

Minutes
James Blackstone Memorial Library
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
October 7, 2020

The meeting was conducted remotely via Zoom.

Trustees (Present): Maryann Amore, Don Gentile, Mary-Rita Killelea, Cheryl Kaiden, Beth Law, Matt Roth, Pat Sanders, Adam Spilka, Jack Thompson, Frank Twohill

Trustees (Absent): Michelle Blank, Norman Dahl, Liz Ferguson, Ed Kirk, Janice Kochanowski, Heather Nolin, Jeff Valette

Friends of the Library: Al Bertoline **Guests:** Eloise Owens, Yale SOM Intern

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

Beth Law called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

- 1) **Additions to the Agenda** – none
- 2) **Approval of Minutes (September)**—Pat Sanders made a motion to approve the minutes of September 9, 2020; Mary-Rita Killelea seconded the motion and all voted in favor.
- 3) **Director’s Report** – Karen Jensen circulated a written report in advance of the meeting. She noted that there has been very positive response to the library’s reopening of the stacks, reading room and study areas on September 14. The Governor has approved libraries moving from 50% of fire code capacity to 75%, or maximum occupancy that is consistent with social distancing guidelines, whichever is lower. Since the Library calculated its maximum occupancy consistent with social distancing, our capacity will not change. So far, the number is adequate and we have not had to turn away any “walk-in” appointments. Our neighboring libraries in East Haven and New Haven have recently opened for computer access but not yet for browsing the stacks. The majority of libraries in the state are focusing on contactless pickup as the most popular service. Patrons are also very happy that the library has gone fine-free. The library is offering two new online resources – Petersons Test Prep and Gale Legal Forms. Karen presented the library’s annual report, noting that the renovation is essentially complete and response has been overwhelmingly positive. Materials circulation is down over last year due to the COVID pandemic but electronic circulation continues to grow.
- 4) **Friends of the Library** – Friends President Al Bertoline reported that the Mini Book Sales had raised almost \$24,000. Online sales are double what they were last year. The Friends are still facing a deficit and have initiated a task force for fundraising. Al invited a representative from the Board of Trustees to work with the committee.
- 5) **Treasurer’s Report** – Adam Spilka reviewed the August financial report and explained that we are in the second month of the fiscal year. The report shows the new format. Of note: \$5,000 was carried from Spring 2019’s cancelled Caddystacks event and there has been some savings in salaries, payroll taxes and benefits – this is not expected to continue at the same level as one staff member returns to full-time status. The \$14,300 in building/FFE is part of the \$27,000 allocated at the end of FY ’20, but we don’t reflect the expense until we receive the invoice - these invoices were received after July 1 2020. There has been recent market volatility typical of an election season and the long-term investment approach has not changed. The approximate value of the investment account is \$2,960,000.

6) Committee Reports—

Finance Committee—

- PPP Loan – Adam Spilka reported that the library had spent \$171,000 on salaries and started the process to apply for loan forgiveness.
- Annual Audit – Adam presented a draft of the library’s annual audited financial statements. He described the role of Bailey Scarano, independent auditors. Dominic Scarano and Tammy Lamb had attended a meeting of the Finance Committee the prior week, and described their process. This year, because the library received \$900,000 of a \$1,000,000 construction grant from the State Library, a state single audit was conducted in addition to the usual audit. In both cases, the auditors issued a clean or “unqualified” opinion, reporting that there were no areas of concern. It is possible that we may be required to perform a state single audit again at the end of this fiscal year, as we expect to receive the remaining \$100,000 allocated from the grant when the project is officially complete. Adam reported that the Finance Committee had approved a motion recommending to the full board the acceptance of the statements. Maryanne Amore made a motion to accept the audit; Don Gentile seconded the motion and all voted in favor.
- Adam concluded with the following remarks regarding the budget process:

The possible existence of a significant surplus based on speculation half way through the fiscal year resulted in the RTM granting the library approximately \$45,000 less funding than requested for FY 2021. The library hopes to engage the RTM and the Board of Finance earlier in the budget process this year. The Library has long had an understanding that significant surpluses will contribute to the investment balance, which benefits all library stakeholders, including the town’s taxpayers and their representatives on the RTM. A larger investment balance reduces the amount the Library requests from the Town.

The term “surplus” is not one the Library has used, and we don’t know how anyone else calculated it. We have adopted an easily understood and transparent approach. The audited financials show fundraising revenue that exceeded the budgeted goal by \$69,733. \$36,000 of this amount came from wholly unexpected donations in May, and was restricted by the Board to fund an overdue strategic planning process and related activities. Net expense savings were \$49,596, mainly due to temporary staffing changes that were not anticipated at budget time. The combination of additional revenue plus net savings equals \$119,329. The only adjustment from the audited financials was to take out depreciation expense, which is a non-cash item.

The Blackstone Library is not a town department, but a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation. Our ability to seek tax-deductible donations benefits all tax payers in Branford. The Library is an effective fundraiser and prudent manager of expenses. A significant surplus, while not an appropriate goal for a non-profit, can certainly be a source of pride, and should give others comfort that the Library is well managed.

Project Planning Committee—

- Roof Repair Update – The committee met on September 24. There has been little activity in the last month, caused by a delay in the manufacture of the steel frame. Additionally, the committee learned that the air conditioning chiller needs

replacement – estimated at \$77,000. The chiller repair will be completed with contingency funds from the project.

Development Committee—

- Road Race Update – Katy McNicol reported that the Road Race has been officially cancelled due to the organizer’s inability to obtain permission from the health department.
- Fall Appeal – Katy McNicol distributed the draft appeal letter for Trustees’ consideration, and thanked Michelle Blank and Cheryl Kaiden for their help in drafting it. The appeal will be mailed in November. All trustees are reminded to review the “unclaimed” donor list.

Governance Committee—

- Pat Sanders reminded Trustees that terms are for 3-year periods with the option of serving an additional 3 years. She will be in touch with Trustees who are nearing the end of their first term to confirm their interest in continuing to serve.

Strategic Planning – Michelle Blank and Eloise Owens have been meeting regularly to map out a timeline and plan for initial interviews with stakeholders.

- 7) **Meeting & Holiday Dates 2021** – The proposed board meeting dates and holidays were circulated in advance. Don Gentile made a motion to approve the dates; Pat Sanders seconded and all voted in favor to approve the dates as submitted.
- 8) **Sunday Hours** – Karen reported that while those who have visited appreciate more areas of the library being open, traffic is very low due to concerns about the pandemic. In addition, many area libraries are still not planning to open on Sundays during the fall. She recommended revisiting the topic of Sunday hours again at the November meeting.
- 9) **Branford Microfund** – Maryann Amore informed the Trustees that she has recently joined the Board of the Branford Microfund, a newly established non-profit organization offering interest free loans to individuals and families who encounter unexpected financial obstacles. The library had been asked to partner with the organization and declined as it cannot collect or vouch for patron’s personal financial information. The library does allow nonprofit organizations to post information in the library’s community area. Staff are aware of the organization and can offer it as a resource to patrons in need. Maryann agreed with the decision and thanked the Board for the opportunity to present the benefits of this new organization.
- 10) **Public Comments** (10 minutes) – Beth Law read a letter from Wayne Cooke and noted that the points had been addressed at previous meetings, and again in the agenda items of this meeting.
- 11) **Adjournment** – Maryanne Amore made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Jack Thompson seconded the motion and all voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 6:58 p.m.
- 12) Next regular meeting—November 4, 2020—Location TBD

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Jensen