

Bedford Free Public Library
Library Trustees Minutes for Tuesday February 14th, 2023
7:00 PM • Online Meeting via Zoom

Chair Mike Pulizzi called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

Present

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

Other attendees: Dot Bergin, Bedford Citizen; Emily Mitchell, Select Board

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

Not present: Abby Hafer

Public Comment

None.

Secretary’s Report

The Board noted the good conversation at the last meeting. The January minutes were approved.

Moved by Elizabeth, seconded by Rachel. Ayes: Michael, Fahad, Padma, Rachel, Elizabeth: Vote 5-0-0.

Director’s Report

- Congratulations to Fahad on the Martin Luther King Jr. Service Award from ULowell!
- The Bedford Safe Campaign asked us to give out gun locks as part of their gun safety program, since the library is so good at giving out the COVID Tests. The campaign will handle all the publicity.
- Children’s Librarian search: We have 4 applicants, and interviews set up for this week. The candidates all look good. Nicole is planning to be at the Simmons Job Fair, if need be.
- Finance Committee Meeting: Michael and Elizabeth attended. Richard and Noreen presented. The Finance Committee was happy we were under the 3.5% guideline. Overall, the meeting went well.
- Biennial Art Steering Committee Show is back after a four year hiatus.
- Budget: On target for FY23.
- Statistics: Checkouts are down a little bit, but patron foot traffic is up. Last week was 3200, whereas we’ve been at about 2600-2700 lately. Fahad noted that there was a large number of people in the Library at around 3PM on Wednesdays.

Padma moved to accept the Director’s Report, seconded by Rachel. Ayes: Michael, Fahad, Padma, Rachel, Elizabeth: Vote 5-0-0.

Unfinished Business

- HVAC Project: We are still expecting an April start, but there’s nothing new.
- Meeting Room policy: Town Counsel reviewed our policy and thought it was fine, but did suggest a hate speech policy. We can discuss this, but would need to add it to new business for the next agenda. One thing to think about is that we don’t want to cause additional problems because of vagueness. We need to be careful about the Library as a public forum. Town Counsel cautioned against monitoring the content of what is going on in the meeting room. We will add to next month’s agenda. Richard will also

look at what other libraries are doing. Libraries are not obligated to have meeting spaces.

- Elevator upgrade: Both elevators have been scheduled to have the controls replaced. There have been a number of delays in this project and associated complaints. There is now another mechanical issue with one of the elevators at the Library, but the Facilities Department wants to roll the separate issue into their existing control replacement project to be fixed at the same time. Several Library patrons have already complained to Town Hall, so we are the first on the list for the project. Parts have all been ordered and it will take 2-3 weeks of work for each elevator. Rachel noted that this may be an ADA compliance issue; would it be possible to have a stair assist? Richard said that right now the only difficulty of access is the Flag mezzanine. Richard talked to the Building Inspector, and because we have one elevator working, we are not technically out of compliance. Some of the repairs have been due to changes in state regulation. The project was approved in March 2022, but no repairs have started in any of the town buildings. It's also so much more additional work for the staff, to have to transport the books up and down the ramps for reshelving.
- Social Media: Padma asked if we could add to the monthly materials a report of our social media statistics, so we can better understand what is working and where we can improve.

New Business

- Virtual Meetings: As of now, virtual meetings are ending March 31st. The Town Manager said the Legislature will likely extend this for public boards. Next month's meeting will be fine, but the April meeting will be up in the air if the Legislature has not passed anything. The Finance Committee and Select Board have been conducting hybrid meetings, but there have been some concerns about the system. The Library does have its own OWL webcam, so we are prepared if we need to go hybrid.
- Behavior Policy/Teen Behavior update: Wednesdays have been very busy with large amounts of teens in the building after early release. There have been several incidents of the teens not behaving as they should. Last week, Richard had a meeting with the Town Manager and the Superintendent of Schools, and they asked what they could do to help. It's a minority of students, but there has been property damage, water bottles thrown over the mezzanine, creating a safety hazard. Maybe we could get the School Resource Officer to come over and patrol. We contacted the school last fall, without much response, but there's been more of a response recently. If they're misbehaving, we first redirect them to the Teen Room, but if it continues, we ask them to leave for the day. All the teen librarians in other libraries report experiencing similar issues. The public behavior standard seems to have been changing. Perhaps we could look at our policies again. Rachel asked about what contact we had with the Resource Officer. It's a new officer this year. The plan is to get the School Resource Officer to patrol more often, especially on Wednesday afternoons. The Superintendent had asked if we had any names, but we don't usually take names. Rachel asked the Board to consider whether we want to provide names to the School Superintendent. The Library has historically been a safe place. However, if we call the police, they would take names. The School Resource Officers have been a good resource and have been helpful. Michael noted that there is also a balance; we have a responsibility to other patrons, so they feel safe and comfortable. Pam has created a condensed behavior policy that is more applicable to kids – it's a nice way to reflect that libraries and

schools expect the same behavior. We can have a more specific discussion at the March meeting.

- Author Events: Fahad asked if we could add this to the agenda for next month. Noreen noted there are a number of events scheduled for March.
- March Madness: This is a program that we're competing with other libraries to have the most minutes read by patrons in March. It's a bracket style competition.

Other Business

Elizabeth has been elected President of the Board of the Bedford Citizen. She wanted to state publicly and to the Board that if there is a conflict, she would abstain from voting, and that she would be happy to leave the room, if that ever became necessary. The Trustees congratulated Elizabeth on her new position.

The Town Election is Saturday, March 11th. The April meeting the board will reorganize with new officers elected.

There have been no new appointments.

Next meeting will be Tuesday, March 14th at 7PM via Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:11.

Rachel made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Fahad seconded. Approved - Ayes: Elizabeth, Rachel, Padma, Fahad, Michael. 5-0-0.

Meeting minutes are respectfully submitted by Padma Choudry.

Documents distributed during the meeting: Agenda, Director's Report, Minutes from January meeting, January 2023 Expenditures, January 2023 Statistics, and Meeting Room Policy Guidance (including Somerville and Cambridge behavior and hate speech policy examples).