

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, January 8, 2025, 6:00 p.m.
Location: Library Auditorium, 758 Main Street

Trustees (Present): Liz Alcorn, Michelle Blank, Chad Edgar, Paul Gavejian, Nancy Goldstein, Larry Greenberg, Cheryl Kaiden, Mary-Rita Killelea, Janice Kochanowski, Sue Wharfe, Lisa Zwack

Trustees (Absent): Andy Melnick, Shahida Soomro, Jack Thompson

Friends of the Library: Barbara Barrett

Staff: Katy McNicol, Library Director, Kathy Oxsalida, Business Manager, Rhea Williams, Development Coordinator

Yale SOM Fellow:

Public: none

Janice Kochanowski called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

President's Remarks – Janice welcomed the trustees back from the holidays and said that she is looking forward to 2025 and all the great things that are planned for the library.

Additions to the Agenda – none

Appointment of Trustee – Janice reported that the Governance Committee met in December to interview candidates for a current vacancy on the Board of Trustees and for a vacancy that will arise in July, 2025. The committee recommended Wendy Wheeler to fill the current vacancy and her resume was circulated as part of the materials for this meeting. Janice moved that the board approve Wendy Wheeler to serve as a trustee of the Blackstone Library to fill the remaining term of Christi Cantu ending June, 2027. Mary-Rita Killelea seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Approval of Minutes—Janice moved to approve the minutes. Nancy Goldstein seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Staff Presentation – Deb Trofatter, Associate Librarian for Reference Services and Technology - Deb Trofatter addressed the Board. Deb grew up in Branford, attended Middlebury College, and moved back to her home town in 1994. After obtaining a MLS from Simmons College she joined the library staff in 1996. She started her work in the children's and cataloguing departments and then moved to the reference department. Having now worked at the Blackstone for 28 years Deb noted that "it is safe to say I like it here." Deb's administrative duties include scheduling, reporting statistics for Katy's various state and local reports, creating and supervising a technology budget to repair and replace materials and overseeing the nonfiction reference budget. Deb handles all inter-library requests and helps staff with technology issues. She works closely with Town Historian Jane Bouley to house the Historical Society archives and photographs collections at the Blackstone and she also maintains and expands the library's extensive history and genealogy collection. Deb noted that the library is working toward in-house

digitalization of archival materials. Deb thanked her “fantastic” reference staff, Jordan, Stephanie, Jared, Christina and Jenny and commended their cooperation, collaboration and compassion.

Director’s Report – Katy McNicol introduced the new Development Coordinator Rhea Williams who was attending her first Board meeting. Rhea is familiarizing herself with the library data bases and systems and entering Fall Appeal data. Katy congratulated the Friends on their successful Holiday Basket Sale which made over \$6000 and observed that the lobby was “rocking” with holiday spirit throughout the sale. The new website went live and the launch went very well. The staff will continue to work on some minor hiccups, identify items that were missed and update things that come up. Katy continued to attend a wide variety of state, local, library and community meetings throughout the month of December and is working with the Branford Superintendent of Schools and other libraries to coordinate programs to educate the community around teen mental health, computers and the internet. The schools will introduce book clubs and the libraries will host the programs. Katy met again with a local community podcaster and recorded their conversation about the Blackstone. The podcast will have two 20-minute episodes and be called Beyond the Pages, a Blackstone Library Podcast. Among other things the podcast will highlight the history of the library and the many different collections that it has. The podcast will be available on the Blackstone website.

Friends of the Library – Barbara Barrett reported that the Holiday Basket Sale was a successful event, not only for the over \$6000 it raised but also for the atmosphere it created in the library. At the opening night, two singing groups, the Branford Choir Quartet and a flute player created a festive atmosphere enjoyed by all library patrons. Barbara met with First Selectman Jamie Cosgrove to discuss alternative sites for the annual fall book sale in 2025 since the green is anticipated to not be available due to road improvements. Since the suggestions provided so far have not been workable, the Friends continue to look for a feasible site.

Treasurer’s Report – Larry Greenberg reported that the main endowment account stood at \$4.3m, down about \$100,000 or 2.3%. The Creative in Residence stood at \$548,000, down about \$16,000 or 2.9%.

Kathy Oxsalida presented the November variance report and pointed out that contributions were low compared to the budget because of a timing issue that will be resolved when Fall Appeal funds are reflected next month. Utility expenses are over budget due to a significant increase in Eversource bills. Professional fees are significantly under budget because the bills from the accountant for the year end audit have not yet been received.

Committee Reports—

Finance Committee— Larry reported that the committee did not meet in December due to holiday logistics and the lack of pressing issues that needed attention. The committee will begin a review of fiscal year 2026 budget in the coming weeks.

Buildings and Grounds Committee –Michelle Blank reported the committee will conduct a walk through on Saturday, January 11 at 10 a.m. Michelle and Katy will meet soon with Town Engineer John Hoeffler to begin formulating the bidding request that will go out to architects interested in submitting proposals to do the balcony enclosure work.

Development Committee – Nancy Goldstein asked the new Development Coordinator Rhea Williams to address the board. Rhea shared that she started working at the library late last month and looked forward to getting to know the trustees. She is a recent May graduate of Yale Divinity School and was drawn to work as part of a Branford community organization after working in Branford as a Nanny during her years of divinity school. Before attending divinity school Rhea worked in Washington D.C. doing program managing, event planning and fundraising. Katy noted that she is looking forward to working with Rhea and tapping into her fundraising expertise. She also pointed out that the Fall Appeal was budgeted at \$47,000 and to date has raised over \$48,000 with donations coming in through January still counting toward the final amount. The library received a bequest of \$54,000 from Mary Lowery, a longtime supporter and patron of the library and Katy will work with the finance committee to determine uses for that gift.

Governance Committee – Sue Wharfe reported that the committee, in addition to recommending new trustee Wendy Wheeler, has also approved another candidate for the board to consider at a later date to fill the seat of a trustee whose term is expiring in June.

Adjournment – Janice made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Nancy seconded the motion. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 6:45 pm.

Next regular meeting will be held on February 5, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary-Rita Killelea
Secretary

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