

**TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY**  
**Tuesday, March 25, 2025**

**Present:** Ms. Rebekah Anderson, Ms. Debin Bruce, Ms. Lisa Downing, Ms. Ruth Francis, Ms. Molly Moss, Ms. Shelly Ruocco, Ms. Elizabeth Sheirer, Ms. Katy Wight. **Present via Zoom:** Mr. Russell Carrier; Ms. Anne Teschner; Mr. Doug Wheat, Treasurer; Ms. Lori Mathews, observer for the Friends of Forbes.  
**Absent:** None.

Pursuant to Governor Baker's Emergency Order Modifying the State's Open Meeting Law issued March 12, 2020, this meeting was held using remote participation via Zoom teleconferencing for some participants as indicated.

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 PM.

**Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**Secretary's Report**

Ms. Bruce moved that the Secretary's report of February 20, 2025 be accepted and placed on file with a few minor corrections. Ms. Francis seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, and Ms. Wight voting in favor and Ms. Teschner abstaining.

**Bills & Warrants**

The trustees signed the warrant dated March 25, 2025.

**Bookkeeper's Report**

The trustees reviewed the February Bookkeeper's report prepared by Jo Landers which included a Profit and Loss Comparison, Balance Sheet Comparison, Statement of Cash Flows, Stage Fund income and expense report, Coolidge Fund income and expense report, and Endowment report from Bartholomew Inc. The value of the endowment on February 28, 2025 was \$7,017,622.20.

Mr. Wheat said there was nothing in particular to note this month and that the library is in good financial position. He said there were likely some changes to make over the next few months in reporting that would make the report more useful to the trustees. Ms. Moss said that in the past, the Treasurer provided a brief narrative of highlights for the month. Ms. Francis said that she and Mr. Wheat will talk with Ms. Landers about modifications to the report. Ms. Teschner emphasized that it was important to get the report well before the meeting to allow time to review it, and that Ms. Landers should be present to answer questions. Ms. Bruce suggested and the trustees concurred that it would be helpful to have training in how to interpret the reports, and what in particular the trustees should be paying attention to. Ms. Francis suggested a training or review session at an upcoming meeting. Ms. Moss said it would make sense to have that as a discussion topic at the meeting where the complete FY26 budget is presented to the trustees.

In response to a question from Ms. Teschner about the endowment report, Ms. Wight said that the representatives from Bartholomew Inc. used to visit quarterly, but now they are in direct communication separately with the Finance Committee. Mr. Wheat said the trustees could request modifications to the monthly reports from Bartholomew Inc. to make them more useful.

**Bookkeeper's Report** (continued)

Ms. Francis said she is comfortable with that and that she is speaking with Brian Jamros tomorrow about some changes and how to work more efficiently.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to approve the February Bookkeeper's Report and place it on file. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

**Gifts, Donations, and Bequests, etc.**

Ms. Downing reported that \$1,882.48 in undesignated gifts were received during the previous month. The following designated gifts were received since the last trustees' meeting: \$536.90 to the Coolidge Fund, and \$100 to the Garvey Book & Media Fund. No donations or receipts from sales/rents were received.

Ms. Downing said that Library Giving Day is April 1 this year. She encouraged the trustees to donate and share with friends and social networks. Ms. Moss said this is one of the library's two major annual fundraising activities. Ms. Bruce suggested writing a letter to the Daily Hampshire Gazette about the loss of federal money for libraries due to DOGE cuts before Library Giving Day to generate more support.

Ms. Ruocco made a motion to accept the designated and undesignated gifts as reported by Ms. Downing. Ms. Bruce seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

**Next Meetings**

The next regular meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Thursday, April 24 at 4:00 PM. The trustees scheduled the following meetings for the remainder of 2025: Tuesday, May 20; Wednesday, June 18; Thursday, July 24; Thursday, September 25; Thursday, October 23; Thursday, November 20; and Thursday, December 18. Meetings will convene at 4:00 PM unless otherwise noted.

The next meeting of the Friends of Forbes Library will be held on Wednesday, April 2, 2024 at 5:30 PM for their Business Meeting and 6:30 PM for their Annual Meeting and Trustees Award Presentation. Ms. Francis will attend the Business Meeting on behalf of the trustees.

**Directors Evaluation**

The Trustees were asked to review the Director for the time period of 2023-2024. Feedback was gathered from board members and from the staff of the leadership and administrative teams and was distributed to the trustees. The Personnel Committee met to discuss the trustee and leadership evaluation surveys, and began discussing improvements in the process for the future.

Ms. Wight said the best practice is to do this every two year. She thanked the trustees and staff for contributing and Ms. Moss for compiling the results. The trustees all agreed that Ms. Downing is doing an excellent job, and expressed gratitude for all she does. Ms. Ruocco said that the Personnel Committee will be reviewing and revising the questions at their next meeting. Some of them relate to things Ms. Downing is not directly responsible for, or for areas the evaluators may have no knowledge of. Ms. Ruocco suggested adding a section for Ms. Downing's self-reflection, which would give the trustees more to base their responses on.

**Directors Evaluation** (continued)

Ms. Downing thanked the trustees and the Personnel Committee for their participation and comments. She said that one of the areas she will explore for improvement is communication. It can be difficult with so many people with different work schedules and learning styles.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to acknowledge and approve the Director's Evaluation. Ms. Teschner seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

**Staff Trainings**

Ms. Downing said that the board previously gave her permission to close the library 2 half days each year for staff meetings because it is impossible for all staff to gather while the library is open. This has worked very well. Last year she asked to have one of the closings be a full day so that there would be more time together for the training piece of the day as well as socializing. That was also very well received and something that she would like permission to do annually. The dates she is looking at closing this year are from 10-2 on Tuesday, May 6 and from 10-6 (full day) on Friday, December 5. Ms. Downing said that closing the library is not something that she takes lightly, realizing that it means that patrons do not have access to the library in person during those hours. However, the skill building, communicating, and team building that is accomplished during these full staff events cannot be overstated. She asked that the trustees give her permission to close the library for staff training and development a half day and a full day each year.

Ms. Moss said that a Friday was chosen because it is a shorter day and will not impact evening hours. Ms. Teschner asked if two full days would be better and Ms. Downing said not at this time due to the amount of work involved in planning the training days. In response to a question from Ms. Wight, Ms. Downing said that the individual departments were still doing field trips. Additionally, there are mini staff trainings periodically that give staff an opportunity to present on a topic.

Ms. Teschner made a motion to allow Ms. Downing to close the library for a half day and a full day each calendar year for staff training. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

**Department Report**

There was no department report this month.

**Administrative Report**

Ms. Downing said that there is a trustee election coming up in the fall, and that nomination papers will be available from the City Clerk on April 2. Ms. Moss said that according to the city's website, you can make an appointment or request to have the papers delivered. Fifty signatures are required and the papers will due back sometime in July. Ms. Downing asked the trustees to let her know if they don't intend to run for re-election so the openings can be publicized.

Ms. Downing reported that Forbes has a new collaboration with the Northampton Survival Center. The library is now displaying the center's monthly Pantry

**Administrative Report** (continued)

Fresh recipe as "Community Cook-a-long". Pantry Fresh is an offering by NSC that puts together ingredients and a recipe for a home cooked dish. The hope is that having the display encourages everyone in the community to cook the monthly recipe, and it includes information for folks who may need the food pantry's services and have yet to connect with them.

Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss are excited to be presenting Rich Szlosek with this year's Trustee Award in recognition of his many years of service to the Coolidge Museum as a guide, board member, and advocate. The presentation will be given at the Friends Annual Meeting on Wednesday, April 2 followed by Ms. Szlosek reading excerpts from his two recently printed anthologies, *Essays on Coolidge* and *Some Thoughts from Rich's Corner* and sharing tales of Northampton history. In response to a question from Ms. Anderson, Ms. Downing said that the business portion of the meeting is short, followed by the annual meeting where officers are elected, and then the speaker and refreshments.

Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss are watching funding for the single federal library agency, the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). President Trump signed an executive order on March 14 limiting funding, installing a new director, and laying off staff. Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss are not sure what the implications are yet and at this point have been instructed to continue with business as usual, including receiving a \$7,500 grant for assessing the local history collections. Ms. Moss said that the IMLS funding goes to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) which is responsible for administering state aid and accreditation. Additionally, the IMLS funds are used for statewide library databases and e-book platforms, which would be quite costly and difficult to replace. Ms. Moss said that the American Library Association (ALA) is having a town hall meeting on Thursday and she will send info and links to the trustees.

Forbes has signed up to march in the Hampshire Pride March on Saturday, May 3 at 11 AM. She said it is a fun event and encouraged the trustees to participate.

The second annual volunteer and donor appreciation event on March 2 was a huge success. She has heard from so many guests about what a nice time they had. Ms. Downing thanked the trustees for all their support in so many ways with special thanks to Ms. Wight and Ms. Anderson for being part of the program.

Ms. Moss and Ms. Julia Cornick attended an open house by the Smith College Office of Community Relations. They had some great conversations and Ms. Moss and Ms. Downing have been invited to have a follow up meeting to discuss further collaborations.

The MBLC invited participation in a statewide initiative called "Empowered by Libraries" that invited people to share ways their library has helped them. Forbes has received lots of entries and some can be viewed online, <https://www.lovemasslibraries.com/library/1406/>.

Ms. Bruce moved that the Administrative Report be accepted and placed on file. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

**Discussion Topic: Board Survey**

The Personnel Committee sent a six question board self-assessment questionnaire and received five responses. The trustees were asked to review the responses in advance of the meeting and come prepared to discuss the results included in the packet. The questions were: What is the Board doing well related to how it functions, its efforts and actions? What could the Board change or do differently to improve how it functions or its efforts and actions? What would you benefit from receiving (for example: information, training, guidance, support) that would help you with your Trustee responsibilities? In what ways are your current knowledge, skills and experience being used well by the Board for the benefit of the Library? What are successful ways that you see you could contribute as a Trustee in addition to, or in place of, your current contributions, based on your knowledge, skills and experience? Would you recommend being a Trustee to others? Why or why not?

Ms. Wight thanked the trustees for participating in the survey and said it was good to have fresh eyes to help inform training and to improve the flow of information. Ms. Downing said there is some great feedback for some of the individual committees, and that she and Ms. Moss have some items to incorporate into the trustees' orientation and resource page. The Personnel Committee has already reviewed and discussed the results. Ms. Ruocco said that two main themes rose to the top. First, how can the trustees be more helpful without encroaching on the day-to-day operations of staff. The second was the suggestion of term limits. Ms. Anderson said that the United Libraries event she attended stressed the importance of term limits to ensure freshness of perspectives and to allow opportunities for new voices. It was also recommended to recruit board members from various constituent populations. Ms. Bruce said the trustees would welcome feedback from Ms. Downing about how they can be more helpful. Ms. Downing said she is comfortable talking to the board and will let them know if anything comes up. Ms. Wight said the survey will be revisited in two years. The Personnel Committee will take charge, review the questions and send it out again.

**Communications**

The library received an anonymous thank you note on a Survival Center postcard thanking the librarians for their skill, compassion and humor and promising to protect and defend Forbes and all public libraries.

Ms. Downing added that she has an email address where staff can send good things that happen, which she then collates and sends out bi-weekly.

**Trustees Goals Updates**

Ms. Downing reported that good progress is being made on setting goals for 2025. She distributed a compilation of the goals as they currently stand. She plans to bring them back for approval at the next meeting.

**Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings****Friends of Forbes**

Ms. Wight attended the March 5 meeting of the Friends of Forbes and reported that they are starting to plan for their May newsletter, sponsorships are coming in for the Garden Tour, and they are working on the route. They discussed an offer to host a social event following the tour and decided it is too late for this year but will consider it for next year.

**Friends of Forbes** (continued)

Their annual meeting is in April where officers will be elected. JoEllen MacKenzie is staying on as President, Jacquie Fraser as Vice President, Scott Monroe as Treasurer, and Chris Hannon as Secretary. Rich Szlosek will be the speaker. They are revising their by-laws to create a new Communications Committee to do promotions. There was discussion around improving the website to drive more traffic and sending quarterly "update" emails to members. They decided to move the newsletter to the Communications Committee. Ms. Downing gave an update on the performance stage.

**Building and Grounds**

Ms. Bruce reported that the bid for the performance stage was awarded last week. They are in the promotion phase building public awareness. The timeline is a Spring construction schedule followed by several weeks of re-seeding the lawn. It should be available for programming by mid to late summer. There is an arrangement to add solar panels to the roof. They have a grant out to AARP to fund the sound system and expect to have some need for additional funding, but are close to a final budget. Parking lot electric vehicle chargers will be added to the project's electric service running to the west lawn. The Children's bathroom has been "fixed" by Keiter and has been satisfactory for about a week. The Children's renovation is moving along thanks to Sarah Johnson's continued interaction with Dietz. Ms. Downing said that the library was awarded \$1.4 million in Capital Improvement Funding for the Children's and Young Adult department renovation and HVAC project work. The project is authorized to go out to bid right away. However, during March, the architect combined the two projects into one contract, and in the process of reviewing HVAC specifications, the cost has increased by \$300,000, leaving a funding gap. She will notify the mayor's office and ask how to proceed. She will keep the trustees updated. Ms. Bruce said that projects over \$1.5 million face more regulations. Julie Nelson has re-activated the software program that needs updating for disaster preparedness. Ms. Bruce has attended one MBLC web training program and has registered for another one in the next few weeks.

Ms. Downing said that former trustee Marjorie Hess and her partner Rudy Talaber donated significant funds to the performance stage both last year and this year. She asked for approval from the trustees to pursue naming the stage in honor of Ms. Hess. Ms. Wight said she has spoken to the mayor about it. Ms. Ruocco said the name of the stage should also include Forbes Library, for example the Hess Performance Stage at Forbes Library.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to authorize Ms. Downing to move ahead with the naming of the performance stage in honor of Ms. Hess. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

**Coolidge Standing Committee**

Ms. Wight reported that the Exhibits committee shared notes from the kickoff meeting with the exhibit designers and drafts of a big ideas statement for the project. They also shared some draft sketches of room orientation and large-scale focal points for feedback. Design Division will be at the April 7 meeting to gather feedback from the full standing committee. Jay Fleitman is the new chair of the development committee. March 4 was a day of online giving to kick off fundraising. Two grant applications were submitted in February and one has been funded. A Northampton Community Preservation Act mini grant of \$3,000 with a \$2,000 match from Forbes was received for an

**Coolidge Standing Committee (continued)**

onsite evaluation from a textile conservator of Coolidge and local history materials. They also applied to The Museum Assessment Program for a Collection Stewardship assessment. Funds are administered by the American Alliance for Museums with IMLS funding and they expect to hear back in May. Ms. Moss said that \$3,800 was raised on Coolidge Giving Day.

**Development Committee**

Ms. Anderson reported that they haven't met since the last trustees' meeting. She said Ms. Downing has put her in touch with a woman who is eager to help with development work. She is looking at foundations to help with fundraising, and has ordered a couple of books. Ms. Ruocco asked if the Development Committee has considered using the performance stage as a source of income. Ms. Moss said that the library's Meeting Room Use Policy could be expanded to include the performance stage. The policy calls for no charges for non-profit groups, but charging a fee for groups that charge admission. In response to a question from Ms. Bruce, Ms. Moss said that the library pays artists who perform at library programs. The library also charges a modest fee for weddings and birthday parties.

**Finance Committee**

Ms. Francis reported that the Finance Committee met on March 12 and finalized their goals to include: 1) Complete transition to QuickBooks online and new budget structure. 2) Complete FY23 and FY24 audit. 3) Clarify our relationship and expectations with Bartholomew & Company. 4) Contemplate our options outside of Bartholomew. 5) Ongoing monitoring of investments. 6) Long term goal of putting FY26 audit out for competitive bidding. The FY23 audit is now with the auditor for review. Jo Landers will reach out and inquire on the ETA for completion. Going forward, Ms. Landers will provide the finance committee with the following reports: 1) cash flow statement, 2) net operating income, 3) separate reports for capital projects; Coolidge renovation, Children's department renovation; and the Performance Stage. Finally, they discussed who the main points of contact for Bartholomew should be: Doug Wheat, Katy Wight and Ruth Francis, and online access should be made available to Ms. Wight, Ms. Downing, Ms. Landers, Mr. Wheat, Ms. Moss, and Ms. Francis. Ms. Francis will share this information with Bartholomew Inc. Their next meeting is scheduled for April 9 at 11 AM.

**Personnel Committee**

Ms. Ruocco reported that the committee reviewed the Board Survey responses and identified strengths and concerns in responses and will lead a discussion about them at the next trustee meeting along with other items the trustees may note. These insights may guide practices, new trustee training and discussions at future meetings, as examples of how this information may be applied. The committee then discussed the Director's evaluations by both the Board and the Leadership Team, reviewing results data and comments. They also plan to work at their next meeting on updating the evaluation content for next time to be more relevant to Ms. Downing's responsibilities. After a quick review of personnel expenses, they talked about the meaning of certain lines and how this information relates to the upcoming Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA) negotiations and the compensation study consultants project and its upcoming planning meeting.

Trustee goals were discussed, primarily a roll up of the various committee goals, with the group discussing how to clarify the specific goals that

**Personnel Committee** (continued)

relate to the larger board's responsibilities and how these responsibilities can be captured. By-Law edits made by the committee were reviewed, however a decision at the state level about remote participation is needed before the By-Laws can be finalized. The hope is to finalize the By-Law edits at the next Personnel Committee meeting on Monday, April 14 at 4 PM.

**Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group**

Ms. Teschner reported that the advisory group met via Zoom on Monday, March 3. Eight members were present including trustees Anne Teschner and Shelly Roucco, Library Director Lisa Downing, and community members Marjorie Hess, Maxine Schmidt, Lucy Hartry, Lolan Sevilla and Adrienne Andrews. Guests included Alexandra Mello, Laura Phoenix, and Gaurav Jashnani. Ms. Downing updated the group on library activities since the group last met. The group then turned its attention to their mission and structure. Many things have changed in the world and with the group since its inception and they began a discussion about what it would like to do, what it could do, and what it should do. It was also determined that the same questions should be put to the trustees and that the two groups synthesize expectations and visions. The group will meet again on April 21 at 4 PM via Zoom. Ms. Teschner will ask to have the issue included on an upcoming trustee agenda.

In response to a request from Ms. Anderson, Ms. Downing will send the group's charge to the trustees. Ms. Ruocco asked that she also include things the group has done to date. Ms. Downing said that the trustees are welcome to sit in on a meeting. Ms. Wight said the trustees should look at the charge and think about how the group can be of use to the trustees, so they can give them some direction. Ms. Ruocco said there are some new people representing a wide range of constituencies who are highly motivated and want to contribute in some way.

**Open Meeting Law for Library Trustees**

Ms. Bruce attended "Open Meeting Law: Balancing Government Transparency with Government Efficiency" held by the MBLC on March 11, and distributed the slide deck from the presentation. The speakers were from the attorney general's office.

**Other Business**

Ms. Bruce said she attended an online training today on climate change sponsored by the MBLC. She said there are a lot of offerings on the MBLC website. Ms. Moss or Ms. Downing will send the link to the trustees.

At 5:20 PM Ms. Anderson moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 PM.