

**TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY**  
**Thursday, September 25, 2025**

**Present:** Rebekah Anderson, Debin Bruce, Lisa Downing, Ruth Francis, Molly Moss, Shelly Ruocco, Elizabeth Sheirer, Katy Wight. **Also Present:** Priya Charry, Head of Adult Services; Robbie Saner Sullivan; Ed Welch. **Present via Zoom:** Russell Carrier; Anne Teschner; Jo Landers, Bookkeeper; Doug Wheat, Treasurer; Christine Hannon, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library; Lolan Sevilla. **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 4:01 PM.

**Public Comments**

Robbie Saner Sullivan addressed the trustees to talk about her reasons for running for the School Committee At-Large position. She said she supports a holistic approach to city budgeting that includes all ages, and said that public schools and libraries are anchors in the community. She gave background about her personal history and longtime connections to the community and the library. She said she is turning away from the idea that there is more money to be found in the city's budget, and she would like to focus on how best to support the schools with the funds available. She would like to turn attention to state funding for schools in western Massachusetts. She wants to highlight how great the public schools are, and said that to describe the entire system as being in crisis is counterproductive and drives people away. Her first priority is to find a new superintendent who is dynamic, innovative, positive, and collaborative. She is here today to further forge a connection between the public schools and the library.

The trustees thanked her for her comments, and she thanked the trustees for their time. Robbie Saner Sullivan, Ed Welch, and Julia Bender left the meeting at 4:15 PM.

**Secretary's Report**

Debin Bruce moved that the Secretary's report of July 24, 2025 be accepted and placed on file with two corrections. Anne Teschner seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

**Financial Reports**

Jo Landers distributed and presented the August Financial Reports which included a Profit and Loss Comparison, Balance Sheet Comparison, Budget to Actual Report for July and August, Stage Fund income and expense report, Coolidge Museum Redesign income and expense report, and HVAC Project income and expense report. The value of the endowment on August 31, 2025 was \$7,439,119.99.

Jo Landers said this is the first report in the new format that shows budgeted to actual expenditures. This is a collapsed version of the report prepared for the Finance Committee which shows more detail. Some expenses are pre-paid at the beginning of the fiscal year, such as ebook and periodical purchases and insurance costs, and are noted in the report. She asked trustees for feedback, and as a result will add a column showing the

**Financial Reports** (continued)

percentage of the budget spent or remaining. Katy Wight said she was grateful to everyone who spent months working on the new budget format. Understanding the budget and the library's finances in general will be a discussion topic at a future trustees meeting.

Rebekah Anderson made a motion to approve the August Financial Reports and place them on file. Ruth Francis seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Doug Wheat said that it is hard to see just the latest month's activity in this format, and the Finance Committee will discuss possible solutions at a future meeting.

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

Lisa Downing reported that \$2,763.15 in undesignated gifts were received in July and \$1,526.50 in August. The following designated gifts were received since the last trustees' meeting: \$5,047.80 to the Coolidge Fund, \$103 to the Performance Stage Fund in honor of Ruth Francis, and \$103 to the Marie Hershkowitz Memorial Children's Book Fund in memory of Melvin Hershkowitz. There were no receipts from sales/rents.

The following donations were received since the last trustees' meeting: three Fine Press Books and three original prints by the artist Thomas Cornell, and "We'll get there eventually" print exchange collection.

Shelly Ruocco asked about bequests and how to promote them more proactively as an option for people to consider. Lisa Downing said bequests will be highlighted in the annual appeal this year and also in the newsletter. She said she hoped to get to know the people making bequests while alive, to help her think about how to use their gift and talk about them in a more meaningful way.

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

**Next Meetings**

The next regular meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Thursday, October 23 at 4:00 PM. Katy Wight will attend remotely and Debin Bruce will facilitate. The representatives of Bartholomew Inc. will attend the beginning of the meeting. The trustees scheduled the following meetings for the remainder of 2025: 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, October 1, 2025 at 6:30 PM. Katy Wight will attend on behalf of the trustees.

**Department Reports: Adult Services**

Priya Charry presented the Adult Services Annual Report introducing the team and covering reference and technology services, adult programming, and community partnerships. She highlighted the work of Jill Emmons, Joshua Vrysen, and Pamela Acosta in the transition to a team approach for Arts & Music. After revising the Arts & Music Librarian position to fit more general needs, a new Adult Services Librarian will be hired this fall. The new

**Department Reports: Adult Services** (continued)

Librarian will cover arts and music, reference, social media, and programming. This year the volunteer-run Drop-In Tech Help program expanded to include two bilingual sessions and one digital navigator-led session weekly. Adult computer sessions are up about 18% from last year. 2024-2025 was a dynamic year of learning, experimentation, and connections with community members and organization. In FY25, there were 20+ live/hybrid author talks, 15 film screenings, and a fun Summer Reading schedule, plus an assortment of art workshops, musical performances, and scholarly talks. The addition of the new performance stage will allow for more high quality, diverse performances to entertain and educate the community. The past year also provided many opportunities to establish new relationships and solidify existing partnerships with community organizations including the Center for New Americans and International Language Institute, Grow Food Northampton, the Senior Center, Northampton Housing Authority, MassHire, Smith College, Trauma-Informed Hampshire County, and Hampshire Hope.

Priya Charry said she would like help in developing a booking process for the performance stage that is similar to the one used for the Hosmer Gallery. She would like consultation and training, and will come back to the board with a more formal request for hardware or software if needed.

Mr. Carrier said that Forbes has been lucky over the years to have such a well-developed Arts & Music department and asked if there will still be separate departments in the library. Lisa Downing said that administratively Arts & Music has been placed in the Adult Services department, but that it still retains its separate collection and space on the second floor. The other library departments are Borrower's Services, Children's & Young Adult Services, Facilities, Special Collections, and Technical Services.

The trustees thanked Priya Charry for her work and her report, and she left the meeting at 4:49 PM. She invited the trustees to get in touch with her if they have questions or would like to see first-hand the work they do.

**Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group Charge**

Anne Teschner reported that after discussions with both the advisory group and the trustees, the committee is presenting a revised charge for the trustees' review and approval. The new charge is more straightforward and seems to better align with current practice and the mission of the group. The revised charge states: "The Racial & Social Justice Advisory Group advises the library's leadership and trustees in the library's efforts to seek out and eliminate underlying structures of white supremacy, and promote racial and social justice in our policies, procedures, and programs. The advisory group also serves to engage the community about the library." Activities of the group include: representing the library at community engagement opportunities, supporting staff in developing goals and activities, meeting regularly with other groups doing justice work in the community, providing regular feedback to library leadership, and seeking appointments on library committees according to expertise and interest. The advisory group membership will consist of up to 2 trustees, up to 2 library staff members with one serving as co-chair and one as secretary, and up to 10 community members with one serving as co-chair. Each member will be approved by the co-chairs for a 2-year term with additional terms possible.

**Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group Charge** (continued)

Russell Carrier said that in the past potential members of official library committees were brought to the trustees for review, and then appointments were formally made by the Chair of the trustees. This is a departure from that process, and he expressed concern about the trustees not having input into the selection of people representing the library in the community. Anne Teschner said the appointment by the trustees seemed perfunctory to the group and unnecessary. There will be up to 2 trustee representatives in the group who will have input into the selection of new members. Russell Carrier said the same could be said for other committees such as the Coolidge Advisory Committee. He asked if this is not a formally appointed library committee, will the Personnel Committee consider it when recommending trustees for committee positions in January of each year. Lisa Downing said that trustee involvement is still very important, and if someone is volunteering for this group it is a commitment of time and should count toward their committee participation. Shelly Ruocco said that the difference is that this is an "advisory group" not a committee. She said appointments will be made only after interested people have attended a certain number of meetings and can be evaluated by the co-chairs of the advisory group. Lisa Downing said that the group would like to have a "youth" member and is reaching out to Smith Vocational High School and Northampton High School for interested students. Russell Carrier said he is not against the new charge and likes everything else about it.

Debin Bruce made a motion to approve the revised charge of the Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group as presented. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed with Rebekah Anderson, Debin Bruce, Shelly Ruocco, Anne Teschner, and Katy Wight voting yes, Ruth Francis abstaining, and Russell Carrier voting no.

**Administrative Report**

Lisa Downing reported that Outreach Delivery Services Coordinator, Maria Sperduti resigned in August after nearly 10 years of service. All are very grateful to her for reinvigorating the homebound delivery service after budget cuts forced the library to reduce staffing for the longtime service. Maria also saw the program through the pandemic with care and added both the needed delivery service and the neighborhood book box program. All wish her the best in her future endeavors.

The annual statistical report has been submitted, and Molly Moss created an infographic that highlights some of the growth Forbes has seen as compared to the prior fiscal year. Included in those statistics is a 65% increase in summer reading participation this year over last. Lisa Downing and Molly Moss want to congratulate everyone on staff who contributed to its success including Pam Acosta who created the original artwork for the program.

Forbes had its third annual open house this month for Smith College students, culminating in a satisfying final count of exactly 100 new cards registered. Julia Cornick coordinated the event that included a scavenger hunt, snacks, historic postcards, and a tour.

Jacque Frasier on the Friends board lives in a condo at Village Hill. Residents on her floor wanted to put something up to enliven their hallway. With Dylan Gaffney's help, they chose a photo of Forbes from the early 1900s.

**Administrative Report** (continued)

It looks amazing and the residents said it makes them feel like they are walking to the library every time they see it, which brings them joy.

Al Hayden of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) has written an article called "The Future is Unknowable, but the Past Can Help Us Prepare" that utilizes data from past downturns to conclude, "in a time of economic downturn, MA residents relied more on their libraries." It is well worth reading and something that hopefully policy makers will consider.

The Leadership Team had their fall outing at Historic Northampton where they gathered in the historic Shepherd Barn for a brainstorming session and then were treated to a private tour of the new Slavery and Freedom in Northampton exhibit which is not to be missed.

Lisa Downing and Molly Moss thanked all of the trustees who made the performance stage grand opening such a success.

Shelly Ruocco moved that the Administrative Report be accepted and placed on file. Debin Bruce seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

**Communications**

The library received a comment from a patron about the dangerous state of the pavement outside the front door, and the difficulty it presents to the elderly and people with walkers or wheelchairs.

Lisa Downing said this was the second person to make a formal complaint. Replacing the pavement was approved by the trustees for this fiscal year at a cost of \$18,000 to be paid from undesignated funds, however undesignated funds have been going to other projects. She discussed the possibility of adding this on to Children's Department work, but it is not feasible to do it simultaneously. She will get in touch with the new Director of Central Services, Katie Deppen, to ask if the city can take this on as a high priority project due to the serious and urgent nature of the problem.

**Discussion Topic: Computer and Online Privacy**

The trustees agreed by consensus to postpone the discussion until next month.

**Duplicate Payment**

Lisa Downing reported that as described in the notes for the Finance Committee, a duplicate payment made by Forbes was discovered that related to the bathroom accessibility project. The Finance Committee decided to request the duplicate payment currently being held by the city for \$36,964. It is expected these funds will be returned by the end of the month.

**2025 Trustees Goals Mid-Year Review**

Lisa Downing distributed a mid-year review of the trustees' goals for 2025. 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 increase outreach to the downtown business community about library resources. In addition, each committee has set goals. The goals of the Finance Committee are: complete transition to new budget structure, complete FY23 and FY24 audits, clarify our relationship and expectations with Bartholomew, and ongoing monitoring of investments. The goals of the Development Committee,

**2025 Trustees Goals Mid-Year Review** (continued)

which sets goals on the fiscal year rather than the calendar year are: produce a reliable stream of fundraising dollars per year to support the library's operating budget, readiness for increased solicitation for major gifts and planned gifts (including coordination and review), donor appreciation and retention, and review and revise goals annually. The goals of the Personnel Committee are: complete independent Classification and Compensation Strategy and devise an implementation plan once complete, begin negotiating a new contract with FLEA, create rolling calendar of activities for Personnel Committee. The Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group goals are: review the advisory group charge; provide input to library boards, committees and projects; and support the work of the Northampton Reparations Committee. The Coolidge Standing Committee goals are: 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 are: 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. All goals are in progress.

**ARIS FY2025 Annual Report**

Molly Moss reported that the ARIS (Annual Report Information Survey) is a requirement in order to be certified and eligible for State Aid. The complete ARIS Statistics are available online. She distributed charts that give a snapshot of some of the data that is included in the report. Forbes' door count was 216,875, compared to 199,431 and 223,131 in FY19 (last year pre-COVID). Molly Moss noted that many library programs are now online or hybrid and attendance in those is not reflected in the door count. Computer use and meeting room use are both up, as well as circulation, especially ebook and eaudio. She said that much of the cost of ebooks and eaudio are covered by the library's CWMARS assessment. The library has separately budgeted \$25,000 for ebooks this year compared to about \$150,000 for print books. Lisa Downing thanked her for compiling this report. Molly Moss said she would email the CWMARS report to the trustees.

**Building Projects Updates**

Lisa Downing reported that the performance stage is complete, and the grand opening was a joyous occasion. She thanked everyone for coming out to celebrate. It was especially wonderful to honor Marjorie Hess and Rudy Talaber as well as recognize how instrumental Debin Bruce was to the project's success. There is more library programming scheduled this fall, and she will be bringing a use policy to the trustees for consideration over the winter in anticipation of opening it up for use by the community.

The Children's renovation and HVAC project is going full speed ahead. The space for the new programming room has been cleared and preparations for the new space are underway. Additionally, plumbing work for the HVAC work has been started. There are anticipated change orders because a temporary heat coil is needed to allow for heat until a permanent part is available. There have also been leaky pipes or valves that will need to be repaired.

Rebekah Anderson left the meeting at 5:45 PM.

### **Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings**

Friends of Forbes - Shelly Ruocco attended the September 3 meeting of the Friends of Forbes and reported that they will be doing a fall membership mailing. At their next meeting, they will discuss developing a policy for when money can be taken from the endowment. They are still working on getting sponsorships for the Artisan's Fair which is scheduled for Sunday, October 5, 10 AM-3 PM. There was much brainstorming about future events. The Friends are looking into a new printer provider. Another fun idea was having a Bingo night at the Elks this winter. There was discussion of an Auction with Children's Authors and Illustrators. Mo Willems and Holly Black have signed on. The Friends are already planning for next year's Garden Tour. Seven gardens have been visited as potentials. At the Artisan Fair, Garden Tour T-shirts will be on sale as only half of the expected sales took place during the Tour this year. A field trip is planned to 2 homes in Hyde Park for \$130 on Friday, October 24, which has since been rescheduled to November 14 because of the government shutdown.

Building and Grounds Committee - Debin Bruce reported that the Building and Grounds Committee did not meet in September. This report is an opportunity to bring the trustees up to date on the basement project being referred to as the HVAC project, although it involves more than upgrading the existing heating and cooling system. In the August meeting report, it was noted that the start of the project involved a clean out of the basement boiler room. Since the project began in early September, the architect from Deitz, the lead contractor, Keiter, Northampton Central Services and Forbes staff have been meeting weekly. Central Services hired Rick Katsanos to serve as their project oversight representative. The start of the project involved creating dust barriers to separate the work. The basement pipe cutting in Mid-September created some disruptive noise for the Children's Department. The delayed availability of equipment has affected the schedule; instead of 4 weeks lead time, it has increased to 24 weeks, creating the need for a temporary hot water coil for the system to bridge the winter heating season.

Coolidge Standing Committee - Katy Wight reported that the exhibit work is continuing with this phase focusing on content and estimates. The annual appeal was sent out in July with an email follow-up this week. The Programming Committee is offering a program about President Coolidge and the Jewish Community in the 1920s at Congregation B'Nai Israel on Sunday, October 26 at 10:30 AM.

Development Committee - Rebekah Anderson reported that they met on August 14 and set goals for the fiscal year. The annual appeal is set to go out in a week or two.

Finance Committee - Ruth Francis reported that the Finance Committee met on September 10. They learned that the library paid an invoice (\$37,000) twice in FY24 and FY25 for the bathroom construction project, specifically for the water bottle filling stations. The first payment was to the City of Northampton and a second payment was issued directly to Keiter Construction. This over payment was discovered during the city's audit. The Finance Committee suggested that Forbes ask the city for the money back (in lieu of applying it to another library construction project). The library has been notified that it has received a bequest of real estate. The Gift Acceptance Policy notes that gifts of real estate are not accepted. Given that the property is located in Northampton, the Finance Committee will explore what

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

is involved in accepting this gift as it is encumbered with the contents on the property. While there will be various expenses involved with cleaning out and selling the property, it is hoped that the profits from the sale will outweigh the costs. Jo Landers provided them with reports that reflect an updated budget for the year, budget year to date, and actual for the year to date. They will look at the first quarter report in October as it will be shared with the city. A detailed month-to-month report is available upon request. It was suggested that the Finance Committee offer budget education as a board discussion item this fall and again in the spring with new trustees. During the library's FY23 audit, it was discovered that several transfers to Bartholomew were coded incorrectly. Molly Moss is working on getting this corrected so the money can be designated as spendable and not principal. Bartholomew Inc. will present to the full board of trustees at the October trustees' meeting. Bartholomew Inc. will also attend a Finance Committee meeting so they can speak to them about the Blackstone Real Estate Income Fund (Forbes is the only client in the fund) and inclusion of private equity. They began discussions on a process for vendor contracts as it relates to capital projects. The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for October 8 at 11 AM.

Personnel Committee - Shelly Ruocco reported that the interviewing process is going well for the open Adult Services Librarian position. The committee has been working on onboarding for new trustees and a review for current trustees. Topics include how to best access and present information including having a series where committee members present on their current work, accomplishments, etc. They talked about a new trustee post-meeting debrief for questions and clarifications and ways the trustees could all get to know each other better on a personal level. They are discussing a document that at a glance would let the trustees know what the committee does, or is due, at any time during the year, from mailings to Director's review. A subgroup is still looking at what the new compensation structure will look like, from designated levels and ranges to number of steps. There is still much work to do and there won't be a structure and answers for staff until later this year, possibly not until January 2026. There is still much to do and changes in city government play a role in any implementation. There are some unknowns that could affect the degree and speed the library moves forward. Any presentation to the mayor of the library's needs must wait until after the election. While acknowledging that pay increase options are limited, they did briefly discuss options including creating an endowed position that would sit outside the city's money, thereby freeing up funds from the city for needed pay adjustments that could then be met over many years. Next, they will begin preparation for contract negotiations with FLEA. The committee will review the current contract as well as those from other libraries. Their next meeting is October 14 at 4 PM.

Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group - Anne Teschner reported that they met on June 23 at 4:30 PM. See the action item earlier in the meeting for details.

**Other Business**

There was no other business.

At 5:47 PM, Debin Bruce moved to adjourn the meeting. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:47 PM.