

Bedford Free Public Library
Library Trustees Minutes for Tuesday January 17th, 2023
7:00 PM • Online Meeting via Zoom

Chair Mike Pulizzi called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

Present

Trustees: Elizabeth Hacala, Rachel Field, Padma Choudry, Abby Hafer, Fahad Alden, Mike Pulizzi.

Other attendees: Dot Bergin, Bedford Citizen

Administration: Richard Callaghan, Director; Noreen O’Gara, Assistant Director.

Emily Mitchell was not available because of the changed meeting date.

Public Comment

None.

Secretary’s Report

The December minutes were approved: Moved by Elizabeth, seconded by Rachel. Ayes: Elizabeth, Rachel, Padma, Abby, Fahad. Michael abstains: Vote 5-0-1.

Director’s Report

- Greg Mathews passed away earlier this month after a long illness. He was a member of the Friends and was on the Board of Directors. Rachel asked that we send a condolence card to his family on behalf of the Trustees.
- The Winter Lecture Series resumes on Sunday the 22nd. Polar exploration (Antarctica) with Professor Dan Breen, both in person and on Zoom. We will use the Library’s new Meeting Owl to put the program on Zoom. The series will be for five Sundays, through the end of February.
- AARP Tax Help will start February 3rd.
- Lunar New Year – Year of the Rabbit celebration will be on Saturday the 21st in the Meeting Room. We are happy to have it back in person this year.
- FY23 budget looks good and we are on track halfway through the year.
- There’s a note in the Statistical Report that patron foot traffic has picked up. Wednesday is always our busiest day. Wednesdays are biggest day besides the book sale on Bedford Day. Circulation has been fine though a little behind last year. Middle schoolers have been very energetic, and we have been having discussions regarding behavior.

Rachel moved to accept the Director’s Report, seconded by Abby. Ayes: Elizabeth, Rachel, Padma, Abby, Fahad, Michael: Vote 6-0-0.

Unfinished Business

- HVAC Project: We are looking to start on April 1, so we can have heat back by October.
- Trustee Vacancy: Renae Nichols was nominated at caucus. She’s a frequent patron and also a librarian at Arlington Public School system.
- Storytime Policy: We proposed some changes to remove procedure from the policy. The Board had a discussion regarding the Pastor Storytime at the Chelmsford Public Library. Chelmsford initially refused the story time because of their Meeting Room Policy, but he

was from a non-profit group. Question of separation of church and state and how that should be handled. The Board agreed to add the discussion of the meeting room policy to the February agenda. Richard will run our policy by the Town Manager and Town Counsel. We need to create a concise message. Perhaps we can ask Town Counsel to come to our next Board Meeting. With respect to the Storytime Policy, Storytime is by trained staff, not volunteers.

Rachel moved to accept the Storytime Policy, seconded by Elizabeth. Ayes: Michael, Fahad, Abby, Padma, Rachel, Elizabeth: Vote 6-0-0.

- Rachel inquired regarding any updates about the Children's Librarian search. There are no current candidates. We had a couple of leads, but people are not interested in relocating. We will start looking again at the end of the month, prospective candidates will be searching for positions after graduation this spring.

New Business

- COVID: There have been upticks of COVID, flu and RSV. We just put up a banner on the website, as the Health Department just posted new information on the tridemic. Richard talked to the head of the Health Department about this, but they are not going to enforce any masking policy. Rachel feels that to protect the most vulnerable, particularly children too young to be inoculated or the immunosuppressed; she would like the Library to have a policy to ask patrons to wear a mask, until the threat is reduced. The current library messaging is that you can wear a mask, but you are not required. Rachel would like to see that we kindly *request* – not require – that patrons wear masks in the Library. However, if we're the only town building that has that language, that might cause murky waters. We don't know what kind of a reaction this could cause. Richard agrees that if we request and not require, it could cause confusion. Wearing a mask is currently also a choice for the staff. Elizabeth is of two minds about this because of her own care responsibilities, but at the same time if we request masks, that likely won't change anyone's behavior. It has become such a lightning rod – people are upset on both sides of this issue. The library currently has signs encouraging masks and washing your hands. Rachel suggested that we should require staff to wear masks. Also, we have been facing staff sickness frequently, and have had to close on occasion because of the staffing issues. Rachel proposes that (A) we require our staff to wear masks, and (B) that we post, in the interest of protecting those who are most vulnerable in our community (young children and the immunosuppressed), we are requesting (and not requiring) everyone to wear masks inside the library until further notice. Would it be fair to the staff as being the only employees mandated to wear the masks. Richard says a lot of staff wears masks anyway, because they want to. There was previously a mandate for staff to wear masks for all town employees, but if only requiring for Library staff, they may feel singled out. Will have to wear a mask in the private office, or only with other people or only with patrons? That will come up. Rachel wants to amend the proposal to say that any time staff is interfacing with patrons they should be masked, so it's consistent with what we're asking patrons to do. Richard believes we might get some pushback from staff, saying patrons have a choice. On precedent, we have followed health department in the past, although as the board oversees the building, we have a choice.

Rachel moved to (A) require staff to wear masks anytime they interface with patrons, seconded by Elizabeth. Ayes: Rachel. Nays: Michael, Fahad, Abby, Padma, Elizabeth: Vote 1-5-0.

For part (B) Abby offered: “in the interest of protecting those who are most vulnerable in our community (young children and the immunosuppressed), we are requesting (but not requiring) that patrons wear masks inside the library until further notice. Someone suggested putting the sign that’s currently on the bulletin board with light blue background and a mask on it, with the added language, “Masks encouraged” on the doors to the library (instead of just on the bulletin board). Padma also suggested having masks available for staff and patrons at the entrances. Rachel withdrew her proposed Part (B) motion. Michael noted that the signs will be on 8.5” x 11” paper.

Rachel moved to have staff post signs with the mask icon and language that says, “masking strongly encouraged,” and provide masks at all entrances to the library, seconded by Abby. Ayes: Michael, Abby, Padma, Rachel; Elizabeth. Nays: Fahad: Vote 5-1-0.

The Board all agreed that we should be proud of having a great and respectful discussion on a difficult topic.

- Bedford Safe Campaign: The campaign is about gun safety. They’ve asked each department to join in an endorsement of the campaign. Richard is not sure whether there is anything for the Board to do other than decide upon the endorsement. It’s about guns in the community and gun buyback. We may get some materials to distribute to patrons, as well. Sadly, the last few days has seen quite a few incidents of gun access by minors in the news. Rachel noted that the materials mentioned violence as a concern, and the CDC has previously noted violence as a public health concern.

Rachel moved to endorse the Bedford Safe campaign, Abby seconded. Ayes: Michael, Fahad, Abby, Padma, Rachel; Elizabeth: Vote 6-0-0.

Other Business

- Finance Committee meeting will be hybrid on Thursday the 19th at 7PM. Richard and Noreen will be there in person. Richard will send documents and Zoom link to the Board. The Health Department will present before Library this year, so we might be on at 7:30PM.
- There have been no new appointments.

Next meeting will be Tuesday, February 14th at 7PM via Zoom. We will be meeting virtually until April 15th. Richard has not heard whether that date has been extended, or whether we will have to go hybrid at that time.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:36. Elizabeth made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Padma seconded. Approved - Ayes: Elizabeth, Rachel, Padma, Fahad, Michael. Abstain: Abby (Abby had to step away): 5-0-1.

Meeting minutes are respectfully submitted by Padma Choudry.

Documents distributed during the meeting: Agenda, Director's Report, Minutes from December meeting, December 2022 Expenditures, December 2022 Statistics, Storytime Policy (both current and draft markup), and the Bedford Safe Campaign document.