

TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY
Thursday, December 18, 2025

Present: Rebekah Anderson, Debin Bruce, Lisa Downing, Ruth Francis, Molly Moss, Shelly Ruocco, Elizabeth Sheirer, Katy Wight. **Present via Zoom:** Anne Teschner; Jo Landers, Bookkeeper; Doug Wheat, Treasurer; JoEllen MacKenzie, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library; Fred Kass. **Absent:** Russell Carrier.

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

Lisa Downing read a public comment submitted by Marjorie Hess recognizing Russell Carrier for his 44 years as a Forbes Library trustee, and thanking him for his leadership, commitment and dedication.

Secretary's Report

Debin Bruce moved that the Secretary's reports of November 20, 2025, the Special Meeting of December 2, 2025, and the Executive Session of December 2, 2025 be accepted with a few minor corrections, the November and Special Meeting reports be placed on file, and the Executive Session report placed on file after completion of the contract negotiations with the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA). Rebekah Anderson seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Financial Reports

Jo Landers distributed and presented the Trustees Financial Reports for the period ending November 30, 2025 which included a Profit and Loss Comparison, Balance Sheet Comparison, Budget to Actual Report, Coolidge Museum Redesign income and expense report, and HVAC Project income and expense report. The Performance Stage income and expense report will no longer be presented as the project is complete. Future and ongoing expenses related to the performance stage will be included under regular building and ground maintenance.

Jo Landers shared her screen and went through the reports in detail. She said that there are no surprises. The library is on track to have more income this year than last year at this point. Donations and grants are on track, dividends and interest are down a bit from Bartholomew, but capital gains are up. Ruth Francis will look into that in more detail with Doug Wheat. Where line items may appear to be over budget, it is mostly due to timing issues with expenses incurring early in the fiscal year and being expensed all at once rather than amortized over the course of the fiscal year. Personnel expenses are on budget or a little under due to vacancies. Lisa Downing said that development and travel funds may be a little under-budgeted but are generally reimbursed by the Friends. Jo Landers said that the 5% earned on Amazon purchases using the Amazon credit card will be received as cash back and transferred to the library's bank account, rather than reducing the individual expense incurred. Molly Moss said that last year, the library purchased \$40,000 in materials, mostly media, from Amazon. Jo Landers said that the timing of the capital expenses is all over the place. So far, the

Financial Reports (continued)

expenses related to the Coolidge renovation and HVAC projects have been fully funded by the Friends or other sources. Lisa Downing said that city money for the HVAC project will be exhausted before the library begins to pay invoices. Ruth Francis said the report is great and she is looking forward to seeing it this time next year, when it will be possible to show a comparison with the prior year. The trustees said they appreciate this level of detail and all the work involved in creating the reports.

Rebekah Anderson made a motion to approve the November 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 \$17,580.95 in undesignated gifts were received in November, including two \$5,000 gifts. The following designated gifts were received since the last trustees' meeting: \$2,208.15 to the Coolidge Fund, and \$100 for the Children's Renovation project. There were no receipts from sales/rents or donations this month.

An update on fundraising was provided: Coolidge funding budgeted \$50,000, received \$17,260; Children's Renovation Project budgeted \$50,000, received \$15,500; Annual Appeal budgeted \$50,000, received \$51,584; Library Giving Day budgeted \$30,000, none received; Other budgeted \$67,100, received \$11,803.

Lisa Downing said that she has learned that there is an opportunity through late spring for qualified donations from donors that are 10% more than previously donated to be eligible for matching funds for which the library can apply.

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, January 22 at 4:00 PM. The remainder of the meetings for 2026 will be scheduled at the January meeting.

The next meeting of the Friends of Forbes Library will be held on Wednesday, January 7, 2026 at 6:30 PM. Ruth Francis will attend on behalf of the trustees.

Department Report

There was no department report this month.

Endowment Structure Revision

Lisa Downing reported that the Finance Committee is proposing a revision to the endowment funds for the trustee's approval. They are recommending a consolidation of "board designated" funds to streamline administration of the funds. Several board designated funds have been incorporated into a single fund with the same purpose. Historical information about the individual donations contributing to that fund has been retained in bullet points under each fund. Reducing the overall number of funds will save both time and money and make it easier to keep track of the funds and their balances. Lisa

Endowment Structure Revision (continued)

Downing said one of the goals is to create guidelines and best practices for the library and future trustees.

The funds include donor restricted, board restricted, and unrestricted funds. Donor restricted funds are when donors have designated how and what the funds can be used for. Board restricted funds are when the donor has made no designation, but the trustees have created a fund for their use. To maintain future flexibility, board designated funds include the provision that funds can be used for "other operating expenditures as needed or desired by the board." Unrestricted funds have no designations. Right now, there is only one unrestricted fund, the Keogh Family Bequest, because it is awaiting further contributions before the trustees decide how it will be used. Katy Wight said that when establishing new funds, the trustees aim to be as broad and flexible as possible.

General Funds include the Forbes Aid Fund (donor restricted), Library Director Supplementary Fund (donor restricted), Doland Reference Room Fund (donor restricted), and Keogh Family Bequest (unrestricted). Book Funds include the Charles E. Forbes Book Fund (donor restricted), The H. Clifton Kellogg II Memorial Fund (donor restricted), Marie Hershkowitz Memorial Children's Book Fund (donor restricted), The David W. Shearer Memorial Periodicals Fund (donor restricted), and Gertrude P Smith Book Funds (board restricted). Coolidge Museum Funds include the Rosamond Chester Coolidge Fund (donor restricted) and Pike-Rowe Coolidge Funds (board restricted). Special Collections Funds include the Lyman Special Collections Funds (board restricted). Technology Funds include the Janet Moulding Technology Funds (board restricted). City of Northampton Funds Held at Bartholomew, Inc. for the Forbes Library include the Earle Fund (donor restricted) and Clarke Fund (donor restricted). These funds will appear on the endowment report from Bartholomew Inc., but are not advertised publicly.

Molly Moss reminded the trustees that all book & media and technology purchases are funded by the library, not the city of Northampton. Doug Wheat reviewed and clarified the language for the Clarke and Earle funds held by the city on behalf of the library.

Shelly Ruocco made a motion to approve the new fund structure for the endowment as proposed by the Finance Committee. Anne Teschner seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Rebekah Anderson, Debin Bruce, Ruth Francis, Shelly Ruocco, Anne Teschner, and Katy Wight all voting in favor.

Administrative Report

Lisa Downing reported that today is the last meeting for Russell Carrier and Debin Bruce. She and Molly Moss thanked both of them for their exceptional work as Forbes Library trustees. Debin Bruce accomplished so much in 4 years and was the driving force behind making the beautiful Hess Performance Stage a reality. This marks the end of 44 years of service for Russell Carrier. His record is next to none in the history of Forbes Library - both because of the longevity of his service but more importantly because of how much he contributed to the library's success. Nowhere is that more true than with the iconic building that is in great shape, inside and out, thanks in large part to his efforts through fundraising, committee work, and clarifying the library's relationship with the City of Northampton. He will be greatly

Administrative Report (continued)

missed. Looking ahead, the city's inauguration will take place on Monday, January 5 at 10 AM at the Northampton Senior Center.

Forbes held a very successful staff day earlier this month that included additional training on American Sign Language (ASL) for library customer service. The first part was held last year and the staff appreciated the review and additional training. Staff have reported interacting with patrons using ASL which is fantastic. Katy Wight joined staff for lunch while they celebrated Julia Cornick's completion of library school. The staff shared their accomplishments for the year and hopes for the new year. Several staff mentioned the opportunities that the stage and soon the new youth programming room bring to expanding the ways the library can connect with the community. Lisa Downing and Molly Moss would like to thank the Friends of Forbes for sponsoring most of the staff development budget including the cost of the full day staff training.

The administrative and facilities staff were able to make it out for their fall outing/team building excursion and managed to escape from Alcatraz! They had a great time at the escape room which utilized a lot of skills, including being very adept at opening sticky locks.

Lisa Downing and Molly Moss would like to thank everyone who participated in the Hot Chocolate Run this year. Forbes Library staff, trustees, Friends, and patrons walked, ran, drummed and sipped their way through the Hot Chocolate Run! Thank you to library supporters who helped raise \$2,300 for the great work done by Safe Passage.

Forbes received recognition for research assistance in the acknowledgements for a new book, *A World Without Summer* by Nicholas Day, a best-selling local author. It is a middle-grade nonfiction book about the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora, which caused global climate chaos, famine, and social unrest, and inspired Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Forbes rallied quickly to have an active appeal for this year's Giving Tuesday earlier this month including a \$6,000 match for the furnishing of the new youth programming room. The day was very successful, thanks in large part to the efforts of the Children's and Young Adult Departments staff.

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

Communications

Forbes Library received a letter dated November 21, 2025 from the Northampton Survival Center thanking Forbes for the recent donation of toiletries and 74 pounds of food. This month Sara Johnson in the Children's Department is collecting donations of pajamas and winter clothes.

The trustees received a letter from Heather Diaz on behalf of the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA) dated December 1, 2025 stating that they elected their slate of officers at their most recent annual meeting: Jason Petcen as President, Dylan Gaffney as Vice President, Joshua Vrysen as Treasurer, and Heather Diaz as Secretary.

Discussion Topic: Legislative Agenda

Lisa Downing reported that the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) has begun advocating for the FY2027 state budget lines for libraries with a letter to Governor Healey. This is a step that hasn't been taken in recent years but was deemed necessary as it is anticipated to be a challenging budget season due to federal funding uncertainty and many competing demands on the state level. The legislative breakfasts have already begun which is a great opportunity to interact with local legislators and speak up on behalf of state funding for libraries. The breakfast for Senator Comerford's district will take place on Friday, January 16 at 9 AM at the Sunderland Public Library. Registration is online. This year the Commissioners have requested that State Aid to Public Libraries (state budget line 7000-9501) be prioritized and increased by 5% to \$21 million in the FY27 budget in the Governor's budget from FY26's \$20 million. This is critical, unrestricted, direct local aid that libraries can use to maintain their services. It has a massive impact across the Commonwealth with 347 out of 351 municipalities certified in the program and receiving this funding. For libraries and the millions of people who depend on them, it's a lifeline.

Lisa Downing said she will share the funding request for the other state library budget lines when she gets them. They represent a very small percentage of the state budget but are hugely significant to Forbes. She is expecting to receive \$84,000 in direct state aid as well as huge cost savings in indirect support through 9101, 9401, and 9506. The relevant line items are: 9101 Board of Library Commissioners, 9401 Regional Libraries Local Aid, 9402 Talking Book Program Worcester, 9406 Talking Book Program (Perkins) Watertown, 9501 Public Libraries Local Aid, 9506 Technology & Resource Sharing, and 9508 Center for the Book. The \$84,000 in state aid received by Northampton will be split between Forbes (80%) and Lily Library (20%). The indirect funding gives access at a subsidized rate to e-books, training and consulting, CWMARS, and interlibrary loan delivery.

Lisa Downing said that Representative Sabadosa and Senator Commerford are strong supporters and need to hear from us. She asked the trustees to advocate for Forbes and libraries by email, letter, or phone call, and to attend the Library Legislative Breakfast on January 16. Katy Wight said that the letter to Governor Healey from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) provides a set of very good talking points.

IMLS Funding

Lisa Downing reported that the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) has announced that funding for IMLS, the only federal budget line that supports libraries, has been restored including the \$3.6 million for Massachusetts this year. The MBLC will begin to rebuild its federal program which includes a \$7,500 grant to Forbes for a preservation assessment grant for the Hampshire Room.

Building Projects Updates

Lisa Downing reported that the HVAC and youth programming room project is going along well. It is still on track to be wrapped up by early spring. Improvements to the teen room have been made including new ceiling tiles, flooring, and paint. The concrete pad for the new chiller has been laid, and now the library will need to wait until the spring for the installation of the chiller. There is a long lead time for the equipment, and the heat will need to be turned off during installation. The library is switching from

Building Projects Updates (continued)

steam heat to hot water which is more efficient. It is hoped that costs will go down, even though an additional space is being added. Due to the unusually cold weather this month, it is possible that energy costs for the fiscal year will be up overall.

The front doors have a structural issue due to the vertical steel beams that support the door frame rotting at the bottom from salt corrosion. Central Services has requested an estimate to repair the doors. Repairs to the front patio will need to wait until the spring due to the weather.

All of the seat cushions in the chairs on the adult floors were refinished by students at Holyoke Creative Arts Center in West Springfield. They did an amazing job and breathed new life into the chairs. The next step will be for facilities staff to steam clean the upholstery and the chairs will be almost as good as new. This month JR Greene painting was on site to repair wall damage in the main staircase, Coolidge Museum, Hampshire Room, and rear staircase. The cause of the damage was addressed and now it is nice to have the walls restored.

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings

Friends of Forbes - Katy Wight attended the December 3 meeting of the Friends of Forbes and reported that Stephen Stover spoke about the 2026 Winter Exquisite zine fest. They will be highlighting puppets instead of dioramas. He is seeking financial support from the Friends for supplies and has also applied for a grant to cover a portion of the costs. There was discussion of the balance in the Director's Discretionary Fund and how best to use it. The Friends are being cautious about spending until they know if the \$50k they have pledged to the Children's renovation will be needed. They plan to include an interview with Russell Carrier in their next newsletter. The Garden Tour committee will start meeting in January. The gardens have already been selected. The Volunteer/Donor event is scheduled for March 1.

Art Selection Committee - Katy Wight reported that the ad hoc committee consists of herself, Rebekah Anderson and her daughter, Anne Teschner, and Children's Librarian Sarah Johnson. They had their first meeting and developed a call for artists as well as agreed on criteria for the mural in the youth programming room that dovetails with the library's art selection criteria and Special Collections policy. The call has received a great deal of interest already and the committee will reconvene in January to make a recommendation to bring to the board. It is hoped the project will be completed by the end of April for a grand re-opening. The project still needs to be funded.

Building and Grounds Committee - Debin Bruce reported that the Building and Grounds Committee did not meet in December. Their next meeting is January 14, 2026. She is taking on one more project before she leaves her role as trustee, revising the library's disaster preparedness plan. The trustees thanked Debin Bruce for all the work she's put into the building and grounds over the years and especially for her work on the performance stage.

Coolidge Standing Committee - Katy Wight reported that the standing committee reviewed the preliminary interpretive panel content for the redesigned museum exhibits. A Massachusetts Cultural Facility grant towards the cost of the

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings (continued)

renovation was submitted. The committee will be meeting with consultant Sarah Tanner for a strategic planning session next week.

Development Committee - Rebekah Anderson reported that the Development Committee met on December 11. They welcomed new committee member, Jocelyn Merrick, an annual fund professional who was referred to the committee by Nicole Sibley. She brings professional experience in development work plus enthusiasm for the library's mission. They discussed FY26 fundraising, and it has been a good year so far. Giving Tuesday produced very good results, particularly for the Children's Department campaign. The library has received 92 gifts totaling \$12,000, with 27 gifts from new donors. They discussed new ideas and decided to back off on the idea of an online auction but are considering doing a raffle. They may reach out to local authors for donations of books. Jocelyn Merrick discussed ways to make the thank you phone calls and notes more personal and said they can really make a difference. They discussed a donor survey as a way to gather library love stories in print or video format and incorporate them into the volunteer and donor event, which will be held March 1, 2026. Volunteers, donors and elected officials will be invited. The event will include games, tours, and refreshments. They are considering baseball hats as gifts. Lisa Downing will call a special planning meeting in early January to include Coolidge Museum staff, the Friends, and others. They discussed a legacy society webpage under development. They are applying to the Massachusetts Cultural Council for grants, and a Community Preservation Act (CPA) grant for lighting and design. They are seeking Smith College community sponsorships towards the Children's/Teen's project. They recognized Russell Carrier for his generous 44 years of giving, both financially and with his time, attention, and care for Forbes Library, and discussed creating a fund or society in his name recognizing especially his passion for local documents and history.

Finance Committee - Ruth Francis reported that the Finance Committee met on December 10. Lisa Downing and Molly Moss have begun working on the FY27 budget and will present the initial draft to the Finance Committee in January. Jo Landers reviewed the current FY26 budget and highlighted that the staff development budget and travel budget have been fully utilized, while the amount budgeted for general donations and grants is ahead by \$30,000. Lisa Downing presented the proposed endowment fund changes to the full committee, and all agreed that it should be shared with the trustees at the December meeting. The committee discussed the benefits of having a process in place for how the cash from the parking meters is handled. All agreed that checks and balances should be implemented as the current collection method could be flagged in a future audit. Historically, the FLEA bank account has been under the Forbes Library TIN. As the library doesn't have ownership of these assets, the Finance Committee agrees that FLEA should try to open a bank account that is outside of the library's purview. In exploring larger grants from local banks, Lisa Downing learned that some of the local banks now require a banking relationship for the larger grants and sponsorships. It was suggested that FLEA consider transferring their account to another institution. Bartholomew & Company is scheduled to meet with 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 Thursday, January 15 at 11 AM via zoom.

Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings (continued)

Personnel Committee - Shelly Ruocco reported that the Committee met on December 12. They discussed the Staff Training Day, which went well. Funds have been depleted for this budget year. They will add a brainstorming session with trustees to determine ways to show staff appreciation in 2026. Two presentations about the Classification and Compensation Study were shared with staff, along with the final report. They hope to meet with the mayor early in 2026 as negotiations will begin soon after the new year with the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA). Data is being prepared, including past comparable municipalities used by Northampton and actual funds needed, as a result of the study, in advance of meeting with the mayor. The committee will work to identify items that can be updated or clarified in preparation for contract negotiations with FLEA. They discussed new trustee orientation and related actions for all trustees. Fred Kass and Lolán Sevilla will tour the library and will be consulted about scheduling of the orientation presentations. They also discussed topics for trustee meetings throughout 2026 that could serve both as orientation and as a review for returning trustees. Google Drive, Gmail and related access will be available early in 2026 and then be used by all trustees for all document development and communication. They discussed trustee committee selection for 2026. Trustees who chair a committee will discuss their committee, its achievements and current projects at the January 2026 meeting after which all will rank order their interest in all committees. Assignments will be made by the Personnel Committee in time for the February meeting. Molly Moss will distribute a list of the library's committees and their descriptions.

Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group - Anne Teschner reported that their next meeting is scheduled for January 12, 2026. She said they will enact the revised structure agreed upon by the trustees with co-leaders from the community and library staff.

Other Business

There was no other business.

At 5:23 PM, Shelly Ruocco moved to adjourn the meeting. Debin Bruce seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:23 PM.