

**TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY**  
**Thursday, May 22, 2025**

**Present:** Ms. Rebekah Anderson, Ms. Debin Bruce, Ms. Lisa Downing, Ms. Ruth Francis, Ms. Shelly Ruocco, Ms. Elizabeth Sheirer, Ms. Katy Wight. **Also Present:** Mr. Michael Hanke, Design Division; Ms. Julie Bartlett Nelson, Coolidge Archivist; Ms. JoEllen MacKenzie, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library. **Present via Zoom:** Mr. Russell Carrier, Ms. Anne Teschner, Ms. Molly Moss, Mr. Doug Wheat, Treasurer; Ms. Jo Landers, Bookkeeper. **Absent:** None.

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 4:12 PM.

**Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**Secretary's Report**

Ms. Francis moved that the Secretary's report of April 24, 2025 be accepted and placed on file. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

**Bills & Warrants**

The trustees signed the warrant dated May 22, 2025.

**Financial Reports**

Ms. Landers presented the Trustee Financial Reports for April which included a Profit and Loss Comparison, Balance Sheet Comparison, Statement of Cash Flows, Stage Fund income and expense report, and Endowment report from Bartholomew Inc. The value of the endowment on April 30, 2025 was \$6,941,715.21. Ms. Landers said there was nothing surprising or unexpected, and that not many expenses have been incurred so far for the performance stage. In response to a question from Ms. Anderson, Ms. Landers said that regular fundraising is steady, but that bequests can vary quite a bit from year to year. She said that in the future, that number could be broken down to give the trustees a better sense of that breakdown.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to approve the April Financial Reports and place it on file. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

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

Ms. Moss reported that \$25,889.34 in undesignated gifts were received from multiple donors in the previous month, which includes donations received on Library Giving Day. The following designated gifts were received since the last trustees' meeting: \$200 to the Marie Hershkowitz Memorial Children's Book Fund and \$255.15 to the Coolidge Fund. The following donations were received in April: letter postmarked 1926 from May Johnson to Miriam James, Kathleen Shea photographs and memorabilia, and NHS Class of 1937 photos. There were no receipts from sales/rents this month.

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

**Next Meetings**

The next regular meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Wednesday, June 18 at 4:00 PM. The trustees scheduled the following meetings for the remainder of 2025: 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, June 4, 2024 at 6:30 PM. Ms. Ruocco will attend the Business Meeting on behalf of the trustees.

**Discussion Topic: Design Division Preliminary Museum Design**

Michael Hanke of Design Division presented the preliminary design plans and schematic drawings for the Coolidge Museum renovation. This phase of the planning process is nearing completion, and the trustees were invited to provide feedback and to ask questions. Mr. Hanke described his background and experience as an interpretive exhibition designer. His career has focused mostly on historical exhibits, with some natural history and science as well. His first project was for the Lyndon B. Johnson library, and he has also done work for the Richard Nixon Library and Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. The Coolidge project started off with a lot of research, especially photo research, discussions, and a kick off meeting. In addition to a great number of images, Forbes has many items and three-dimensional objects, which are treasures and will be treated as such. Next a preliminary content outline was created, which will be fleshed out more as the project progresses. He said the exhibit will focus on both Calvin Coolidge and Grace Coolidge. One of the main themes will be that Coolidge was a product of and inspired by small-town New England, but ended up playing a major role nationally. The material will be organized in a way that is accessible and does not need to be experienced in any particular order. The exhibits will be divided into geographical locations, Vermont (early life), Massachusetts (college, law, marriage to Grace), and Washington D.C. (vice presidency, presidency, his cabinet and advisors). The space will include a certain number of fixed seats for viewing an introductory video, but retain the capacity for seating up to 75-80 people. Some of the exhibits will be in light plywood cases on wheels that can be rolled aside when needed. Waist height reading rails will line the room with interactive exhibits including Cal's and Grace's Closets, an Oval Office table and Coolidge's desk. The space will be transformed with color and furnishings to make it more presidential. The exhibits will be low-tech with an introductory video of no more than 8 minutes that prepares people for the experience, audio recordings of Coolidge speaking, and flipbooks for easy maintenance. Visitors will be able to open closet doors and desk drawers to reveal objects that will be behind glass or plexiglass for protection.

The trustees were very impressed and thanked Mr. Hanke for the presentation. In response to a question from Ms. Anderson, Mr. Hanke said that maintenance will be not much more than what is currently required and that the proposed technology is low maintenance. In response to a question from Ms. Landers about theft control, Mr. Hanke said that none of the small original objects will be touchable, and things of value will be behind glass. In response to a question from Ms. Bruce, Mr. Hanke said that he will provide a rough cost estimate that will be further refined in the next phase. Then he will produce contract documents for the project to go out to bid to exhibit fabricators. If the figures come in too high, the plans can be adjusted. Ms. Teschner suggested that the plans be run by people at Historic Northampton for

**Discussion Topic: Design Division Preliminary Museum Design** (continued)

feedback and advice on anything that may be missing. Mr. Hanke said that he is currently working with Historic Northampton on a Slavery exhibit. Ms. Nelson said that the more eyes on it the better. Ms. Ruocco asked about focus groups and engaging the public on what's there, what's missing, etc. She said it may be too soon to consider in this phase of the project, but there are opportunities for selling merchandise. Ms. Downing said that there are other considerations including marketing and curriculum. Ms. Anderson asked if there was anything about the space that posed a challenge, and Mr. Hanke said that the lighting and acoustics are not particularly good, but can be resolved to some degree. The doors and windows also pose layout challenges, but the building and space overall is beautiful.

The trustees thanked Mr. Hanke for his presentation. Ms. Downing said that Ms. Bruce is on the Exhibits Committee and the trustees can send any additional feedback to her.

**Department Report: Coolidge Presidential Library & Museum (CCPLM)**

Ms. Julie Bartlett Nelson presented the 2024 highlights of the CCPLM. Programming included the Presidents Book Group, the annual meeting of the CCPLM, two 1920s music performances tied with Coolidge Centennial celebrations, and two panels on key pieces of 1924 legislation - the Indian Citizenship Act and Immigration Act which were live-streamed and recorded. The Exhibits committee worked on a program plan and put out an RFP to hire a designer to re-image the Coolidge Museum, and chose Design Division of Amherst to do the work. The Development committee was formed and a Coolidge fundraising appeal went out in July to solicit funds for designer fees. Museum renovation fundraising kicked off in March 2025. In FY25, 24 people provided 1808 hours of volunteer service to the Coolidge Museum programs, collections, and visitors, and 4 work-study students contributed about 30 hours a week to Coolidge projects. Ms. Nelson has been busy with work-study students, interns and volunteers working with the archives catalog to review, enhance and add more materials. Ms. Nelson attended many trainings about the National Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) regarding compliance with items in the Coolidge collections. 30 items including the headdress were received by President Coolidge in formal ceremonies or official visits. An inventory was sent to the Standing Rock Sioux Historic Preservation Offices to begin tribal engagement. Research is being conducted to confirm dates and locations of events, who was in attendance, and who was involved in the creation of gifts. Work continues to comply with 2024 NAGPRA revisions and obtain formal consent to display and write new print and audio labels and catalog descriptions in Lakota and English.

Ms. Nelson said that the Coolidge Standing Committee is actively recruiting for new members for the Standing Committee as well as for the subcommittees of Development, Marketing, Exhibits, and Programming. The limited staffing of one part-time professional and reliance on volunteers and work-study students is not sustainable for current activities or for growth and a re-imagined space. The Standing Committee has discussed the need for a strategic plan to identify and plan for short term and long-term activities, needs, and goals. The Coolidge Marketing Committee is planning an event for July 7 to bring together western Massachusetts legislators to hear about the exhibit design plans and to advocate for state funding and earmarks. In response to a question from Ms. Anderson, Ms. Downing said that the money needs to be raised before the project can begin, but it is hoped it can begin as soon as

**Department Report: Coolidge Presidential Library & Museum (CCPLM)** (continued) the second half of next year. She said the total cost is currently estimated to be about \$350,000 to \$400,000. In response to a question from Ms. Teschner about the headdress, Ms. Nelson said that the library plans to abide by whatever decision the tribe makes.

The trustees thanked Ms. Nelson, and she and Mr. Hanke left the meeting at 5:30 PM.

#### **Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group Appointment**

Ms. Downing reported that Alexandra Mello is seeking an appointment to the advisory group. She has been attending for the last few meetings as a guest and has already been a wonderful addition to the conversation. Ms. Downing asked the Chair to make this appointment with her endorsement.

Ms. Wight appointed Alexandra Mello to the Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group.

#### **Doland Fund Request**

Ms. Moss reported that \$5,000 had been set aside from the Doland endowment transfer for FY25 to purchase new laptops to use for tech classes. The current ones were purchased before COVID and are out of date. Due to the nature of the classes Forbes provides, and the work being done with community partners such as Tech Foundry, it is now realized that the library should purchase 15 instead of 10 laptops rather than Chromebooks. This brings the purchase price to \$13,000. Currently \$46,000 is being drawn from the endowment at 3.5% for FY25. The draw at 4% would be \$52,500. Ms. Moss requested that the Trustees approve an additional transfer of \$6,500 to go toward the purchase of these laptops for classroom use. As of April 30, the Doland endowment fund was valued at \$1,427,454 and the terms of the bequest require that it remain at or above \$1 million. The Finance Committee has reviewed and supports this request.

Ms. Teschner made a motion to approve the withdrawal of an additional \$6,500 from the Doland Fund in the endowment for the purchase of laptops. Ms. Ruocco 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.

#### **Administrative Report**

Ms. Downing reported that Forbes received a \$75,000 bequest from Marguerite Bedell that will be in the gift report for June. In the accompanying letter from her daughter, she writes, *"Peggy to all who knew her, a long time patron of the library in all the ways. Even long after she stopped driving, she'd have me picking up books for her... Nothing made her happier than hefting a bag of books to read or reread. Mom died last June; I'm grateful she didn't have to face the disrespect and frank depravity of watching cultural institutions be undermined. But I know she'd be glad to know her support might help at such a crucial moment."* Ms. Downing said the funds are unrestricted and will be discussed by the Finance Committee at their next meeting.

Forbes received notification of a \$15,000 Cultural Facilities Grant by the Massachusetts Cultural Council for the Coolidge Museum design planning. This is wonderful news and positions the library to apply for a construction grant

**Administrative Report** (continued)

in the future. It also offsets some of the design expense so that money can be rolled forward into the next phase.

The Children's renovation and HVAC project request for proposals went out and the bid opening is in mid-June. Ms. Downing has a meeting with the Mayor's office later this month to discuss other possible funding sources in light of the known funding gap estimated to be \$250,000.

The groundbreaking for the performance stage took place on Wednesday, May 14. The Mayor, architect, and the construction firm were joined by trustees, Friends, staff, and Marjorie Hess and Rudy Talaber for the brief ceremony. Due to a tight schedule, it happened on a day when Ms. Bruce was out of town. She was missed and everyone commented on how this project would not be happening without her persistence and dedication. Ms. Downing will make sure she is there for the ribbon cutting later this year.

The library was as enthusiastically received as ever in the Hampshire Pride event earlier this month. The theme of libraries being for everyone felt especially important this year. Among the cheers often heard were "we love the library" and "we love Paco". Paco, Forbes' beloved fish, was featured in the latest issue of *School Library Journal*. She is such an important part of the experience of visiting the library for so many children in the community.

There was a very successful library staff training day earlier this month. There was a full staff meeting, a Spanish conversation circle, an introduction to graphic novels, and Mary Biddle was presented with a gift in recognition of receiving her Masters in Information and Library Science.

The 31st Annual Northampton Garden Tour is on June 14. Eileen Travis, who donated and designed the library's Athena Garden, is among the gardens featured this year.

Ms. Francis moved that the Administrative Report be accepted and placed on file. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

**Communications**

The trustees received a letter dated May 12, 2025 from Representative Sabadosa congratulating the library on receiving the \$15,000 Cultural Facilities Grant and offering her assistance if needed.

**Upcoming Trustee Election**

Ms. Downing reported that in addition to Ms. Anderson and Ms. Ruocco, Fred Kass has taken out papers for the open seats on this fall's ballot. A couple of other people have expressed interest but have not yet taken out papers. The Personnel Committee has created a FAQ about serving as a trustee and will be looking for help to distribute it through ward association email newsletters and in any other possible way.

**Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings**

Friends of Forbes - Ms. Bruce attended the May 7 meeting of the Friends of Forbes and reported that there was discussion of the voting process for the Annual Meeting's election of the Board of Directors. Mr. Scott Monroe summarized the Treasurer's report, saying the previous month was uneventful. The Bartholomew account has recouped most of its slight downturn in

**Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings** (continued)

February/March to about \$634,000. Cash on hand is \$38,900 with no change in the Director's fund. Mr. Monroe provided JoEllen MacKenzie with a \$25,000 check to give to Ms. Downing for the stage project. There was no Finance Committee report. The Membership Committee has collected articles for the newsletter. There are plans to review and prepare the newsletter for mailing before the end of the month. The Special Events Committee reported that they had sponsors for the June 14th Garden Tour, tickets are available, and volunteers were solicited. There will be one more Friend's meeting before the Garden Tour. There was also a discussion of the number of food trucks for the Artisan's Fair. Ms. Downing discussed a training opportunity with a fundraising consultant for both the Friends and the Trustees. Sarah Tanner would conduct two 90-minute sessions for \$1,500. The Friends approved up to \$500 for that purpose. Ms. Downing also reported on the children's library renovation, the participation in the Pride March, staff training, and recognized Mary Biddle for completing her MLS degree. The meeting adjourned with plans to discuss Committee assignments at the next meeting.

Building and Grounds - Ms. Bruce reported that they did not meet this month. Their next meeting is May 22 at 2:00 PM.

Coolidge Standing Committee - Ms. Wight reported that their next meeting is June 2, at 5:00 PM.

Development Committee - Ms. Anderson reported that they did not meet this month. Their next meeting is June 12 at 4:30 PM.

Finance Committee - Ms. Francis reported that The Finance Committee met on Wednesday, May 14. That morning, they received the FY23 draft Form 990 from the auditor and were able to review it together as it needed to be signed and filed the following day. They noted obvious errors, for example, the mission of the library and number of voting members were inaccurate. The Finance Committee agreed to file the current 990 as is and then correct it at a later date with an amended filing. Many thanks to Jennie Lamour and Jo Landers for providing the auditors with all the requested information. They agreed to review the audit process and make necessary adjustments once FY23 and FY24 audits are completed and filed. The Finance Committee agreed to present the FY26 budget to the trustees in June, with the understanding that it would be provisional until the city and state budgets are approved. They also requested a more detailed breakdown of media purchases and salary allocations by department. The Finance Committee was asked to approve an update to the warrant and payment process that would enhance efficiency and authorize library administration to pay all budgeted expenses below \$10,000 (exceptions to include anticipated recurring expenses over \$10,000 for insurance premiums, credit card payments, Ingram, and the City of Northampton). Large unanticipated expenses, not reflected in the budget, would be brought to the Finance Committee for review then to the full board for approval. The Finance Committee requested revised language to the process and will review it at their next meeting on June 11 at 11:00 AM.

Personnel Committee - Ms. Ruocco reported that they did not meet this month. Their next meeting will be in June.

Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group - Ms. Teschner reported that they met on April 21 via Zoom. Ms. Downing updated them on library activities

**Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings** (continued)

since the group last met. She discussed the elimination of the federal IMLS agency and how the library is responding, saying that it is an ongoing situation and the actual impact is not yet clear. Ms. Ruocco shared with the group that there are 4 seats for library trustee on this fall's ballot. Group members were encouraged to run or to support others in their community to run. Getting the idea out there was encouraged by all with ideas like a panel on what it means to be a trustee, an appearance by someone on the library staff on the Bill Newman show, creating an FAQ for potential candidates, and sharing the info on each members' social media communities. The group turned its attention to their mission and structure, asking how best this group can serve the Trustees and the Library more broadly. Some of the outcomes of brainstorming included: reflecting on the positive results of the committee's presence to date; suggesting young and diverse musicians for outdoor concerts at the new stage; considering adding a student seat on the trustee board; continuing with outreach including Senior Center presentations, Grow Food Northampton presence, bringing books through the Neighborhood Book Box program to youth at housing authority complexes; and inviting advisory group members to serve on trustees committees. Their next meeting is June 23 at 4:30 PM. Ms. Teschner asked that the Racial & Social Advisory Group charge be put on the agenda for the June trustees meeting. She asked the trustees to think about why this group exists and what they would like them to do. She is asking the same question of the advisory group and will then reconcile the two for a vote in September.

**Other Business**

There was no other business.

At 5:49 PM Ms. Bruce moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:49 PM.