposito

Karen introduced Jeanine Esposito, the Founder and CEO of Innovation Builders, the consultant engaged by the board to facilitate the development of a new strategic plan. Karen informed the board that over the past 5 months she and her staff have worked with Jeanine to receive the training needed in order to conduct a community deep needs analysis. This involved learning the techniques for interviewing target groups, recruiting for those groups, then scheduling and conducting the interviews. As part of the training, the team also learned how to collect and analyze the data from these conversations. The team also sought input through a community survey at the end of the summer. The results of these efforts are set forth in the report.

Jeanine Esposito addressed the board and led them through the big insights, core trends and universal truths contained in the report. She began by congratulating Karen, Katy McNicol and the Blackstone staff for their outstanding work and dedication throughout the project and noted that this data will not only be used this year to set goals for a new strategic framework but will also be used for many years to come as the library continues to adjust to changing community needs. Some highlights of the report included:

The Staff: The Branford community loves the library staff and finds them to be consistently effective, open and caring.

The Blackstone Building and Space: The community sees the building as a beautiful and historic treasure, a welcoming and quiet refuge to sit, contemplate, read and learn. At the same time people are looking for more comfortable spaces, social spaces and spaces for small group meetings, a café space and a safe "third place" like Starbucks to meet and connect. The library will need to balance quiet and privacy with group events along a sound continuum.

Access to Expert Minds: The community is looking for more lecture series, learning and connecting experiences, mentorships, including community-based mentorships, and community members who are willing to share their expertise.

Groups, Groups, and More Groups: There is a strong desire for more group events, both structured and flexible, for a variety of purposes, including social support, sharing, connecting, learning and networking. In addition, the community is interested in new ways to learn that are interactive, hands on, fun and engaging.

Civic Hub Match: The community would like the library to act as a civic hub, a place where people can learn about and connect with a variety of town resources and opportunities around the town. They would also like town information to be organized for specific motivational groups, like people new to town or families with young children.

Millennials: This group is less interested in lectures and learning opportunities. They are interested in attending social events that are light and fun.

Volunteer Match: People would like to find volunteer opportunities at the library through events such as a volunteer fair. They are particularly interested in one day events where they can volunteer with others.

Barriers to Using the Library: People are looking for more convenient library hours. They are also struggling with a lack of time and looking for programs that accommodate their needs, including programs that do not require prior registration and programs that provide child care. Some people are reluctant to come to the library alone and need facilitated programs that reduce social apprehensions with ice breakers and games.

After the presentation the board discussed and commented on the report and the big insights that will enable the library to better meet the current needs of the Branford community. Michele Blank noted that now the hard work begins of making choices and prioritizing these big insights as they are fed into a strategic framework and developed into a new strategic plan for the library.

Public Comment - none

- **Adjournment** –Janice Kochanowski made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jack Thompson seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:32p.m.
- Next regular meeting—January 5, 2022

Respectfully submitted,

Mary-Rita Killelea

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