



Bethel Public Library

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Meeting Minutes
BPL Board of Directors
Virtual Meeting
Monday 07/26/2021 at 6:00 pm

PRESENT: Chairman Mary O’Leary, Tia Murphy, Judith Schlemmer, Terri Rotella, Connie Kaufman, Linda Curtis, Robin Grubard, Mary Spain, Ted Stevenson, Library Director Megan Dean, Jan Patzold, Friends of the Bethel Public Library President .

ABSENT WITH NOTICE: Sue Morton, Robin Kahn

ABSENT WITHOUT NOTICE: Chris Sell

Call to order: Chair Mary O’Leary called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

PUBLIC INPUT: None

CORRESPONDENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENTS: None

APPROVAL OF JUNE 28 MEETING MINUTES: Chair O’Leary asked if the members had read the minutes, and if there were any questions. Connie Kaufman indicated that there was a typo in her name – it is spelled with one f not two. Terri Rotella moved to approve the minutes; Connie Kaufman seconded the motion. All in favor; motion passed.

TREASURER REPORTS: Treasurer Murphy asked the Board if they had reviewed the Treasurer’s report and if there were any questions. Treasurer Murphy observed that the Library programing was now back funded in large part as the report indicated by monies from the FOL, which she and the rest of the board thanked for their generosity. Treasurer Murphy asked for a motion to accept the Treasurer’s Report. Ted Stevenson made the motion, Judy Schlemmer seconded. All in favor; motion passed.

FRIENDS OF THE BETHEL PUBLIC LIBRARY: FOL President Jan Patzold reported that the Book Cellar is slated to reopen on September 13. BJ Liberty has taken on the mantle of organizing the return opening as well as operations. Additionally, materials donation will resume as of August 11. Donations will be accepted on Wednesdays from 1 – 7:30 pm and Saturdays from 11 am – 2 pm. A FOL Newsletter will be sent to all members to announce the reopening of the Book Cellar with a message to encourage visiting the Library. FOL President Patzold acknowledged the return of FOL funded programing, focused on children and families, to help increase library foot traffic and utilization, and encouraged the Board to help spread the message.

LBOD CHAIR UPDATE: Chair O’Leary acknowledged that this July 2021 meeting was the first hybrid Board meeting, thanking those who were able to meet in person for doing so, and acknowledging that Board members choice in attendance preference, in person or virtually is a personal decision. Chair O’Leary thanked Director Dean and her staff for their hard work in making the reopening of the Library smooth and well received by the public. She also praised their work and innovation throughout the Covid 19 pandemic. Board agreed.

DIRECTOR UPDATE: Library Director Megan Dean began by reviewing the June end of fiscal year spending report, acknowledging that due to curtailed operations during the pandemic, monies earmarked for payroll were not spent at the anticipated level when the budget was developed and approved. Additionally, monies allocated for certain materials, such as hardcopies of newspapers and magazines, were also not spent. A lag time in new materials receipt, back-order issues with RFID and other equipment and furniture has also contributed to the underspending situation, although some monies have been allocated to cover these expenses once they are finally received. This situation led to an anticipated return of approximately \$70, 000 to the Town of Bethel.

Director Dean has discussed the situation with the Town Finance Department to ensure that they understand the nature and reason for such a large return. Director Dean indicated that the Library is now acquiring some of these materials and anticipates that the staffing levels as the Library returns to pre-pandemic operations hours will return to budgeted staffing levels and spending in the new fiscal year which started July 1.

Director Dean, in reviewing the patron foot traffic and area utilization statistics, acknowledged that it will take some time for the public to return to pre-pandemic utilization levels. Some areas are faster to return to prior levels such as Children, than others. Programs which are not held inside the Library, such as the very successful and well attended Tie Dye Program, do not count toward utilization statistics, which are statistics that are defined as to how they are counted by the state library association for its annual utilization reporting. These programs do, however, drive foot traffic and awareness of the Library reopening, and as such are valuable programs to hold.

Summer Reading program is underway for children, teens, and adults. While enrollment is lagging somewhat at the moment, it is anticipated that it will continue to pick up as marketing and awareness efforts spread. The Thousand Books Before School program is now underway, with achieving the first 250 book goal awards a personal coloring book which can be picked up at the library, followed by other prizes for different goal attainment. This program should also contribute to building traffic and utilization.

Consumer Reports, a perennial favorite and driver of many phone calls for staff to read different articles for patrons, will now be available online. The Library will once more submit articles for publication in the Bethel Gazette

Director Dean then discussed a series of operational issues with the Board the proposed return of Sunday operational hours after Labor Day. After some discussion, the Board agreed that returning to the pre-pandemic Sunday opening hours was appropriate at this time. Continuing staff face masking and continuing some COVID protocols were discussed with the Board. It was agreed to continue staff masking at this time and review again no later than our September meeting. Decisions by the schools will assist in informing decision making going forward.

Director Dean recommended to the board that quarantining materials be discontinued given the CDC acknowledgement that the spread of the infection is not due to material handling, rather due to airborne particulates, which do not thrive on materials for very long. This will also alleviate patron complaints that materials are not returned to circulation quickly and so available for checkout and facilitate the prompt removal of returned materials from the patron’s library account. Cleaning procedures and hand sanitizer availability will continue. The Board then discussed reinstating fines, which had been suspended due to

the pandemic which posed an issue for many patrons to return books. After a brief discussion, the Board agreed that the fines should be reinstated after Labor Day.

The full-time position of Senior Library Assistant, Technology and Programing is currently listed on the library website and will be posted on a wider array of library employment list serves, including Westchester, as there were very few applicants. Director Dean observed that many long-time library employees across the states have opted to retire rather than return to work as libraries commence regular services and operations, which has let to a smaller pool of qualified applicants and a larger opportunity pool for employment, which negatively impacts the smaller, less well funded libraries as they search out candidates. Part time positions that are open will be recruited for once the full-time position is filled.

Regarding the progress of the AARPCT Grant to provide a permanent location for three picnic tables on the Greenwood Ave. Library side lawn, the tables have been ordered, and are scheduled for delivery in the next two weeks. The Friendship Bench, which will be located on the School St. side of the library adjacent to the parking lot, will be undertaken once the AARPCT project is completed, anticipating that the bench will be installed by late August/early September and fully marketed to the general public in October.

ADJOURNMENT: Chair O'Leary thanked the Board for its involvement and attentiveness to all the agenda items, then asked for a motion to adjourn. Terri Rotella moved to adjourn; Robin Grubard seconded. All in favor, motion passed unanimously. Chair O'Leary adjourned the meeting at 6:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tia Murphy, Treasurer in the approved absence of Sue Morton, Secretary