

TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY
Thursday, November 20, 2025

Present: Rebekah Anderson, Debin Bruce, Lisa Downing, Ruth Francis, Molly Moss, Shelly Ruocco, Elizabeth Sheirer, Katy Wight. **Also Present:** Joshua Vrysen, Joseph Twarog. **Present via Zoom:** Russell Carrier; Jo Landers, Bookkeeper; Doug Wheat, Treasurer; Heather Diaz, observer for the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA); Chris Hannon, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library; Fred Kass; Lolana Sevilla. **Absent:** Anne Teschner.

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

Joseph Twarog said that since this is one of Russell Carrier's last meetings as a trustee, he wanted to recognize his years of service, almost half a century. He said that when he was a trustee, Russell Carrier had a wealth of historical and institutional knowledge and was a great leader, and he wanted to thank him for his years of service.

Joseph Twarog left the meeting at 4:03 PM.

Secretary's Report

Ruth Francis moved that the Secretary's report of October 23, 2025 be accepted and placed on file with a minor correction. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Financial Reports

Jo Landers distributed and presented the Trustees Financial Reports for the period ending October 31, 2025 which included a Profit and Loss Comparison, Balance Sheet Comparison, Budget to Actual Report, Stage Fund income and expense report, Coolidge Museum Redesign income and expense report, and HVAC Project income and expense report. She said that since construction of the performance stage is now complete, the Performance Stage Fund report will no longer appear in future reports. Any future maintenance or repairs will appear in Facilities expenses going forward. She said that the library remains within budget, and she does not see any areas of concern. There are some timing issues which are explained in the notes. She said the inadvertent \$37,000 double payment was returned by the city, and reduced the capital asset on the balance sheet. Ruth Francis thanked her for all her work on getting the library's accounts into shape over the last year.

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

Gifts, Donations, and Bequests, etc.

Lisa Downing reported that \$22,993.62 in undesignated gifts were received in September, including a \$5,000 gift from Rachel Maddow and Susan Mikula. The following designated gifts were received since the last Trustees' meeting: \$456.65 to the Coolidge Fund and \$1,088.40 for the Children's Renovation project. There were no receipts from sales/rents or donations this month.

Gifts, Donations, and Bequests, etc. (continued)

This month Molly Moss added a new chart to the report for fundraising, showing the amount budgeted and what has been received year to date: Coolidge \$50,000 budgeted and \$15,000 year to date; Children's Renovation Project \$50,000 budgeted and \$1,300 year to date; Annual Appeal \$50,000 budgeted and \$39,000 year to date; Library Giving Day \$30,000 budgeted and \$0 year to date; other fundraising \$67,100 budgeted and \$9,700 year to date. The library is a bit behind where it needs to be, partly due to timing and partly because of setting ambitious goals. Library Giving Day has not yet happened this fiscal year. The annual appeal, which went out in October is ahead of where it was last year. The Coolidge project is a little more difficult as it involves reaching out to a different donor network than usual. Molly Moss is working on a \$200,000 grant for that work.

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

Next Meetings

A special meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Tuesday, December 2 at 4:00 PM to discuss the MGT Classification & Compensation study. The next regular meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Thursday, December 18 at 4:00 PM. Meetings for 2026 will be set at the January 2026 meeting.

The next meeting of the Friends of Forbes Library will be held on Wednesday, December 3, 2025 at 6:30 PM. Katy Wight will attend on behalf of the trustees.

Department Report

There was no department report this month.

Coolidge Standing Committee Appointments

Lisa Downing reported that The Coolidge Standing Committee unanimously recommends that the following board members be reappointed for another term by the trustee chair; David Murphy, Eli Porth, Cynthia Simison, and Leslie Skatz-Hodgeson. The committee also recommends that Jay Fleitman be appointed as a board member.

Katy Wight made the appointments as recommended by the Coolidge Standing Committee.

FY2023 Audit

Lisa Downing reported that Eric Nickolaison, Senior Accountant with Downey, Pieciak, Fitzgerald & Co., P.C. has completed the FY2023 Audit and requests that the trustees vote to approve it so that it can be filed. There are two documents, the Form 990 and the Independent Auditor's Report. They have both been reviewed and discussed by the Finance Committee, who recommends they be approved. It was a clean audit with no statement of concerns or deficiencies. Once approved by the trustees, Doug Wheat will sign them. The auditor is now working on completing the 2024 audit by the end of the calendar year. Doug Wheat said the auditor will come to a trustees' meeting to discuss the 2024 audit and answer questions. Now that the accounts are cleaned up, next year's audit should be done earlier. Once it is filed, the Form 990 becomes public. Some donors will look at it to make sure the organization's finances are in order before making donations.

FY2023 Audit (continued)

Debin Bruce made a motion to approve the FY2023 audit. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Rebekah Anderson, Debin Bruce, Russell Carrier, Ruth Francis, Shelly Ruocco, and Katy Wight all voting in favor.

Staff Appreciation

Lisa Downing reported that the library's staff continues to be exceptional and for the past few years have been given an end-of-year appreciation gift of a \$50 Downtown Northampton Gift card. She proposed that it be done again this year. This expense is included in the budget. They will be given to everyone on payroll, which is just about 50 people for a total cost of \$2,500. Katy Wight suggested looking into increasing the amount in next year's budget. Jo Landers said that the gift card amount is included in staff wages and subject to taxes.

Shelly Ruocco made a motion to approve giving \$50 Downtown Northampton gift cards to library staff on payroll. Ruth Francis seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Debin Bruce, Russell Carrier, Ruth Francis, Shelly Ruocco, Katy Wight, and Rebekah Anderson all voting in favor.

At 4:45 PM Lisa Downing and Molly Moss left the meeting.

Library Director Salary Supplement

The chair requested a conversation about the Library Director Salary Supplement fund, established by the Trustees in 1904 with a memorial gift of \$5,000 from Mrs. Sarah F. Cutter. She was the widow of Charles A. Cutter, the first librarian, for the stated purpose that the income would provide "an addition to the salary of the Librarian." Katy Wight said that every year the library director is given a small bonus from this fund. The market value of the fund is currently about \$11,500 with earnings of \$3,500. A \$500 bonus would represent about 4.3% of the market value, which is in line with other withdrawals from the endowment. If used judiciously, the fund should last for a while and continue to grow. It was agreed that Molly Moss should receive a \$50 gift card since she is on payroll.

Debin Bruce made a motion to give Lisa Downing a \$500 bonus to be paid from the Library Director Salary Supplement fund. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Russell Carrier, Ruth Francis, Shelly Ruocco, Katy Wight, Rebekah Anderson, and Debin Bruce all voting in favor.

At 4:55 PM Lisa Downing and Molly Moss rejoined the meeting.

Administrative Report

Lisa Downing congratulated Rebekah Anderson, Shelley Ruocco, Lolan Sevilla, and Fred Kass on their election to the board! All are very grateful for the effort they made to get elected and look forward to continuing working with them. The swearing in ceremony is in early January.

Representative Lindsay Sabadosa is offering a free session called, "Civics 101: Interacting with Our State Government" at Bombyx on Tuesday, December 2 at 6:30 PM. The event is free, but registration is encouraged. Representative Sabadosa is also offering a Town Hall Meeting at Forbes on Saturday, November 29 at 1:00 PM in the Coolidge Museum.

Administrative Report (continued)

Senator Comerford was a vocal supporter of two library bills that passed the State Senate this week, An Act Regarding Free Expression and the eBook Bill. Both bills still need to be debated and passed by the House, but this is significant progress. All are grateful to those who have contacted the state legislators during this process.

Lisa Downing gave a quick reminder that Forbes is holding a food and toiletries drive through the end of the month for the Northampton Survival Center. Lisa Downing and Molly Moss thanked Sarah Johnson for spearheading this effort and delivering the food on the library's behalf.

Forbes' all staff training day is scheduled for Friday, December 5, when the library will be closed for the day. Highlights will include Customer Service Signs for Librarians 2.0 (ASL) and celebrating the graduation of Julia Cornick from her MLS program.

The Library Legislative Breakfast held by Senator Jo Comerford is scheduled for January 16 in Sunderland. More information will be distributed as it gets closer.

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

Communications

Katy Wight received a letter from Anne Awad regarding the estate of Warren Hubley who passed away in July of this year, leaving his estate worth between \$200,000 and \$300,000 to Forbes. The estate includes a property that needs to be sold. The library's lawyers said it would be best practice for the estate to be handled by a representative of Mr. Hubley's estate to avoid conflicts of interest. Ruth Francis said she would add this to the Finance Committee's agenda.

Discussion Topic: Orientation of New Trustees

The Personnel Committee is reviewing the onboarding process for new trustees and how to continue to grow the knowledge and confidence of all members of the board. The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners provides a guide for trustees that is worth reviewing. Questions to get the trustees thinking were distributed including: 1) What are essential pieces of information that need to be part of the training? 2) For new Trustees, what information are you most concerned about learning? 3) What topics will need to be repeated and enhanced throughout the year? 4) What information do you wish you had learned/mastered sooner in your time as a Trustee? 5) What have you seen used in orientations at other institutions that you thought was helpful and could be implemented here? 6) When orientation topics are introduced outside the meeting with new trustees in a special training meeting, would continuing trustees like the option to attend? 7) What considerations do we need to keep in mind as the training takes place and new trainees work through their first year? Examples include: recognize the possibility of varying learning styles and present the information in more than one way; repetition will be needed over time as people's learning curves vary; find opportunities during the meeting to point out or expand on a comment or piece of data to give a more rounded view of what is being discussed.

Discussion Topic: Orientation of New Trustees (continued)

A few themes emerged from the discussion. Current trustees are interested in attending an orientation along with new trustees and there is a desire for more information about the library's finances and the library's agreement and relationship with the city. Ruth Francis said that the Finance Committee is working on a curriculum for the trustees to learn more about the library's finances. Group sessions are preferable to one-on-one sessions as a best use of time, though groups cannot exceed 3 trustees or they become public meetings and will need to be posted and recorded. Katy Wight said that training around the open meeting law would be helpful. Lolana Sevilla said they were excited to be oriented and were absorbing the process by attending the trustees' meetings. They said it was helpful to have the historical context along with the current conditions. Ruth Francis said it would be helpful to share time schedules for trustees and committees as well as annual and special library events. Molly Moss is currently working on a calendar that includes events for the trustees, the Friends of Forbes, the Coolidge Committee, and the library in general.

Katy Wight said training around email use and document storage in Google Drive would be helpful. Russell Carrier said to be careful about using email as it can be subject to FOIA requests and sometimes a phone call may be better. It was agreed that Forbes Library email accounts would be created for all trustees to use for their official Forbes business. This will also grant access to Forbes' Google Drive for the trustees. It was generally felt that the current training page for the trustees is overwhelming and could be reworked. Library staff have an online handbook that could serve as a model for the trustees.

Fred Kass said understanding the relationship between the city and Forbes is important, as well as the underlying infrastructure such as the bidding process and who is responsible for what. He said learning more about the committees and where there are openings and what is needed would be valuable. Katy Wight said that she is planning to reach out to the trustees individually to see where their interests lie and what would be the best fit for committees. In January she will ask trustees to rank their committee interests, and the Personnel Committee will make the committee assignments in February. Trustees could audit committee meetings in January to help them learn more and identify where they think they can best serve. Katy Wight said that trustees should email Shelly Ruocco if they think of anything else they would like covered in the orientation.

Building Project Updates

Lisa Downing reported that the children's renovation and HVAC project is continuing. The new programming room is now sheet rocked and painting and ceiling work have begun. They plan to move into the young adult room where ceiling, painting, and flooring work will also take place in early December. The children's department had to be closed today due to paint fumes, but is expected to reopen tomorrow. Heat was restored at the end of October and while there were some temperature irregularities during the switchover, the building is now more comfortable. Lisa Downing said that the project is experiencing long lead times in obtaining some materials. The HVAC system will need to be offline for a week in March to complete work. There have also been delays with some lighting materials. There have been a few change orders and unanticipated modifications that will be paid from contingency funds.

Building Project Updates (continued)

The beautiful pear tree that was a memorial of Daniel Goldstein, planted near the enclosure by the back of the building was lost. Half of it came down in a windstorm and the part that remained was a danger, so it had to be cut down. It is hoped to replant another tree there in the spring.

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings

Friends of Forbes - Rebekah Anderson attended the November 5 meeting of the Friends of Forbes and said that she continues to be impressed by their passion and generosity. Their budget looks good, and endowment and expenses are on track. They made about \$9,400 from the artisan's fair, and are forming a subgroup to brainstorm other fundraising ideas, such as a bingo or trivia night. They are looking to raise \$50,000 for the children's department project and mural. They discussed and agreed to dip into their endowment if needed, and will develop guidelines for using endowment funds in the future.

Building and Grounds Committee - Debin Bruce reported that the Building and Grounds Committee met on November 12. Building updates started with the Children's Renovation and HVAC upgrade. Keiter's weekly status meeting discussed the need to change the millwork drawings to include countertop space next to the sinks. The effect of that change order will be addressed at the next status meeting. Forbes determined that the concrete pad, previously the site of an outdoor compressor, would not be repurposed and should be removed. It is anticipated that the new programming room may be finished by the end of January; but completion of the HVAC will extend sometime into Spring because heat will have to be off for an extended period of time. Two other items of old business were mentioned: sidewalk repair on West Street is complete (thanks to the DPW) and the EV charging station will need an extension of the parking place length necessitating a reposition of the granite curb. With regard to repairing the concrete patio at the front door, the DPW did not take that project on this Fall and weather may prevent it being addressed until Spring. Northampton Concrete is coming by to see if, and when they could take on the repair, and at what price. The first of the reupholstered cushions is being delivered; and a recent windstorm damaged a memorial pear tree that will be removed with intentions to replant it when additional landscaping occurs in the Spring. The next meeting is scheduled for January 14, 2026.

Coolidge Standing Committee - Katy Wight reported that the annual officer elections were held and Bill Scher was elected Chair and Rob Weir was elected Vice Chair at the meeting this month. The committee thanked JR Greene for his many years of service to the committee as Chair. He will continue on as an emeritus member. They will start working on a strategic plan that will also help with fundraising.

Development Committee - Rebekah Anderson reported that they did not meet this month. Their next meeting is scheduled for December 11, at 4:30 PM via Zoom.

Finance Committee - Ruth Francis reported that the committee reviewed the FY23 reports prepared by the auditor. The treasurer and Finance Committee recommend that the board approve the FY23 audit and tax return. The auditor will be asked to present the results of the FY23 and FY24 audits to the Finance Committee once the FY24 audit is completed. Jo Landers reviewed the bookkeeper's reports with the committee and the budget to actual report shows the library is on track for the current fiscal year. The performance stage

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings (continued)

project has been fully paid for. Going forward, Jo Landers will add notes to the budget report showing expected amounts for Library Giving Day and the annual appeal fundraising event. A new donor-designated Local History Fund will be created for the \$10,000 Turner donation, and an expected \$50,000 bequest for a specific project, will be added to this newly created fund. The committee addressed budget planning for FY27 with Lisa Downing explaining that while she and Molly Moss await guidance from the mayor's office, they will need to negotiate salaries and address the classification and compensation study findings. The Finance Committee agreed that they should prepare the FY27 draft budget for the committee to review, rather than involving trustees in the creation process. Lisa Downing provided an update on the real estate bequest. The personal representative (executor) has agreed to manage the distribution of the estate. The committee also discussed budget flexibility, particularly in two main areas where the director has discretion: 1) the process for Friends donations, which include both standing budget items and 2) the Director's Discretionary Fund. The committee also discussed how to handle capital campaign funding, with Lisa Downing and Molly Moss noting that while some projects are budgeted, others like the Coolidge renovation are still in planning stages. The Finance Subcommittee has had ongoing discussions regarding the endowment and donor restricted funds and board designated funds. The Subcommittee will present proposed recommendations to the Finance Committee on the endowment structure next month. The Finance Committee began preliminary discussions on the Investment Policy Statement. Areas addressed include: making the IPS more flexible so it allows for investments that align with library goals; removal of the requirement to use the "Carbon Underground 200" list; removal of the restrictions on Unit Investment Trusts and Business Development Companies, as these investments could provide opportunities; inclusion of private equity; seek clarification from Bartholomew & Co. on the benchmark as the current benchmark is 50-50 vs. target portfolio allocation of 60-40; consult with Bartholomew & Company about the restrictions and their impact on other municipalities. Doug Wheat raised questions about the interpretation of "direct" investments and the liquidity of alternative investments, which Ruth Francis acknowledged as areas requiring further discussion. The Finance Committee will ask Bartholomew & Company if they can present to the Finance Committee on February 11, 2026 for an in-person presentation with a hybrid option available. The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for December 10 at 11:00 AM via zoom.

Personnel Committee - Shelly Ruocco reported that the Committee met on November 13 and spent most of the meeting reviewing the slide show that will be presented to the trustees and staff about the MGT Classification & Compensation study. These edits will next be shared with MGT for correction before the slides are shared with trustees and staff. Trustees will be encouraged to ask questions during the presentation. New trustees will be invited to stay for the executive session to follow the presentation to the trustees. They also reviewed the MGT Final Report summarizing the process and work completed, and these edits will be shared with MGT as well. They continued their discussion of the new trustee orientation. While some orientation efforts will work with the new trustees, and newer trustees if they would like, some information will be shared throughout the year at trustee meetings as new or refresher information. Any trustee can feel free to join any orientation sessions including those for new trustees. All

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings (continued)

trustees will be provided with Google email/doc training in the new year and moving forward will be required to use the Forbes Google email and docs.

Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group - Anne Teschner reported that their next meeting is scheduled for January 12, 2026.

Other Business

There was no other business.

At 5:23 PM, Ruth Francis moved to adjourn the meeting. Rebekah Anderson seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:23 PM.