

MAUD PRESTON PALENSKE MEMORIAL LIBRARY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Special meeting Tuesday, Jan.10, 2023
DRAFT

Call to order: Board President Ren Baldwin (City of St. Joseph) called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Other board members present: Vice President Melissa Clapper (St. Joseph Township); Secretary William Ast (City of St. Joseph); and trustees Barbara Thompson (City of St. Joseph), Betty Mundy (St. Joseph Township), Kathy Buursma (City of St. Joseph). Mimi Elwell, St. Joseph Township, and Patrice Rose, St. Joseph Township.

Also present: Attending by Zoom were: library director search consultant Brian Mortimore; library director candidate Eric Magness-Eubank of Alpena, former director of the Alpena County Public Library; and Paula Stakley, interim director of the Maud Preston Palenske Memorial Library and director candidate. No members of the public attended, either in person or remotely.

Candidate interviews: “I really want to be your next director,” Magness-Eubank told the board in his opening statement. He said he had been a library director for 20 years, and that it was an “enjoyable and rewarding career.”

“I bring a lot of experience and knowledge to the table,” Magness-Eubank said.

Baldwin told the candidate about the history of, and recent building improvements and upgrades at, the Maude Preston Palenske Public Library. “We’re very proud of the place, and library services in the area,” he said.

Magness-Eubank had been fired by the Alpena public library board in 2022. He told the St. Joseph library board that was due to a massive building project that suffered frequent delays, had big cost overruns, meant that a “stressed-out” library staff had to work in temporary and unsatisfactory locations, and that everything was exacerbated by the COVID epidemic.

Magness-Eubank said he had been working in location apart from staff. “I learned I can never let myself get separated from staff again,” he told the board.

At 4:54 p.m., the board interviewed Stakley.

Stakley said she joined the library staff as a part-timer in 1999, and quickly realized she “loved the library.” She said she took courses in library work and earned a master’s degree in library science.

The library building recently has seen big improvements from the work with ABM, and “now we can focus on smaller things that need to be done,” she told the board. The library needs a “larger strategic plan,” an improved method of outreach, and better marketing, she added.

The library’s technical network “is a little bit Frankenstein” and needs improvement, Stakley said. She added she is “not going to come in and start making a lot of changes, but see what needs to be changed.”

When Elwell asked Stakley how she would bring a “positive culture” to the staff, Stakley said wants staff “to be comfortable coming to me with questions and concerns, that it’s OK to express themselves, that it’s not going to come back at them.”

Baldwin closed the interviews session at 5:45 p.m.

Board discussion: Board members decided informally they would like to talk to the candidates again. “I’d like to hear more from both of them,” Clapper said. “We definitely need to hear from both of them again,” Thompson said later.

The board agreed to start its upcoming regular meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 24, with an interview from 2-3:30 p.m., a 15-minute break, another interview from 2:45-5:15 p.m., and to then start its regular board meeting at 6 p.m.

Adjournment: Ast moved to adjourn the meeting, and Elwell seconded the motion. The board voted unanimously to adjourn, and Baldwin declared the meeting adjourned at 6:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

William Ast, board secretary