

No parking will be allowed in the Forbes Library parking lot after 6 pm on Saturday, October 4th. The parking lot will remain closed on Sunday, October 5th, for the [Friends of Forbes](#)

[Artisans Fair](#). TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY

Thursday, July 24, 2025

Present: Rebekah Anderson, Debin Bruce, Lisa Downing, Ruth Francis, Molly Moss, Shelly Ruocco, Elizabeth Sheirer, Katy Wight. **Also Present:** Jason Petcen. **Present via Zoom:** Russell Carrier; Anne Teschner; Jo Landers, Bookkeeper; Doug Wheat, Treasurer; JoEllen MacKenzie, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library; Heather Diaz, observer for Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA); Fred Kass, prospective trustee. **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 4:03 PM.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Secretary's Report

Debin Bruce moved that the Secretary's report of June 18, 2025, and the Special Meeting of July 3, 2025, be accepted and placed on file with a minor correction. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Bills & Warrants

The trustees signed the warrant dated July 24, 2025.

Financial Reports

Jo Landers distributed and presented the June Trustees Financial Reports which included a Profit and Loss Comparison, Balance Sheet Comparison, Statement of Cash Flows, Stage Fund income and expense report, Coolidge Museum Redesign income and expense report, HVAC Project income and expense report, and Endowment report from Bartholomew Inc. The value of the endowment on June 30, 2025, was \$7,345,920.63. In response to a question from Lisa Downing, Jo Landers said that if the expense was paid out prior to June 30 it is part of FY25. She said the auditors are still working on the 2024 audit and will then begin the 2025 audit. In response to a question from Katy Wight, Jo Landers said that unrealized gains are a snapshot that represent a change in the value of the investment portfolio on a particular date and will go up and down due to market fluctuations. She said that at year-end, capital expenses will appear as assets and be depreciated. All of the expenses and income for the performance stage have not yet been reported, but it appears the project will net even. Lisa Downing said there will be additional expense for an A/V system, landscaping, and ongoing maintenance. Jo Landers said that some of the Coolidge income and expenses listed in the report may not be associated with the redesign, and she will be in touch with Molly Moss to review them.

Debin Bruce made a motion to approve the June Financial Reports and place them on file. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Ruth Francis asked the members of the Finance Committee to approve rolling over the \$10,000 CD at Florence Bank that matures on August 11 into the

Financial Reports (continued)

operating account since the interest rate is so low. The Finance Committee members all agreed.

Rebekah Anderson made a motion to approve the recommendation of the Finance Committee to not renew the \$10,000 CD at Florence Bank that matures on August 11 and to roll it into the operating account. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with Rebekah Anderson, Debin Bruce, Russell Carrier, Ruth Francis, Shelly Ruocco, Anne Teschner, and Katy Wight all voting in favor.

Gifts, Donations, and Bequests, etc.

Lisa Downing reported that \$1,547.54 in undesignated gifts were received in June. The following designated gift was received in June: \$211.15 to the Coolidge Fund. There were no receipts from sales/rents this month. Molly Moss said that a Coolidge appeal is scheduled to go out next week.

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

Next Meetings

The next regular meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Thursday, September 25 at 4:00 PM. The trustees scheduled the following meetings for the remainder of 2025: 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, September 3, 2025, at 6:30 PM. Shelly Ruocco will attend on behalf of the trustees.

Discussion Topic: Reading Bartholomew Reports

Treasurer Doug Wheat presented and reviewed the reformatted endowment report from Bartholomew Inc., which has been reconfigured to make it easier for the trustees to understand. The number of columns has been decreased and a new column was added for Growth/(Loss). The new report shows the beginning market value for the period, the beginning principal, beginning earnings, net transfers of earnings, and ending market value. The growth/loss column shows the net gain or loss in each fund. In the future, Doug Wheat said he would like to break that column down to show both the amounts going in and out, not just the net amount. The total growth/(loss) for the portfolio for FY25 was \$776,158.18, an 11% rate of return. In response to a question from Anne Teschner, Doug Wheat said these reports will be provided to the trustees quarterly and to the Finance Committee monthly. If trustees have questions or concerns, they can ask for more detail from the Finance Committee. The trustees all said that they appreciate these changes that will make the report easier to understand. Shelly Ruocco said it would be helpful to have the report also in a graphic format and Doug Wheat said he would be happy to do that for the next quarter. He will invite the representatives from Bartholomew Inc. to present to the trustees at their October meeting.

Department Reports: Building & Grounds

There was no department report this month.

MCC Cultural Facilities Fund Match Certification

Lisa Downing reported that Forbes received a \$15,000 grant from Mass Cultural Council (MCC) towards the Coolidge exhibit redesign costs. To release the funds, the MCC requires that the board take a vote to commit the matching funds to the project. The matching funds are in hand thanks to the Friends \$10,000 contribution and the balance from individual donations.

Debin Bruce made a motion to commit \$15,000 toward the Coolidge exhibit redesign costs to match the grant from the Mass Cultural Council. Ruth Francis seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with Debin Bruce, Russell Carrier, Ruth Francis, Shelly Ruocco, Anne Teschner, Katy Wight, and Rebekah Anderson all voting in favor.

Children's HVAC and Renovation Contractor Selection

Lisa Downing said that the apparent qualified low bidder is Keiter Corporation for the base bid as discussed at the July 3 special meeting for a total of \$1,563,609.00. The trustees were asked to approve Keiter as the general contractor for this project.

Debin Bruce made a motion to approve Keiter Corporation as the general contractor for the Children's HVAC and Renovation project. Rebekah Anderson seconded the motion with Russell Carrier, Ruth Francis, Shelly Ruocco, Anne Teschner, Katy Wight, Rebekah Anderson, and Debin Bruce all voting in favor.

Authorizing Treasurer as Signatory

Lisa Downing requested that the Chair direct Doug Wheat, Forbes Treasurer, to be a signer on the library's account with Florence Bank. Doug Wheat has agreed to accept this responsibility in accordance with the bylaws. This will provide a third signer in addition to the Chair and Vice-Chair for signing checks and other bank duties. There have been three signers including the treasurer in the past and it is helpful for handling business in a timely manner.

Katy Wight directed that Doug Wheat be added as a singer to the library's account with Florence Bank.

Payment Policy

Molly Moss reported that the Finance Committee has brought forward a Payment Policy for the board's consideration. It was drafted after careful consideration to maintain oversight while improving efficiency.

Currently the trustees are working off a warrant system for bill paying. This system requires a certain number of trustees to sign the warrant so bills may be paid and checks signed. With the new budgeting software in place, the Finance Committee recommends the board of trustees retire the existing warrant system and replace it with a process that is more efficient for library staff and the authorized signers. With this change, going forward, trustees will be presented with a Budget to Actual report for review, so each trustee may monitor, on a monthly basis, library spending. When the budget to actual reports are available, starting in August 2025, the trustees authorize library administration to pay all budgeted expenses below \$10,000 in a timely manner and online when possible. Anticipated recurring budgeted expenses over \$10,000 for insurance premiums, credit card payments, Ingram, and the City of Northampton will also be authorized for payment. Other expenses over \$10,000 will be brought to the Trustee Chair, Vice Chair, or Treasurer for review

Payment Policy (continued)

and/or second signature on the check. Staff reimbursement checks and vendor checks not applicable for online payment will continue to be manually processed and signed by a trustee designated authorized signer. This process will save time at the trustee meetings when most trustees are pro forma approving the warrant, as well as save administrative time currently taken in preparing the warrant. This change will increase the timeliness of bill paying and allow for more flexibility to work around vacations and other scheduling considerations. All details of payments are available to the Finance Committee and trustees. The Chair of the Finance Committee and the Treasurer also have access to QuickBooks Online to view reports as needed, in addition to the administrative staff. The Administrative Assistant has access and can assist if a trustee needs information.

In response to a question from Katy Wight, Molly Moss said that this policy is for budgeted expenses only, and anything out of the ordinary, new projects and unexpected expenses, would be brought to the trustees for review. The trustees agreed this was a good recommendation and would save time and money.

Rebekah Anderson made a motion to adopt the Payment Policy as proposed by the Finance Committee. Ruth Francis seconded the motion with Ruth Francis, Shelly Ruocco, Anne Teschner, Katy Wight, Rebekah Anderson, Debin Bruce, and Russell Carrier all voting in favor.

Administrative Report

Historic Northampton's new exhibit, "Slavery and Freedom in Northampton, 1654 to 1783" is up now through the end of next year. Dylan Gaffney served on the exhibits committee and contributed greatly to the research for the display using resources from Special Collections. Guided tours are available.

Forbes Library is on track to have the biggest Summer Reading program ever--nearly 500 people have signed up, and there's still time to register! Stop by Forbes Library to pick up a beautiful Summer Reading log designed by artist Pamela Acosta and learn about the different prizes that can be earned simply by reading or doing fun activities. There are programs for all ages--from babies to adults!

Children's book author and illustrator Mo Willems and his family are moving out of Northampton after many years in residency. They donated many boxes of children's books, a telescope, and more as they prepare for their move. In speaking with Mo Willems, he reminded Lisa Downing that when they first came to Northampton to check it out, they visited Forbes and that experience helped them decide to move here.

Lisa Downing and Molly Moss were happy to welcome Madison Socha-Bishop back from her maternity leave last week. They also posted the Adult Services Librarian position last week and expect to start interviewing in August. There is a new contact form to reach the trustees on the library's website. This replaces having individual trustee email addresses on the site which have been spammed with increased frequency.

The library has served as a cooling center officially during the recent spells of hot and humid weather. The Department of Health and Human Services provided refillable water bottles that were placed near the new bottle filling stations that have proven very popular.

Administrative Report (continued)

Lisa Downing and Molly Moss believe the largest number of elected officials, at least in recent history, assembled in the Coolidge Museum on July 7th for the special "Stay Cool with Coolidge" event revealing the new exhibit plans to a room full of state Representatives as well as the Mayor, Senator Comerford, representatives from McGovern and Markey's offices, and from Mass Cultural Council and the Mass Office of Travel and Tourism. The exhibit plans were well received and Cynthia Simison engaged audience members to commit their support as the library seeks earmarks, grants, and foundation funding to execute the design. There will be follow up next week with the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and they are also hoping to meet with Congressman McGovern or one of his aides.

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

Communications

The library was copied on an email on July 9 from Cynthia Simison to Kristen Elechko, Western Mass Director in Governor Healy's office providing information about the Coolidge exhibit redesign project. The letter is a very good summary of the project.

Building Project Updates

Lisa Downing reported that the performance stage is nearly finished, with just a few punch list items left to do. Grass will be established in the areas that were disturbed around the construction site, and it is anticipated that the space will be fully open in mid-August. The Meeting Rooms and Grounds Use policy are in the process of being amended to include the stage and will be brought to the board for consideration in September. The grand opening is on Saturday, September 13 at 3:00 PM and the O-Tones will perform. If the weather is bad, the event will be moved indoors. There has been much interest in the new stage and there are a couple of other events scheduled prior to the grand opening. An A/V system is needed for a cost of about \$13,000.

The Children's HVAC and Renovation project timeline should be known soon. It is anticipated that the first construction meeting will take place in the next week. Staff have been busy getting the affected areas cleared out including a dumpster of old items and a bunch of paper shredding.

FY25 Action Plan

Lisa Downing reported that the first year of the library's strategic plan is complete and good progress has been made on goals. A chart with updates was distributed to the trustees. She said she is pleased with the progress and reviewed a few highlights including completion of the bathroom renovation project, and work on the performance stage. The library is moving closer to its goal of being bilingual with Spanish language learning initiatives for staff. The core competencies that were introduced this year have been helpful and successful in creating opportunities for staff to grow in areas they may be less comfortable with. There has been significant growth in community engagement, and the Coolidge redesign phase is wrapping up. The digitization of the Judd manuscript has not only been good for preservation, but has also made it more accessible.

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings

Friends of Forbes - There was no meeting in July. The next meeting is September 3, 2025, at 6:30 PM.

Building and Grounds Committee - Debin Bruce reported that the Building and Grounds Committee met on Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at 4:00 PM. There were two main projects discussed: the outdoor stage and the children's renovation and HVAC upgrade. Earlier in the day, there was a walkthrough of the stage project with the contractor, the architect, and Forbes staff. In addition to a couple of punch list fixes, the remaining work centers on finalizing concrete walkways, leveling the surrounding dirt, and seeding the grass landscape. Other to-do actions are: pave the driveway trench; order a dedication plaque, acquire a sound system, and arrange the ribbon cutting. Solar didn't work out (yet) because there is no current availability of the right size inverter to connect the stage array with the three phase 408 building system. If Northeast Solar can find the right size inverter we will move forward with solar sometime in the future. As for the stage budget, there have been change orders of approximately \$25,000 to date. The first partial bill was \$137,000, and Forbes will get about \$130,000 reimbursed through \$50,000 from a state earmark and \$80,000 in ARPA money. It is expected that the ARPA money will take several months to process. The Children's Renovation and HVAC Upgrade Project has been awarded by Northampton Central Services. There were four bids submitted and they were very close in base price. Rick Katsanos is the Owners Project Manager (OPM) for the city's Central Services project representing the library's interest. Trustees and Friends both voted to use some funds from endowments to make up the difference between the Capital Improvement approved funds and the bids. The committee was pleased with the kickoff event for the Coolidge Museum Redesign. It was well attended. Two projects for FY26 were briefly discussed: the reupholstering of soft chairs, and the need to resurface the sidewalk in front of the main doors. Two additional maintenance projects that are anticipated to be handled with the labor and repairs budget are new toilet paper dispensers and drywall repair. The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday August 20 at 4:00 PM.

Russell Carrier said that he is very pleased with the outcome of the performance stage, and that it is just the right size and at just the right angle. Many people were involved in bringing the project to fruition, but he would like to say that the trustees, the administration and staff of the library as well as the entire community owe a huge debt of gratitude to Debin Bruce who worked so hard over many years to make it a reality. All of the trustees concurred and thanked Debin Bruce for all her work on the performance stage.

Coolidge Standing Committee - Katy Wight reported that the legislative event on July 7 was very successful. She is very grateful to Cynthia Simison, JoEllen MacKenzie and Julie Nelson for all their work on the event. In response to a question from Shelly Ruocco about whether the project can be phased, Lisa Downing said that the nature of the project makes that untenable and would prolong the period when the museum would need to be closed.

Development Committee - Rebekah Anderson reported that they met on July 10, 2025. They discussed the need to recruit new committee members as several members are retiring. The trustees should let her know of any potential new members to consider, especially with fund-raising experience. In FY25,

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings (continued)

\$240,000 was raised, a bit less than the previous year. Foundations are playing a larger role in funding non-profits in the community these days. The committee will explore how to better exploit this source of funds. They discussed bequests and how to better recognize donors. Development Committee members will have an opportunity to attend the upcoming training in Development that is planned by the Coolidge Museum Development Committee. They will also explore grant writing as another possible source of funds. Rebekah Anderson, Nicole Sibley, Lisa Downing and Molly Moss will work on drafting new Development Committee goals for FY26.

Finance Committee - Ruth Francis reported that the Finance Committee met on July 15 and reviewed the packet of financial reports Jo Landers provided in advance of their meeting. Lisa Downing shared that Forbes is moving ahead with the HVAC project for the Children's Department and the contract is being awarded to Keiter Corporation. Doug Wheat has agreed to be the third authorized signer for the library and will work with Molly Moss and Lisa Downing so he can be added. Lisa Downing provided an update on the audit; Erik Nicolaison is making updates and received the requested information. The Finance Committee began a robust discussion, tabled from June, about the future tracking and management of undesignated donor gifts, particularly in relation to the city's financial oversight. The committee acknowledges that the library receives funding from the city's budget, as well as funding from other sources which includes gifts, donations, grants, and bequests. The committee will continue discussions on how the library should handle gifts that are unexpected and unrestricted and for a substantial amount, perhaps trustee designated to a fund for a particular use. The other dynamic that plays into the conversation is the endowment's investment portfolio. If the library increases the draw from the investment portfolio, it runs the risk of reaching a level where the withdrawal rate would be deemed imprudent. Additionally, as Bartholomew Inc. has previously advised the full board, to maintain a higher withdrawal rate from the investment portfolio, a more aggressive asset allocation would need to be implemented. This may not be a prudent course of action knowing the endowment needs to be managed in perpetuity. The discussions are ongoing and Russell Carrier said any recommendations would be brought to the full board for a vote. The next meeting of the Finance Committee is on September 10 at 11:00 AM.

Personnel Committee - Shelly Ruocco reported that the Personnel Committee met on July 16 at 4:00 PM. They reviewed the trustee candidates: 5 have taken out papers and 3 have had their signatures approved. One other candidate may well make the deadline. Lisa Downing reached out to all who had contacted her with an interest in being a trustee to remind them of the deadline. In January 2026 the Personnel Committee will collect rank choices of all trustees for committees and assign them before the February 2026 meeting. MGT, the consulting group for the Compensation Review project has gathered an array of salary data directly from other MA libraries and public salary data as well as some possibly related industries and organizations. After discussion and review with MGT, Lisa Downing, Molly Moss and Shelly Ruocco continued reviewing the data and had numerous questions for MGT and will meet with them again soon to continue the discussion. Questions raised at the Personnel Committee meeting included how to move forward, and will/should the library align with other city positions including teachers, firefighters, etc. Lilly Library has let Forbes know they may also use MGT for a salary survey.

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings (continued)

There are many more steps before this process will be completed, certainly well into the fall. When the rollout happens, it should include benefit information and costs covered for the employee, to show total compensation received, a common practice in the HR world. The city provides a lump sum for salaries to Forbes and Forbes determines its distribution. Also, as Forbes employees are not city employees, they do not get all the benefits that city employees receive as they are not on the city payroll, a requirement for managing certain benefits. The committee also discussed how to bridge any gap between what the city might cover and what is needed. Ideas and questions included: can the library create endowed positions, and can the library find funders to supplement what the city provides or to cover other Forbes costs so there is money for subsidizing pay or at least bonuses? Paying for salary increases from the endowment is not a viable option. This may be a good trustee discussion topic for a future meeting. Next, the committee discussed the search for the Adult Services Librarian, which has been posted. There was discussion about the difficulty of getting a strong pool due to current salary levels, although staff turnover is low due to general staff comfort and the appreciation they receive at Forbes. Next, they discussed trustee training and orientation. In January 2026 there will be a significant number of new trustees. They brainstormed ideas on how to get people up to speed on the documentation, processes, structure and language used by the trustees. Ideas included: use the Trustee Agenda item Discussion Topic for different committees to provide training and information, pair new trustees with a trustee mentor who they could approach comfortably with questions, and pursue a way to make the documents trustees learn from and need to refer to more accessible. Ideas or concepts should be presented and then revisited on a regular basis, adding more information, rather than providing everything all at once which can easily overwhelm a new trustee. Finally, they reviewed their FY25 goals and feel they are on track to achieve them. Their next meeting is Wednesday August 27, 2025, at 4:00 PM.

Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group - Anne Teschner reported that they met on June 23 at 4:30 PM. She said a realignment and update was in order and will present a revised charge and structure in the fall.

Other Business

Lisa Downing said she was invited to speak at a joint hearing that covered topics such as freedom of expression, the right to read, protecting librarians from harassment, and collection development policies. She spoke about e-book pricing equity for libraries, suggesting that libraries be able to share licensing terms with each other to have more leverage when bargaining for contracts and protecting patron privacy. One suggestion is to set up a joint committee with the publishing industry and libraries to find solutions together. There is still time to submit written testimony on those issues, and the trustees should contact her if they are interested.

At 5:15 PM, Debin Bruce moved to adjourn the meeting. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 PM.