

TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY
Thursday, April 24, 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. **Also Present:** Ms. Mary Biddle, Head of Borrower Services. **Present via Zoom:** Mr. Russell Carrier, Trustee; Ms. Anne Teschner, Trustee; Ms. Jo Landers, Bookkeeper; Ms. Nicole Sibley, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library; Mr. Joseph Twarog; Cynthia Simison. **Absent:** Doug Wheat, Treasurer.

Pursuant to the extended authorization for certain remote meeting provisions signed into law by the Governor, and now available through June 30, 2027, this meeting was available for remote participation.

The meeting was called to order at 4:02 PM.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Secretary's Report

Ms. Francis moved that the Secretary's report of March 25, 2025 be accepted and placed on file with a few minor corrections. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Bills & Warrants

The trustees signed the warrant dated April 24, 2025.

Bookkeeper's Report

Ms. Landers distributed the March Bookkeeper's report which included a Profit and Loss Comparison, Balance Sheet Comparison, and Performance Stage Fund income and expense report. The value of the endowment on March 31, 2025 was \$6,844,938.71. Ms. Landers said that the library is on track for both spending and income and there is nothing notable to point out. Ms. Francis said that she and Mr. Wheat now have access to reports in QuickBooks and are meeting next week to look at what reports would be most useful for the trustees, and will then loop in Ms. Landers.

Ms. Anderson made a motion to approve the March Bookkeeper's Report and place it on file. Ms. Teschner seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Gifts, Donations, and Bequests, etc.

Ms. Downing reported that \$6,793.87 in undesignated gifts were received in March. The following designated gifts were received since the last trustees' meeting: \$40,000 to the Performance Stage Fund, \$3,266.90 to the Coolidge Fund, and \$250 to the Lyman Special Collection Endowment Fund. No donations or receipts from sales/rents were received.

Ms. Downing said she had contacted Ms. Marjorie Hess and she is delighted to have the stage named in her honor.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to name the performance stage the Hess Performance Stage at Forbes Library. Ms. Teschner 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. (continued)

Ms. Ruocco made a motion to accept the designated and undesignated gifts as reported by Ms. Downing. Ms. Francis seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Next Meetings

The next regular meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Thursday, May 22 at 4:00 PM. The trustees scheduled the following meetings for the remainder of 2025: 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, May 7, 2024 at 6:30 PM. Ms. Bruce will attend on behalf of the trustees.

Trustee Bylaws Revision

Ms. Ruocco said that the Personnel Committee reviewed the bylaws with input from the Finance Committee. The version they are presenting today shows the proposed changes which include changing the title "President" to "Chair", changes to the Treasurer position to reflect the current situation, and changes to remote meeting participation. The trustees reviewed the proposed changes in more detail. In response to a question from Ms. Teschner, Ms. Wight said that she feels the title Chair is more collegial and collaborative than President. This change was run past the library's lawyers who suggested the new language in the By-Laws stating that the Chair will have all the powers of the President according to state statutes.

Ms. Ruocco made a motion to approve the Bylaw changes as proposed by the Personnel Committee. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion, which passed with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, and Ms. Wight voting in favor, Mr. Carrier voting against, and Ms. Teschner abstaining.

2025 Trustees Goals

Ms. Downing presented the 2025 Trustee Goals for approval. Ongoing goals include: publicly support legislation that protects intellectual freedom and library employees, seek opportunities to serve as an ambassador for the library and advocate for the library's needs, and support the downtown business community during the Main Street project. The Development Committee operates on a fiscal year calendar and will review their goals at the start of the new fiscal year. Personnel Committee goals include: complete independent Classification and Compensation Strategy and devise an implementation plan, begin negotiating a new contract with FLEA, and create rolling calendar of activities for Personnel Committee.

The Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group goals include: provide input to library boards, committees and projects; and support the work of the Northampton Reparations Committee. The Coolidge Standing Committee goals include: support the renovation, collections, and programming work of the Coolidge Presidential Library and Museum; and assist the Marketing & Outreach subcommittee with advocacy with elected officials and tourism agencies. The Building and Grounds Committee goals include: add an accessible performance stage to the west lawn; advocate for improved links to existing and planned bike infrastructure in the city to the library; and renovate the young adult room, add a youth programming room, and update the HVAC system that supports the ground level. Ms. Downing said she will bring the goals back for a mid-year review in September.

2025 Trustees Goals (continued)

The trustees discussed the goals and agreed to change the goal that currently states to "support the downtown business community during the Main Street project" to "increase outreach to the downtown business community about library resources." They agreed to add "review the Racial and Social Justice Advisory group charge" to that group's goals. They agreed to change the Finance Committee's first goal to "complete transition to new budget structure," removing QuickBooks online since that has already been completed.

In discussing the goals of Buildings & Grounds Committee, Ms. Downing said that the Resilience Center has recently purchased two electric assist bicycles that they have offered to lend to Forbes to try out for local delivery services. She said that one of her dreams is to connect Forbes more seamlessly to the bike path that runs behind the library.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to approve the 2025 Trustees Goals as amended above. Ms. Francis 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.

Records Retention Schedule

Ms. Downing reported that she and Jennie Lamour developed a records retention schedule for documents not related to human resources, and it was also reviewed by Jo Landers. The schedule covers a wide range of records including financial records, correspondence, inventories, schedules, policies, reports, licenses, permits, and more. It supplements the retention schedule the trustees approved a few years ago for HR files. She said the schedule is based on what is set forth by the State for municipalities, combined with requirements for non-profits. In cases where the timeline varied between those, the longer period was chosen. Many things can be discarded after a successful audit has been completed and will then be shredded. This will free up a lot of storage space. For items that need to be kept indefinitely, Ms. Downing is looking into electronic storage. She will also be looking into records management in general.

Ms. Ruocco made a motion to approve the Records Retention Schedule as presented. Ms. Bruce 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: Borrower Services and Outreach Delivery Services

Ms. Mary Biddle presented the Borrower Services report. She said that the past 12 months have been busy and productive. Highlights include events honoring donors, volunteers, and Zine-making community; the migration of Arts and Music periodicals collections to the Reading Room; and the addition of 1880 new library cards for community members. Comments from patrons show that the kindness and expertise of staff make a difference in their lives, which is the goal they strive for. The main desk continues to see ever-increasing numbers in circulation and patron visits. 36,800 checkouts/renewals were processed in March (not including e-books), and typically between 20 and 30 bins of materials are sent out and received daily through interlibrary loan. In the past year, foot traffic coming into the library has been constant, and the tables in the reading room are often full. There are increases in program attendance, the number of public flyers posted, and bookings for private study spaces. Borrower Services employs more volunteers and senior tax work-

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Department Report: Borrower Services and Outreach Delivery Services (continued) off volunteers (15) and students (7) than ever before to keep the books flowing back to the shelves. Each member of the Borrower Services team has participated in professional development. Outreach and Delivery, coordinated by Maria Sperduti continues to flourish. At this time, there are 40 volunteers assigned to 50 patrons in the Ongoing Delivery (formerly known as Homebound) category. The As-Needed Delivery Service, primarily supported by Borrower Services staff, remains extremely popular. Five new Neighborhood Free Book Boxes were added in Northampton last summer, bringing the count to nine and the number of volunteers stocking them to twenty-two.

Ms. Biddle thanked the trustees for the opportunity to speak with them. She highlighted a few items from her report and passed around a printout of the CWMARS dashboard showing the ever-increasing circulation figures. She said that the Borrower's Service department was ready and happy to handle the increase. She said that getting the bins of materials in and out of the building every day is a challenge. She would love to explore better ways to handle this task. She said that recently staff have been fielding questions from patrons concerned about library funding and the state of the country. She said that staff try to reassure them and hand out contact information for government officials. She said that staff are interested in professional development, especially in learning other languages, and it will be covered at an upcoming staff training day. In addition, the state provides some language learning software and translation services. Ms. Biddle discussed with the trustees ways to spread the word about the services offered and welcomed their suggestions. She said that the recent Zine fest produced by the Borrowers Service Team was very popular with 564 attendees. She said she was thankful for the addition this year of a barcode printer at the desk which allows staff to issue new library cards with the cardholder's same barcode number as well as barcodes for books that don't have them.

In response to a question from Ms. Wight, Ms. Biddle said her goals for the coming year include looking for ways to make the bin delivery easier, long-term planning for one day updating the first floor and reconfiguring the circulation desk to create more patron space with more soft seating and tables, and looking at ways to improve staff communication. Ms. Wight asked if there were any immediate barriers or difficulties and Ms. Biddle said that staffing is a challenge during the summer when staff are on vacation and in the winter when staff may be out due to illness.

In response to a question from Ms. Anderson, Ms. Biddle said that the IMLS cuts affect the state funding for e-books. She said that as it is now, people must wait a long time for some e-books. Some e-book platforms have added AI generated titles that can be confused with authentic titles. Ms. Ruocco said she was amazed at the volume of interlibrary loan and Ms. Biddle said that Forbes tries to fulfill as many requests as possible because those numbers factor into the state aid formula. Additionally, Forbes has unique and titles and materials not held by other libraries.

Ms. Downing and the trustees congratulated Ms. Biddle on the recent completion of her MLS degree. The trustees thanked Ms. Biddle for her report and all she does, and she left the meeting at 5:04 PM.

Administrative Report

Ms. Downing reported that Rich Szlosek was honored to receive this year's Trustees Award presented by Ms. Francis during the Friends Annual Meeting. The award featured two vintage images of his family's business, Imperial Bakery, that was located on 376 Pleasant Street for decades that Dylan Gaffney found on the open market.

Library Giving Day was a great success. Thanks to the Friends' generous \$25,000 match, an additional \$30,650 was raised with 335 gifts for a total of \$55,650. Of this amount, \$5,130 was given by 97 new donors. There are now 14 new Bookshelf Builders (recurring donors).

Forbes celebrated Mark Toczydlowski's retirement from the library this month after 20 years of custodial service. He will be missed for his dedication. Two people have been hired to fill his hours. Evan LeBeau will work Thursday evenings and Saturdays and Mark Dufault will work Monday through Wednesday evenings. Both are in the process of training.

The Gazette has been on site three times this month. Once for a photo story about baby Storytime featuring Sarah Johnson delighting and mesmerizing some of the library's youngest patrons. Just this week Dylan Gaffney was featured in a story about the federal cuts to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) that resulted in the loss of a \$7,500 grant for a preservation study in the Hampshire Room. And finally for a photo op with Paco and the new Paco tattoos.

All were very saddened to learn of Dr. Melvin Hershkowitz's passing last month. He was a beloved patron and generous donor through the establishment of the Marie Hershkowitz Memorial Children's Book Fund, named in memory of his daughter.

Ms. Ruocco moved that the Administrative Report be accepted and placed on file. Ms. Francis 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

There was no discussion topic this month.

Communications

There were no communications this month.

Federal Library Cuts

Ms. Downing reported that a news item has been added to the library's website summarizing the evolving situation of the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and its impacts and responses. It includes a way to contact federal and state representatives. The Gazette also did a feature story on the impacts to libraries and museums in the region.

Ms. Downing said that the House Ways and Means Committee released its FY2026 budget numbers, and all library lines were level funded. This is below what was requested for FY26 to provide level services. Representative Sabadosa initiated a motion to increase funding for the Center for the Book and has signed off on all of these budget amendment increases.

Upcoming Trustee Election

Ms. Downing reported that information has been added to the website about the upcoming trustee election. It includes information about taking out nomination papers which are available now. The Personnel Committee discussed ways to make this opportunity known broadly in the community as well as how to help the community get to know the candidates to make an informed decision. She said that the Personnel Committee and Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group are discussing creating an FAQ about running for and being a trustee, and perhaps offering a panel discussion before June. Ms. Ruocco said that interested people should first go to the city clerk's website and complete an online form. An appointment can then be made to pick the papers up in person or have them mailed.

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings

Friends of Forbes - Ms. Francis attended the April 2 Friends of Forbes meeting and reported that it was brief as it coincided with their Annual Meeting and the Trustees Awards. The Garden Tour is June 12, and tickets are being printed and will be sold at Forbes. A new bench will be ordered for the Garden Tour. Ms. MacKenzie put together a list of companies and will send letters hoping to add new sponsors to special events held by the Friends. The Performance Stage will be ready for use at the end of the summer, and the Coolidge Design is ready to go and is moving quickly. The Friends were pleased to share that the designers always take out books and have lots of Coolidge quotes. Library Giving Day received over 300 gifts totaling \$25,956. The Friends had a robust conversation regarding the federal cuts and impact on IMLS. All agreed that with National Library Week coming up, as library advocates, they would like to do a pointed campaign/event for Forbes. They will send an email and also include information in their newsletter about the impact of the potential cuts. An upcoming trip is being planned to the FDR Library with lunch at the Culinary Institute of America. At their Annual Meeting immediately following, JoEllen MacKenzie and Chris Hannon were re-elected as President and Secretary. Lori Matthews was welcomed to the Board.

Building and Grounds - Ms. Bruce reported that the committee did not meet this month. Their next meeting is scheduled for May 13 at 12 PM, but will need to rescheduled. Ms. Downing met with Pat McCarthy and Charlene Nardi to discuss options for moving forward with the basement HVAC and Children's and Young Adult renovation. The costs have gone up significantly, and the project will be divided into phases. Bidders will be asked to give pricing for each phase. The first phase will include the HVAC system and programming space. Next phases will include the teen room and picture book room, the Wizard of Oz room, and then the lighting. Ms. Bruce said that the addition of steel beams for the Performance Stage will add \$5,500 to the project cost. Two charging stations are being added to the plan at no extra cost. She spoke with the contractor and he put in the request for a building permit 2 weeks ago. Lawn furniture should be removed in preparation for construction to begin in 2 weeks.

Coolidge Standing Committee - Ms. Wight reported that they had a meeting with fundraising consultant Sarah Tanner. The committee was impressed and felt she would be a good fit to work with the Coolidge Committee, trustees, and Friends on fundraising projects and joint trainings on donor engagement. The committee looks forward to a formal proposal and discussing options with the other committees. The Development Committee is also discussing and working on what a phase 2 might look like for fundraising for an endowment, staffing,

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings (continued)

digitization, and financial sustainability. On March 4, Centennial Giving Day, there were 34 gifts totaling \$3,800. The Exhibits Committee presented on recent meetings and staff focus sessions that gathered feedback on room use and future exhibits. Michael Hanke of Design Division made a presentation of the draft plans and gathered feedback, ideas and suggestions. Ms. Wight said that there are some who want to scale up and increase the fundraising target. There is hope that larger donors may come forward, but no money will be accepted that comes with strings attached. Plans will be brought to the trustees when they are closer to being finalized.

Development Committee - Ms. Anderson reported that the committee met on April 10. They are sticking with the current plans for now and will develop new goals at the start of the next fiscal year. In the meantime, Ms. Anderson is meeting with people and has met with Nicole Sibley and JoEllen MacKenzie of the Friends and plans to meet with Ms. Moss and Ms. Downing soon. She is reading books and educating herself on fundraising. The committee's next meeting is scheduled for June 12 at 4:30 PM.

Finance Committee - Ms. Francis reported that the Finance committee met on April 9. Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss provided them with an update on their meeting with Mayor Sciarra to review the budget which includes the 2.5% increase as agreed upon. A 2.5% increase is not sustainable for library operations going forward especially as the compensation and classification study will be completed and the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA) contract goes through the end of FY26 at which time it will be up for negotiation. The FY26 budget will be presented at the May trustees meeting.

The auditor, Eric Nickolaison of Downey, Pieciak, Fitzgerald, is moving forward with the FY23 audit and it should be filed shortly. Additionally, he is requesting documents for the FY24 audit, which should be completed by end-of-year 2025. The audits will cost approximately \$11,000. The Finance Committee is working with Jo Landers on having suitable reports available for the trustee meetings. They have met their first goal - the transition to QuickBooks online, with thanks to Jennie Lamour and Jo Landers for working together on this undertaking. The Finance Committee met with Bartholomew & Company on April 17. Highlights of the meeting include: the portfolio is 60% equities and 40% fixed income/cash/alternative, SRI/ESG focused and excludes Fossil Fuels; the investment portfolio is currently down 2%; and their fee is 19 basis points on AUM (this is an ALL inclusive fee so trading costs, wire fees, etc. are part of the 19 basis points). Forbes receives this rate as it is grouped with the City of Northampton. The 20 trailing quarters and monthly summary reports can be sent in an excel spreadsheet. There was discussion about maintaining ESG principles in managing the portfolio while adapting to market change. BC said stay the course! They also believe that SRI/ESG nomenclature will go away as SRI/ESG investing will be the norm as companies strive to be more SRI/ESG focused. The Finance Committee is eager to continue its conversation with BC over the course of the year and plan to review the Investment Policy Statement and address replacing a few funds that have not performed well but continue to be held given the mandate of a Fossil Fuel Free portfolio. Additionally, when the FY26 budget is finalized, it will be provided to BC so they can use it as a guide for discussing the library's cash flow needs for funding future special projects. The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for May 14 at 11:00 AM.

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings (continued)

Personnel Committee - Ms. Ruocco reported that the committee reviewed the By-Laws, updating them in part in response to the Governor's extension of remote participation through 2027. Besides these Open Meeting changes, language was updated relating to technology and its use in participation. They also looked at the Director's Evaluation, deciding to make notes now when the process was still fresh in their minds, and having feedback from trustees on the form and process. These notes will be kept with the document to be reviewed before a revised evaluation is developed in 2 years. This will give new trustees elected in 2025 time to learn more about Ms. Downing and her responsibilities, through more information being provided during trustee training as well as through their work on the Board. The Trustee Self-evaluation was also reviewed for changes that could be made when it is being prepared to conduct next time. They talked about questions that might be eliminated as they didn't relate directly to Ms. Downing's role and those that could be added that are more directly related. They also reviewed a Trustee Self-evaluation, generously shared with them by the Lathrop Community, noting questions and topics that would be useful to consider in the next evaluation. They decided that it should be conducted again in 2 years so the new people elected in November 2025 will have time to acquaint themselves with the responsibilities of a trustee and their experiences and thoughts about their work in that role. The Committee recommends that review and revisions of both evaluations should happen in late 2026 so they are ready for an early 2027 rollout. Ms. Downing gave an update on the Compensation Study conducted by MGT, and she shared the survey. The Committee reviewed the survey questions and formatting that will be shared with 28 peers to gather salary data. There was discussion around the election of new trustees this November. Ms. Downing shared the press release and they discussed how to provide even more information and support for those who want to run for office, including information on the Forbes website and possibly a panel discussion or other event to give people more information and to respond to their questions and concerns.

Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group - Ms. Teschner reported that the group met on April 21. She will send out a written report soon. They are continuing to look at the group's purpose and how best to serve the library and the trustees. She asked to have this added as a discussion topic to the trustees' June meeting agenda. The group's next meeting is June 23.

Other Business

Ms. Downing said that the annual Pride Parade is Saturday, May 3, and anyone interested in walking with the library should meet up at Sheldon Field. She will send out an email with more details.

At 5:45 PM Ms. Francis moved to adjourn the meeting. 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. The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 PM.