

**TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY**  
**Tuesday, May 19, 2026**

**Present:** Rebekah Anderson, Lisa Downing, Ruth Francis, Fred Kass, Molly Moss, Shelly Ruocco, Elizabeth Sheirer, Katy Wight. **Present via Zoom:** Doug Wheat, Treasurer; Heather Diaz, observer for the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA). **Absent:** Lolan Sevilla, 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 4:02 PM.

**Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**Secretary's Report**

Rebekah Anderson moved that the Secretary's report of April 16, 2026 be accepted and placed on file, and that the report of the Executive Session of April 16, 2026 be approved but not placed on file until after negotiations are complete. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

**Financial Reports**

Doug Wheat presented the Trustees Financial Reports for the period ending April 30, 2026 prepared by Jo Landers, 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. He said that Jo Landers is doing a great job of keeping track of the library accounts and flow of money. He reviewed the Budget to Actual report focusing on year-to-date income and expenses. He said donations were much higher than budgeted and grant income was lower. Molly Moss said that she thinks the \$80,000 in state aid may have been entered as a donation instead of grant income. She also said the library is awaiting \$15,000 in grant income it has not yet received but should receive before the end of the fiscal year. Doug Wheat said that the expenses were on track, and he acknowledged the effort that goes into making that happen and the budgeting efforts of Lisa Downing and Molly Moss. He said that it has been a good year for the library's investments. In response to a question from Fred Kass, Ruth Francis said that the Finance Committee is currently looking at the library's budget for FY27, which was put together by Lisa Downing and Molly Moss and will bring it to the trustees for approval at their June meeting. She said in the next fiscal year, the library will have a full prior fiscal year for comparison. Molly Moss said that the city-side of the budget was brought to the trustees as an informational item at their February meeting, prior to meeting with the mayor. The mayor has presented her budget, and the city council will vote on it on Thursday. In that budget, Forbes is receiving a 4.23% increase to maintain a level services budget.

Shelly Ruocco made a motion to approve the April Financial Reports and place them on file. Fred Kass seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

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

Lisa Downing reported that \$33,804.14 in undesignated gifts were received in the previous month, including \$5,000 from Karen Howat. The following designated gifts were received since the last Trustees' meeting: \$7,455.80

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

for the Children's Renovation project, including \$5,000.00 from Marjorie Hess and Rudolph Talaber; \$166.20 for the Coolidge Fund; \$103.00 for the Special Collections; and \$1,200 for the Adult Programming Fund. She said that last month included Library Giving Day, which explains the high numbers. She said that this year a fewer number of gifts were received, but for a larger total, and that development professionals are seeing this as a trend.

There were no donations or receipts from sales/rents this month.

An update on fundraising was provided: Coolidge funding budgeted \$50,000, received \$31,803; Children's Renovation Project budgeted \$50,000, received \$39,268; Annual Appeal budgeted \$50,000, received \$89,951; Library Giving Day budgeted \$30,000, received \$45,784; Other budgeted \$67,100, received \$33,221.

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, June 18 at 4:00 PM. The trustees scheduled the following meetings for the remainder of the year: Thursday, July 16; Thursday, September 24; Thursday, October 22; Thursday, November 19; Thursday, December 17; and Thursday January 21, 2027. Meetings will convene at 4:00 PM unless otherwise noted.

The next meeting of the Friends of Forbes Library will be held on Wednesday, June 3, 2026 at 6:30 PM. Shelly Ruocco will attend on behalf of the trustees.

**Department Report: Coolidge Museum**

The planned Coolidge Museum department report was postponed to a future meeting.

**Collection Development Policy Update**

Molly Moss thanked the trustees for their input last month. The suggestions were incorporated into the draft policy which is now being brought back for the trustees' approval. The quote from the now defunct "Free Access to Libraries for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights" was replaced with this:

As stated in Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors: An Interpretation of the American Library Association's Bill of Rights, "Libraries and their governing bodies have a legal and professional obligation to provide free and equitable access to a diverse range of library resources and services that is inclusive, regardless of content, approach, or format to everyone in their community equally, including minors."

This removed the language about parents and addresses the issues raised during the discussion last month about caregivers or legal guardians.

Shelly Ruocco made a motion to approve the revised Collection Development Policy. Rebekah Anderson seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Rebekah Anderson, Katy Wight, Shelly Ruocco, Ruth Francis, and Fred Kass all voting in favor.

### **Buildings & Grounds Projects for 2027**

Lisa Downing reported that the Building and Grounds committee reviewed the facilities plan and have a short list of projects to recommend for FY2027 including: 1) Plantings around the stage (\$4,000 funded by the Friends) 2) Repair of the front patio pavers (\$40,000 budgeted to be paid by the city Capital Improvement Projects) 3) Replace the front doors (funding to be determined, \$30,000 estimated.) They are also monitoring projects for the next 2-5 years including the Coolidge Museum renovation, replacing the storage shed, and replacing the main floor stacks carpet. In response to a question from Katy Wight about carpet squares, Molly Moss said she would get prices for both the squares and traditional carpeting.

Rebekah Anderson made a motion to approve the proposed projects for FY2027. Fred Kass seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously, with Ruth Francis, Fred Kass, Shelly Ruocco, Katy Wight, and Rebekah Anderson all voting in favor.

### **Administrative Report**

Lisa Downing reminded the trustees that the Trustees Award ceremony is scheduled for June 11 at 6:30 PM on the Hess Performance Stage. The program will include a performance by a folk duo and refreshments. Debin Bruce and J.R. Greene are receiving the trustees' award this year.

The Friends had their first bingo fundraiser on Sunday, May 15 at 1:30 PM at the library. Their big fundraiser, the Garden Tour, is coming up on Saturday, June 13 from 10-4. She hopes the trustees can attend! The Friends bus trip to the FDR homestead and presidential library and museum this month was a huge success. They are already thinking about the next trip.

The Senate budget was recently released, and the results for library lines are good. All of Forbes' lines match the numbers in the Governor's budget. It's a 2% increase rather than the 3% (5% for state aid) that had been asked for but it is good news. That leaves the MBLC line as the only line that will go to Conference Committee, if this is approved. Debate begins May 19. It is also expected that the freedom to read and ebook bills will soon be deliberated by the Senate.

The Community Preservation committee unanimously recommended Forbes' application for a lighting system in the Coolidge Museum and now it will be presented to the City Council for approval on June 4.

Pen America issued a report examining the content of 3,743 unique titles banned during the 2024-2025 school year and how these trends are evolving. The findings remain consistent with an ongoing effort to "purge stories and books that discuss race and racism, LGBTQ+ people or characters, people or characters of color, and sex from our nation's schools."

Forbes had a strong showing at the Hampshire Pride parade earlier this month where bookmarks were handed out and the library received lots of enthusiastic praise from the crowd.

Forbes held a half day staff meeting this month that included a presentation about artificial intelligence and its impact on libraries with a consultant from the Massachusetts Library System followed by lunch provided with funding from the Friends. Lisa Downing said that some of the recommendations include

**Administrative Report** (continued)

creating core competencies for staff around AI so staff can better inform the public. The library will also consider a policy or guidelines around AI.

Molly Moss has been accepted into the Massachusetts Municipal Association Suffolk Certificate program in Local Government Leadership and Management for the 2026-2027 academic year. This graduate-level academic program provides a solid grounding in public management and comes highly recommended by other library leaders who have participated in the past. Molly Moss said that the program consists of 25 Fridays between September and May with five 5-week sessions, some of which will be in person in Palmer, MA and some online.

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

**Communications**

There were no communications this month.

**Discussion Topic: Building History and Maintenance**

Lisa Downing presented a brief overview of the building's history from beginning to present and led a discussion on building maintenance. The Forbes Library opened in 1894, as a result of a bequest by Judge Charles Edward Forbes to the City of Northampton, who wished to build a public library for the citizens of Northampton. It was designed to be completely fireproof with steel framing and is on the Register of Historic Buildings. Forbes Library was designed by architect William C. Brocklesby of Hartford, Conn. in a style known as Richardsonian Romanesque. This style is characterized by the use of contrasting light and dark color stones (granite and sandstone), massive, rounded arches resting on short, squat columns, and complex roof systems. The library was dedicated on October 23, 1894.

Forbes Library underwent a complete renovation of the interior, designed by Architectural Resources of Cambridge, MA, from 1996-2001 accentuating many of Forbes' unique features such as the glass mezzanine floors, expansive spaces, and the Guastavino arches which support the second floor. This is also when air conditioning was installed for the first time, the Hampshire Room for Local History was created to bring together collections that had previously been spread around the building, and the Gallery was created. The final piece of this renovation was adding the rear parking lot. The "building envelope" has also been extensively renovated through a series of projects, taking place from 2003-2019, cleaning and repointing the stone exterior, rebuilding foundational structures, and restoring the library's 150 historic windows.

Exterior work on the building and grounds is ongoing for such things as replacing slate tiles, repairing gutters and downspouts, concrete and blacktop cracks, and replanting of historic oak trees. The grounds have been improved as an extension of the library's usable space through the addition of Adirondack chairs and picnic tables in the last decade. This work has continued with the new Athena sculpture garden and just last year with the Hess Performance Stage. Smaller interior renovations have taken place during the years to the Children's and Young Adult Department and the Reference Room to improve functionality and appearance. Others have focused specifically on improving accessibility including the installation of several lifts in the front entry that were replaced by a fully functional elevator in 2015, curb cuts, accessible book drops, and most recently a bathroom renovation project to add automatic door openers and improve ventilation. Additionally, there

**Discussion Topic: Building History and Maintenance** (continued)

has been a huge investment by the City of Northampton through capital improvements funds and Community Preservation Act funds in the heating, cooling, and ventilation systems of the building including the installation of an additional HVAC system for the special collections spaces, a boiler replacement, and currently a conversion of the building from steam to hot water that includes additional ventilation in the basement and replacement of other end of life equipment.

The library is committed to helping the city achieve its goal of becoming carbon neutral and has been part of energy savings projects like converting lights to LED, fine tuning the programming of the heating and cooling settings, installation of a Valley Bike station, and hopefully soon, the addition of EV charging stations to the parking lot.

The library building and grounds are owned by the Trustees of Forbes Library, and the city has an obligation to maintain them. An agreement was reached with the city in 2017 to settle several longstanding disputes. It clearly spelled out how Forbes and the city should work together in the spirit of transparency and cooperation. Forbes now has a good working relationship with Central Services who they partner with on most building projects as well as the Mayor's Office. Forbes budgets \$10,000 from the city for "Labor and Repairs" from the annual appropriation. This is intended to cover basic needs for everything from parts to repair broken toilets to replacing bulbs that blow out. If unanticipated expenses exceed this budgeted amount that cannot be covered with the annual appropriation from the city, Forbes may request additional funding.

In response to a question from Rebekah Anderson about limitations of the building in meeting modern day needs, Lisa Downing said that the building layout with four public service desks requires that six staff members be onsite for the library to be open. Additionally, she said that sight lines to the restrooms and elevators make it hard for staff to monitor them. She said that some libraries she's visited have large programming rooms that are separated from the main library, meaning they can be used even when the library is closed. Molly Moss added that events are often at capacity in the Coolidge Museum, and larger meeting space would be desirable. In response to a question from Fred Kass, Molly Moss said that the next major project might be implementing geothermal. The trustees thanked Lisa Downing for her presentation. Links to the library's timeline and agreement with the city were included in the trustees' packet.

**Building & Grounds Projects Updates**

Lisa Downing reported that Keiter has been back on site working on demolition of the duct work (mainly in the boiler room) and installing new duct work. The new heating and cooling units in the community room have been put in place but are not yet connected. They have been having logistical issues with moving into the building the chillers (which they have) and the air handler (which still hasn't shipped). They are concerned about potential delays in hooking up air conditioning in the building as well as additional costs for addressing the logistical issues. They anticipate the city billing Forbes for the library's portion of the project in the next month. Central Services is working on bidding documents for the front patio which should go out soon. It was hoped that Forbes might be able to do the front doors at or near the same time but funding for that project is uncertain at this time. The Friends have approved \$4,000 in funding to add plantings around the performance stage.

**Building & Grounds Project Updates** (continued)

Eileen Travis has offered to help pick out suitable plants and coordinate planting.

**Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings**

Friends of Forbes - Fred Kass attended the May 6 meeting of the Friends of Forbes and reported that the Membership Committee is working on the newsletter. The Special Events Committee is continuing planning for the Bingo event on May 17 and the Garden Tour on June 13. The Garden Tour is moving along smoothly with sponsorships coming in and tickets on sale now. They reviewed a funding request for planting around the Hess Performance Stage, which was approved. They will use funds from the Florence Bank grant to supplement if needed.

Building and Grounds Committee - Lisa Downing reported that their next meeting is scheduled for May 20, at 4:30 PM.

Coolidge Standing Committee - Fred Kass reported that the Coolidge Standing Committee met on May 4. Strategic Planning - They have received great data so far from surveys (72 so far), interviews (17 so far), and focus groups, and a preliminary report is coming soon. Exhibits Committee - Michael and Charles met with the standing committee and shared draft panels for Vermont and Massachusetts. The committee will review Washington, D.C. next. The Standing Committee has requested the final review before signing off on the panels. Development - The CPA application is before the committee for consideration and will be voted on soon. They expect to hear back from the Mass Cultural Council soon about their grant application. Programming Committee - the committee is presenting a Narcotics Farm Act panel discussion on May 27 at 6:30 PM, *A Century of Drug Rehab: What is Coolidge's Legacy?* One of Calvin Coolidge's final acts as President was to sign into law the Narcotic Farms Act of 1929, which established the first federal government-run drug addiction treatment facilities. How well did the law work, and what have we learned in the 97 years since? The panelists are Professor Marjorie Senechal, Professor Sally Marlow, Dr. Thomas Lincoln, Professor Nancy Campbell, with Bill Scher as moderator. An article about the panel appeared in the Daily Hampshire Gazette. The other program planned for later this year is about deaf education. The Presidents Book Group is meeting June 1 to discuss Coolidge. Marketing and Outreach - The committee visited with Allen Price, JFK's Library Director and he learned a lot about Forbes and the CCPLM. He is open to joining programming and finding other ways to support the library. The Presidential Site Summit conference is September 8-11 in Washington D.C.

Development Committee - Shelly Ruocco and Lolan Sevilla agreed to serve as co-chairs this year. They welcomed Russell Carrier back on the committee. Molly Moss presented an overview of Library Giving Day, and they discussed ways board members can support the work of the Development Committee. They reviewed giving levels for the online donation form and had an initial discussion about business sponsorships. They will send out a scheduling poll to determine their next meeting date.

Finance Committee - Ruth Francis reported that the Finance Committee met on May 13. They reviewed the financial reports prepared by Jo Landers to be distributed to the trustees before their meeting on May 19. They also reviewed the endowment investments. The Forbes portfolio has earned 3.21% year-to-date. Last year it earned 13.56%, and 7.05% since its inception in 2015. The money market account is currently earning 3.35%.

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

Personnel Committee - Shelly Ruocco reported that they met and continue to meet with the FLEA bargaining unit as they work to come to agreement on a new contract. Details will be shared after their work has been completed.

Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group - Lisa Downing reported that their next meeting is September 28 at 4 PM.

Rebekah Anderson reported on outreach to the local business community and has attended Chamber of Commerce meetings. She purchased a book about the role libraries can play in small business communities. Lisa Downing said that Forbes once had a brochure with resources for local businesses. She suggested including a focus group with the business community when working on the new strategic plan next year.

**Contract Negotiations with FLEA**

At 5:19 PM, Shelly Ruocco moved that the trustees go into executive session to discuss contract negotiations with the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA) because negotiation in open session would be detrimental to the library's bargaining position. Rebekah Anderson seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously, with Rebekah Anderson, Ruth Francis, Fred Kass, Shelly Ruocco, and Katy Wight all voting in favor. The trustees invited Lisa Downing, Molly Moss, and Elizabeth Sheirer to remain as guests at the executive session. Doug Wheat and Heather Diaz left the meeting at 5:19 PM. Rebekah Anderson, Lisa Downing, Ruth Francis, Fred Kass, Molly Moss, Shelly Ruocco, Elizabeth Sheirer, and Katy Wight were present during the executive session. No votes were taken during the executive session.

At 5:47 PM, Shelly Ruocco moved to end the executive session. Ruth Francis seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously, with Rebekah Anderson, Ruth Francis, Fred Kass, Shelly Ruocco, and Katy Wight all voting in favor.

**Other Business**

There was no other business.

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